

# Elements of Modernism in Fiction from Taiwan

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The so-called "modernist literary movement" in Taiwan reached its peak at the end of the sixties; after its practices and aesthetic assumptions encountered severe challenges in the seventies, however, the widespread fervor it had inspired subsided somewhat, and the once overriding voice of modernism gradually submerged in a sea of multiple orchestrating sounds. This paper offers some germinal ideas that I hope will be developed into a full-scale study of the far-reaching influence of this movement on fiction-writing in Taiwan.

My contention is: the most sustaining impact of the modernist literary movement in Taiwan lies in its having altered the aesthetic conception of many Chinese writers and readers of the next generation, to such an extent that we may say a change in the literary code, the system of compositional and thematic conventions which governs the production and reception of literary texts as defined by Juri Lotman, has occurred. Therefore in my reassessment of the modernist impact, I have included works written after what is generally considered the period of literary modernism in Taiwan, especially works published in the eighties. As these works are products of the very dynamics of this change on the artistic horizon, the new aesthetic is sometimes imprinted in them even more deeply than in works of the earlier periods.

Like any other period or movement, modernism in Taiwan has many phases. Two of its unusual aspects must always be given special consideration: the first one concerns its dialogical relationship with more traditional types of writing in Taiwan; the second, its interactions with Western literary trends that came after the high tide of modernism proper in the West (as we all know, there is a time lag of nearly half a century between the Western and the Chinese modernist movement).

A third feature that we must also keep in mind is that even though modernist ideology and aesthetics as they were most narrowly conceived dominated the literary scene in Taiwan for only a decade or so, the movement's influence on fictional technique has been extremely pervasive in Taiwan. In a strict sense, "modern fiction," including the novel and short story, is not an indigenous Chinese literary form, but has been "imported" to Chinese soil from the West in this century. It is therefore unsurprising that when its fundamental generic features, artistic principles, and criteria for excellence were systematically elucidated and propagated by the Western-influenced modernists during the sixties, very few Chinese fiction writers, even those who did not sympathize with the modernist ideology, could actually remain immune to the modernist influences. For this reason, I will not follow the customary distinction between modernist and non-modernist writers, but instead will discuss notable traits of modernist style where it exists in literature written both during and after the period conventionally designated "modernist."

In the process of my study, a new classification presented itself: On the one hand, the more conventional writers under the modernist influence seem to concern themselves primarily with perfecting narrative art, while, on the other hand, the more experimental modernist writers strive to challenge established narrative conventions in a radical manner, often calling into question the concept of "realistic illusion," historically closely associated with the genre of fiction itself. From writings of both the conservative and the radical wings, new literary conventions emerged, which I will treat in the following sections.

### I. Widened Distance Between Author And Text

One fundamental distinction of Taiwan's fiction of the last twenty years is the widening distance between author and text. At the discourse level, initiatives were consciously taken by modernist writers to rid their stories of "authorial intrusion," to favor indirect ways of conveying messages, and to maintain an ironic distance through various types of "impersonal narration." At the story level, the realists' demand for "objective portrayal of the bare truth of reality" was upheld, as clearly revealed by one of Ou-yang Tzu's prefaces:

I am very careful to maintain an objective stance; except

sometimes to hint at my personal attitude through the "tone," I always avoid criticizing or passing judgement on my characters. Consequently, the views of the heroes in my stories do not necessarily represent my personal views, and naturally do not have to be correct views, either. The reader ought to use his own judgement in evaluating these characters, and then come up with the final word by himself.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, the "principle of objectivity" was to be assimilated so well by writers of the following generation that this kind of declaration was seldom needed again. Fine writers of the eighties — Tung-nien, Yuan Ch'iung-ch'iung, Chiang Hsiao-yun, Ku Tsao-sen, to name just a few — all demonstrate remarkable detachment and subtlety in drawing "impartial pictures of reality." As the author has retreated from the narrative surface in order to let the story "unfold itself," we have witnessed much higher degrees of authorial manipulation in the stories' compositional features and a stronger self-consciousness in treating literary works as artifacts. In many cases, the structural refinement of the productions of many younger writers even surpasses that of the writings of their predecessors and well deserves the complimentary label of "well-wrought urn."

These all bear witness to the frequently observed contributions of modernist literary school in the advancement of technical sophistication in Taiwan's fiction. However, if we look at these fiction writers' accomplishment in appropriating Western, "modernist" literary standards as only an isolated phenomenon, we may easily lose sight of the much broader range of the modernist impact on existing forms of writing in Taiwan. In reality, the new mode of narration sanctioned by the modernist criteria has seriously challenged the formal and thematic conventions of more traditional types of story-telling and prose composition prevailing in the fifties and sixties. Features that are integral parts of the generic stylistics of certain older narrative forms, forms that receive substantive influence from the literati essay tradition,<sup>2</sup> from the vernacular folk stories, and from the "romantic generation" of the earlier twentieth century, are now regarded as technical flaws: loose plot structure, ornamental diction and literary "cliché," sentimentalism and moralistic overtones. Thus, in what may well amount to a critical transition in the history of modern Chinese literature, the mode of "objective narration" has thrived against a background of competing literary genres, in the manner of dialogical interaction of a new voice with

the social heteroglossia as described by Bakhtin, causing current conventions of reading and writing in Taiwan to undergo a series of readjustments.

Most notably, this significant process of intergenre competition has foregrounded the different roles played by "subjectivity" in the old and new modes of literary prose. An illustrative example of the dialogical interaction between the old and the new literary modes is found in recent writings by Ch'i Chun. In her stories written in a hybrid genre of the lyrical essay and fiction, the voice of the author is relatively subdued, but the works still characteristically rely on the author's subjectivity as an organizational principle, and on the evocation of an intersubjective empathy for the creation of aesthetic effect. As a result, such problematic issues as the distance between the author and his/her discourse, that between art and life, and the fictional reconstruction of personal experience are inevitably evoked.

Overall, the fact that the author of the more traditional mode of prose is by convention held directly accountable for the belief systems expressed through his own voice while the author of a modernist narrative can be extremely oblique about his/her real attitudes has a profound effect on the semantics of these two types of writing. What often appears to be an opposition in the ways in which the author explains reality turns out to be deeply rooted in the reciprocal relationship between generic stylistics and the ideological constitution of the writer's mind.

Since the reader's assumption about authorial distance in a text is an essential guiding principle of his interpretive activity, it is not surprising that we have found abundant evidence of a bifurcation in readers' responses toward certain literary works in the last twenty years. When the modernist mode of expression was in fashion, readers frequently relegated certain types of more traditional writing to the periphery. Now, even among sophisticated readers, unfamiliarity with certain conventions may cause total rejection of certain "modernist" works, such as Wang Wen-hsing's controversial *The Man Kept at Bay*, which will be briefly discussed later. What this phenomenon repeatedly reminds us of is the crucial role played by aesthetic assumptions in the activity of reading and appreciation of literature and the reality of a confrontation of native Chinese literary sensibility and modernist aesthetics.

However, the traditional literary sensibility and modernist aesthetics do not always have to be oppositional. More recently, we have witnessed self-conscious effort among young writers of fiction to integrate the two. The past decade's ascendant influence of Eileen Chang's style on a group

of young writers may be partially attributed to this tendency. Eillen Chang seems to be an ideal model. Despite her mastery of Western stylistic techniques, her unusually rich poetic symbolism, her exquisitely wrought "mood," and a self-conscious sentimentalism frequently evoke a heightened lyrical subjectivity that is conspicuously lacking in some of the modernist writings in Taiwan. Even in the similarly flamboyant, imagistic texts of Pai Hsien-yung, which, as critics have pointed out, also show considerable influence of traditional Chinese literature, such lyrical subjectivity is often absent, or much more dramatically objectified.

## II. Self-consciousness in Language and Voice

When discussing modernist writers' experiments with language, critics more often than not focus their attention on such external linguistic features as ungrammatical sentence structure, neologisms, or other such idiosyncracies. However, if we look deeply into the aesthetic assumptions underlying these ostensible traits of modernism, we will find that they are largely manifestations of an avant-gardist tendency to "subvert the form" (which will be treated in the next section) and play insignificant roles in actually shaping the essential styles of individual writers.

The proper domain of a discussion of language in any artistic prose, as M. M. Bakhtin has convincingly shown us, lies in the ways the author artistically organizes and reformulates "a diversity of speech types and a diversity of individual voices" in his text.<sup>3</sup> Since each of the speech types (artistic and extra-artistic speech genres) "possesses its own verbal and semantic forms for assimilating various aspects of reality," while each individual voice represents a particular way of viewing the world, this process of incorporation broadens the conceptual horizon of the artistic discourse.<sup>4</sup> Although Bakhtin privileged the novel, I think his ideas nevertheless provide us with a powerful interpretive frame for discussing the widely divergent styles of modernist short story writers in Taiwan.

The self-conscious use of language and voice as a special medium for the art of fiction is not restricted to such masterful stylists as Pai Hsien-yung, or to the highly experimental innovators of language, such as Wang Wen-hsing and Wang Chen-ho. It is also found in writers whose language is plain and unassuming, those who seemingly lack a distinctive style.

That ornate, colorful diction is deliberately shunned in writings of such modernists as Ou-yang Tzu and Ch'en Juo-hsi can be partly attributed to a

conscious effort to make the language a transparent medium for representing reality. Out of the same concern, these writers have carefully maintained a "unitary language," allowing voices other than that of the narrator's to enter their stories only through represented inner speeches and dialogues between the characters. As a consequence of such "single language consciousness" and meticulous control of narrative perspective, the dynamics is frequently transferred to plot and action, resulting in some extremely well-constructed short stories.

Another prominent example of self-conscious language use in literary discourse is found in the many stories written during the Nativist Literary Movement which employ Taiwanese dialect. Although the literary merit of such stories is frequently marred by their overt, tendentious thematic statements, yet through the artistic image of a rural-style Taiwanese, these works have successfully represented a distinct verbal-ideological social group and hence sharpened general readers' perceptions of socio-linguistic differentiations in Taiwan's society.

There are also various speech genres which play significant roles in shaping individual writers' styles. It is often mentioned that Pai Hsien-yung draws influence from the language of the traditional Chinese novel, *Dream of the Red Chamber*. In "Dragon Tower" by Wang Wen-hsing, the brigade commander's neighbor's speech is apparently a parodic stylization of Greek tragedy. The incorporation of non-literary genres, however, are less frequently noted. For example, in a number of stories in Pai's *Taipei People*, most notably in "The Eternal Snow Beauty," the collective voice of high-society gossip is mixed with the narrator's voice, more often than not in the typical form of "hybrid construction." An appropriation of Japanese syntax and sentence ending particles in Ch'en Ying-chen's stories adds a melancholic accent to his text. Even more remarkably, an integral element of the narrative structure of many of Huang Fan's stories is a markedly oratorical speaking voice. In the incongruity of such a public voice and introspective description lies the key to interpretation of his stories. It is thus very misguided to compare Huang's novels to those of Saul Bellow or nineteenth-century Russian novelists, which feature completely different kind of narrative voice.

It is nevertheless most interesting to detect self-conscious exploration of the dialogical interrelations of divergent styles and rivaling voices within a single text. For example, Hwang Ch'un-ming, who shows great versatility in his manipulation of narrative perspective, uses subtitles in a number of his

stories, each subtitle clearly ushering in an alien voice, a point of view that is markedly external to the story world. Frequently in the form of an epigram, representing mundane wisdom in its collective voice, this intruding point of view interacts dialogically with the viewpoints represented in the story, creating effects ranging from mildly humorous to bitterly sarcastic.

Finally, the real master who most explicitly and energetically explores heteroglossia in his text is Wang Chen-ho. In many of his stories authorial discourse is markedly double-voiced, double-accented. Wang frequently uses parodic stylization and a mixture of high and low styles. A notable example is found in the mock-heroism of "A Happy Whore," in which lines quoted from well-known classical poetry, depicting lofty sentiments and exalted states of mind, are juxtaposed with descriptions of vulgarities.

### III. The Subversion of Form or Use of Anti-form

If the more conservative wing of the modernists in Taiwan adhere to principles laid down by Henry James and devote themselves to technical refinement, then the more "progressively experimental" writers are more inspired by the avant-gardist aspect of Western modernism, by "its use of anti-form or desecration of established conventions."<sup>5</sup> The former is more formalist, closer in spirit to early Modernism, while the latter is anti-formalist, "though compelled to use form to subvert it," and frequently shows affinities with Neo-Modernism or Post-Modernism.<sup>6</sup>

Formal experiment, or deliberate subversion of form, is one of the most conspicuous aspects of modernist writings in Taiwan and the most problematic as well. Before our brief treatment of this characteristic, however, I would like to follow Irving Howe in arguing that, despite the common belief, formal experiment is in fact not the most crucial component of modernist style. As Howe points out in "The Idea of the Modern," "There are works in which the outer mannerisms and traits of the modern are faithfully echoed or mimicked but the animating spirit has disappeared."<sup>7</sup> The quintessential modernist spirit is undoubtedly missing in numerous sporadic attempts at formal experiment in the early period of Taiwan's modernist movement, even though not all of these works are totally uninteresting in themselves. For better or worse, this trend was effectively checked by advocates of the Nativist Literature, with their forceful demand for stylistic simplicity and thematic clarity.

The three authors I will mention here have engaged in formal

experiments that are generated by deep-rooted aesthetic concerns. These experiments are thus not only manifestations of an innovative spirit, but also signs of commitment to particular fundamental Modernist assumptions about art.

The first author is Wang Chen-ho. We may conveniently summarize the various experiments found in Wang's works as the writer's strong interest in the delicate author/reader relationship and the dynamics of narrative pragmatics, which, in an era of postmodern aesthetics, underlie many innovative literary techniques.

Wang not only tampers with existing narrative and reading conventions, but bluntly undermines the kind of "realistic illusion" that a traditional fiction writer strives to preserve. Even his seemingly "realistic" works of fiction contains such modernist idiosyncracies as typographical variations (enlarged or bold-face print, framed blank on the page, for instance) and textual insertions from other written genres (verses, play or music scripts, official documents). Moreover, occasional anomalies in the story's narration itself challenge the reader's habitual assumptions about fiction. For example, the naturalistic setting of the story "The Thirteenth-of-May Festival" is unexpectedly given a surreal cast when two separate events in the story are narrated nearly verbatim in the text, with almost identical details, as if the narrator were suddenly captured by a capricious desire for self-mimickry. This undermining of realistic illusion ultimately calls our attention to the paradox of the act of narrative transmission.

The second author, Wang Wen-hsing, persistently endeavored to find an ideal style that would embody his individual vision of reality. With respect to his often discussed experiments with languages in his two novels, as I have argued elsewhere,<sup>8</sup> the apparent departure from older versions of mimetic rules governing language use in realistic fiction does not aim at exposing, or even to subverting these rules. Instead, Wang is constantly seeking to "heighten" the realistic effect in what he himself calls a "transmimetic" manner.<sup>9</sup>

Wang's experiments with compositional aspects of fiction are most explicit in *Family Crisis*, in which a highly personal reality is arbitrarily presented through a mechanically devised framework (segmentation and the interweaving of two story lines and two time planes) and a hypothetical narrative situation.<sup>10</sup> Such an effort to maximize the function of form in the overall meaning structure of the literary work reflects a basic act of faith crucially important to the modernist enterprise: upon recognizing

the primary epistemological difficulty, the modernists set out "to redeem, essentially or existentially, the formless universe of contingency" through art.<sup>11</sup>

Underlying the recently published story series, *Annals of the Chi-ling Town* by Li Yung-p'ing, is an expansion of this faith. Although formal experimentation still figures centrally in this work, its significant departures from earlier phases of Modernism alert us to traits of a new aesthetic.

In this book, events and fragments of events are constantly refocused from different angles and distances and recounted with different degrees of detail. However, even though the author manipulates points of view, the work is not genuinely concerned with the problem of perspective, of the representation of reality. Instead, the primary function of such recurrence is to shape a peculiar text syntax. Each time an event is mentioned, it is recontextualized within a new sphere of reality, while at the same time reverberating with a number of other spheres that have been "stored" in the story's memory. Thus individual stories tangentially intersect, and an individual character's fate becomes "entangled" with another's in an almost fatalistic manner. Instead of arbitrariness, or other common devices, the author has explored "contingency" as a powerful unifying principle of his book, wherein lies its greatest interest.

#### IV. Intellectualism and Individualized Vision of Reality

In his popular book *Modernism*, Peter Faulkner describes the transition between the Victorian age and the era of Modernism in the following way:

Modernism is part of the historical process by which the arts have dissociated themselves from nineteenth-century assumptions . . . . These assumptions about literary forms were closely related to a particular relationship between the writer and his readers — on the whole a stable relationship in which the writer could assume a community of attitudes, a shared sense of reality.

. . . In poetry as in the novel, the expectation was of ethical enlightenment, to be conveyed in a form intelligible to a wide audience. . . .

. . . [there] was a certain lack of force and range in Victorian literature, most notoriously in the treatment of sexual relationship. . . . This sense of the limitation imposed on the writer as his part of the social consensus became increasingly irritating

Then, in the era of Modernism:

... The challenge to the artist is always to combine openness to experience with formal control. . . .

... the world of 1910 was felt to be much more complex than the world as it had been known before, and especially more complex than the orderly world that had been presented to the reader in Victorian literature.

... If experience was felt to have enormous complexity, it followed... that traditional realistic methods were inadequate to render it.<sup>13</sup>

I have quoted Faulkner at some length because I feel that the rationale given in these passages for the English writers' aspirations for a drastic change in the literary sphere in a transitional age may also be applied to the modernist literary movement in Taiwan. The universal ring of these descriptions may be attributed to the fact that Faulkner has viewed things primarily from the writer's standpoint, not from the viewpoint of the much more complex realms of socio-economic and political developments, which are inevitably more culture-specific. Nevertheless, his assessment highlights a particular aspect of Modernism that held strong appeal for the modernists in Taiwan, exerting great influence on the directions of their later development.

A subscription to liberal, intellectual rationalism was rather common among early modernists in Taiwan, most of whom had a college education. At the same time, because of various socio-political constraints, the modernist writers of the sixties identified themselves more as artists with an intellectual disposition than active participants in the critical "public sphere" in the sense used by Terry Eagleton.<sup>15</sup> The attempt to "get beyond the oversimplified accounts of experience" led to a widely shared interest in human psychology, in such existential, epistemological problems as have plagued the consciousness of many twentieth-century intellectuals, and in highly intellectualized literary forms. Existentialism and Freudian psychology lent much of the terminology for such explorations, if not actually providing ideological frameworks. Symbolism and a Jamesian manipulation of narrative perspective attracted sincere followers. The objective narrative method

discussed in our first section, for example, typically features an intellectually sophisticated author who, upon analysing behaviors, dissects the human souls with clinical coolness, moral relativism, and a delicate taste for irony.

A correlated phenomenon is the writers' effort to combat philistine complacency and didacticism, for which more radical means are in order. Avant-gardist formal experiment always contains an iconoclastic element. What deserves to be further examined, however, is the more persistent tendency to use underground realism in the more hard-core modernist writers and the candid treatment of tabooed themes such as sexuality. As rebellious gestures mocking the established culture or ethical norms, and, more important perhaps, as part of the effort to achieve individualized style, these tendencies produced their impact relatively late in Taiwan's modernist literary development.

It is perhaps not a coincidence that four of the more ambitious modernist works published in the eighties – Wang Wen-hsing's *The Man Kept at Bay* (1981), Pai hsien-yung's *The Condemned Son* (1983), Wang Chen-ho's *Rose, Rose, I Love You* (1984), and Li Yung-p'ing's *Annals of the Chi-ling Town* (1986) – in one way or another, all share these characteristics. Criminality and poverty, prostitution, hetero- and homo-sexuality are themes never so penetratingly (but at the same time not polemically) treated in serious modern Chinese literature. Never was a subversive, though non-political, edge in the form of a threat to social propriety, presented in such an undisguised manner. None of these novels are strictly naturalistic; the primary import of such modernist tendencies is the achievement of independent perceptual and expressive modes through art. Once again, I would like to borrow from Irving Howe's discussion of Western modernism:

The modernist writer strives for sensations, in the serious sense of the term; his epigone, in the frivolous sense. The modernist writer thinks of subject matter not as something to be rehearsed or recaptured but to be conquered and enlarged. . . . He becomes entranced with depths – whichever you choose: the depths of the city, or the self, or the underground, or the slums, or the extremes of sensation induced by sex, liquor, drugs. . . .<sup>14</sup>

Or, in Julia Kristeva's more contemporary version, the practice of writing is seen as an attempt to "expand the boundaries of human experience" and thus has a special significance in our post-industrial society:

Compared to the media, whose function it is to collectivize all systems of signs, even those which are unconscious, writing-as-experience-of-limits *individuates*. This individuation extends deep within the constituent mechanisms of human experience as an experience of meanings. . . .<sup>16</sup>

This passage seems extremely appropriate in describing the motives behind several writers' attempts to create a highly individualized "idiolect" — more radically by Wang Wen-hsing and Wang Chen-ho, but also in Li Yung-p'ing and Pai Hsien-yung — which not only serves the function of "individuating," but also expands the limit of language as communicative system.

### V. The Sociological Dimension of Fiction

Writers of the modernist school have been frequently criticized for their elitist tendency, their allegedly hostile relations with the masses, and, in particular, their indifference to contemporary social problems. Critics following this line of argument often cite, as incontrovertible evidence of such attitudes, certain modernist writers' "excessive and self-indulgent" experiments with literary form and language.

What can be pointed out here, however, is the paradox underlying this situation: It is precisely through long, dedicated quests in the artistic use of language that mature modernist writers such as Wang Wen-hsing and Wang Chen-ho have come to terms with such sociological essences of the prose art as formulated by Bakhtin.<sup>17</sup> In the remaining part of this paper, I will illustrate this point by discussing some aspects of the fiction written by these two rather radical experimenters in language.

*All languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view of the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values.*

— M. M. Bakhtin<sup>18</sup>

Wang Chen-ho is a writer who started to explore the socio-ideological

dimension of language early in his career. For example, references to different planes of social reality, mainly through original analogies, quoted aphorisms, or simply loaded vocabulary, contribute greatly to the powerful sarcasm of his much celebrated short story "An Oxcart for Dowry." In the language of his discourse, the mischievous double-voiced narrator consistently makes allusions to military drills, education, and such respectable professional positions as mathematician and diplomat in depicting the hopeless case of a perennially unemployed poor villager. The aphorisms used to relentlessly mock the underprivileged characters in the story, moreover, belong collectively to the entire community of language users, who are the readers of this story. Thus the readers laugh with the narrator, laughing at the characters, only to find themselves sharing the class snobbery and the mean-spiritedness of the narrator. Thus through the device of eliciting "ambivalent laughter," the author criticizes the reader by first involving him through his sociolinguistic consciousness.

Wang Chen-ho continued to develop this technique. The *tour-de-force* of his more recent novel, *Rose, Rose, I Love You*, lies precisely in the juxtaposition of different social "languages" — Tung Ssu-wen's pseudo-intellectual rhetoric, the pimps' vulgar language, the prostitute's naive talk, etc. — so that the interplay of different verbal-ideological groups is intensively dramatized. In this novel, the author even more aggressively invites the reader to participate in the event of his "utterance," through such scattered parenthetical remarks as "If it were today, 1983, he (the character) would have used a different expression '——' for this situation. But unfortunately, by that time, this colorful expression had not been invented yet." The author is apparently poking fun at such fetishism as surrounds certain social jargon currently in vogue. At the same time, however, with this act, he appeals to the consciousness of his immediate contemporaries, coercing them into his game by defining the specific context of his discourse as "the present."

Like *Rose, Rose, I Love You*, *The Man Kept at Bay* has a specifically defined social context (the story takes place some twenty years ago in Taiwan), and its criticism is specifically targeted at the ideological structure of contemporary Chinese society. However, while most of Wang Chen-ho's incorporations of social heteroglossia into his texts are externally and compositionally marked to sharpen our perception of sociolinguistic differentiations, the novel *The Man Kept at Bay* frequently illustrates Bakhtin's contention that "The ideological becoming of a human being. . .

is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others.”<sup>19</sup>

The narrator/hero's distinctive language is pregnant with conscious and unconscious distortions of familiar idioms. To dispel boredom, he amuses himself by thinking through words. It turns out that words are also thinking through him. Almost from the very beginning, the narrator shows an unusual fascination with the inadequacy of “names” to the objects being named, and he derives great pleasure from naming and deliberately misnaming. This game soon becomes a parody of the very act of conceptualizing things in language, calling our attention to a multiplicity of meanings and significances engrained in words by social consciousness.

The text is also full of brilliant examples, such as the section on Freedom and Democracy, of how the ideological structure of an ordinary person's consciousness is conditioned by other people's words. However, the narrator/hero is not merely a passive victim of the rhetorical operations of social discourse. A self-styled philosopher of sorts, he searches the common discourse for logical fallacies, paradoxes, and its enormous power to deceive. The problem, however, is that the narrator, while trying to use language to expose language itself, is at the same time hopelessly trapped in language, just like everyone else. Thus the narrator sometimes abruptly demythologizes, yet sometimes unwittingly upholds the very assumptions that make up the ideological basis of our culture. The situation's complexity is further compounded when the reader tries to discover the real intentions of the author, which, refracted through the hero's discourse, require great discernment to unravel.

In this book, Wang Wen-hsing also actively involves the reader, trapping him in order to drive home particular messages. If developed to their logical extremes, many assumptions that are commonly taken for granted will be reduced to sheer absurdity. It is by presenting the process of the hero's reasonings, their ingeniousness, their inconsistency, and the paradoxical truths at times revealed in them, that the author invites the reader to reexamine the ideological workings of his own consciousness, and, by extension, that of people in the same society who use the same language. Wang's work thus attains a philosophical depth that is rarely seen in modern Chinese literature.

## Notes

1. Ou-yang Tzu, *The Girl with Long Black Hair* (Taipei: Darling Publisher, 1969) 3.

2. In his introduction to an anthology of modern Chinese prose *Chung-kuo hsien-tai san-wen hsuan-hsi* (Annotated Selections of Modern Chinese Prose) (Taipei: Ch'ang-an Publisher, 1985), Li Feng-mao has described the important roles of lyrical prose in Taiwan's literary scene during the fifties and the sixties.
3. M. M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1981) 262. Taking into consideration Bakhtin's theory of discourse, I have intentionally placed the term "impersonal narration" in quotation marks in the previous section to indicate that it is a qualified concept, a concept that receives its particular impact from the realistic conventions of twentieth-century fiction writing. Wayne Booth and Seymour Chatman (scholars who themselves have presented us with such taxonomical terms as impersonal narration and overt and covert narrators) remind us that, in a sense, all narrative types exhibit "mixed point of view," which is inevitably reflected in the author's choice of diction, or use of personal deictics. In brief, strictly "impersonal narration" is a practical impossibility. M. M. Bakhtin, working with the nineteenth-century novel, confronts the issue from the opposite angle. In a fundamental sense, his notion entails that a discourse is never purely personal or impersonal; through the working of "internal dialogism," the presence of the other's discourse is always immanent. In the novelistic discourse in particular, even the most unitary and direct authorial discourse, which would be the closest to the condition of impersonal narration, is fused with "another's speech" – another's voice, another's accent, another's point of view – through the "character zones."
4. Bakhtin 321.
5. "The Name and Nature of Modernism," *Modernism: 1890-1930*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (Penguin Books, 1976) 30.
6. Bradbury and McFarlane 35.
7. Irving Howe, ed. *Literary Modernism*, (Greenwich, Conn. 1967) 22.
8. Sung-sheng Y. Chang, "Wang Wen-hsing's Quest in Art and Religion," trans. into Chinese by Hsieh Hui-ying, *Chung-wai Literary Monthly* 15, 6 (1986): 108-119.
9. It is extremely interesting to note that Wang's idea and practice seem to conform perfectly to what was proposed in Bakhtin's discussion of "the artistic image of a language" in artistic prose (in the chapter on "The Speaking Person in the Novel" in "Discourse in the Novel"). In essence, Bakhtin argues that the novelist makes no effort to achieve a linguistically exact reproduction of the empirical data of languages that he incorporates into his text; instead, a distinctive social language in the novel becomes "the object of a re-processing, reformulation and artistic transformation that is free and oriented towards art. . . departures from the empirical reality of the represented language may. . . be highly significant, not only in the sense of their being biased choices or exaggerations of certain aspects peculiar to the given language, but even in the sense that they are a free creation of new elements – which, while true to the spirit of the given language, are utterly foreign to the actual language's empirical evidence." (Bakhtin 336)
10. Chang.
11. Bradbury and McFarlane 50.
12. Peter Faulkner, *Modernism*, (Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1977) 1-4.
13. Faulkner 13-16.
14. Howe 31.
15. Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism* (London: Verso Editions and NLB,

- 1984).
16. Julia Kristeva, "Postmodernism?" in *Romanticism, Modernism, Postmodernism*, ed. Harry R. Garvin (London & Toronto: Associated Univ. Press, 1980) 137-138.
  17. As a matter of fact, the relationship between many early modernist literary works and their social contexts is much closer than suggested by the above-mentioned trend of criticism. It is nevertheless true that this relationship is of a different nature than that prescribed by so-called social realism. Criticism that honors the bifurcation of ideology and form would have difficulty accounting for the difference between the stories of Pai Hsien-yung and those more polemical works of social realism, not necessarily of less artistic quality.
  18. Bakhtin 292.
  19. Bakhtin 341.