
The Case for Literature

Author(s): Gao Xingjian and Mabel Lee

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nobel lecture 2000

The Case for Literature

GAO XINGJIAN



GAO XINGJIAN, winner of the 2000 Nobel Prize in Literature, was born in 1940 in Ganzhou, in southeastern China. After several years of forced labor during the Cultural Revolution, Gao in 1979 was permitted to publish his work, and he became recognized for his essays, fiction, and experimental plays, such as the absurdist drama *車站* (1983; *Bus Stop*). Facing increasing official harassment for his writings, he took a ten-month walking journey along the Chang River, an experience that shaped his first novel, *靈山* (1989; *Soul Mountain*). Gao emigrated from China in 1987, settling in France. His works were banned in China after the publication of his play *逃亡* (1989; *Fugitives*), set against the Tiananmen Square massacre. His second novel is *一個人的聖經* (1999; *One Man's Bible*).

This translation of Gao's Nobel Lecture was provided by the Nobel Foundation.

I HAVE NO WAY OF KNOWING WHETHER IT WAS FATE THAT HAS PUSHED ME ONTO THIS DAIS BUT AS VARIOUS LUCKY coincidences have created this opportunity I may as well call it fate. Putting aside discussion of the existence or non-existence of God, I would like to say that despite my being an atheist I have always shown reverence for the unknowable.

A person cannot be God, certainly not replace God, and rule the world as a Superman; he will only succeed in creating more chaos and make a greater mess of the world. In the century after Nietzsche man-made disasters left the blackest records in the history of humankind. Supermen of all types called leader of the people, head of the nation and commander of the race did not balk at resorting to various violent means in perpetrating crimes that in no way resemble the ravings of a very egotistic philosopher. However, I do not wish to waste this talk on literature by saying too much about politics and history, what I want to do is to use this opportunity to speak as one writer in the voice of an individual.

A writer is an ordinary person, perhaps he is more sensitive but people who are highly sensitive are often more frail. A writer does not speak as the spokesperson of the people or as the embodiment of righteousness. His voice is inevitably weak but it is precisely this voice of the individual that is more authentic.

What I want to say here is that literature can only be the voice of the individual and this has always been so. Once literature is contrived as the hymn of the nation, the flag of the race, the mouthpiece of a political party or the voice of a class or a group, it can be employed as a mighty and all-engulfing tool of propaganda. However, such literature loses what is inherent in literature, ceases to be literature, and becomes a substitute for power and profit.

In the century just ended literature confronted precisely this misfortune and was more deeply scarred by politics and power than in any previous period, and the writer too was subjected to unprecedented oppression.

In order that literature safeguard the reason for its own existence and not become the tool of politics it must return to the voice of the individual,

for literature is primarily derived from the feelings of the individual and is the result of feelings. This is not to say that literature must therefore be divorced from politics or that it must necessarily be involved in politics. Controversies about literary trends or a writer's political inclinations were serious afflictions that tormented literature during the past century. Ideology wreaked havoc by turning related controversies over tradition and reform into controversies over what was conservative or revolutionary and thus changed literary issues into a struggle over what was progressive or reactionary. If ideology unites with power and is transformed into a real force then both literature and the individual will be destroyed.

Chinese literature in the twentieth century time and again was worn out and indeed almost suffocated because politics dictated literature: both the revolution in literature and revolutionary literature alike passed death sentences on literature and the individual. The attack on Chinese traditional culture in the name of the revolution resulted in the public prohibition and burning of books. Countless writers were shot, imprisoned, exiled or punished with hard labour in the course of the past one hundred years. This was more extreme than in any imperial dynastic period of China's history, creating enormous difficulties for writings in the Chinese language and even more for any discussion of creative freedom.

If the writer sought to win intellectual freedom the choice was either to fall silent or to flee. However the writer relies on language and not to speak for a prolonged period is the same as suicide. The writer who sought to avoid suicide or being silenced and furthermore to express his own voice had no option but to go into exile. Surveying the history of literature in the East and the West this has always been so: from Qu Yuan to Dante, Joyce, Thomas Mann, Solzhenitsyn, and to the large numbers of Chinese intellectuals who went into exile after the Tiananmen massacre in 1989. This is the inevitable fate of the poet and the writer who continues to seek to preserve his own voice.

During the years when Mao Zedong implemented total dictatorship even fleeing was not an option. The monasteries on far away mountains that provided refuge for scholars in feudal times were totally ravaged and to write even in secret was to risk one's life. To maintain one's intellectual autonomy one could only talk to oneself, and it had to be in utmost secrecy. I should mention that it was only in this period when it was utterly impossible for literature that I came to comprehend why it was so essential: literature allows a person to preserve a human consciousness.

It can be said that talking to oneself is the starting point of literature and that using language to communicate is secondary. A person pours his feelings and thoughts into language that, written as words, becomes literature. At the time there is no thought of utility or that some day it might be published yet there is the compulsion to write because there is recompense and consolation in the pleasure of writing. I began writing my novel *Soul Mountain* to dispel my inner loneliness at the very time when works I had written with rigorous self-censorship had been banned. *Soul Mountain* was written for myself and without the hope that it would be published.

From my experience in writing, I can say that literature is inherently man's affirmation of the value of his own self and that this is validated during the writing, literature is born primarily of the writer's need for self-fulfilment. Whether it has any impact on society comes after the completion of a work and that impact certainly is not determined by the wishes of the writer.

In the history of literature there are many great enduring works which were not published in the lifetimes of the authors. If the authors had not achieved self-affirmation while writing, how could they have continued to write? As in the case of Shakespeare, even now it is difficult to ascertain the details of the lives of the four geniuses who wrote China's greatest novels, *Journey to the West*, *Water Margin*, *Jin Ping Mei* and *Dream of Red Mansions*. All that remains is an autobiographical essay by Shi Naian and had he not as he

said consoled himself by writing, how else could he have devoted the rest of his life to that huge work for which he received no recompense during life? And was this not also the case with Kafka who pioneered modern fiction and with Fernando Pessoa the most profound poet of the twentieth century? Their turning to language was not in order to reform the world and while profoundly aware of the helplessness of the individual they still spoke out, for such is the magic of language.

Language is the ultimate crystallisation of human civilisation. It is intricate, incisive and difficult to grasp and yet it is pervasive, penetrates human perceptions and links man, the perceiving subject, to his own understanding of the world. The written word is also magical for it allows communication between separate individuals, even if they are from different races and times. It is also in this way that the shared present time in the writing and reading of literature is connected to its eternal spiritual value.

In my view, for a writer of the present to strive to emphasise a national culture is problematical. Because of where I was born and the language I use, the cultural traditions of China naturally reside within me. Culture and language are always closely related and thus characteristic and relatively stable modes of perception, thought and articulation are formed. However a writer's creativity begins precisely with what has already been articulated in his language and addresses what has not been adequately articulated in that language. As the creator of linguistic art there is no need to stick on oneself a stock national label that can be easily recognised.

Literature transcends national boundaries—through translations it transcends languages and then specific social customs and inter-human relationships created by geographical location and history—to make profound revelations about the universality of human nature. Furthermore, the writer today receives multicultural influences outside the culture of his own race so, unless it is to promote tourism, emphasising the cultural features of a people is inevitably suspect.

Literature transcends ideology, national boundaries and racial consciousness in the same way as the individual's existence basically transcends this or that -ism. This is because man's existential condition is superior to any theories or speculations about life. Literature is a universal observation on the dilemmas of human existence and nothing is taboo. Restrictions on literature are always externally imposed: politics, society, ethics and customs set out to tailor literature into decorations for their various frameworks.

However, literature is neither an embellishment for authority or a socially fashionable item, it has its own criterion of merit: its aesthetic quality. An aesthetic intricately related to the human emotions is the only indispensable criterion for literary works. Indeed, such judgments differ from person to person because the emotions are invariably that of different individuals. However such subjective aesthetic judgments do have universally recognised standards. The capacity for critical appreciation nurtured by literature allows the reader to also experience the poetic feeling and the beauty, the sublime and the ridiculous, the sorrow and the absurdity, and the humour and the irony that the author has infused into his work.

Poetic feeling does not derive simply from the expression of the emotions nevertheless unbridled egotism, a form of infantilism, is difficult to avoid in the early stages of writing. Also, there are numerous levels of emotional expression and to reach higher levels requires cold detachment. Poetry is concealed in the distanced gaze. Furthermore, if this gaze also examines the person of the author and overarches both the characters of the book and the author to become the author's third eye, one that is as neutral as possible, the disasters and the refuse of the human world will all be worthy of scrutiny. Then as feelings of pain, hatred and abhorrence are aroused so too are feelings of concern and love for life.

An aesthetic based on human emotions does not become outdated even with the perennial changing of fashions in literature and in art.

However literary evaluations that fluctuate like fashions are premised on what is the latest: that is, whatever is new is good. This is a mechanism in general market movements and the book market is not exempted, but if the writer's aesthetic judgement follows market movements it will mean the suicide of literature. Especially in the so-called consumerist society of the present, I think one must resort to cold literature.

Ten years ago, after concluding *Soul Mountain* which I had written over seven years, I wrote a short essay proposing this type of literature:

Literature is not concerned with politics but is purely a matter of the individual. It is the gratification of the intellect together with an observation, a review of what has been experienced, reminiscences and feelings or the portrayal of a state of mind.

The so-called writer is nothing more than someone speaking or writing and whether he is listened to or read is for others to choose. The writer is not a hero acting on orders from the people nor is he worthy of worship as an idol, and certainly he is not a criminal or enemy of the people. He is at times victimised along with his writings simply because of others' needs. When the authorities need to manufacture a few enemies to divert people's attention, writers become sacrifices and worse still writers who have been duped actually think it is a great honour to be sacrificed.

In fact the relationship of the author and the reader is always one of spiritual communication and there is no need to meet or to socially interact, it is a communication simply through the work. Literature remains an indispensable form of human activity in which both the reader and the writer are engaged of their own volition. Hence, literature has no duty to the masses.

This sort of literature that has recovered its innate character can be called cold literature. It exists simply because humankind seeks a purely spiritual activity beyond the gratification of material desires. This sort of literature of course did not come into being today. However, whereas in the past it mainly had to fight oppressive political forces and social customs, today it

has to do battle with the subversive commercial values of consumerist society. For it to exist depends on a willingness to endure the loneliness.

If a writer devotes himself to this sort of writing he will find it difficult to make a living. Hence the writing of this sort of literature must be considered a luxury, a form of pure spiritual gratification. If this sort of literature has the good fortune of being published and circulated it is due to the efforts of the writer and his friends, Cao Xueqin and Kafka are such examples. During their lifetimes, their works were unpublished so they were not able to create literary movements or to become celebrities. These writers lived at the margins and seams of society, devoting themselves to this sort of spiritual activity for which at the time they did not hope for any recompense. They did not seek social approval but simply derived pleasure from writing.

Cold literature is literature that will flee in order to survive, it is literature that refuses to be strangled by society in its quest for spiritual salvation. If a race cannot accommodate this sort of non-utilitarian literature it is not merely a misfortune for the writer but a tragedy for the race.

It is my good fortune to be receiving, during my lifetime, this great honour from the Swedish Academy, and in this I have been helped by many friends from all over the world. For years without thought of reward and not shirking difficulties they have translated, published, performed and evaluated my writings. However I will not thank them one by one for it is a very long list of names.

I should also thank France for accepting me. In France where literature and art are revered I have won the conditions to write with freedom and I also have readers and audiences. Fortunately I am not lonely although writing, to which I have committed myself, is a solitary affair.

What I would also like to say here is that life is not a celebration and that the rest of the world is not peaceful as in Sweden where for one hundred and eighty years there has been no war. This new century will not be immune to catastrophes simply because there were so many in the past century, because memories are not transmitted

like genes. Humans have minds but are not intelligent enough to learn from the past and when malevolence flares up in the human mind it can endanger human survival itself.

The human species does not necessarily move in stages from progress to progress, and here I make reference to the history of human civilisation. History and civilisation do not advance in tandem. From the stagnation of Medieval Europe to the decline and chaos in recent times on the mainland of Asia and to the catastrophes of two world wars in the twentieth century, the methods of killing people became increasingly sophisticated. Scientific and technological progress certainly does not imply that humankind as a result becomes more civilised.

Using some scientific -ism to explain history or interpreting it with a historical perspective based on pseudo-dialectics has failed to clarify human behaviour. Now that the utopian fervour and continuing revolution of the past century have crumbled to dust, there is unavoidably a feeling of bitterness amongst those who have survived.

The denial of a denial does not necessarily result in an affirmation. Revolution did not merely bring in new things because the new utopian world was premised on the destruction of the old. This theory of social revolution was similarly applied to literature and turned what had once been a realm of creativity into a battlefield in which earlier people were overthrown and cultural traditions were trampled upon. Everything had to start from zero, modernisation was good, and the history of literature too was interpreted as a continuing upheaval.

The writer cannot fill the role of the Creator so there is no need for him to inflate his ego by thinking that he is God. This will not only bring about psychological dysfunction and turn him into a madman but will also transform the world into a hallucination in which everything external to his own body is purgatory and naturally he cannot go on living. Others are clearly hell: presumably it is like this when the self loses control. Needless to say he will turn himself into a sacri-

fice for the future and also demand that others follow suit in sacrificing themselves.

There is no need to rush to complete the history of the twentieth century. If the world again sinks into the ruins of some ideological framework this history will have been written in vain and later people will revise it for themselves.

The writer is also not a prophet. What is important is to live in the present, to stop being hoodwinked, to cast off delusions, to look clearly at this moment of time and at the same time to scrutinise the self. This self too is total chaos and while questioning the world and others one may as well look back at one's self. Disaster and oppression do usually come from another but man's cowardice and anxiety can often intensify the suffering and furthermore create misfortune for others.

Such is the inexplicable nature of humankind's behaviour, and man's knowledge of his self is even harder to comprehend. Literature is simply man focusing his gaze on his self and while he does a thread of consciousness which sheds light on this self begins to grow.

To subvert is not the aim of literature, its value lies in discovering and revealing what is rarely known, little known, thought to be known but in fact not very well known of the truth of the human world. It would seem that truth is the unassailable and most basic quality of literature.

The new century has already arrived. I will not bother about whether or not it is in fact new but it would seem that the revolution in literature and revolutionary literature, and even ideology, may have all come to an end. The illusion of a social utopia that enshrouded more than a century has vanished and when literature throws off the fetters of this and that -ism it will still have to return to the dilemmas of human existence. However the dilemmas of human existence have changed very little and will continue to be the eternal topic of literature.

This is an age without prophecies and promises and I think it is a good thing. The writer playing prophet and judge should also cease since the many prophecies of the past century

have all turned out to be frauds. And there is no need to manufacture new superstitions about the future, it is much better to wait and see. It would be best also for the writer to revert to the role of witness and strive to present the truth.

This is not to say that literature is the same as a document. Actually there are few facts in documented testimonies and the reasons and motives behind incidents are often concealed. However, when literature deals with the truth the whole process from a person's inner mind to the incident can be exposed without leaving anything out. This power is inherent in literature as long as the writer sets out to portray the true circumstances of human existence and is not just making up nonsense.

It is a writer's insights in grasping truth that determine the quality of a work and word games or writing techniques cannot serve as substitutes. Indeed, there are numerous definitions of truth and how it is dealt with varies from person to person but it can be seen at a glance whether a writer is embellishing human phenomena or making a full and honest portrayal. The literary criticism of a certain ideology turned truth and untruth into semantic analysis, but such principles and tenets are of little relevance in literary creation.

However whether or not the writer confronts truth is not just an issue of creative methodology, it is closely linked to his attitude towards writing. Truth when the pen is taken up at the same time implies that one is sincere after one puts down the pen. Here truth is not simply an evaluation of literature but at the same time has ethical connotations. It is not the writer's duty to preach morality and while striving to portray various people in the world he also unscrupulously exposes his self, even the secrets of his inner mind. For the writer truth in literature approximates ethics, it is the ultimate ethics of literature.

In the hands of a writer with a serious attitude to writing even literary fabrications are premised on the portrayal of the truth of human life, and this has been the vital life force of works that have endured from ancient times to the pres-

ent. It is precisely for this reason that Greek tragedy and Shakespeare will never become outdated.

Literature does not simply make a replica of reality but penetrates the surface layers and reaches deep into the inner workings of reality; it removes false illusions, looks down from great heights at ordinary happenings, and with a broad perspective reveals happenings in their entirety.

Of course literature also relies on the imagination but this sort of journey in the mind is not just putting together a whole lot of rubbish. Imagination that is divorced from true feelings and fabrications that are divorced from the basis of life experiences can only end up insipid and weak, and works that fail to convince the author himself will not be able to move readers. Indeed, literature does not only rely on the experiences of ordinary life nor is the writer bound by what he has personally experienced. It is possible for the things heard and seen through a language carrier and the things related in the literary works of earlier writers all to be transformed into one's own feelings. This too is the magic of the language of literature.

As with a curse or a blessing language has the power to stir body and mind. The art of language lies in the presenter being able to convey his feelings to others, it is not some sign system or semantic structure requiring nothing more than grammatical structures. If the living person behind language is forgotten, semantic expositions easily turn into games of the intellect.

Language is not merely concepts and the carrier of concepts, it simultaneously activates the feelings and the senses and this is why signs and signals cannot replace the language of living people. The will, motives, tone and emotions behind what someone says cannot be fully expressed by semantics and rhetoric alone. The connotations of the language of literature must be voiced, spoken by living people, to be fully expressed. So as well as serving as a carrier of thought literature must also appeal to the auditory senses. The human need for language is not simply for the transmission of meaning, it is at the same time listening to and affirming a person's existence.

Borrowing from Descartes, it could be said of the writer: I say and therefore I am. However, the I of the writer can be the writer himself, can be equated to the narrator, or become the characters of a work. As the narrator-subject can also be he and you, it is tripartite. The fixing of a key-speaker pronoun is the starting point for portraying perceptions and from this various narrative patterns take shape. It is during the process of searching for his own narrative method that the writer gives concrete form to his perceptions.

In my fiction I use pronouns instead of the usual characters and also use the pronouns I, you, and he to tell about or to focus on the protagonist. The portrayal of the one character by using different pronouns creates a sense of distance. As this also provides actors on the stage with a broader psychological space I have also introduced the changing of pronouns into my drama.

The writing of fiction or drama has not and will not come to an end and there is no substance to flippant announcements of the death of certain genres of literature or art.

Born at the start of human civilisation, like life, language is full of wonders and its expressive capacity is limitless. It is the work of the writer to discover and develop the latent potential inherent in language. The writer is not the Creator and he cannot eradicate the world even if it is too old. He also cannot establish some new ideal world even if the present world is absurd and beyond human comprehension. However he can certainly make innovative statements either by adding to what earlier people have said or else starting where earlier people stopped.

To subvert literature was Cultural Revolution rhetoric. Literature did not die and writers were not destroyed. Every writer has his place on the bookshelf and he has life as long as he has readers. There is no greater consolation for a writer than to be able to leave a book in humankind's vast treasury of literature that will continue to be read in future times.

Literature is only actualised and of interest at that moment in time when the writer writes it and

the reader reads it. Unless it is pretence, to write for the future only deludes oneself and others as well. Literature is for the living and moreover affirms the present of the living. It is this eternal present and this confirmation of individual life that is the absolute reason why literature is literature, if one insists on seeking a reason for this huge thing that exists of itself.

When writing is not a livelihood or when one is so engrossed in writing that one forgets why one is writing and for whom one is writing it becomes a necessity and one will write compulsively and give birth to literature. It is this non-utilitarian aspect of literature that is fundamental to literature. That the writing of literature has become a profession is an ugly outcome of the division of labour in modern society and a very bitter fruit for the writer.

This is especially the case in the present age where the market economy has become pervasive and books have also become commodities. Everywhere there are huge indiscriminating markets and not just individual writers but even the societies and movements of past literary schools have all gone. If the writer does not bend to the pressures of the market and refuses to stoop to manufacturing cultural products by writing to satisfy the tastes of fashions and trends, he must make a living by some other means. Literature is not a best-selling book or a book on a ranked list and authors promoted on television are engaged in advertising rather than in writing. Freedom in writing is not conferred and cannot be purchased but comes from an inner need in the writer himself.

Instead of saying that Buddha is in the heart it would be better to say that freedom is in the heart and it simply depends on whether one makes use of it. If one exchanges freedom for something else then the bird that is freedom will fly off, for this is the cost of freedom.

The writer writes what he wants without concern for recompense not only to affirm his self but also to challenge society. This challenge is not pretence and the writer has no need to inflate his ego by becoming a hero or a fighter.

Heroes and fighters struggle to achieve some great work or to establish some meritorious deed and these lie beyond the scope of literary works. If the writer wants to challenge society it must be through language and he must rely on the characters and incidents of his works, otherwise he can only harm literature. Literature is not angry shouting and furthermore cannot turn an individual's indignation into accusations. It is only when the feelings of the writer as an individual are dispersed in a work that his feelings will withstand the ravages of time and live on for a long time.

Therefore it is actually not the challenge of the writer to society but rather the challenge of his works. An enduring work is of course a powerful response to the times and society of the writer. The clamour of the writer and his actions may have vanished but as long as there are readers his voice in his writings continues to reverberate.

Indeed such a challenge cannot transform society. It is merely an individual aspiring to transcend the limitations of the social ecology and taking a very inconspicuous stance. However this is by no means an ordinary stance for it is one that takes pride in being human. It would be sad if human history is only manipulated by the unknowable laws and moves blindly with the current so that the different voices of individuals

cannot be heard. It is in this sense that literature fills in the gaps of history. When the great laws of history are not used to explain humankind it will be possible for people to leave behind their own voices. History is not all that humankind possesses, there is also the legacy of literature. In literature the people are inventions but they retain an essential belief in their own self-worth.

Honourable members of the Academy, I thank you for awarding this Nobel Prize to literature, to literature that is unwavering in its independence, that avoids neither human suffering nor political oppression and that furthermore does not serve politics. I thank all of you for awarding this most prestigious prize for works that are far removed from the writings of the market, works that have aroused little attention but are actually worth reading. At the same time, I also thank the Swedish Academy for allowing me to ascend this dais to speak before the eyes of the world. A frail individual's weak voice that is hardly worth listening to and that normally would not be heard in the public media has been allowed to address the world. However I believe that this is precisely the meaning of the Nobel Prize and I thank everyone for this opportunity to speak.

Translated by Mabel Lee

文學的理由

高行健

我不知道是不是命運把我推上這講壇，由種種機緣造成的這偶然，不妨稱之為命運。上帝之有無且不去說，面對這不可知，我總心懷敬畏，雖然我一直自認是無神論者。

一個人不可能成為神，更別說替代上帝，由超人來主宰這個世界，只能把這世界攪得更亂，更加糟糕。尼採之後的那一個世紀，人為的災難在人類歷史上留下了最黑暗的紀錄。形形色色的超人，號稱人民的領袖、國家的元首、民族的統帥，不惜動用一切暴力手段造成的罪行，絕非是一個極端自戀的哲學家那一番瘋話可以比擬的。我不想濫用這文學的講壇去奢談政治和歷史，僅僅藉這個機會發出一個作家純然個人的聲音。

作家也同樣是一個普通人，可能還更為敏感，而過於敏感的人也往往更為脆弱。一個作家不以人民的代言人或正義的化身說的話，那聲音不能不微弱，然而，恰恰是這種個人的聲音倒更為真實。

這裡，我想要說的是，文學也只能是個人的聲音，而且，從來如此。文學一旦弄成國家的頌歌、民族的旗幟、政黨的喉舌，或階級與集團的代言，儘管可以動用傳播手段，聲勢浩大，鋪天蓋地而來，可這樣的文學也就喪失本性，不成其為文學，而變成權力和利益的代用品。

這剛剛過去的一個世紀，文學恰恰面臨這種不幸，而且較之以往的任何時代，留下的政治與權力的烙印更深，作家經受的迫害也更甚。

文學要維護自身存在的理由而不成為政治的工具，不能不回到個人的聲音，也因為文學首先是出自個人的感受，有感而發。這並不是說文學就一定脫離政治，或是文學就一定干預政治，有關文學的所謂傾向性或作家的政治傾向，諸如此類的論戰也是上一個世紀折騰文學的一大病痛。與此相關的傳統與革新，弄成了保守與革命，把文學的問題統統變成進步與反動之爭，都是意識形態在作怪。而意識形態一旦同權力結合在一起，變成現實的勢力，那麼文學與個人便一起遭殃。

二十世紀的中國文學的劫難之所以一而再，再而三，乃至於弄得一度奄奄一息，正在於政治主宰文學，而文學革命和革命文學都同樣將文學與個人置於死地。以革命的名義對中國傳統文化的討伐導致公然禁書，燒書。作家被殺害、監禁、流放和罰以苦役的，這百年來無以計數，中國歷史上任何一個帝制朝代都無法與之相比，弄得中文的文學寫作無比艱難，而創作自由更難談及。

作家倘若想要贏得思想的自由，除了沉默便是逃亡。而訴諸言語的作家，如果長時間無言，也如同自殺。逃避自殺與封殺，還要發出自己個人的聲音的作家不能不逃亡。回顧文學史，從東方到西方莫不如此，從屈原到但丁，到喬依斯，到托馬斯·曼，

到索爾任尼津，到一九八九年天安門慘案後中國知識分子成批的流亡，這也是詩人和作家還要保持自己的聲音而不可避免的命運。

在毛澤東實施全面專政的那些年代裡，卻連逃亡也不可能。曾經蔽護過封建時代文人的山林寺廟悉盡掃蕩，私下偷偷寫作得冒生命危險。一個人如果還想保持獨立思考，只能自言自語，而且得十分隱秘。我應該說，正是在文學做不得的時候我才充分認識到其所以必要，是文學讓人還保持人的意識。

自言自語可以說是文學的起點，藉語言而交流則在其次。人把感受與思考注入到語言中，通過書寫而訴諸文字，成為文學。當其時，沒有任何功利的考慮，甚至想不到有朝一日能得以發表，卻還要寫，也因為從這書寫中就已經得到快感，獲得補償，有所慰藉。我的長篇小說《靈山》正是在我的那些已嚴守自我審查的作品卻還遭到查禁之時著手的，純然為了排遣內心的寂寞，為自己而寫，並不指望有可能發表。

回顧我的寫作經歷，可以說，文學就其根本乃是人對自身價值的確認，書寫其時便已得到肯定。文學首先誕生於作者自我滿足的需要，有無社會效應則是作品完成之後的事，再說，這效應如何也不取決於作者的意願。

文學史上不少傳世不朽的大作，作家生前都未曾得以發表，如果不在寫作之時從中就已得到對自己的確認，又如何寫得下去？中國文學史上最偉大的小說《西遊記》、《水滸

傳》、《金瓶梅》和《紅樓夢》的作者，這四大才子的生平如今同莎士比亞一樣尚難查考，只留下了施耐庵的一篇自述，要不是如他所說，聊以自慰，又如何能將畢生的精力投入生前無償的那宏篇鉅製？現代小說的發端者卡夫卡和二十世紀最深沉的詩人費爾南多·畢索瓦不也如此？他們訴諸語言並非旨在改造這個世界，而且深知個人無能為力卻還言說，這便是語言擁有的魅力。

語言乃是人類文明最上乘的結晶，它如此精微，如此難以把握，如此透徹，又如此無孔不入，穿透人的感知，把人這感知的主體同對世界的認識聯繫起來。通過書寫留下的文字又如此奇妙，令一個個孤立的個人，即使是不同的民族和不同的時代的人，也能得以溝通。文學書寫和閱讀的現時性同它擁有的永恆的精神價值也就這樣聯繫在一起。

我以為，現今一個作家刻意強調某一種民族文化總也有點可疑。就我的出生、使用的語言而言，中國的文化傳統自然在我身上，而文化又總同語言密切相關，從而形成感知、思維和表述的某種較為穩定的特殊方式。但作家的創造性恰恰在這種語言說過了的地方方才開始，在這種語言尚未充分表述之處加以訴說。作為語言藝術的創造者沒有必要給自己貼上個現成的一眼可辨認的民族標籤。

文學作品之超越國界，通過翻譯又超越語種，進而越過地域和歷史形成的某些特定的社會習俗和人際關係，深深透出的人性乃是人類普遍相

通的。再說，一個當今的作家，誰都受過本民族文化之外的多重文化的影響，強調民族文化的特色如果不是出於旅遊業廣告的考慮，不免令人生疑。

文學之超越意識形態，超越國界，也超越民族意識，如同個人的存在原本超越這樣或那樣的主義，人的生存狀態總也大於對生存的論說與思辨。文學是對人的生存困境的普遍關照，沒有禁忌。對文學的限定總來自文學之外，政治的，社會的，倫理的，習俗的，都企圖把文學裁剪到各種框架裡，好作為一種裝飾。

然而，文學既非權力的點綴，也非社會時尚的某種風雅，自有其價值判斷，也即審美。同人的情感息息相關的審美是文學作品唯一不可免除的判斷。誠然，這種判斷也因人而異，也因為人的情感總出自不同的個人。然而，這種主觀的審美判斷又確有普遍可以認同的標準，人們通過文學薰陶而形成的鑒賞力，從閱讀中重新體會到作者注入的詩意與美，崇高與可笑，悲憫與怪誕，與幽默與嘲諷，凡此種種。

而詩意並非只來自抒情。作家無節制的自戀是一種幼稚病，誠然，初學寫作時，人人難免。再說，抒情也有許許多多的層次，更高的境界不如冷眼靜觀。詩意便隱藏在這有距離的觀注中。而這觀注的目光如果也審視作家本人，同樣凌駕於書中的人物和作者之上，成為作家的第三隻眼，一個儘可能中性的目光，那麼災難與人世的垃圾便也經得起端詳，在勾起痛苦、厭惡與噁心的同時，也喚醒悲憫、對生命的愛惜與眷戀之情。

植根於人的情感的審美恐怕是不會過時的，雖然文學如同藝術，時髦年年在變。然而，文學的價值判斷同時尚的區別就在於後者唯新是好，這也是市場的普遍運作的機制，書市也不例外。而作家的審美判斷倘若也追隨市場的行情，則無異於文學的自殺。尤其是現今這個號稱消費的社會，我以為恰恰得訴諸一種冷的文學。

十年前，我結束費時七年寫成的《靈山》之後，寫了一篇短文，就主張這樣一種文學：

「文學原本同政治無關，只是純然個人的事情，一番觀察，一種對經驗的回顧，一些臆想和種種感受，某種心態的表達，兼以對思考的滿足。

「所謂作家，無非是一個人自己在說話，在寫作，他人可聽可不聽，可讀可不讀，作家既不是為民請命的英雄，也不值得作為偶像來崇拜，更不是罪人或民眾的敵人，之所以有時竟跟著作品受難，只因為是他人的需要。當權勢需要製造幾個敵人來轉移民眾注意力的時候，作家便成為一種犧牲品。而更為不幸的是，弄暈了的作家竟也以為當祭品是一大光榮。

「其實，作家同讀者的關係無非是精神上的一種交流，彼此不必見面，不必交往，只通過作品得以溝通。文學作為人類活動尚免除不了的一種行為，讀與寫雙方都自覺自願。因此，文學對於大眾不負有甚麼義務。

「這種恢復了本性的文學，不妨稱之為冷的文學。它所以存在僅僅是人類在追求物慾滿足之外的一種純粹

的精神活動。這種文學自然並非始於今日，只不過以往主要得抵制政治勢力和社會習俗的壓迫，現今還要對抗這消費社會商品價值觀的浸淫，求其生存，首先得自甘寂寞。

「作家倘從事這種寫作，顯然難以為生，不得不在寫作之外另謀生計，因此，這種文學的寫作，不能不說是一種奢侈，一種純然精神上的滿足。這種冷的文學能有幸出版而流傳在世，只靠作者和他們的朋友的努力。曹雪芹和卡夫卡都是這樣的例子。他們的作品生前甚至都未能出版，更別說造成甚麼文學運動，或成為社會的明星。這類作家生活在社會的邊緣和夾縫裡，埋頭從事這種當時並不指望報償的精神活動，不求社會的認可，只自得其樂。

「冷的文學是一種逃亡而求其生存的文學，是一種不讓社會扼殺而求得精神上自救的文學，一個民族倘竟容不下這樣一種非功利的文學，不僅是作家的不幸，也該是這個民族的悲哀。」

我居然在有生之年，有幸得到瑞典文學院給予的這巨大的榮譽與獎賞，這也得力於我在世界各地的朋友們多年來不計報酬，不辭辛苦，翻譯、出版、演出和評介我的作品，在此我就不一一致謝了，因為這會是一個相當長的名單。

我還應該感謝的是法國接納了我，在這個以文學與藝術為榮的國家，我既贏得了自由創作的條件，也有我的讀者和觀眾。我有幸並非那麼孤單，雖然從事的是一種相當孤獨的寫作。

我在這裡還要說的是，生活並不是慶典，這世界也並不都像一百八十年來未有過戰爭如此和平的瑞典，新來臨的這世紀並沒有因為經歷過上世紀的那許多浩劫就此免疫。記憶無法像生物的基因那樣可以遺傳。擁有智能的人類並不聰明到足以吸取教訓，人的智能甚至有可能惡性發作而危及到人自身的生存。

人類並非一定從進步走向進步。歷史，這裡我不得不說到人類的文明史，文明並非是遞進的。從歐洲中世紀的停滯到亞洲大陸近代的衰敗與混亂乃至二十世紀兩次世界大戰，殺人的手段也越來越高明，並不隨同科學技術的進步人類就一定更趨文明。

以一種科學主義來解釋歷史，或是以建立在虛幻的辯證法上的歷史觀來演繹，都未能說明人的行為。這一個多世紀以來對烏托邦的狂熱和不斷革命如今都塵埃落地，得以幸存的人難道不覺得苦澀？

否定的否定並不一定達到肯定，革命並不就帶來建樹，對新世界的烏托邦以剷除舊世界作為前提，這種社會革命論也同樣施加於文學，把這本是創造的園地變為戰場，打倒前人，踐踏文化傳統，一切從零開始，唯新是好，文學的歷史也被詮釋為不斷的顛覆。

作家其實承擔不了創世主的角色，也別自我膨脹為基督，弄得自己精神錯亂變成狂人，也把現世變成幻覺，身外全成了煉獄，自然活不下去的。他人固然是地獄，這自我如果失控，何嘗不也如此？弄得自己為未來當了祭品且不說，也要別人跟著犧牲。

這二十世紀的歷史不必匆匆去作結論，倘若還陷入在某種意識形態的框架的廢墟裡，這歷史也是白寫的，後人自會修正。

作家也不是預言家，要緊的是活在當下，解除騙局，丟掉妄想，看清此時此刻，同時也審視自我。自我也一片混沌，在質疑這世界與他人的同時，不妨也回顧自己。災難和壓迫固然通常來自身外，而人自己的怯懦與慌亂也會加深痛苦，並給他人造成不幸。

人類的行為如此費解，人對自身的認知尚難得清明，文學則不過是人對自身的觀注，觀審其時，多少萌發出一縷照亮自身的意識。

文學並不旨在顛覆，而貴在發現和揭示鮮為人知或知之不多，或以為知道而其實不甚了了的這人世的真相。真實恐怕是文學顛扑不破的最基本的品格。

這新世紀業已來臨，新不新先不去說，文學革命和革命文學隨同意識形態的崩潰大抵該結束了。籠罩了一個多世紀的社會烏托邦的幻影已煙消雲散，文學擺脫掉這樣或那樣的主義的束縛之後，還得回到人的生存困境上來，而人類生存的這基本困境並沒有多大改變，也依然是文學永恆的主題。

這是個沒有預言沒有許諾的時代，我以為這倒不壞。作家作為先知和裁判的角色也該結束了，上一個世紀那許許多多的預言都成了騙局。對未來與其再去製造新的迷信，不如拭目以待。作家也不如回到見證人的地位，儘可能呈現真實。

這並非說要文學等同於紀實。要知道，實錄證詞提供的事實如此之少，並且往往掩蓋住釀成事件的原因和動機。而文學觸及到真實的時候，從人的內心到事件的過程都能揭示無遺，這便是文學擁有的力量，如果作家如此這般去展示人生存的真實狀況而不胡編亂造的話。

作家把握真實的洞察力決定作品品格的高低，這是文字遊戲和寫作技巧無法替代的。誠然，何謂真實也眾說紛紜，而觸及真實的方法也因人而異，但作家對人生的眾生相是粉飾還是直陳無遺，卻一眼便可看出。把真實與否變成對詞義的思辨，不過是某種意識形態下的某種文學批評的事，這一類的原則和教條同文學創作並沒有多大關係。

對作家來說，面對真實與否，不僅僅是個創作方法的問題，同寫作的態度也密切相關。筆下是否真實同時也意味下筆是否真誠，在這裡，真實不僅僅是文學的價值判斷，也同時具有倫理的涵義。作家並不承擔道德教化的使命，既將大千世界各色人等悉盡展示，同時也將自我袒露無遺，連人內心的隱秘也如是呈現，真實之於文學，對作家來說，幾乎等同於倫理，而且是文學至高無上的倫理。

那怕是文學的虛構，在寫作態度嚴肅的作家手下，也照樣以呈現人生的真實為前提，這也是古往今來那些不朽之作的生命力所在。正因為如此，希臘悲劇和莎士比亞永遠也不會過時。

文學並不只是對現實的模寫，它切入現實的表層，深深觸及到現實的底蘊；它揭開假象，又高高凌駕於日

常的表象之上，以宏觀的視野來顯示事態的來龍去脈。

當然，文學也訴諸想像。然而，這種精神之旅並非胡說八道，脫離真實感受的想像，離開生活經驗的根據去虛構，只能落得蒼白無力。作者自己都不信服的作品也肯定打動不了讀者。誠然，文學並非只訴諸日常生活的經驗，作家也並不囿於親身的經歷，耳聞目睹以及在前人的文學作品中已經陳述過的，通過語言的載體也能化為自己的感受，這也是文學語言的魅力。

如同咒語與祝福，語言擁有令人身心震蕩的力量，語言的藝術便在於陳述者能把自己的感受傳達給他人，而不僅僅是一種符號系統、一種語義建構，僅僅以語法結構而自行滿足。如果忘了語言背後那說話的活人，對語義的演繹很容易變成智力遊戲。

語言不只是概念與觀念的載體，同時還觸動感覺和直覺，這也是符號和信息無法取代活人的言語的緣故。在說出的詞語的背後，說話人的意願與動機，聲調與情緒，僅僅靠詞義與修辭是無法盡言的。文學語言的涵義得由活人出聲說出來才充份得以體現，因而也訴諸聽覺，不只以作為思維的工具而自行完成。人之需要語言也不僅僅是傳達意義，同時是對自身存在的傾聽和確認。

這裡，不妨借用笛卡爾的話，對作家而言，也可以說：我表述故我在。而作家這我，可以是作家本人，或等同於敘述者，或變成書中的人物，既可以是他，也可以是你，這敘述者主體又一分為三。主語人稱的確

定是表達感知的起點，由此而形成不同的敘述方式。作家是在找尋他獨特的敘述方式的過程中實現他的感知。

我在小說中，以人稱來取代通常的人物，又以我、你、他這樣不同的人稱來陳述或關注同一個主人公。而同一個人物用不同的人稱來表述，造成的距離感也給演員的表演提供了更為廣闊的內心的空間，我把不同人稱的轉換也引入到劇作法中。

小說或戲劇作品都沒有也不可能寫完，輕而易舉去宣佈某種文學和藝術樣式的死亡也是一種虛妄。

與人類文明同時誕生的語言有如生命，如此奇妙，擁有的表現力也沒有窮盡，作家的工作就在於發現並開拓這語言蘊藏的潛能。作家不是造物主，他既剷除不了這個世界，那怕這世界已如此陳舊。他也無力建立甚麼新的理想的世界，那怕這現實世界如此怪誕而非人的智力可以理解，但他確實可以多多少少作出些新鮮的表述，在前人說過的地方還有可說的，或是在前人說完了的地方才開始說。

對文學的顛覆是一種文學革命的空話。文學沒有死亡，作家也是打不倒的。每一個作家在書架上都有他的位置，只要還有讀者來閱讀，他就活了。一個作家如果能在人類已如此豐盛的文學庫存裡留得下一本日後還可讀的書該是莫大的慰藉。

然而，文學，不論就作者的寫作而言，還是就讀者閱讀而言，都只在此時此刻得以實現，並從中得趣。為未來寫作如果不是故作姿態，也是自欺欺人。文學為的是生者，而且是對生者這當下的肯定。這永恆的當下，對個體生命的確認，才是文學之為文

學而不可動搖的理由，如果要為這偌大的自在也尋求一個理由的話。

不把寫作作為謀生的手段的時候，或是寫得得趣而忘了為甚麼寫作和為誰寫作之時，這寫作才變得充分必要，非寫不可，文學便應運而生。文學如此非功利，正是文學的本性。文學寫作變成一種職業是現代社會的分工並不美妙的結果，對作家來說，是個十足的苦果。

尤其是現今面臨的這時代，市場經濟已無孔不入，書籍也成了商品。面對無邊無際盲目的市場，別說孤零零一個作家，以往文學派別的結社和運動也無立足之地。作家要不屈從於市場的壓力，不落到製作文化產品的地步以滿足時興的口味而寫作的話，不得不自謀生路。文學並非是暢銷書和排行榜，而影視傳媒推崇的與其說是作家，不如說作的是廣告。寫作的自由既不是恩賜的，也買不來，而首先來自作家自己內心的需要。

說佛在你心中，不如說自由在心中，就看你用不用。你如果拿自由去換取別的甚麼，自由這鳥兒就飛了，這就是自由的代價。

作家所以不計報酬還寫自己要寫的，不僅是對自身的肯定，自然也是對社會的某種挑戰。但這種挑戰不是故作姿態，作家不必自我膨脹為英雄或鬥士，再說英雄或鬥士所以奮鬥不是為了一個偉大的事業，便是要建立一番功勳，那都是文學作品之外的事情。作家如果對社會也有所挑戰，不過是一番言語，而且得寄託在他作品的人物和情境中，否則只能有損於文

學。文學並非憤怒的吶喊，而且還不能把個人的憤慨變成控訴。作家個人的情感只有化解在作品中而成為文學，才經得起時間的損耗，長久活下去。

因而，作家對社會的挑戰不如說是作品在挑戰。能經久不朽的作品當然是對作者所處的時代和社會一個有力的回答。其人其事的喧囂已蕩然無存，唯有這作品中的聲音還呼之即出，只要有讀者還讀的話。

誠然，這種挑戰改變不了社會，只不過是個人企圖超越社會生態的一般限定，作出的一個並不起眼的姿態，但畢竟是多多少少不尋常的姿態，這也是做人的一點驕傲。人類的歷史如果只由那不可知的規律左右，盲目的潮流來來去去，而聽不到個人有些異樣的聲音，不免令人悲哀。從這個意義上說，文學正是對歷史的補充。歷史那巨大的規律不由分說施加於人之時，人也得留下自己的聲音。人類不只有歷史，也還留下了文學，這也是虛枉的人卻也還保留的一點必要的自信。

尊敬的院士們，我感謝你們把諾貝爾這獎給了文學，給了不迴避人類的苦難，不迴避政治壓迫而又不為政治效勞獨立不移的文學。我感謝你們把這最有聲譽的獎賞給了遠離市場的炒作不受注意卻值得一讀的作品。同時，我也感謝瑞典文學院讓我登上這舉世注目的講壇，聽我這一席話，讓一個脆弱的個人面對世界發出這一番通常未必能在公眾傳媒上聽得到的微弱而不中聽的聲音。然而，我想，這大抵正是這諾貝爾文學獎的宗旨。謝謝諸位給我這樣一個機會。