

Studies on Kate Jennings in the Process of Internationalization of Australian Literature*

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Abstract - During the process of the internationalization of Australian literature, there arise many famous writers in Australian literary world, who have accelerated this process. Kate Jennings is one of them. Born in New South Wales, Australia, she was firstly famous for an incendiary speech given before a Vietnam Moratorium march in 1970, which is credited as signaling the beginning of the second wave of feminism in Australia. With distinguished gifts for writing, she has created some famous literary works. Later in 1979, Kate Jennings moved to New York City, continuing her literary career in the melting pot of America, which has publicized Australian literature in the international world. This paper aims at undertaking a little deeper study about this Australian pioneer of feminism, and probing her great contributions to the internationalization of Australian literature.

Index Terms - Australian literature, the process of internationalization, Kate Jennings

1. The Internationalization of Australian Literature

As a new branch of world literature, Australian literature originated from Anglo-Saxon literature, flourishing with the infiltration of Euro-American literature, economy, politics and culture. From the very beginning of British settlement in Australia in 1788, the settlers from Britain has begun their own literary history in the new continent. Compared with her counterparts of British and American literature, unfortunately, the process of Australian literary development was quite slow and lagged behind, and it was not until 1890s that Australian literature began to form its own peculiar characteristics. By 1960s, "Sydney University originally established the post of Australian literary professor, and subsequently, many universities begun to offer the course of Australian literature" [1]; thus, Australian literature has been on the way of catching up with the development of world literature, and on its way to the internationalization, being recognized by the whole world. In 1973, Patrick White received the Nobel Prize in Literature, accelerating the internationalization speed of Australian literature. From then on, foreign critics have regarded Australian literature with special esteem, and their interests in studying Australian literature have been on the rise. One American critic comments: "What Australia is most proud of is that it has the most distinguished novelist and poet who uses English language to create works for the recent 25 years of the 20th century." [2] Patrick White's winning of the Nobel Prize in Literature has further consolidated Australian literature's

position in the world literature, and has finished the most crucial step of the internationalization of Australian literature.

The history of Australia is the history of Anglo-Saxons who settled down, exploited and established the colony of Australia, and eventually integrated with the whole world. It is the same with the history of Australian literature, with three stages experienced. As what has been put by Huang Yuanshen, "Australian literature has undergone three stages, namely, the stages of colonization, nationalization and internationalization." [3] Compared with the various works created in the former two stages, which have contributed greatly to the establishment of Australian literature and the formation of its national features, the literary works produced in the stage of internationalization have achieved great success and drawn more attention from the world. These works adopt varieties of genres, subject matters and ways of narration, with multiple perspectives of perception employed. This period has seen numerous distinguished writers in the literary world of Australia. It is a floruit, with numerous green-hand writers emerging and varied excellent works produced. Many Australian writers have won "Booker Prize", "The Miles Franklin Award", "Australian Literature Society Gold Medal", "NSW Premier's Award", "Christina Stead Prize for Fiction", "Adelaide Festival Fiction Prize", "NBC Banjo Awards", and "Arts Queensland Steele Rudd Australian Short Story Award", etc. With their outstanding literary productions, these rising stars present the world with a marvelous Australian literature, proclaiming the approaching of a new era of Australian literature and contributing a lot to its internationalization.

Kate Jennings, an avant – garde writer in Australian feminism, is one of them. This paper aims at undertaking a general study on her, her works, her contributions to the internationalization of Australian literature, as well as the factors contributing to her success, presenting readers with a panorama of Kate Jennings.

2. Kate Jennings, Her Works, and Her Contributions to the Internationalization of Australian Literature

2.1 Kate Jennings

Kate Jennings, an Australian-born novelist, poet, prosa, memoirist and speech writer. In May 20th, 1948, she was born on a farm near Griffith, New South Wales. In the late 1960s,

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Kate studied in the University of Sydney, and received Bachelor of Arts degree with honours. During her study there, Kate Jennings actively involved herself in feminist and left wing-movements. She gained her fame for an incendiary speech given before a Vietnam Moratorium march in 1970, which was subsequently regarded as signaling the beginning of the second wave of feminism in Australia. [4] With peculiar gifts in creation, Kate Jennings has won many literary awards, laying the foundation for the flourishing of Australian women literature. Consequently, she can be ranked as an avant – garde writer in Australian feminism. In 1979, she immigrated to New York, America, the melting pot, where she continues her career of writing and publicizes Australian literature to the whole world.

2.2 Her Works

Her works include: novels of *Snake* (1996) and *Moral Hazard* (2002); short story collection, *Women Falling Down in the Street*(1990); poetry of *Come to Me My Melancholy Baby*(1975) and *Cats, Dogs and Pitchforks* (1993); autobiographies of *Stanley and Sophie* (2008) and *Trouble: Evolution of a Radical, Selected Writings 1970–2010* (2010); proses of *Save Me, Joe Louis* (1998) and *Bad Manners* (1993); poetry anthology, *Mother I'm Rooted* (1975). Among them, many have won varieties of prizes: her two novels was New York Times Notable Book of the Year; *Moral Hazard* won Christina Stead Prize for Fiction, NSW Premier's Award, Adelaide Festival Fiction Prize, Australian Literature Society Gold Medal and was also shortlisted for the 2003 Miles Franklin Award, the Los Angeles Times Fiction Prize, and the Tasmania Pacific Region Prize; *Women Falling Down in the Street* won Arts Queensland Steele Rudd Australian Short Story Award; *Cats, Dogs and Pitchforks* won NBC Turnbull Fox Phillips Poetry Prize and NBC Banjo Awards. [5]

As an international women writer, who has once lived in Australia and now lives in the United States, Kate Jennings' life experiences are complex and varied, which have been embodied in her works. That's why the genres and subject matters of her works are so varied and broad. Newly arriving in New York, she had to make her ends meet, so she "tried my hand at the kinds of writing at which my literary peers have sniffed; no matter." [6] She even tried to compose articles for magazines and newspaper, and write speeches for politicians. Such as: "Best Business Books of the Millennium: Business Novels" (2001, in *Strategy Business* Q4); "Less is More" (Feb. 2003, in *Prospect magazine*); "The Serious Business of Literature" (May 11th, 2003, in *Los Angeles Times Book Review*); "Gutless Fiction" (Aug. 26th, 2005, in *Australian Financial Review*); "Among the Strong and the Shrewd" (May 2nd, 2003, in *Australian Financial Review*); "To Hell with the Future" (May, 2009, in *Australian Financial Review*); "Doublethink on Wall Street" (May 10th, 2002, in *Financial Times*) and "The Hypocrisy of Wall Street Culture" (July 14th, 2002, in *New York Times*). [7]

Kate Jennings' novels, short story collections and poetry are well-received both in America and in Australia, enjoying a

high reputation. For example, *Publishers Weekly* describes *Snake* "lethal and fast-moving"[8], while *New York Times Book Review* describes it "possessing a holographic shimmer"[9]. *Moral Hazard* was Kate Jennings' most famous literary production, winning a lot of prizes both in Australia and in America. Shirley Hazzard, a distinguished writer, comments it "humane and unsparing; witty, unsettling, and wildly intelligent"[10]. *The Economist* comments it "...a sad, moving and rather bitter novel"[11], while Margaret Stead "At a time when length seems to be regarded as a prerequisite signal of literary weight, *Moral Hazard* stands out as an elegantly slim volume. Jennings ... brings to her novels an understanding of how to distil narrative down to its essence." [12] *Snake* mainly adopts her girlhood life experience (in Australia) as life prototype, while *Moral Hazard* mainly adopts her midlife one (in America) as life prototype. Both novels give a subtle perception of and fierce questioning on Australian and American social, political, economic and marital issues at that time respectively, revealing Kate's keen vision and deep insight in writing. Together, they provide chances for readers in the world to make comparison between Australia and America and to know them roughly, and tighten the ties between Australia (or the Australian continent) and America (the American continent), thus bridging the gap between these two countries (or continents).

Enjoying great popularity, the articles and Op-Eds published in varieties of magazines and newspapers give incisive analyses of current politics and financial issues of America, and holds up a mirror to the contemporary times. Being bluntly direct and outspoken in expressing her thoughts is one of her writing styles. In those articles, Kate Jennings bitterly attacks the malfeasance in American financial world, and the abuse of language in American commercial world from the perspective of an international writer, exposing the hypocritical side of Wall Street, America's financial centre, which provides chances for Australian readers – even the readers from the world – to get a deep perception about America, further strengthens the literary ties between these two countries, and consequently accelerates the process of internationalization of Australian literature. Andrew Field, a prominent Nabokov scholar, comments Kate Jennings is a "ferocious truth-teller" [13], and he even praises "[her] humor, her obdurate individuality, and her willingness to say what other people won't" [14]. In the cover of her new book, *Trouble* (for short), Elliot Perlman comments "Piercing, intellectually rigorous and scrupulously honest, no holds-barred writing has been Kate Jennings' trademark." [15] Many critics' comments corroborate each other, revealing the true nature of Kate Jennings and her writing.

2.3 Her Contributions to the Internationalization of Australian Literature

As an Australian born American, Kate Jennings knows various aspects of both countries very well — literature, culture, social affairs, politics and economy, etc. — so she knows how to present the newly-rising Australia (its literature,

culture, politics and economy) to America (or even to the whole world), which offers chances for readers from America and even from the whole world to get a deep understanding about Australian literature, culture, politics and economy, and consequently leads to the popularization of Australian literature in the whole world. Meanwhile, Kate Jennings also knows how to present American literature, culture, politics and economy to Australia (or even to the whole world), which also provides chances for Australian readers to get a deep insight into American literature, culture, politics and economy, and eventually tightens the literary, cultural, political and economic ties between Australia and America. Kate Jennings, being famous for her fame in literary world, combines Australian literary theory with American one, the new trend, and takes advantage of the strong points of them in her writing. Eventually, she has produced works of varied genres with her typical style, winning great fame for her, her motherland — Australia— and America, and publicizing the literature of both Australia and America. To some extent, it can be said that Kate Jennings acts as the bridge of communication between Australian and American literature, further accelerates the literary and cultural exchanges between these two countries and consequently promotes the internationalization of Australian literature, contributing a lot to its popularization.

3. Factors Contributing to Her Success

Many underlying factors contribute to Kate Jennings' success, among which her distinguished and remarkable capabilities play a very important role. With a peculiar way of thinking, a bold courage and a keen insight, Kate Jennings can throb with the pulse of the times, and can perceive the social issues and the focus of her times. She is expert at finding the problems, analyzing them and expressing her thoughts in her writing. In her creations of novels, poems, essays and speeches, Kate's gifts for writing have been well displayed. In the 1960s and 1970s, influenced by American social movements, Australian society was undergoing political, social and cultural upheaval and turmoil, which was observantly perceived by Kate Jennings. In 1970, when all Australian men were actively involved in the Vietnam Moratorium march, Kate Jennings was bold enough to seize the occasion to give a passionate speech before the public, calling on the equal right of women. In her speech, Kate Jennings sharply put forward the inequality of women, distracting public attention from the Vietnam Moratorium march to the issues of women. "there are a lot of people here who feel strongly about the vietnam war. but how many of you, who can see so clearly the suffering and misery in vietnam, how many of you can see at the end of your piggy noses the women who can't get abortions, ... go check the figures, how many australiamen have died in vietnam, and how many women have died from backyard abortions." [16] It was Kate Jennings who firstly raised the legalization of women abortion and the liberation of women to the same height as the issue of anti-Vietnam, making Australian men and women realize the sharp social contradiction of the inequality between them that has existed in Australian society

for so long a time. In her opinion, Australian men were "recruited" into the army, devoting their lives to their country; while Australian women were "recruited" into the kitchen like slaves, being busy with trivial household duties every day — cooking, washing, cleaning and taking care of children and husbands — and devoting their lives to their families. Kate Jennings called on the public to make this situation improved, and liberate women from the slavery of household duties. It can't be denied that Kate Jennings' speech was very successful at that time, and that with her great eloquence, undeniable facts and persuasive discourse, Kate Jennings had removed the scales from both Australian men's and women's eyes, promoting the liberation movement of Australian women.

Secondly, her international living background plays a significant role in her success. Grown up in Australia, Kate Jennings know very well about her motherland's politics, economy, culture and literature; later, her immigration into America provides her chances to be exposed to and get a better understanding about America, the country representing "the World Cultural Center". Because of such unusual experience, Kate can look upon Australian and American issues with broader outlooks from more special perspectives, and can always reflect on what has happened or is happening around her from an outsider's viewpoint, objectively and profoundly. Consequently, her questioning and analysis about current issues will be more close to the truth. That's also why her works are so popular among readers from Australia, America and even the world.

Thirdly, the historical opportunity and mission of her time accounts for her success. The 1960s and 70s have seen an changing international situation, with new thoughts of world politics, economy and culture upsurging. All these upheavals stemmed from the turbulent and unsafe social condition of America. The 1960s is the most turbulent decade in American history: "firstly, the Black Civil-rights Movement spread the whole United States, and then the New Left Movement of radical students and the Counterculture Movements of the rebellious youth broke out subsequently, eventually the large-scale Feminist Movement and the nationwide Anti-war Movement burst out." [17] In the next decade, the remaining wave of these movements still affected other countries in the world. Australia, though far from America and the European continent, couldn't avoid getting entangled in them. Consequently, Australia also underwent a turbulent and unsafe social condition, leading to the vitality of Australian thoughts at that time. Living in such a turbulent society and affected by American Feminist Movement, Kate Jennings held the banner of Feminist Movement in Australian society, with her speech before a Vietnam Moratorium march signaling the beginning of the second wave of feminism in Australia. It was Kate Jennings who bravely took on the holy mission bestowed by history, and took advantage of this golden opportunity to display her talent on the historical stage.

Finally, the high pressure life in New York contributes a lot to her success. After she immigrated into New York, the fast-paced city, Kate Jennings had to support herself by

writing, without subsidy from the government or the generous salary of college professors. Just as what Kate has put it, this vocation “has pushed me into the world”[18]. To make ends meet, she has to lower herself and try any writing opportunity that comes to her, which leads to her typical feature of various genres produced. Kate Jennings’ subject matters range from global financial crises to Australian film industry and swimming history, to hypocrisy of Wall Street, and even to the abuse of the language of American business world, etc. Eventually, Kate Jennings presents readers with works of varieties of genres, novels, essays, poems, biography, Op-Eds, articles and speeches, which have won a great fame for her. Without exaggeration, Kate Jennings can be ranked as one of the contemporary Australian-born writers who are gifted in composing works with the most varied genres and the broadest subject matters.

4. Conclusions

Kate Jennings, a contemporary Australian-born woman writer, held the banner of the second Feminist Movement in Australian society. In the 1960s and 70s when Australia was flooded with numerous movements and varieties of ethos, Kate Jennings stood in the forefront of the times, and assumed the historical duties. Her passionate speech before the Vietnam Moratorium march stirred up troubles in Australian society. From then on, both Australian men and women no longer confine their focus on just political issues; indeed, they pay more attention to matters concerning women. It can be said that, Kate Jennings has contributed greatly in Australia both culturally and literarily. As a successful international writer, Kate Jennings has an extensive living background, and has done a great deal for the improvement of Australian literature in the international world. Acting as the bridge of cultural and literary communications between Australia and America, Kate

Jennings has produced works combining the literary theories of both countries, and provides Australian and American readers with a fresh trend, which has, to some extent, accelerated the internationalization of Australian literature in the whole world.

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