

Speech at China-Australia Literary Forum

Li Guoping

Dear friends,

I am delighted to be here at the 5th China-Australia Literary Forum today. I am not a professional writer and I am doing the edition of literature publications, which are the bridge between writers and readers. I am more of a literary amateur, reader and appreciator. I have a book with me today, which, as we see, is yellowish with time. It is the Chinese version of novel *The Thorn Birds* by Australian author Colleen McCullough. I take it back to its motherland today.

During the 1980s when I was still a young man in my twenties, there were two books serialized at China's most influential and most popular radio station, which attracted and deeply moved numerous audiences and readers. One book was *the Ordinary World* by Chinese novelist Lu Yao, telling the story of how Chinese young people struggled hard to change their destiny and seek a beautiful life during the early years of reform and opening-up, and it is still educational and instructional for many people even today. The other one was *The Thorn Birds* by Australian author Colleen McCullough. The old days when I listened to it every day come back clearly to me whenever I think of it. The story was set in Drogheda of Australia. The author sketches an idyllic landscape painting by describing the simple life attitude of the Cleary family and how they live in harmony with nature. Her descriptions of the nature and the love of nature and life of leading characters in her novel all reflected Colleen McCullough's ecological thinking. This book well expresses the author's reflection on anthropocentrism and the relationship between man and nature, praises the harmony between man and nature, advocates the wisdom of constructing a civilized ecology and voices her longing for a better future of mankind.

In the literary sense, *The Thorn Birds* is both a period of history and a poem. The story spans half a century from early 20th century till the 1970s, telling the life events and relationships of three generations of the Cleary family, among which the most important is the impressive love between Meggie and priest Ralph. The smooth and vivid language, ups and downs of the plots, bittersweet and warm stories and unshaken pursuit of love make the book a real masterpiece. The last paragraph, in particular, has moved millions upon millions of audiences and readers and it breaks my heart too.

I'd like to read it out here:

“The bird with the thorn in its breast, it follows an immutable law; it is driven by it knows not what to impale itself, and die singing. At the very instant the thorn enters there is no awareness in it of the dying to come; it simply sings and sings until there is not the life left to utter another note. But we, when we put the thorns in our breasts, we know. We understand. And still we do it. Still we do it.

This is how we are, just like the thorny bird of the ancient Celtic legend that sobbed through blood and vomited out of the bloody heart and died.”

The visit to Australia and exchange with Australian friends in the literary circles arouses such complex of me. This is the complex of *The Thorn Birds* and the complex of Australian literature too. It is a part of my literary reception and literary nutrition and I believe that this is the same case with many Chinese people engaged in literature. Listening to and reading *The Thorn Birds* also gave me the earliest emotional perception of Australia on the other side of the ocean and made me imagine the emotional dispositions and lifestyle of Australian people. This is how literary reading is, through which we can reach a level of understanding of a state or a nation that can hardly be matched by any historical, political or economic readings, because it is full of emotional and humanistic appeal. The connective role of literature lies in that, with emotional strength and vivid characters, it takes people from different states and nations who love life on a long journey across the Pacific Ocean and arouses our common humanity and common yearning. While connecting the emotions of people with different cultural backgrounds, it also opens the culture and tradition peculiar to one state or nation to continuously enrich our knowledge about the world and enhance our emotions and imaginations.

There is a wide background for the development of Chinese contemporary literature, which is to actively absorb the literary resources from the world, learn from the excellent literary achievements of various states and nations and learn from their excellent literary traditions and outstanding writers through reading and dialogue, pay attention to their expressions and absorb their experience. In today's world, with the rapid development of science and technology, economic and cultural integration and communication has enabled mankind to enter the real community era. This is a world where information is highly connected, which is just like how I felt initially when I read *The Thorn Birds* that brought me exotic knowledge and touched my heart so deeply. I think it is necessary for us to emphasize the peculiarity of literature and the characteristics of its regional culture. Literature of each nation and state has its own soil and tradition and the literature of each region presents its own different form too, which constitutes the territory of the world republic of literature. They share some connecting points such as common attention to and exploration of humanity and humanism, but there are also irreducible aspects that can inspire each other and enhance mutual understanding, such as lifestyles and ethical traditions, etc. In my opinion, however open and advanced the world may be, literature should maintain its own unique expression and thinking. It enhances our mutual understanding of each other's local knowledge, including thinking modes, social conditions, living habits and customs, etc. Through mutual understanding and cognition, we agree to differ and jointly enrich our spiritual life and try to build a spiritual community.

Our topic today is "Ideas of the Future: Building Relations". Today's world is full of changes. Scientific and technological development, co-building and sharing, communication, mutual learning and interconnection are a major proposition of human society. More than a technological concept, interconnection is also a humanistic concept. The goal of interconnection in the future should be the reach of higher-level value rationality from the instrumental rationality. Exchange and integration of culture and literature is a kind of interconnection that has more humanistic content, which enables various cultural subjects to influence and learn from each other and thus foster a spirit of diversity, openness and inclusiveness through exchanges. The eternity of literature is that it travels across the ocean and land, spans the historical, geographical, conventional and mental distance and calls the charm of people-to-people bond and social harmony and progress.

Interconnection is an everlasting pursuit of mankind as well as the memory and vision expressed in all literary readings and writings. We should talk about the proposition of interconnection at a higher level today. Literature is the lifeblood of a state and a nation as well as a bond beyond the national border. It is an important bridge to enhance mutual understanding, embody dialogues among advanced civilizations and strengthen friendships. It is also the important foundation and source to build and maintain the “spiritual community”. Today, with strong penetration and long-lasting influence, literature is playing a unique and significant role that cannot be replaced by any other way of communication in narrowing the distance between countries and between peoples, especially emotional exchanges.

At last, I'd like to quote British scholar Raymond Henry Williams to conclude my presentation. Raymond Henry Williams is a scholar engaged in studying literary community and he has offered us a way of thinking on the future of literature:

A good community and a living culture will not only accommodate but also actively encourage all and any of those who can contribute to the progress of consciousness in common need. Regardless of why we started, we need to listen to other people's opinions from different perspectives. We must think about every attachment and every value with our entire mind, because we know little about future and we have no idea what will enrich it. We can only absorb what we can by listening to and thinking about whatever offered to us.

在中澳文学论坛上的演讲

李国平

尊敬的作家朋友们：大家好！

很高兴参加第五届中澳文学论坛。我不是一个职业写作者，我的工作编辑文学刊物，文学出版物是架设在作家和读者之间的桥梁。我更多的是一个文学爱好者，文学阅读者、文学欣赏者。今天，我带来一本书，大家看到这本书有些发黄了，有历史了，它是澳大利亚作家考琳·麦卡洛的长篇小说《荆棘鸟》的中文版。今天，我带着它回到母国，回到家乡。

上世纪八十年代，我还是一个二十多岁的青年，有两本书在我们国家最有影响力、最有传播面的广播电台连播，这两本书吸引了无数听众，打动了成千上万个听众和读者。一本是我们国家的作家路遥的《平凡的世界》，他的这本书写的是我国改革开放初期中国青年为改变个人命运，通过劳动自强，寻找美好生活的奋斗历程，至今，仍然是许多人的生活的教科书。另一本，就是澳大利亚作家考琳·麦卡洛的《荆棘鸟》，我现在回想起来，当时每天收听这部小说的情形，仍然还扣人心弦，历历在目，如在耳边。《荆棘鸟》的背景设置于澳大利亚的德罗海达，通过描写克利里家族简单、朴实、淡薄的生活态度以及与大自然的和谐相处，描绘出了一幅田园牧歌式的风景画。考琳·麦卡洛对德罗海达自然的描绘，以及她的主人公们对人与大自然生命的热爱都体现了她的生态思想。这部作品表达了作者对人类中心主义、人和自然关系的思考，赞美人与自然的和谐，提倡构建文明生态的智慧，深情表达了作者对人类美好未来的憧憬。

在文学意义上，《荆棘鸟》既是史，又是诗。它从二十世纪初叶，一直写到半个世纪以后的七十年代，整整讲述了克利里一家三代的人生经历和情感历程，其中最主要的是梅吉与拉尔夫神父刻骨铭心的爱情。小说流畅生动的语言，跌宕起伏的情节，凄美温暖的人生故事，矢志不渝的情感追求，堪称一曲美好的爱情绝唱，尤其是最后的一段落，打动过千千万万个听众和读者，也击碎了我的心。

我愿意把它读出：

“鸟胸前带着荆棘，他遵循着一个不变的法则。她被不知其名的东西刺穿身体，被驱赶着，歌唱着死去。在那荆棘刺进的一瞬，她没有意识到死之降临。她只是唱着，唱着，直到生命耗尽，再也唱不出一个音符。但是，当我们把荆棘刺进胸膛时，我们是知道的，我们是明明白白的。然而，我们却依然要这么做，我们依然把荆棘扎进胸膛。

我们就是我们，就是这样，就像古老的传说中胸前佩戴着荆棘的鸟，泣血而啼，呕出血淋淋的心而死去……。”

因为访问澳大利亚，和澳大利亚的文学朋友交流，唤起了我这样的情结，这是《荆棘鸟》情结，也是澳大利亚文学情结；这是我文学接受，文学营养的一部分，相信也是许多中国文学人文学接受、文学营养的一部分。收听和阅读《荆棘鸟》也使我大洋彼岸的澳大利亚第一次有了感性的感知，使我想象澳大利亚人民的情感性格和生活方式。文学就是这样，通过阅读，我们所达到的对一个国家，一个民族的了解和理解程度，任何历史的、政治的、经济的

读物都难以相比，因为它有情感的、人性的感染力。文学的互联互通的作用在于，它会用情感的力量，形象的人物，带领我们不同国度，不同民族的对生活的热爱者，穿越太平洋，穿越地理的千山万水，唤起我们共同的人性，共同的向往，在沟通世界上不同文化背景的人们的情感的同时，也打开一个国家和民族独特的文化和传统，不断丰富我们对世界的认识，不断增进我们的情感和想象。

中国当代文学的发展，有一个宏阔的背景，就是积极的汲取世界的文学资源，借鉴各国，各民族的优秀的文学成果，通过阅读，通过交流对话向世界各国的优秀文学传统和优秀作家学习，关注他们的表达，吸收他们的经验。今天的世界，随着科学技术的高速发展，一体化的经济、相互交错的文化融合与沟通交流，使人类进入了真正的共同体时代。在这样一个信息高度联接的世界，正如我读《荆棘鸟》的原初感受，它给我带来了异国的知识，又冲击着我的心灵。我想，我们有必要强调一下文学的独特性和它地域文化的特征，每一个民族、国家的文学都有它的土壤、传统，每一地域的文学都呈现出各自不同的形态，构成了我们文学世界共和国的版图，它们彼此有相互融通的接驳点，比如共同的对人性、人道主义的关注探索，但是也有彼此不可化约，增进了解，相互启发之处，比如生活方式和伦理传统，等等。我想，世界再开放、再发达，文学也应该有自己独特的表达、独特的思维，通过文学我们增进了解，了解对方的地方性知识，包括思维方式、社会状况、生活习惯、风俗人情等等，从了解与认知中求同存异，共同丰富我们的精神生活，共同谋求精神共同体的建构。

我们中澳文学论坛本单元的讨论主题是“展望未来·互联互通”，当今世界，时代变化，科技发展，共建共享，交流互鉴互联，是人类社会的一个大命题；互联互通，是一个技术概念，更是一个人文概念。未来互联互通的目的，应该是由工具理性通达更高层向的价值理性。文化与文学交流与融合是更有人文内容的互联互通，它可以让各个文化主体互相影响，相互借鉴，在共同交流中形成多元、开放、包容的精神气度。文学的永恒性就在于，它能跨越海洋和大地，跨越历史、地理、风俗和心理的距离，呼唤人类心意相通，和谐进步的魅力。互联互通是人类社会亘古不变的追求，也是每一个文学人阅读写作中表达的记忆和憧憬。今天，我们谈论互联互通这个命题，一定有更高的层面，文学，是一个国家，民族的血脉，也是跨越国界的纽带，是增进了解、体现进步文明的对话，加强友谊的重要桥梁，是构建和维系“精神共同体”的重要根基与源泉。当今世界，文学以其强大的渗透力和长久的影响力，在拉近国家民族之间的距离，尤其是情感交流方面发挥着别的交往方式不可替代的独特的重要作用。

最后，我想引用英国学者雷蒙·威廉斯的话作为我演讲的结语，雷蒙·威廉斯是研究文学共同体的学者，他为我们提供了一种思考文学未来的思考方式：

一个好的共同体，一个有生命力的文化，不仅会容纳而且会积极鼓励所有的、任何能够对人们共同需要的意识的进步作出贡献的人。无论我们的出发点是什么，我们都有必要聆听从不同立场出发的其他人的看法。我们必须全神贯注地思考每一种依附，每一种价值，因为我们不了解未来，因为我们永远无法确切知道是什么东西会使未来变得更加丰富；我们现在只能聆听并思考任何提供给我们东西，从而吸收我们所能吸收的东西。