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INTRODUCTION

**TO LITERARY THEORIES
AND LITERARY CRITICISM**

文学理论与文学批评
概要

■ 吕长发 胡金环 编著
河 南 大 学 出 版 社

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PREFACE

It had long been our wish to compile a book concerning literary theories and literary criticism as we observed how our students needed literary theories to guide them and methods for them to make use of in writing their graduation theses and research papers on literature. But when we set about the work we found it must be a bulky volume that can cover the rich and varied content of literature. We had to confine ourselves to certain aspects of it, and therefore what this book offers is but some elementary knowledge of literary theories and literary criticism. It introduces to the students who are studying literature in English at colleges and universities and the other English learners who are interested in literature, in the simplest possible way, the value of literature, its nature, views and opinions on the essence and function of literature, and the ways we approach literary works. Included in the book as samples of literary approaches are some research papers we wrote ourselves and essays by some critics selected from English journals so that the students and the learners may have articles on different subjects and of different styles for reference when they write their own theses.

We tried to apply the Marxist stand, viewpoint and method to our discussion of the value and nature of literature, but it was just an attempt, and we know much work remains to be done in this respect.

We are learners of literature ourselves. The knowledge contained in this book is that which we have acquired in our study of literature, including the information we collected, the ideas and opinions we borrowed from

a number of books. We are indebted to the authors, compilers and editors whose works we have consulted.

Acknowledgements must also be made to Professor Zhang Jin and Professor Qin Yingjun, who spent time going over the manuscript of the book and gave us valuable advice and suggestions on the improvement of it. We are thankful, too, to our colleagues who have given us help in many ways.

Kaifeng

The Compilers

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PART ONE

THE VALUE OF LITERATURE

As one of human creations, literature is a reflection of life and a record of human experiences. Art and literature reveal to us the things people treasure and admire, the things people praise and advocate as the true, the good and the beautiful, as well as the things they fear and hate most deeply, the things they denounce and do away with as the false, the evil and the ugly. The beauty of a face, of a bunch of flowers, or of a haunting landscape can be revealed in a painting in a way that is impossible to convey in an ordinary description; a complex personality can be captured in a novel or a play in a way that reveals the person's innermost soul; the joy or anguish of human feelings can be transmitted with music, or drama more quickly and completely than by other means. Without these modes of expression, human beings would be as impoverished and as handicapped as they would be if they tried to live without language.

Art and literature are not only something we find desirable and enjoyable; there are feelings, emotions, and ideas that can not be expressed in any way other than through art and literature. An effective literary work may seem to speak directly to us, especially if we are ripe for it. The inner life that good writers reveal in their characters often gives us glimpses

of some portion of ourselves. We can be moved to laugh, cry, tremble, dream, ponder, shriek, or rage with a character by watching a play acted on the stage or by simply turning a page instead of turning our lives upside down. Although the experience itself is imagined, the emotion is real. Present-day production of *The Birds* by Aristophanes and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* by Shakespeare have provoked the audience to gales of laughter that have literally stopped the shows for almost minutes at a time, while the mention of the ghastly sight of the wretched queen hanging herself and the king plunging the golden brooches into his eyes in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* have appalled them and filled their hearts with sorrow and sadness. A reader may be so concerned about the fate of Oliver Twist in the hands of Old Fagin and the gang of thieves that he does not go to have his meals until he knows the little boy was rescued and then was adopted by Mr Brownlow. The repressed love of Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter* is painful to a sympathetic reader. And a reader is happy to read about the engagement of Darcy and Elizabeth, in spite of the insolent intervention of Lady Catherine, and their marriage in the end of the novel *Pride and Prejudice*. We read again and again with unfailing delight good love poems and the poems describing the beauty of nature, and the final chapters of a good adventure novel can make our hearts race as much as a 100-yard dash. Human emotions speak a universal language regardless of when or where a work was written.

Art and literature provide an endless variety of inspiration in addition to enjoyment, for it is the means of making people feel truth and beauty through their senses. The highest forms of art and literature have had the effect of exciting a noble enthusiasm and sincere desire of self-sacrifice. Count Leo Tolstoy pointed out, "If art be the means of expressing and conveying emotion, then the noblest art must be that which expresses and

conveys the noblest form of emotion." The noblest form of emotion expressed by the great writers and artists has inspired one generation of human beings after another. The sublime thought of caring for the broad masses of the people and for others as conveyed in "Oh, for a great mansion with ten thousand rooms/Where all the poor on earth could find welcome shelter, /Steady through every storm, secure as a mountain! /Ah, were such a building to spring up before me, /I would freeze to death in my wrecked hut well content" by the famous poet in the Tang Dynasty Du Fu who wrote the lines in his thatched hut wrecked by the autumn wind and beaten by the rain streams, and in "Be the first to become concerned with the world's troubles and the last to rejoice in its happiness" by Fan Zhongyan, a great writer and politician in the Northern Song Dynasty, has filled our hearts with noble emotion and encouraged us to make self-sacrifice for others. Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote "Ode to the West Wind", the subject of which is the power of the west wind to create new life by stripping the foliage from the trees in order to provide room for new growth and to spread the seeds for new plants. When we read the poem we can feel the great strength with which the West Wind sweeps across the land, driving the dead leaves "like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing", and charioting "the winged seeds" "to their dark wintry bed" where "they lie cold and low" until "the Spring shall blow" her "clarion o'er the dreaming earth" and fill "plain and hill" with "living hues and odours". The political reform or revolution, which is symbolized and manifested in the West Wind, is sure to come to create a new world: "The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind, /If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" Our confidence in the final victory of the revolution is thus heightened and our morale boosted. There are literary works which teach us moral lessons, and the maxims given by Confucius in *The Analects* as well as those in the

essays by Francis Bacon give us advice on how to live, how to treat others and how to become persons of morality. We need political culture, instruction, that is to say, in what pertains to our relation to the State, to our duties as citizens; and we need also to be impressed sentimentally by having the presentation in legend and novels of heroic and patriotic examples brought vividly and attractively before us. The stories of Robert Bruce, Alfred the Great, William Tell and a lot of stories in China have the effect of exciting a noble enthusiasm and filling our hearts with ardent patriotism. Such heroic struggles waged by the working people as described in *Outlaws of the Marsh*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, etc. arouse our sympathy for the oppressed and our indignation against those who lord over others. Many characters created in poetry, short stories, novels and plays are much on our lips, and in our hearts. The positive characters, the heroes and heroines that contributed to the defence of the nation, the welfare of the people and the selfless service of others are always respected by us, while the negative characters have become the object of our contempt. A thing of beauty is a joy forever. The poetry and prose portraying the beauty of mountains, rivers, forests, and plants by the famous Tang poets Li Bai and Wang Wei, and the Song poet and prose writer Su Shi, as well as by a large number of English and American writers have greatly inspired us and made us love Nature all the more.

In addition to appealing to our emotion, literature broadens our perspectives of the world. Most of the people we meet are pretty much like ourselves, and what we can see of the world even in a lifetime is astonishingly limited, and the richest of lives can but touch directly a fraction of the potential range of human experience. Literature allows us to move beyond the inevitable boundaries of our own lives and introduces to us people different from ourselves, places remote from our neighbourhoods, and

times other than our own. Reading literary works makes us more aware of life's possibilities as well as its subtleties and ambiguities. The excitement with which we read *Journey to the West*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, etc. is beyond description. If we do not have the money and leisure to visit a certain place, we can always "experience" it at second hand by reading travels or literary works describing the place. The actually impoverished experience of people can be supplemented by literature.

The study of literature is also practical, because it engages us in the kinds of problem solving important in a variety of fields, from philosophy to science and technology. The interpretations of literary texts require us to deal with uncertainties, value judgements, and emotions; these are unavoidable aspects of life. Literature is, therefore, not only something we find desirable and enjoyable; it can be seen as an absolute necessity for human survival.

PART TWO

THE NATURE OF LITERATURE

Chapter One

The Phenomenon of Literature as a Social

Phenomenon of Human Beings

Literature is the product of social practice (rather a particular social practice) of human beings. It does not fall from the heavens, the product of a mysterious creation, nor is it something that comes flying like Athena, fully grown and fully armed, from Zeus' head. The phenomenon of art and literature came into being with the emergence of human society, and no phenomenon of art and literature exists outside human society. The phenomenon of art and literature, as the phenomenon of part of human activities in society, emerged to meet the needs of human beings in social production and social activities, and emerged when the same activities made its emergence possible. Frederick Engels, in his "The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man" gives an explicit account of

the development of human brain and sense organs, and then the development of society and the emergence of art and literature: First labour, after it and then with it, speech — these were the two most essential stimuli under the influence of which the brain of the ape changed, step by step, into the brain of man. With the development of the brain went the development of sense organs, its most immediate instruments. In the course of labour and communication man's clarity of consciousness, power of abstraction and of judgement developed. All this gave both labour and speech an ever renewed impulse to further development, and man became finally distinct from the ape. The development continued, and human beings became capable of executing more and more complicated operations, and of setting themselves, and achieving, higher and higher aims. Human beings began to be engaged in agriculture, and then in spinning, weaving, metalworking, pottery and navigation in addition to hunting and cattle raising. Along with trade and industry there appeared finally art and science. Engels pointed out in the article,

Only by labour, by adaptation to ever new operations, by inheritance of the thus acquired special development of muscles, ligaments and, over longer periods of time, bones as well, and by the ever renewed employment of this inherited finesse in new, more and more complicated operations, has the human hand attained the high degree of perfection that has enabled it to conjure into being the paintings of a Raphael, the statues of a Thorwaldsen, the music of a Paganini.”^①

① Frederick Engels, “The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man”, *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Selected Works in Two Volumes*, Volume II, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1958, pp81 – 82.

It is labour, the sources of all wealth as well as the prime basic condition for all human existence, that has brought about the development of human brain and sense organs, and therefore, the highly developed human intelligence for the creation and appreciation of art and literature.

Art and literature came into being in labour and other human practices and, as a social practice, cannot be separated from other kinds of social practice. In speaking of the emergence of art and literature, Lu Xun, a great writer and thinker and father of contemporary Chinese literature said,

To my mind, even before there was a written language there were literary works; but unfortunately no one recorded them, for there was no way to record them. The primitive men who were our ancestors could not even speak at first; but to work together they had to convey their ideas, and so gradually they learned to utter complex sounds. Suppose they were carrying logs and found it hard work, but did not know how to express this; if one of them called out "Yo, heave, ho!" that was a literary creation. And if others, admiring him, took it up, this was a form of publication. If it were recorded by some method it would become literature, and of course such a man would be an author or writer of the Yo-heave-ho school. ^①

Every culture develops some kind of art and literature as it develops language. Our ancestors expressed their feelings and communicated with each other by means of songs and dances. They sang songs and danced in

^① Lu Xun, "A Layman's Remarks on Writing", *Lu Xun Selected Works*, Vol. Four, translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1961, pp114 - 115.

their expression of the love and affection between men and women, of their wishes and desires in sacrificial rites and of their lament over the dead in war. When these songs were recorded, it became possible for them to be handed down from generation to generation. *The Book of Odes* (*The Book of Poetry* / *The Book of Songs*), China's earliest collection of poems, includes folk songs describing the life and struggle of the people in ancient times and songs of praise during sacrifice. Ceremonies and rituals invariably contain important elements of the theatre. Wherever drama, which is considered the greatest of the arts, has evolved — in ancient Greece, medieval Europe, India, China, Egypt, Japan — its basic origin is the same; it arises from religious rituals, in the exchange of speech or song between lead and chorus, or between antiphonal choirs. Once the germ of the idea appears, even in a four-line form, it rapidly expands until complete plays are developed, and it may become entirely secularized — and even be condemned by the religion from whose rites it arose.

The origin of Greek drama, which is regarded as the real beginning of the theatre, lay in religious ceremonials honouring Dionysus, the god of wine, a being with godlike powers and immortality but with an emotional nature that ranged from the sublime and the beautiful through love and fertility, and madcap drunkenness down to the most terrifying forms of Freudian darkness and revenge. In other words, Dionysus was the god of the emotional, the subconscious, and the irrational forces in people — forces that range from ecstasy to terror. Plays were presented during three of the four religious festivals held annually in his honour: in December, in January and in the springtime. The excitement and anticipation that preceded the city Dionysia — rehearsals, ceremonials, torchlight parades — affected practically almost everyone in Athens. Business came to a

standstill during the dramatic festivals, wars ceased, and political concerns were ignored. The festivals included dancing and singing that celebrated the legends about Dionysus. From these choral songs developed stories of both Dionysus and mortal culture-heroes. These heroes became the subject of playwrights whose works were produced in contests at the festivals. The men responsible for the plays were not narrow specialists; they were leaders in thought and often in action.

The emergence and development of the theatre fully shows that art and literature cannot be separated from other kinds of social practice and that art and literature of a given society and in a given period have much to do with the political movements, religious thought, philosophical speculation, culture and learning of the society and in the period.

The Western theatre's origin centres in Athens, Greece during the fifth century B. C., when there had already been outstanding achievements in politics, philosophy, science, and the arts in the place. By then the Greeks had developed a friendly, personal, human attitude towards their gods — an attitude that emphasized the here rather than the hereafter, an attitude that called for expression, not repression. Politics played a part: Democratic in spirit if not always in practice, Athens produced a generation of citizens bursting with pride, curiosity and independence. A number of other things had also prepared the way. Impressive civilizations had developed around the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea: in Egypt, in Persia, and in Greece. Advances had been made in various art forms — in pottery, for example — as well as in science, astronomy, and mathematics. Athens carried forward this tradition. Greek philosophers, such as Socrates and Plato, tried to explain the world around them, while Herodotus transformed history from a simple account of events into a social science. Finally the very pattern of historical hap-