
Essays in English Language and Literature

Qian Jiaoru

 Yilin Press

Essays in English Language and Literature
by Qian Jiaoru

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Preface

Upon the publication of this collection of essays by Professor Qian Jiaoru over years of a variety of English teaching, translating and research experiences, I would like to express my heart-felt congratulations to him in the form of this preface, which I have the pleasure of writing at his request. Honestly, when he first asked me if I could do him this favor, I was a little hesitant because I had just arrived at Shihezi University in Xinjiang as a visiting professor with new people to meet and new things to attend to. But after reading the first few essays he sent me, I felt sure they were going to make a good collection worthy of strong recommendation not only to students of English language and literature but to scholars in this field as well.

I have known Professor Qian for some years. We were onetime colleagues at UNESCO where I had a chance to work for a period of time in the autumn of 2002. I had the pleasure of sharing the same office with him and I benefited a great deal from his experience and expertise in translating and revising the things which were quite different from those I was more familiar with. Later in 2005, Professor Qian and I were invited by a university in Nanchang to give lectures. Through these contacts and later communications to exchange ideas on teaching, translation and research, I found in Professor Qian an unassuming person with the qualities of a fine scholar.

Before he joined UNESCO in 1993, Professor Qian was professor of English and doctoral supervisor at Nanjing University where he had taught for 30 years since his graduation from the same institution. In the 1980s, after his return from his studies abroad first in Australia and then in America, he began to offer courses in English stylistics and contemporary

Western literary theories, and became one of the first to take such initiatives in English departments of Chinese universities. Alongside his teaching, he also engaged himself in research and translation and published a number of papers on stylistics and literary theory and translated into Chinese Fredric Jameson's *The Prison-House of Language* and other essays in criticism. His teaching and research in these fields established him as one of the pioneers in introducing new thoughts and trends in English language and literary studies into Chinese universities. Professor Qian's long and varied experience in teaching, research and translation enabled him to have a broad knowledge base and a depth of insight, which are clearly shown in the present collection consisting of three sections: Literature, Linguistics and Stylistics, and Miscellaneous Writings.

Three distinct features of Professor Qian's essays are worth mentioning here. When we read these essays, we are, first of all, impressed by the broad scope they cover and the profound depth they reach. Years ago I chanced upon an essay of nostalgia that compares man's unceasing pursuit of knowledge of all branches in the past with the modern man's narrow division of work and the limited and specific branch of knowledge that goes with his profession. However, in this collection of essays, I am happy to find that in Professor Qian's writings there is a strong intellectual curiosity that has made him render his teaching and translation duties into a process of study and research.

The second striking feature comes from Professor Qian's persistent pursuit of perfection in his writing. Written in idiomatic and fluent English, these essays not only present to us a scholar's valuable insights on a variety of theories and literary texts, and experiences and methods of teaching and translating, but also pose as good samples of written English for Chinese learners of that language. As always, Professor Qian, when writing, would ponder on the choice of words, and take special

care of the clarity and accuracy of expressions, the composition of paragraphs and even the rhythm of the language flow.

The third important feature of this collection is Professor Qian's academic stance, his good balance in offering critical opinions. Take for example the essay "Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature to EFL Learners in China." While pointing out very emphatically that stylistics is, generally speaking, the best way to bring an integration of language and literary studies and supporting this statement with four convincing reasons, Professor Qian is also aware of different readers' problems with the "right" intuition needed for good reading, especially an EFL learner's lack of intuitive potentials for carrying out interpretive transactions between the text and himself. At the end of the essay, Professor Qian quotes Stanley Fish to warn against the extreme practice of early formal stylistics, which disregards the reader's key role in the reading process and ignores the contexts of writing and reading.

As my special field of study is Anglo-American literature, naturally I am drawn in particular to the essays on literature. The discussions here cover a broad range from Anglo-American literature to Australian literature, from poetry to drama and to the novel, and from the 19th-century realistic representation of life to the experimental writings of the 20th century. But, despite the variety and diversity of topics, Professor Qian never fails to enlighten us with his valuable insights and his comprehensive grasp of the subject matter. "A Long Night's Journey that Tries but Fails to Get Beyond the Horizon" and "Classes and Class Conflict as Seen in *Shirley* and *North and South*" are two examples of such. The former is an exploration of O'Neill's chief dramatic theme through a comparative reading of his major works from the first play *Beyond the Horizon* to the last *Long Day's Journey into Night*. And the latter analyzes Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* and Mrs. Gaskell's *North and South* against the industrial social backdrop of Victorian England. The

former impresses us with Professor Qian's sophisticated discrimination in reading characters and their traumatic life experiences, and the latter shows convincingly that although unaware of the nature and cause of the social conflict of their time, these two female novelists have succeeded in their respective novels to present fictionalized and dramatized versions of the working-class life of the Victorian Period.

Of the poetry essays, the one discussing e.e.cummings' poem demonstrates Professor Qian's competence in poetry reading and serves as a good sample of teaching poetry in the tradition of close reading advocated by New Criticism with the assistance of linguistics, stylistics and other branches of knowledge. Not only has he explored the meaning and theme of the poem thoroughly, but also fully presented the poet's daring innovations in poetic expressions. The longer essay on three Australian poets who create poems in relation to or in comparison with music is also a good piece of literary criticism. I am not familiar with Australian literature, and even less so with things concerning music, yet I can still feel the unique qualities of the poems under discussion.

Last but not least, I want to recommend the essay "Literature and Society" to readers interested in literature and its relation to society. In this lengthy essay Professor Qian asserts that literature cannot be separated from society. He gives a review of the past theories of the ancient Greek concept of literature as imitation of life, then the concept of literature as reflection of life and the simplification of assigning literature the sole task of reflecting society. Professor Qian strongly supports the concept of literature as a recreation of life. The essay is richly yet concisely furnished with balanced comments on different perspectives of the relation between literature and society. As a result, it can serve as a good introductory piece to help students of literature to understand the social nature of literature and, at the same time, to learn how to look at heritage with a critical eye.

There is much more to say about this collection of critical essays. However, as what I write is not an introduction but only a preface, I must not drag too long. I shall leave the reader on his own exploration of this book, and the joy of meeting a fertile mind and a scrupulous writer will certainly be his.

Liu Yiqing

Professor of English of Peking University

Dec. 14, 2008

in Shihezi University, Xinjiang

Author's Foreword

The book the reader may have in his hand now is a collection of my essays in English language and literature mostly written in the 1980s and early 1990s. Some of them were assignments in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the MA degree in English I was doing at the University of Sydney from 1979 to 1981. Others were written later for publication in journals or for presentation at academic conferences in China and abroad.

A friend of mine, to whom I had a chance to show some of the things I had written, thought they were a good mix of topics in literary and language studies and could be useful, if published as a collection, to those who might have an interest in them. I was a little dubious of his judgment, knowing well that the articles he was shown were but preliminary attempts at academic writing *per se*, although some of them had appeared in domestic and foreign academic journals. Besides, I was haunted and thus deterred by Qian Zhongshu's satire on those little or lesser-known scholars, whose eagerness to make a name for themselves by assiduous "self-excavation" and the ensuing pleasure of being "discovered" made them blind to the risk of being exposed under broad daylight for everyone to see and to judge. Certainly, I do not want to see myself laid bare and derided for my shallowness and ignorance out of a willing suspension of discretion. However, some disturbing tendencies prevalent in literary studies in our academic circles today have persuaded me to reconsider my friend's proposition in the hope that the traditional way of approaching a literary text by close reading, which I strove to adhere to in my engagement with the works in question, might serve as a feeble antidote to the current belief that literature could, and perhaps even should be studied only by subjecting it to the examination of a

grand theoretical framework, by which all the details and niceties of the work itself are paled and made insignificant, if not superfluous.

Having said this, I must hasten to add that I am by no means against theory. In the years between the mid-1980s and early 1990s, I was also infatuated like many enthusiasts of literature by what is now retrospectively seen as a disoriented craving in China for new literary and critical theories. It was then believed that these new ideas and approaches of literary studies must soon supersede all traditional notions and methods if only in the metabolic sense. From the fall of 1986 I spent a year at Cornell University as a visiting scholar, reading literature and criticism and auditing relevant courses. After my return in the following year to the university where I was then teaching, I ventured to offer some introductory courses in literary and critical theories and supervised a few graduate students working on them. My close encounter with contemporary Western literary theories over those feverish years did broaden my vistas and enabled me to see literature in new perspectives, but I also began to have qualms about going on unquestioningly with what I had gradually come to see as problematic. Interesting and intriguing as those theories were, some appeared more and more untenable and unconvincing to me and I found it increasingly hard to bring myself to concur with assertions that tried to subvert common sense or bordered on wild speculations. My uneasiness with some of these pronouncements and assumptions was voiced in my articles in Chinese that appeared in about the same period. Now looking back at these essays that come to make this collection, I have a feeling of thorough emancipation from the strictures of tortuous theorizing in esoteric jargon and of a happy return to the simple joy of reading. After all, the pleasure derived from reading literature should be more appealing and rewarding than the satisfaction coming from theorizing about it.

In preparing this collection, I was at first undecided about how the

old essays should be presented to the reader. Should I revise and update them by putting in afterthoughts, which are many, or new knowledge, which keeps growing? Or should I keep them intact and leave them as they are with due respect for history? Primitive wisdom told me to opt for the latter, for by remaining the way they read, these essays could be read as an untampered record of my deepening understanding of literature and my growing adeptness with the tools necessary for critical reading. It may be interesting to see how my critical sensibilities developed from the orthodox Marxian perspective from which I was taught to see literary works as social documents and to interpret and analyze them in terms of “class conflict,” “cash-nexus” and “colonial expansion” to a more pluralistic view that could accommodate alternative ways of looking at a text to make it more productive than what a monolithic reading would yield.

These essays fall into three sections: literature, linguistics and stylistics, and miscellaneous writings. In each of these, the essays are basically arranged for the sake of convenience in the order of the time at which they were written except in the case of literature, where a distinction is first made between the works of Anglo-American and Australian writers. In the linguistics and stylistics section, it must be noted that stylistics is used here in the narrow sense to refer to literary stylistics whose object of study is literary texts rather than writings of every description. The two articles I have chosen to make up the last section of this collection are based on two talks given on separate occasions in the interest of two types of audiences. One is about private tuition in China today and aimed at the participants of an international conference in Sydney in December 2002 sponsored by the China Education Center of Sydney University to mark the 30th-anniversary of formal Sino-Australian diplomatic relations. The other is aimed at Chinese college students who are curious about how translation is done

at UNESCO, the international organization where I served as a senior reviser for ten years till my retirement in 2003. Although neither of these two articles touches on literature or linguistics as such, I hope the positive response from the audience, if anything, would justify their inclusion in the present collection.

Throughout the planning, editing and publication of this collection, I enjoyed strong support and warm encouragement from my friends, old and new. Some of them took time to read and comment on some of the articles included herein; others made suggestions concerning the arrangement and the format in which the book is to appear. I am most grateful to Mr. Zhang Zude, former President of Yilin Press in Nanjing, who was among the first to hear my thoughts about the collection and to lend unreserved support for its materialization. Professor Wang Zhigang, a long-time friend in whose expertise and judgment I have always had the greatest trust, was the first reader and reviewer of the two articles in the last section of this collection. As onetime Chief of the Chinese Translation Section at UNESCO, he has both the experience and the authority to make judgments on what I have to say about translation in that international organization. And last but not least, I owe an immense debt of gratitude to Professor Liu Yiqing of Peking University for her kind consent to grace this collection with a preface and her invaluable comments based on her profound knowledge of English language and literature. My thanks also go to Mr. Shi Xiaogang of Yilin Press for his useful advice in editing this collection. Nevertheless, whatever shortcomings and errors there are in these pages, they are all mine and I welcome comments and criticisms from all who take an interest in what is contained between the covers.

Qian Jiaoru
Nanjing, 2008

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I Literature

Anglo-American Literature

The Novel as Reflection of Society under Threat

Some Explorations Based on *Washington Square* and *Heart of Darkness*^①

It has been argued that “the novelist’s art is a ‘social’ art, and he is found at his best when he is engaged, not in celebrating a social order, but in describing society under threat.” This statement, which runs counter to the belief that literature ought to be tendentious with the high-minded purpose of celebrating a righteous cause, is quite disturbing to those who hope to see literature playing a more constructive role in society. However, the subversive nature and critical function of literature combine to determine that its natural mission is one of exposing and criticizing the moral and social evils that pose a threat to the very existence and progress of humankind, but not necessarily providing an answer.

Of course, the question of whether the novelist’s art is or is not a “social” art is, in the first place, a controversial issue to be disputed among literary critics for maybe as long as there is the art of the novel. We are now living in “an Age of Criticism” where there are as many theories of literary criticism as there are techniques for literary creation. It is therefore imprudent, if not reckless, to rush into any conclusion about what the novel is or should be in its relation to society. Nevertheless, it is generally assumed that the poet is more concerned with the universalities of human nature and with his visions of the ideal

① All quotations from the two novels are taken from Henry James: *Washington Square*, Penguin Books, 1963, Reprinted 1973; Joseph Conrad: *Youth, Heart of Darkness, The End of the Tether*, Everyman’s Library, 1967, Reprinted 1974.

and the eternal than with the transient banalities of human existence. The novelist, however, is often juxtaposed as one who is more preoccupied with the realities of life and the relations between man and the society he lives in. This statement is perhaps truer to fact if what we mean by “social art” is understood in a broad sense. It also sounds less peremptory than the above-mentioned assertion and is therefore more likely to be accepted. But, of course, there are novelists who do not care half so much about society as about the individual and there are novels that do not seem to describe any recognizable social pattern.

When the novel is seen as a “mirror” of society, reflecting its ideology, values, norms and practices, it is actually a reflection of the way the novelist looks at the society he is writing about and his attitude towards it. Like everyone else, the novelist does not live in a vacuum free from external influences. As a social being and a member of the society he belongs to, he is without exception identified both materially and spiritually with one social group or another. Thus, what he has to say, whether he says it himself by making direct comments as the omniscient narrator or makes his characters speak for him, is not just the viewpoint of a particular individual but of a section of the social hierarchy. Unlike the historian or the sociologist, who records social events and analyzes them on the basis of facts and figures, the novelist approaches man and society in a different way. He deals more with the emotional aspects and the life philosophies of his characters and explores the relations between them. In other words, he is more concerned with man’s “inner world” and the way his thoughts and actions interact with each other. In the novel, society is reflected through its impact, spiritual as well as physical, on the characters who, like the novelist himself, are social beings caught up in an enormous web of relations based on existing social mores. In this sense, the novel is essentially about man and society, about how the values a given society upholds affect