

The Authenticity of the Soul, Moral Rebellion, and “Serious Concern”: Rereading Ouyang Zi’s Autumn Leaves

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Abstract. In the 1950s and 1960s, currents of Western modernist literature surged into Taiwan and soon came to dominate its literary scene. Following the modernist tide of those decades, however, modernist writing was subjected to fierce criticism as U.S. aid to Taiwan was withdrawn and Washington’s strategic posture shifted. Modernism was subsequently dismissed as a derivative strain of Western modernist literature. This paper argues that modernist works represented by Ouyang Zi’s *Autumn Leaves* are not a mere offshoot of Western modernism. Rather, they inaugurated a new aesthetic direction in Taiwanese literature. Ouyang Zi and other modernist writers employed a diverse range of modernist techniques to reveal the genuine spiritual predicaments of modern individuals, while simultaneously infusing their works with the Chinese philosophical ideal of *min bao wu yu*—a humanistic sympathy that embodies the transcendence of humanitarian literature.

Keywords: Ouyang Zi, modernism, Modern Literature, *Autumn Leaves*

1. Introduction

In the 1950s and 1960s, under the Kuomintang’s promotion of “anti-Communist literature,” Western modernist literary currents entered Taiwan and began to influence its literary scene. Modernist poetry led the way, inaugurating the stylistic transformation of Taiwanese literature. The successive establishment of three major poetry societies—the Chuangzao Poetry Society, the Blue Star Poetry Society, and the Genesis Poetry Society—fostered the flourishing of modernist poetry. Subsequently, the *Literary Quarterly* edited by Xia Jian and *Modern Literature* edited by Bai Xianyong promoted the development of modernist fiction, and modernist literature became the dominant aesthetic paradigm in Taiwan. Modernist literature advocated probing the inner world of modern individuals, revealing psychic conflicts and existential predicaments, and articulating the loneliness and distress of Taiwan’s postwar youth. Existentialism and Freud’s psychoanalytic theories—foundational to modernist literary thought—circulated widely among the youth of the period. As Bai Xianyong remarked: “The rebellious voices and plaintive tones in Western modernist works spoke powerfully to those of us who grew up after the war—young students groping restlessly for novelty and change” [1].

After the modernist tide of the 1950s and 1960s, as U.S. aid to Taiwan was withdrawn and American strategic priorities shifted, nativist literature replaced modernism as the mainstream. Modernist literature came under fierce criticism, being regarded as a “sub-branch” of Western

modernism—a form of “horizontal transplantation.” Critics argued that such transplantation constituted a cultural rupture; modernist literature, lacking indigenous roots, was inferior to “vertical inheritance.” From a nationalist perspective, as Lü Zhenghui observes: “Under such circumstances, it becomes clear that the Westernization and anti-traditional stance of Taiwanese modernism are rootless; they cannot be grounded in nationalism or realism” [2]. As a product of U.S. aid culture, modernism was seen not merely as an instrument of American capitalist cultural strategy but also as evidence of Western cultural implantation in Taiwan. Modernist writers were accused of focusing exclusively on their characters’ inner distress, depression, and anxiety, and of being concentrated among academic intellectual circles, indulging in the “sickly self-lament of ivory-tower intellectuals.”

Notably, Taiwanese modernist literature was also criticized for having lost the fundamental rebellious spirit of Western modernism. The concept of “modern literature” originated in the West as an art form opposing literary and social traditions, and it expressed, in a defiant manner, the impact of the two world wars on the rationalist “kingdom” of capitalism. The collapse of this rational order caused profound inner turmoil in the West. Disillusionment with capitalism and loss of faith in social values rooted in Christian tradition led Western thinkers to draw on Nietzschean irrationalism as a new intellectual resource. Nietzsche’s proclamation that “God is dead” signaled the erosion of Western culture founded upon Christian metaphysics. In his 1886 *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche advanced the notion of the *Übermensch*: “Only the most solitary, the most profound, and the most transcendent individuals can become truly great” [3]. Did Taiwanese modernist literature, as its nativist critics claimed, fundamentally lose its rebellious force and degenerate into a mere derivative of Western modernism? The debate between modernist and nativist literature has been widely discussed. This paper revisits this question through Ouyang Zi’s 1960s short story collection *Autumn Leaves*, a representative work of Taiwanese modernism, in order to reassess the rebellious character of Taiwanese modernist literature and explore the “serious concerns” that preoccupied modernist writers of the era.

2. Confronting the inner self: the authenticity of the soul

Within the Modern Literature circle, compared with the relatively moderate Bai Xianying, the works of Ouyang Zi and Wang Wenxing are regarded as paradigmatic examples of Taiwanese modernist literature due to their pronounced modernist characteristics. Ouyang Zi, a classmate of Bai Xianying at National Taiwan University, produced most of her fiction between 1961 and 1971. As a highly educated female writer, she excelled at portraying women’s lives and exploring female psychology. Her fiction primarily focuses on family life, romantic relationships, and campus experiences. Ouyang Zi’s short story collection *Autumn Leaves* comprises fourteen stories, providing a comprehensive representation of her achievements in modernist literature. When she revised most of the works and published a second edition in 1971, the collection sparked intense criticism in the inaugural issue of *Wen Ji Quarterly*. Chen Fangming’s *A History of Taiwan New Literature* documents this controversy in detail and identifies it as “the first wave of criticism of modernism, preceding the debates on nativist literature” [4].

As critics of *Autumn Leaves* pointed out, Ouyang Zi’s fiction is relatively focused in subject matter, with most works centering on female psychology and dedicated to depicting women’s inner struggles and conflicts. Her stories strive to explore the “dark forest” of the human psyche, often focusing on the negative and shadowed aspects of human nature, uncovering jealousy, possessiveness, vengefulness, vanity, and other undesirable traits. In this, her work responds to the call by Xia Jian when founding the *Literary Quarterly* for Taiwanese literature to be “plain, rational,

and cool-headed” [5]. All of Ouyang Zi’s works adhere to the principle of “authenticity of the soul,” revealing the hidden recesses of modern consciousness by exposing the darker sides of human nature. In *The Wall*, the protagonist Ruo-lan develops resentment toward her brother-in-law after her sister’s marriage. On the one hand, she is jealous that her intimate sister has been “taken” by him; on the other, she gradually and unwittingly falls in love with the forty-year-old man she initially resisted. Although the psychological transition is somewhat abrupt, the story realistically portrays the emotional volatility of adolescence: possessiveness toward a close sister and inexplicable attraction to an older man. In *Awakening*, the mother Dunzhi, over forty and recently widowed, experiences intense jealousy when she learns that her son Minshen is romantically involved with a young and attractive university classmate, Aiyun. Viewing her son as her sole emotional anchor, Dunzhi perceives Aiyun as taking him away, and she is overwhelmed by melancholy over the loss of her own youth. Ouyang Zi uses modernist techniques to depict the loneliness of middle-aged women facing emotional deprivation and their fear of aging. In *Cousin Suzhen*, Li-hui feels jealousy toward her cousin Su-zhen, who surpasses her in friendships, appearance, and academic performance. Lacking a fully developed sense of self, Li-hui otherizes Su-zhen, oscillating emotionally as she compares herself to the idealized other. In *Meirong*, the seemingly beautiful and flawless university student Meirong pursues Zhang Naiting, who has won a scholarship to the United States, with the intent of going there herself. To do so, she seeks to discard her suitor Lei-ping, even redirecting him toward an unattractive female classmate. Treating others merely as instruments to fulfill her desires, Meirong embodies, in Ouyang Zi’s ironic depiction, the authentic psychological predicaments of modern individuals and the utopian, unrealistic fantasies that young Taiwanese women of the period held about the United States.

In *Autumn Leaves: The Web*, Ouyang Zi not only narrates a story of a woman’s extramarital affair but also explores a key modernist theme: the fear of freedom and the avoidance of autonomy. After marrying and having children, Yu Wenjin unexpectedly encounters Tang Peizhi, a university classmate she once loved. Although Yu Wenjin has grown bored and weary of family life and motherhood, she is unable to summon the courage to leave her household. Their street encounter echoes Joyce’s *Dubliners*, particularly *A Little Cloud*, in which the disillusioned Chandler meets his ambitious university friend and reflects on his own fate. Chandler recognizes that to achieve his ambitions, he should immediately leave paralyzed Dublin for the thriving cities of Paris and London, sharing a radiant life with friends. Yet he remains shackled—not by literal constraints, but by the psychological avoidance of freedom inherent in leaving Dublin.

Similarly, in Ouyang Zi’s *The Web*, Yu Wenjin contemplates whether she should love herself more than her husband and prioritize her own desires over others, including her spouse. However, her reflection and nascent rebellion collapse when faced with Ding Shizhong, who reassures her: “Who could bear to abandon such a gentle and good wife like you?” Yu Wenjin has the opportunity to break free, yet ultimately chooses to stay, tearfully pleading for her husband’s forgiveness. “She truly felt happiness” [6]. At this moment, Yu Wenjin’s happiness is the joy of escaping freedom. American social psychologist Erich Fromm, building on Freud’s understanding of human biological instincts, explored the inner conflicts arising from the individual’s relationship with society. Ouyang Zi, in interviews, expressed a stronger affinity with Fromm than with Freud, emphasizing that “humans are products of social and cultural conditions.” As Fromm argues in *Escape from Freedom*, modern individuals oscillate between the pursuit and avoidance of freedom: they strive for autonomy and independence, yet cannot endure the loneliness, isolation, and anguish that come with it. In response, they may seek to evade freedom: “Once a person becomes an individual, he stands alone, facing all the dangers and pressures of the world by himself. To overcome loneliness and

powerlessness, the individual develops an impulse to surrender individuality, to dissolve entirely into the external world” [7]. The biblical narrative of the expulsion from Eden parallels this tension. Humanity’s exile separates people from God but also enables independent consciousness—echoing Nietzsche’s declaration that “God is dead” and the reclamation of the will to power as the prerogative of being human. Ouyang Zi precisely depicts Yu Wenjin’s trajectory in *The Web*: from self-awareness to the pursuit of freedom, and ultimately to the avoidance of freedom, detailing the inner emotional fluctuations and conflicts that accompany this process. The story vividly portrays Yu Wenjin’s fear of, and retreat from, personal autonomy.

Ouyang Zi’s intellectual resources extend beyond Freud and Fromm to include the psychological realism of late-19th-century American novelist Henry James. She recalled: “When I returned to the University of Illinois, I took a course on Henry James and read many of his major works. In 1970, for the 42nd issue of *Modern Literature*, I edited a special issue on Henry James, drawing extensively on the materials I had collected then” [8]. James’ literary theory, particularly in *The Art of Fiction*, emphasizes detailed realism as the supreme quality of a novel: “I venture to assert boldly that I believe giving a sense of reality (through thorough and accurate detail) is the highest excellence in a novel—it is that virtue to which all other merits (including the consciously moral purpose Mr. Pizant speaks of) must submissively yield. Without it, all other merits are in vain; with it, their effects result from the author’s success in creating the illusion of life” [9]. Western modernist literature shifted from Plato’s mimesis—art as imitation of reality—to a focus on personal expression. Ouyang Zi, in this spirit, intensely portrays the human inner world, using psychological realism to reveal multiple facets of human nature, exposing what Baudelaire called the “flowers of evil” in the human soul. At the same time, she shows deep empathy for characters like Yu Wenjin, whose will and capacity to fully realize personal autonomy are constrained. In Ouyang Zi’s fiction, pure, perfect, and noble humanity remains a desirable ideal, but only within the bounds of utopian imagination.

3. Removing the mask: moral rebellion

Autumn Leaves vividly demonstrates the strong anti-traditional, anti-Confucian, and anti-ritualistic moral rebellion in Ouyang Zi’s fiction. Many of Ouyang Zi’s stories center on adolescent girls, whose gradual unveiling of their inner selves reflects both Ouyang Zi’s own youthful voice and a broader challenge to conventional moral norms. In the short story *Half a Smile*, Wang Qi, who wears the mask of the exemplary student praised by others, initially embodies the obedient, virtuous girl of traditional expectations. Yet, driven by desire, she confesses to a male classmate and falls off a cliff, suffering injuries. At first, Wang Qi is terrified of exposing her true self: “The mask has been torn off. This is what she has always longed for, but at this moment, she feels no relief; instead, she is seized by an indescribable fear.” When her authentic desires surface, she feels powerless to resist fate: “Such is her destiny; she has no strength to rebel” [10]. Nevertheless, Ouyang Zi allows Wang Qi to assert her will at the story’s conclusion. In the final scene, Wang Qi wears a “faint, almost imperceptible smile,” having broken through the mask of the ideal student to reveal the imperfect yet real self underneath.

Among Ouyang Zi’s works, the three most thematically complex and narratively compelling stories—*The Witch*, *Autumn Leaves*, and *Near Dusk*—concentrate on the theme of sexual repression and its liberation. In these stories, the protagonists’ inner lives oscillate between the Freudian “id” and “superego,” moving from extramarital affairs to the taboo of mother–stepson romance, and even to biologically grounded mother–son desire. Within this moral transgression, the characters experience profound torment and psychological pain. In *The Witch*, behind the mask of the

exemplary mother lives a woman controlled by irrational emotions—the “witch.” Qianru’s mother, socially regarded as the model mother, reveals that she has loved her youthful lover Zhao Gang continuously for twenty years after marriage and is willing to sacrifice everything for his love. Qianru, upon realizing that her mother is not the moral ideal she once revered, experiences a crisis of belief: “In Qianru’s eyes, her mother had once embodied all virtue. In the past, she had never done anything wrong; she was always right” [11]. Her mother’s character—both perfect in virtue and externally gentle but internally firm—made those around her feel cautious, as if she were their “conscience.” [11] Yet behind the mask praised as the “conscience of the people” lurks an almost terrifying irrational love. Zhao Gang, her mother’s lover, is far from morally perfect and exhibits significant ethical flaws, yet her mother’s passionate love remains undiminished: “You are right about him; he has always been this way—an unstable, irresponsible man. I know every flaw of his, know them too well! Yet I love him—this is fate.” [11] This sentiment echoes Maugham’s line in *The Painted Veil*: “I know you are foolish, frivolous, and empty-headed, yet I love you. I know your schemes, your ideals; you are selfish and vulgar, yet I love you. I know you are second-rate, yet I love you... I know you married me only for yourself. I love you so deeply, it matters not at all” [12]. In *The Witch*, Ouyang Zi allows the mother to remove her social mask, revealing the irrational impulses within her. The intent is unmistakable: the figure of the “witch,” a classic symbol in Western literature often likened to a Siren, when merged with the mother’s identity, intensifies the character’s rebellious dimension. Through this depiction, Ouyang Zi presents the mother as an embodiment of extreme rebellion against conventional female morality.

Autumn Leaves tells the story of Yifen, a thirty-year-old Taiwanese woman who, after experiencing an unhappy marriage, moves to the United States and marries fifty-year-old American university professor Qirui. Their marriage is purely material, devoid of love. Driven by instinct, Yifen begins an illicit affair with Qirui’s young mixed-race stepson, Minsheng. Minsheng’s American mother is irresponsible and has abandoned the family—socially, she has “removed her mask”—yet Minsheng’s inner world remains devoted to his mother. Raised under the strict Confucian and paternalistic discipline of his Taiwanese father, Minsheng’s suffering stems from social and familial constraints: “Am I really that cautious, taciturn gentleman every day? If so, why am I not happy?” [13] His unhappiness reflects the struggle to affirm his identity caught between Chinese and American cultural expectations.

The love between Minsheng and Yifen transcends ethics, race, and social norms, embodying Ouyang Zi’s rebellion against Confucian tradition and patriarchal society. One of the most poignant moments in *Autumn Leaves* occurs when Minsheng and Yifen share an intimate moment on the Rainbow Bridge. Yifen recounts the story of her first husband, who died in a plane crash, and in this space, their illicit, socially forbidden love reaches a timeless intensity: “In this moment, they disappeared as selves, merging with the universe, with nature; in this moment, they touched eternity” [13]. Ouyang Zi creates a utopian, eternal space in which differences of identity, race, and age vanish; in this space, the irrational power of love transcends societal restraints. The sense of love’s eternity in Ouyang Zi’s narrative is reminiscent of Chekhov’s famous short story *The Lady with the Dog*, in which a married woman and her lover meet along the riverbank, symbolizing the celebration of pure love. However, compared with Chekhov’s warmth, Ouyang Zi’s tone is more rational and restrained. The story does not end on the Rainbow Bridge, reflecting the unstoppable passage of time: “Their footsteps were miserly, as if they had no choice but to move. Yet with each step, they left a beloved dream further behind; with each step, they approached inevitable sorrow” [13]. Minsheng and Yifen must descend from the bridge into reality, confronting the ominous

realities of their lives. Ultimately, they are forced to part, returning to their respective homes, where the inevitability of a tragic, ruined ending looms.

Near Dusk, as the most structurally intricate and sophisticated work by Ouyang Zi, exemplifies the modernity most pronounced in Taiwanese modernist fiction—expressing modern human emotions through the most contemporary forms. Ouyang Zi employs extensive stream-of-consciousness techniques and multi-perspective narration reminiscent of Faulkner to portray the complex psychology and chaotic emotions between Jiwei, Yubin, and Jiwei's mother. Ouyang Zi herself stated that the inspiration for this novel came after reading Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* for a class report: "Faulkner likely influenced one of my novels—Near Dusk. At that time, I had just taken a course on Faulkner, and my mind was full of his works. For my term paper, I wrote on *As I Lay Dying*: its structure and tone, applying the new criticism method I learned in the Iowa writing program. The professor praised it highly. Perhaps because I worked so diligently, months later when I wrote *Near Dusk*, I experimented with multiple narrative perspectives and varying tones. Even the ambiguous feelings between mother and son in the novel were partly drawn from *As I Lay Dying*. So when my novel faced criticism and some claimed it didn't resemble Chinese works, I had no defense" [8]. As Ouyang Zi indicated, Faulkner's influence, particularly from *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*, is evident in *Near Dusk*. The novel employs a triple narrative perspective to portray Jiwei, a son with an Oedipal and homosexual inclination, and his inner turmoil. Jiwei's Oedipal desire is fulfilled vicariously through his homosexual lover Yubin: he orchestrates an affair between Yubin and his mother, imagining Yubin as a stand-in for his mother. Ouyang Zi's use of unreliable narration and complementary triple perspectives allows the complex ethical and emotional story to be fully conveyed. By depicting a son who loves his biological mother, who facilitates a tryst between his lover and mother, and imagines himself as his lover Yubin, Ouyang Zi's near-faithful adaptation of Faulkner's multi-perspective technique brings the moral rebellion in *Near Dusk* to its peak. Underlying all the characters' actions are strong Freudian sexual instincts; the emphasis on sexual drive both affirms Ouyang Zi's view of natural human instincts and demonstrates her vehement rebellion against traditional social morals.

Ouyang Zi's focus extends beyond love and rebellion to the mundane reality that follows the dissipation of passion. In *The Prodigal* (1964/1970 revised), a son falls in love with a girl who had an abortion at sixteen due to an accident. The father expresses deep understanding of his son's love: "Nothing in the world compares to love; without love, life is empty—completely empty" [14]. Yet a mother who once experienced intense love views it differently after passion fades: "What a wretched girl! Not even a virgin! She ran off with the servant, got pregnant, and made her poor father rush across town to find a secret doctor for an abortion!" [15] Once love's intensity disappears, the mother loses her rebellious edge, revealing the mundane and vulgar side of life. Western modernist literature emerged in the context of the capitalist society's peak, reflecting disillusionment with traditional social values. The two world wars shattered faith in Christian-based societal norms. In Ouyang Zi's fiction, male and female characters express strong rebellion against Confucian values through sexual instinct and love. In *Autumn Leaves*, the coexistence of anti-traditional morality and anti-traditional literature manifests a modernist pursuit of self-subjectivity, reflecting a profound yearning for individual autonomy and freedom.

4. Contemplating dilemmas: "serious concern"

Ouyang Zi's rebellion is imbued with a deep humanistic empathy and what she terms a "serious concern." This concern extends beyond adolescent girls, married women trapped in domestic life, and marginalized homosexuals; it reflects a broad, universal humanistic attentiveness. Ouyang Zi

has stated that she frequently contemplates the real dilemmas people face, imagining how she herself would respond if confronted with similar situations. The sharpest and most tense dilemma in *Autumn Leaves* occurs in the story *The Last Lesson*. The protagonist, Yang Haoran, one of the few male characters in Ouyang Zi's fiction, faces a dual predicament: as a teacher, he is bound by professional ethics; as a man, he harbors romantic feelings toward another male. In *The Last Lesson*, the middle-aged high school teacher Yang Haoran secretly admires his former student Yang Jian. Upon observing Yang Jian's unrequited feelings for a female classmate and witnessing the girl's rejection, Yang Haoran loses control in class and shouts, "Who are you calling a toad?" [15] His admiration is irrational and inexpressible, ultimately erupting in a dramatic emotional outburst in the classroom.

Ouyang Zi consistently places her characters in extreme dilemmas: in *The Witch*, a married woman falls in love with an old flame; in *The Last Lesson*, a homosexual teacher falls for his student; in *Near Dusk*, a son deprived of maternal affection develops feelings for his biological mother. These predicaments illustrate her "serious concern" for individuals' inner worlds and struggles. She attends to the angst, confusion, and helplessness people experience amid the currents of their era, uncovering the turbulent undercurrents that may exist beneath outward calm. Ouyang Zi validates the legitimacy and rationality of human desire, appreciating the inherent complexity of human nature and providing outlets for desire and passion within her narratives.

Ouyang Zi's fascination with human fate drives her to place her characters in extreme situations, pushing them to the limits of destiny. Her dilemmas are heavily influenced by existentialist thought. When humans are cast into the world by chance, fate forces them to make ultimate choices: to what extent should one act to escape one's predicament, and what inner conflicts arise? Like Bai Xianyong and other Taiwanese modernist writers, Ouyang Zi demonstrates profound empathy and compassion for those striving to find a way forward while being "thrown" into the world. As Sartre observes, "existentialism is a form of humanism." Existentialism embodies deep concern for human fate, questioning whether those thrown into the world must, like Sisyphus, despairingly and futilely push their stone uphill, or whether they can embrace what Sartre calls a "serious optimism."

Bai Xianyong's appraisal of *Selections from Modern Literature* can be regarded as the most authoritative commentary on 1960s Taiwanese modernist literature. When Ouyang Zi revised and republished *Autumn Leaves* in 1971, sparking heated debate, Bai Xianyong responded to Tang Jisong's critique in the *China Times*. In his 1972 article, *On the Standards of Novel Criticism—Reflections on Tang Jisong's Commentary on Autumn Leaves*, Bai incisively refuted Tang's criticism and articulated three standards he believed essential to literary creation and novel evaluation: first, whether "the work's formal techniques and textual structure successfully convey its content and themes; this is perhaps the primary touchstone of novel criticism"; second, whether "the writer's worldview is broad and their view of life mature"; and third, whether "the writer possesses a profound understanding of human nature" [16]. Ouyang Zi did not respond to this debate until seven years later, in *About Myself—Replying to Ms. Xia Zuli's Interview*. Among Taiwanese modernist writers, Wang Wenxing, often regarded as even more radical than Ouyang Zi, once stated, "The sole purpose of literature is to bring pleasure, nothing more." In 1978, at the height of the nativist literary movement, Wang delivered a now-famous (from the perspective of nativist critics, "notoriously infamous") lecture at the Taipei Gengxin Cultural and Educational Institute entitled *The Merits and Faults of Nativist Literature*, which vividly conveyed modernist writers' views on literature's social function. In the lecture, Wang reiterated that the only purpose of literature is "to make people happy, nothing else" [17]. Even in a 2014 interview, Wang maintained this position: "Regarding the debates back then, my views remain unchanged. Simply put, concerning literature, I still believe that

literature and art should enjoy absolute freedom” [18]. Wang’s concept of literary “pleasure” reflects an attentive concern for human beings, a concern that resonates with Bai Xianyong’s perspective. Bai argued, “If one asks what reading novels is for, perhaps the greatest value of novels lies in emotional education. Reading great novels makes our emotions more mature and sensitive, and deepens our understanding of life” [17]. Whether emphasizing “pleasure” or “emotional education,” both views converge on modernist writers’ human-centered literary ethos.

Examining 1960s Taiwanese modernism through Ouyang Zi’s fiction reveals that Taiwanese modernist literature is neither a mere derivative of Western modernism nor confined to intellectual self-indulgence or abstract theorizing. The depiction of the “truth of the psyche,” the rebellion of women and sexual minorities against traditional social norms, and the concern for human beings in extreme situations—all reflected in Ouyang Zi and other modernist writers—reveal the real psychological crises of modern life. Amid doubt, crisis, and predicament, Ouyang Zi’s works also embody a Ulysses-like, modernist humanistic spirit. As Bai Xianyong wrote in the preface to *Modern Literature*: “We are not aiming to propagate a doctrine, yet we have already fulfilled the purpose of doing so” [19]. This statement underscores that the ethical and emotional concerns embedded in Taiwanese modernist literature are expressed through narrative artistry rather than didacticism.

5. Conclusion

Ouyang Zi’s fiction, in terms of subject matter, structure, and language, has become emblematic of Taiwanese modernist literature. She skillfully integrates multiple modernist narrative techniques—psychoanalysis, stream of consciousness, and multi-perspective narration—while emphasizing detailed psychological analysis. Within the truthful depiction of the human psyche lies her rebellion against traditional moral norms, and embedded within that rebellion is a profound concern for individual destiny. Although her novels may not achieve structural or artistic perfection—their subjects are relatively narrow, and certain transitions in structure and technique can feel abrupt—Ouyang Zi’s modernist experimentation undoubtedly played a crucial role in advancing the art of Taiwanese modern fiction. Just as the realist backlash against romanticism demonstrates that literary forms eventually encounter historical limits, the radical edge of Taiwanese modernist literature, represented by writers like Ouyang Zi and Wang Wenxing, may wane over time. Nevertheless, her works vividly convey the inner voices of youth trapped in historical predicaments, expressing psychic truths through tones of frustration, repression, and decadence, and unflinchingly exposing the hypocrisy of traditional culture.

From the 1960s to the present, Taiwanese modernist literature—whether Bai Xianyong’s *Taipei People*, Ouyang Zi’s *Autumn Leaves*, Wang Wenxing’s *The Man by the Sea*, or later works such as Li Ang’s *The Butcher’s Wife* and Ma Sen’s *Night Walk*—has consistently upheld a literary essence rooted in rebellion and the pursuit of subjectivity. Far from being a mere derivative of Western modernism, writers like Ouyang Zi and Wang Wenxing pioneered literary experimentation that brought fresh vitality to Taiwanese literature. Their modernist techniques expose the psychological wounds and spiritual dilemmas of contemporary life while embodying a humanistic sympathy grounded in Chinese philosophical tradition. As Bai Xianyong remarked in his commentary on Ouyang Zi’s *Selections from Modern Literature*: “They demonstrate a serious concern for society and for the individuals within it—not the zealous social reformism of May Fourth writers, but a genuine empathy and compassion for human beings. This, I believe, is the most valuable quality of the works in this collection, and an indispensable element of all great literature.” While *Autumn*

Leaves is not a flawless work, it represents Ouyang Zi's valuable attempt to pursue literary greatness as a proponent of modernist literature.

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