

## **Nobel Prize in Literature 2000**



**Gao Xingjian**

**The Nobel Prize in Literature 2000 was awarded to Gao Xingjian *"for an œuvre of universal validity, bitter insights and linguistic ingenuity, which has opened new paths for the Chinese novel and drama"*.**

The Nobel Prize in Literature for 2000 goes to the Chinese writer Gao Xingjian "for an œuvre of universal validity, bitter insights and linguistic ingenuity, which has opened new paths for the Chinese novel and drama".

In the writing of Gao Xingjian literature is born anew from the struggle of the individual to survive the history of the masses. He is a perspicacious sceptic who makes no claim to be able to explain the world. He asserts that he has found freedom only in writing.

His great novel *Soul Mountain* is one of those singular literary creations that seem impossible to compare with anything but themselves. It is based on impressions from journeys in remote districts in southern and southwestern China, where shamanistic customs still linger on, where ballads and tall stories about bandits are recounted as the truth and where it is possible to come across exponents of age-old Daoist wisdom. The book is a tapestry of narratives with several protagonists who reflect each other and may

represent aspects of one and the same ego. With his unrestrained use of personal pronouns Gao creates lightning shifts of perspective and compels the reader to question all confidences. This approach derives from his dramas, which often require actors to assume a role and at the same time describe it from the outside. I, you and he/she become the names of fluctuating inner distances.

*Soul Mountain* is a novel of a pilgrimage made by the protagonist to himself and a journey along the reflective surface that divides fiction from life, imagination from memory. The discussion of the problem of knowledge increasingly takes the form of a rehearsal of freedom from goals and meaning. Through its polyphony, its blend of genres and the scrutiny that the act of writing subjects itself to, the book recalls German Romanticism's magnificent concept of a universal poetry.

Gao Xingjian's second novel, *One Man's Bible*, fulfils the themes of *Soul Mountain* but is easier to grasp. The core of the book involves settling the score with the terrifying insanity that is usually referred to as China's Cultural Revolution. With ruthless candour the author accounts for his experiences as a political activist, victim and outside observer, one after the other. His description could have resulted in the dissident's embodiment of morality but he rejects this stance and refuses to redeem anyone else. Gao Xingjian's writing is free of any kind of complaisance, even to good will. His play *Fugitives* irritated the democracy movement just as much as those in power.

Gao Xingjian points out himself the significance for his plays of the non-naturalistic trends in Western drama, naming Artaud, Brecht, Beckett and Kantor. However, it has been equally important for him to "open the flow of sources from popular drama". When he created a Chinese oral theatre, he adopted elements from ancient masked drama, shadow plays and the dancing, singing and drumming traditions. He has embraced the possibility of moving freely in time and space on the stage with the help of one single gesture or word - as in the Chinese opera. The uninhibited mutations and grotesque symbolic language of dreams interrupt the distinct images of contemporary humanity. Erotic themes give his texts feverish excitement, and many of them have the choreography of seduction as their



basic pattern. In this way he is one of the few male writers who gives the same weight to the truth of women as to his own.

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