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美国非裔文学批评

——杰瑞·沃德教授中国演讲录

○ 杰瑞·沃德 著

Jerry Washington Ward, Jr.

The China Lectures: African American Literary and Critical Issues



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序

罗良功 (Luo Lianggong)

杰瑞·沃德博士(Dr. Jerry W. Ward, Jr.), 1978年获弗吉尼亚大学文学博士学位,曾先后任教于美国弗吉尼亚大学、图加卢学院、塔拉德加学院等高校,2002年—2012年受聘为新奥尔良迪拉德大学杰出教授。沃德教授是美国重要的非裔文学与文化研究专家,也是美国著名作家理查德·赖特研究会的创始人和学术权威之一,先后出版《南方黑人的声音》、《重新定义黑人文学史》、《搅浑这水:美国非裔诗歌250年》、《理查德·赖特百科全书》、《剑桥美国非裔文学史》(与玛丽娅特·格雷厄姆教授合作)、《卡特里娜札记》等著作。沃德教授曾任美国现代语言协会(MLA)美国黑人文学分会执委、美国人文学科中心研究基金评议组负责人、美国高校语言协会执行委员会委员、密西西比文学艺术研究中心执行理事、密西西比人文科学协会副理事长,美国现代语言学会会刊PMLA、《美国非裔评论》、《文学史官》、《密西西比季刊》等重要学术期刊的编委和特约编辑,曾入选非裔作家国际文学名人堂、获美国黑人高校联合基金会杰出学者称号,在美国享有很高的学术声誉。

我与沃德教授的联系始于2007年,当时我正在筹备即将在华中师范大学举办的20世纪美国诗歌国际学术研讨会(2007年7月),与沃德教授有过几封电子邮件往来,直到2009年圣诞前夕才得以见面。这年秋季,美国密西西比河谷州立大学英语系主任郑建青教授作为富布赖特高级学者来我院短期任教,在他的动议和支持下,我们成功举办了“美国非裔文学国际研讨会”(2009年12月),沃德教授应邀出席并作了题为“文学史的责任:论美国非裔文学研究”的主题发言,其严谨深邃的学术思想及其谦逊真诚的君子风度给我和与会的中外学者留下了深刻的印象。次年春,沃德教授再次访问华中师范大学,作了多场学术报告,他对学术的





真诚与使命感以及亦师亦友的人格魅力深深地感染了我我和我的同事,我们开始讨论合作事宜。2011年春季,我们获得教育部与国家外国专家局“海外名师计划”资助,正式聘请沃德教授为我校特聘教授。在为期三年的聘期里,沃德教授兢兢业业、勤勤恳恳,主讲了“美国非裔文学研究”、“20世纪美国文学”、“美国现当代文学热点”等多门博士生、硕士生课程,组织了一系列“文学研究与论文写作”研讨班,指导学术团队开展科研,积极推动我校与外国高校的合作,并不辞辛劳地在中国各地高校作学术演讲,足迹遍布武汉、北京、西安、成都、南京、杭州、恩施、焦作等地,促进了中国相关领域学者之间以及中国学者与美国学者之间的交流与合作。

沃德教授是一位仁厚的长者、勤恳的师者、严肃的学者,他的血液里流淌着人性的尊严和为之奋斗的使命感与责任感,这也是他的学术思想和学术研究的原动力。作为文学研究专家,沃德教授强调文学的社会功能,特别强调文学对人的解放、对社会进步的推动力量。他说,“文学是我们用于将自我从隐喻性的奴役中解放出来的武器,如果我们不能娴熟地使用这一武器,就可能无法获得人类本可以拥有的相对程度的自由”(“The Obligations of Literary History”)。本书所收录的沃德教授关于理查德·赖特的系列演讲文稿,充分表现了他的文学济世情怀。如果说沃德教授关于赖特的研究和思考是作为一个美国非裔学者从本民族文学出发的,那么这一点恰恰反映了沃德教授将个人、民族、人类的追求融于一体的精神境界,反映了他由个人而及民族、由民族而及世界的普世情怀和追求多样共生的文化多元思想。

沃德教授立足于美国非裔民族和美国非裔文学来表达他的多元文化思想,对他而言,美国非裔文学既是世界多元的风标,又是一个文化战场,具有非常突出的文化意义。因而,他十分强调美国非裔文学的独立性和独特性,并试图建构一套话语来描述美国非裔文学。例如,沃德教授用“黑人写作”与“黑人文学”这两个不同的词语来进行差异性表述。他说,“写作是以手书或印刷形式对口头语言的具体运用,而文学(实际上包含常被称为“口头文学”的维度)是指被人为地割裂出来的一些写作实例。……我们的[美国非裔]文学包括众多缺乏足够描述的模糊的文类,我们



充满活力的口头文学、文学、音乐传统导致了很多日常生活行为的问题,不是因为这些文类过于随意,而是因为我们可以根据需要使它们相互转化”(“Tradition and Acknowledgement in Combat Zones”)。本书收录的篇章与沃德教授的其他论著一样,凸显了美国非裔文学的独特性和独立性在他学术思想中的重要地位,反映了他一贯的主张,即正是因为美国非裔文学的独特性学界才应该采取独立的有别于其他文学的研究方法和理论指导。

关于美国非裔文学研究,沃德教授在他的演讲和其他学术论著提出了两个应该注意的问题:一是“什么才能代表美国非裔文学”,另一个是“如何在当下进行美国非裔文学研究”。第一个问题无疑涉及文学研究的立场与目的。沃德教授说,“如果我们的动机主要是审美的并且局限于面对客体臆想所产生的观念,那么,我们关注那些与美国非裔民族创造的大量‘书写’有所疏离的所谓‘主要作家’创作的诗歌、小说、戏剧就是合理的;如果我们的动机在文化上更加宽泛,那么,我们就必须研究那些应时而生的文类变化和主要主题”,而后者则是“广大美国非裔民族所创造或演奏出来的丰富多样的、充分语境化的表达”(“The Obligations of Literary History”)。换言之,对于沃德教授而言,美国非裔文学中更具有时代性和民族性的主体不在于精英,而在于非裔民族鲜活生动的文艺作品,因而他主张重新检讨精英化的美国非裔文学经典,质疑《诺顿美国非裔文学选集》和《呼与应:河滨美国非裔文学传统选集》这两部主要文集所建构起来的经典,转而关注那些具有文学性但又没有被经典化的美国非裔的口头、印刷、多媒体等多种形式的艺术表达(“The Obligations of Literary History”)。这种敢于挑战权威的学术勇气、积极与权威对话的独立个性正是沃德教授的写照,在本书多篇文章中都得以清晰呈现。

如何在当下进行美国非裔文学研究实质上是一个关于美国非裔文学研究如何在当下保持独立性的问题,本书中有多篇文章都专门探讨了这个问题。沃德教授认为,当下学者在文学研究方法上都面临“后现代选择过剩”,而美国非裔文学学者要保持学术的独立性和对研究对象的尊重,必须在研究方法和方法论上作出选择。沃德教授在《文学史的责任》、《美国非裔文学对现代性的回应》等文章中给出了他自己的观点:当



下性即是对传统的现代回应;美国非裔文学研究的现代性问题离不开对其历史的考察,只有深入的文学史研究才能保证美国非裔研究在当下的方向不发生偏移,正如他所说的,“文学史的探求使得人们能够对美国非裔文学传统的延续与变化获得更加清晰的理解”(“The Obligations of Literary History”)。这种以史观今的学术视角体现了沃德教授对文学的坚守、对文学研究责任的坚守。本书中沃德教授解读理查德赖特在 21 世纪的文学和文化意义、从当下视角审视美国非裔文学传统,都为他本人所警示的美国非裔文学研究的当下性问题提供了注脚。

本书收录的演讲录还体现了一个特点,即沃德教授非常注重并且擅长于面对外国接受者讲述美国非裔文学的故事。他对于演讲题目的选择、演讲内容的设计、风格的把握等都常常有着充分的准备,对于部分曾经在美国发表过的演讲也针对中国接受者的知识背景和文化立足点进行了调整。这不仅反映了沃德教授对中国学术背景的尊重,更体现了他对美国非裔文学和文化的尊重与忠诚,他在将这个常为主流话语所不屑的文学传播给中国学者时,努力真实呈现这一文学及其学术研究的原生性样态,同时保持自己作为学者的独立和尊严。编辑本书时,沃德教授为了确保所收录的演讲录能够尽量真实完整地反映自己的整体学术思想,还特意加入了部分注解,并增添了一些他近年来所作的简短杂谈和诗文。这再一次体现了他作为师者和学者的严谨以及其真诚的学术性格,为中国学者树立了良好的治学榜样。

沃德教授,永远的学者、师者、长者。

罗良功

华中师范大学外国语学院教授、博士生导师

2014 年 10 月于桂子山



Preface

Howard Ramsby II

Jerry W. Ward, Jr. has been an active participant in lively conversations about black writing and literary history for about half of a century now. In fact, Professor Ward's conversations about black writers and writing predate the label "African American literature," which so many of us now use to refer to a distinct body of artistic compositions. We can even plausibly say that in fundamental ways Professor Ward contributed to the exchanges that gave rise to the field of African American literary studies. He was indeed part of the intergenerational group of teachers and scholars whose pedagogical, professional, and publishing activities assisted in establishing a place for black writers in the academy.

When I arrived at Tougaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi, as an undergraduate in the mid-1990s, Professor Ward was more than two decades into his career, already a local legend. At the time, like most of my classmates, I had less specific knowledge of who he was as a prominent scholar of black literature. More immediately, he was known to us as a devoted and challenging teacher-thinker. In one of many memorable instances, he provided feedback on an essay by one of my peers by informing her that "your thesis dances like light on water. In other words, nothing is focused." Thanks to phrasings like that, we were far more aware of the poetic lines that Professor Ward was writing in the margins of our papers for class assignments than we were with his published poems and scholarly articles.



In retrospect, we were actually reaping the benefits of studying with an accomplished poet, researcher, book reviewer, literary historian, and humanities scholar who chose to *pass* or disguise himself as a teacher. How many among the students at Tougaloo College in 1976 or in 1986 or in 1996 knew much concerning Ward's work as a Richard Wright scholar? How many of us knew of his collaborative exchanges with artists and scholars like Houston Baker, Jr., Margaret Walker, Maryemma Graham, Trudier Harris, Kalamu ya Salaam, and so many others? Who would have guessed back then that Professor Ward would, let's say, deliver lectures on African American literature at universities in China? Perhaps, not everyone would have been surprised. After all, we had witnessed him routinely bring the larger world to us at our small college in Mississippi, so the idea that he might discuss black literary art and culture with colleagues and students in Beijing, Enshi, Hangzhou, Nanjing, Wuhan, and Xi'an would not have been beyond what we might expect from him.

Professor Ward's lectures in China are an extension and continuation of the many lectures and presentations that he gave at libraries, universities, and literature conferences in the United States over the decades. Those U.S. presentations were, in turn, linked to the discussions he had with hundreds and hundreds of students at Tougaloo College (1970-2002) and Dillard University (2002-2012) in New Orleans, Louisiana. An awareness of distinct populations of readers, particularly black students from the South, has been central to Ward's approaches to presenting ideas about literature. Most notably, the processes of assisting literature students to become active responsible citizens, not simply college graduates, led Ward to think seriously about the *obligations*—a recurring word in these lectures—of readers, teachers, artists, and literary scholars. For Ward, what we and others did or did not do with literary compositions, with cultural productions, and with language carried real-world and historical consequences. These lectures on Richard Wright, Houston Baker, Eugene B. Redmond, Natasha Trethewey, African American literary art, and history delivered for audiences in China





speak to Professor Ward's expansive commitments as an active reader, teacher, and scholar.

The appendix, which features Professor Ward's blog entries produced over the last few years, also deserves special notice, because that portion of this book represents a new development in the publishing history of African American literary studies. Leading and accomplished African American literature scholars typically write books and articles. So far, blog entries have not been central to their writing and publishing activities. In this regard, Professor Ward quietly breaks new ground and exercises yet another obligation—that of making conversations and insights about black literary works more readily available to readers, this time, online readers.

As a genre or mode of expansive possibilities, the blog format is especially fitting for a vigorous, diverse thinker-writer like Professor Ward. Noticeably, as a blogger, he covers an even wider range of topics and figures than he does in his scholarly articles and lectures. His blog entries comprise short essays, poems, open letters to literary artists and friends, meditations on films, blueprints for lectures, book reviews, and reflections about current events. As a senior scholar in the field who also produces online works, Professor Ward offers early models for the kind of writing and publishing activities that will necessarily become commonplace for a younger generation of literary scholars.

The China Lectures: African American Literary and Critical Issues expands the conversations about writers and writing, history, technology, scholarship and criticism, and the consequences of language and artistry. This book, in short, extends the longstanding efforts of Jerry W. Ward, Jr. to fulfill the many obligations associated with reading and sharing ideas about African American literary art and culture.

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, IL

April 2014



INTRODUCTION

Jerry W. Ward, Jr.

With gratitude for their patient listening and thoughtful questions, I have gathered a few lectures for my colleagues and students in the People's Republic of China. These lectures, which have been revised, were delivered between 2009 and 2013 in Wuhan, Nanjing, Hangzhou, Xi'an, Enshi, Hangzhou, and Beijing. They are predicated on the belief that the study of literatures and statements about the values of literature and culture ought to be more life-driven than theory-driven. To be sure, theories or systematic speculations have a crucial function in representing ideas and thought. They are useful. They often assist us in making reasonable choices about multiple perspectives. In rare instances, theories may lead us to perform non-verbal acts. Indeed, it may be the case that few of us can think and speak without using theories of one kind or another. They seem to offer a sense of security. They can also smooth the pathway into delusions.

It is worth noting that use of theory in the humanities is less disciplined than it is in the sciences. Humanistic methods and methodologies resist testing and verification. They tend to be arbitrary, quite expressive of taste and private interests, and comfortable with the playing of games. Under such conditions, theories resemble ideological costumes. In cultural exchanges, let us say between China and America, we must take pains to be sure we have a common understanding of the promises and limits of theory. Theory is not automatically universal. A careless application of European psychoanalytic theory in the interpretation of American and Chinese literatures, for example,





can produce absurd conclusions. For scholars and students who possess minimal book-learning about the history of the United States, fashionable talk about the Self and the Other or about post-colonialisms in discussions of African American literature can be bizarre and annoyingly disrespectful of African American histories. I am keenly aware of such dangers as I lecture on African American literature and culture for Chinese audiences. Frequently, the most productive unfolding of knowledge is not contained in the texts of the lectures. It emerges from the question and answer sessions that follow lectures. Thus, I strive to embed reasons for questions in my lectures.

It is necessary to restate what I said above about the laxity in how theory is used in the humanities. I admit, of course, that the sciences are not immune to ideology, but responsible science seeks to minimize whims. An absurd humanistic critique of the sciences would orbit around the notion that science prevents freedom of thought, that science regulates thought. That sentiment is partially true. Order and regulation are essential in the sciences. Thought is not permitted to roam like cats in search of the most tasty patches of catnip. The rage to theorize in the study of literature, to leap from one school of theory to another with minimal acknowledgement of reasons for doing so, encourages conflict and confusion about the aims of searching for knowledge. Yes, freedom of thought is maximized in literary theory and criticism, but the will to strive for provisional certainty in the face of chaos is undermined. That probability is less than fortunate. To be blunt, it is anti-humanistic. My lectures reflect my beliefs about moral obligations in critical work, my long struggle to endow my life and the lives of others with meaning through the study of literatures and cultures. In that struggle, I minimize theory as such or adjust it to meet the requirements of special African American situations or employ theory with skepticism. I am much indebted to the late Barbara Christian for helping me to understand what it means to belong to a race for theory. I am obligated to embrace humility, to warn readers that my lectures do not march exclusively to the drumming of theory.





These lectures deal with my ideas about the moral obligations of critics, the importance of tradition and history in the study of literature, the relevance of Richard Wright's legacy in the contexts of American and African American cultural expression, and my sense that literature involves necessary, situated responses to the uncertainty of our experiences of everyday life. I have added a series of blogs, poems, and informal writings as an appendix, because these works are instances of the ironies which flavor my pre-future thinking.

I am especially indebted to Zheng Jianqing and Luo Lianggong for sponsoring my visits to China, and to Zhu Xiaolin, Fang Xingfu, Yang Jincal, Wang Yukuo, Fang Hong, Zhao Wenshu, Wang Zuyou, Jiang Yajun, Tan Huijuan, Duan Bo, and many other friends for their gracious hospitality and support during those visits.

I would be remiss if I failed to give thanks to my American colleagues, especially to Kalamu ya Salaam, Maryemma Graham, Howard Rambsy II, Reginald Martin, C. Liegh McInnis, Wilfred D. Samuels, Kenton Rambsy, and James B. Haile III. They have helped me to sharpen ideas and to pursue my quest for a pre-future truth, my individual war against the limits and trends of academic discourses in the United States of America.

For many of my auditors in China, English was a second or third language, I tried to write and speak plainly. I wished to avoid, as much as possible, jargon and obscure vocabularies. Effective exchange of ideas from one culture to another depends on installing clean panes of glass in spaces where bricks once existed. Clarity must be primary. These revised lectures are not transparent, but I do hope they are accessible and clear. They are my modest gifts to people who have given me moments of happiness and enlightenment. And I am grateful to Luo Lianggong for urging me to publish them.

New Orleans, 2014



Contents

LECTURES

On the Study of African American Literature: The Obligations of Literary History	2
Tradition and Acknowledgement in Combat Zones	15
African American Literature's Response to Modernity	25
Richard Wright Centennial Lectures	36
Richard Wright and 21st Century Questions	68
The Critical Importance of Eugene Redmond's <i>Drumvoices</i>	78
Trickster Criticism: Kenneth Warren's <i>What Was African American Literature?</i>	89
Recent African American Studies	99
The Critical Journey of Houston A. Baker, Jr.	109
Representation and Natasha Trethewey' Poetry	122
Southern Version of Truth: Minrose Gwin's <i>The Queen of Palmyra</i> and Katheryn stockett's <i>The Help</i>	134
"Django Unchained": Ambiguous Ethical Response and the Principle of Double Effect	143

APPENDIX: Blogs and Other Writings

Remarks on April 4, 1997	150
Introduction for <i>Witherspoon</i>	153
A Letter to Nathan McCall	156





Playing in the Sunlight: Colors of Imagination, or Toni Morrison Revisited October 22, 1996/August 10, 2011	158
The Ethnic Ethical Turn	162
On the Letters of Albert Murray and Ralph Ellison	164
Richard Wright's Spinning of Tales	169
Wideman's <i>Fanon</i>	178
A Poetic Journey	181
Toi Derricotte's Open Confession	183
The "Death" of African American Literature	185
The Excellent Absurdity of Legitimate Rape: A Note on Art and History	190
Ishmael Reed and the American War of Words	193
The White Minstrelsy of American Politics	195
America's Soul Unchained	197
Houston A. Baker, Jr.'s <i>Critical Memory</i>	202
Poem 65	204
On Being Like My Tree	205
Winter Solitude	210
Gordon Parks: Photography and Intervention	212
Free Southern Theater	214
Mirror of Violence: Charles Fuller's <i>Zooman</i> and <i>the Sign</i>	219
Ramcat Reads	221
The Gifts of Black Prisoners	228
Cultural Literacy and <i>The New York Times</i>	231
Remembering Alvin Aubert and Amiri Baraka	233

LECTURES

On the Study of African American Literature: The Obligations of Literary History

Scholars of African American literature, whether they work in China or in the United States, have to think deeply about the consequences of their choices. Chinese and African American scholars have chosen to go beyond the limits of Hippolyte Taine's ideas regarding *la race*, *le milieu*, *le moment*, limits that are echoed in Mao Dun's 1922 lecture on "Literature and Life" (published in *Xueshu yanjianglu* 1923). Many of us would agree with Gao Xingjian's proposal in *Aesthetics and Creation* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2012) that "literature is essentially humanity's articulation of existential dilemmas and life's anxieties. It refers to separate, concrete, real individuals and not to abstract concepts about people, and it is in this that literature differs from philosophy" (231). Literature is our weapon for liberating ourselves from figurative enslavement. If we do not use the weapon with great skill, however, we may fail to achieve the relative degrees of freedom which it is possible for human beings to have.

We have remarkably different motives for studying literature, and we can profit greatly by being honest about what those motives are. We are aware that we study, teach, and write under or within what some philosophers designate as postmodern conditions.^① These conditions enable us to have some influence in terms of what large numbers of people think and can then transmit, and we are rightly anxious about whether we make good or bad choices as we seek to produce and to transmit knowledge about African American literature. One of our problems, of course, is the availability of vast amounts of information