

JIA PINGWA



THE HEAVENLY HOUND

and Other Selected Writings

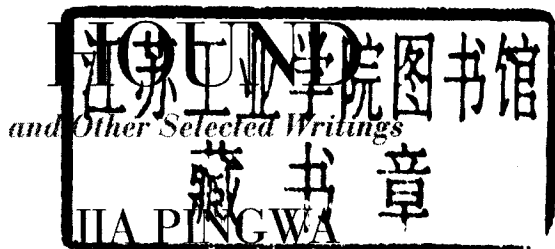


FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS





THE HEAVENLY



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS

图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

天狗：贾平凹作品选：英文 / 贾平凹 著

北京：外文出版社，2009 (熊猫丛书)

ISBN 978-7-119-05907-5

I. 天... II. ①贾...②帕... III. 小说-作品集-中国-当代-英文 IV. I247

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字 (2009) 第123497号

责任编辑：刘芳念 佟 盟

封面设计：周伟伟

印刷监制：韩少乙

天狗 贾平凹作品选

贾平凹 著

帕蒂森 等 英译

© 2009 外文出版社

出版人：呼宝民

总编辑：李振国

出版发行：外文出版社

中国北京百万庄大街24号

邮政编码 100037

<http://www.flp.com.cn>

印制：求是印务中心

开本：850mm × 1168mm 1/32 印张：9.75

2009年第1版 第1次印刷

(英)

ISBN 978-7-119-05907-5

07000 (平)

版权所有 侵权必究



THE HEAVENLY HOUND

and Other Selected Writings

JIA PINGWA



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS

First Edition 2009

ISBN 978-7-119-05907-5

© Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, China, 2009

Published by Foreign Languages Press

24 Baiwanzhuang Road, Beijing 100037, China

<http://www.flp.com.cn>

Distributed by China International Book Trading Corporation

35 Chegongzhuang Xilu, Beijing 100044, China

P.O. Box 399, Beijing, China

Printed in the People's Republic of China

Preface

Literature may reflect the ethos of a country or a nation, while at the same time it can transcend the limits of time and space to most widely resonate a truly universal humanity. Literary works of art that move hearts may even inspire the compassion of strangers toward a people or country...

This "Panda Series" of books, expertly translated into English, compiles the works of well-known modern and contemporary Chinese authors around themes such as the city and the countryside, love and marriage, minority folk stories and historical legends. These works reflect the true spirit and everyday lives of the Chinese people, while widely resonating with their changing spiritual and social horizons.

Published from the 1980s, through more than 100 titles in English, this series continues to open wider the window for readers worldwide to better understand China through its new literature. Many familiar and fond readers await the latest in this "Panda Series." This publication of the "Panda Series" consolidates and looks back at earlier released literary works to draw new readers, while stirring the fond memories of old friends, to let more people share the experiences and views of the Chinese people in recent decades. We express our sincere appreciation to all authors, translators and editors who have engaged in their dedicated and meticulous work over the years to bring out these works. It is their passion and endeavor that have enabled this series to appear now in luminous distinction.

CONTENTS

The Heavenly Hound	7
The People of Chicken's Nest Hollow	92
Touch Paper	268

The Heavenly Hound

The Well

IF it's a traveller you want to be, and you can eat anything and sleep anywhere, if you fear neither snakes nor wolves and have the courage to take risks, then journey four days southwest along the Danjiang River to see a certain lopsided fort and meet its enigmatic inhabitants, an experience which, in its own way, will be no less interesting than visiting some famous scenic spot.

The *Traveller's Guide* often describes a place as "fertile and beautiful". Yet, though motivated by good intentions, descriptions like these can be deceptive. If you travel this particular route, you'll see that these two words shouldn't be used in conjunction: beautiful places are not always that fertile, and fertile places are not necessarily that beautiful. Places are more believable if they are just ordinary, just average in terms of their beauty and fertility. This fort was just such a place.

It was called a fort rather than a village because there had once been a lot of bandits in these parts and, to prevent trouble, it had been placed in splendid isolation on a rise above the river. But time passes, and the old fort walls had long since crumbled, leaving behind only a stone stele in the undergrowth by the

arched entranceway, etched with characters which read "impenetrable" when glimpsed in the fading sun's last rays.

There were some two hundred households in the fort, all of whom originally came from Shaanxi and none of whom had, over the generations, ever left behind them an ancestor temple. Although a main street still remained, commercial trade had never been a big part of local tradition, so there were no markets and it was quiet day and night alike. A dog's bark would echo along the street like a leopard's roar. Running east to west behind the fort was an old official road, now the main route from the provincial capital to the local county town. Passing vehicles sometimes stopped here and sometimes didn't — it was all according to the driver's whim at the time.

Half a *li* north of the road was Tiger Mountain, tigerless in reality, and covered by jagged, precipitous rocks. Rocks, however, can't be burnt like coal, so saplings and shrubbery alike had all been chopped down for kindling and charcoal. Even their roots had been pulled up and cut to burn in the hearth through the long winter nights. All that now struggled through was a type of splendid *achnatherum* which harboured wild rabbits and locusts. In the July dusk children would go out and catch them, sometimes encountering a recumbent wolf along the way, its expression so benevolent they'd mistake it for a dog and call out to it. But the minute they caught sight of a long broom-like tail they'd shriek and the beast, its ruse discovered, would immediately bound away.

With the Danjiang River meandering by the southern edge of the fort, it may sound absurd to say that it

was difficult to obtain drinking water. However, in order to do so, you first had to lug a pair of buckets on a shoulder pole down 372 steps from the fort entrance, and then go another half a *li* along the river bank. During the rainy season, people set wooden buckets and earthenware bowls beneath the eaves for the rainwater to clatter into and once it had settled, they would keep the clearer water for themselves and give the murkier water to the cattle. In recent years, though, there'd been a fair amount of well digging in the area. These wells were usually about thirty metres deep, although some went as far down as one hundred. Those who had them rejoiced at the sound of the winch being hauled up, while those without felt a sense of panic. The wells all belonged to prosperous households, — craftsmen, carpenters, stonemasons and the like. At the outset there's not a lot of difference between one man and another, so it's not possible to simply say that some were cleverer than others. And the fort itself was a fairly average sort of place, not an unusually fortuitous environment for making money, nor did it have abundant financial resources to invest in sideline businesses, so even a modicum of skill could lead to prosperity. Wells had thus become a symbol of the rising craftsman class, and represented profit, wealth and fame, altogether a glorious undertaking.

The well digger Li Zheng was a man of his time, a man whose skills, developed over the years, brought wealth to him as he laboured to enrich others. He had daily become more selfassured, seeing his skill almost as a kind of talisman, and somewhere along the line he had even begun to affect an air of sophistication

and mystery, proclaiming to one and all the three "don'ts" of well digging: namely that no digging should take place until a geomancer had examined the site, nor unless the date was suitably auspicious, nor unless there was good food and drink, good money and proper treatment for the diggers. Such was his solemnity about all of this, you might have thought he'd been empowered by heaven itself to bring goodness into the world.

In the fort everyone saw Li Zheng's well digging as a kind of gold mine and everyone envied him. Laden with presents, parents would take their children to him as prospective apprentices, but the well digger rejected them all without a moment's hesitation.

"It's not something just anyone can do."

"My child is a bit slow, but he's a hard worker."

"Do you think it's only hard work that's needed?"

On hearing this the supplicants would be confounded and, if they persisted, the well digger would simply say, "We've got our boy, Wuxing," and that would be that. This Wuxing was the well digger's only child, then still away at middle school, but his father was making it abundantly clear to all and sundry that the craft was to be kept within the family.

The well digger's wife found his lack of consideration for others, hard to deal with. A man is free to do as he wishes in the outside world, but women are tied to the house and have to stay on good terms with neighbours day in and day out. She worried that people might take offence. Every day she tried to coax and cajole her husband into changing his attitude, and refused to agree to Wuxing's quitting school and re-

turning home to follow in his father's footsteps. After much persuasion, the well digger finally acquiesced to taking a man by the name of Tiangou on as an apprentice, but only on condition that he would do manual labour, get forty percent of the income, and not learn any of the skilled work.

This Tiangou — "Heavenly Hound" — was a man going nowhere, at thirty-six unable to earn enough to get himself a wife and, as an apprentice, bound to do as he was told. To look at, he was fair skinned and had a high forehead and a receding hairline. With nothing to do most of the time and no one to keep him in check, he'd taken up various kinds of hobbies, among them keeping crickets, fishing and hunting rabbits. A man with neither the appearances nor the mentality of a luckless and lonely peasant, he'd still somehow ended up that way.

On the 6th day of the 6th lunar month, a day certain to be all right even without having to check it in the almanac, master and apprentice went together to the east side of the village to dig a well for the Hu family. The previous evening the well digger's woman had lit a candle in the main room which suddenly produced a spluttering flicker after burning out, making her extremely agitated. She'd still felt apprehensive the next morning and, as she waved them goodbye, tears streamed down her face and she warned them repeatedly to be careful. The sight of her tears made Tiangou's heart pound and he told himself that the master's wife was truly buddha-like. Although in his thirty-six years he'd never been with a woman, he knew all about such things and was well aware that although half her tears were for her husband, the other half were for

him. She'd always treated him like someone who hadn't quite grown up yet, like a little puppy, and he in his turn played the part, putting on a simple and not-quite-with-it expression in her presence.

"Tiangou," she said finally, "this is a special year for you...."

He'd replied that there was nothing to worry about, that with the red sash he wore around his waist, there was nothing he feared. "The master's a lucky man — with him around nothing on earth would dare touch us."

On reaching the Hus' place, master and apprentice were seated at a varnished square table while the host quickly produced some of his best tea. As the two men savoured the brew, the atmosphere in the courtyard grew solemn. A yellow-robed geomancer wearing a paper hat and carrying a compass entered. Feet together, he leapt into the air in a manner so ridiculous that Tiangou almost burst out laughing, almost, that was, until he saw his master's sober expression and transformed his laughter into a spit instead. The geomancer determined the appropriate location for the well, then took in a mouthful of clear water which he sprayed onto a sword shaped like a willow leaf and began to chant his "water summoning" incantation. All the while the host kept sprinkling water on the chosen spot in time with the chanting, a sacrifice to the Lord of the Earth. The master stood up and walked across to the geomancer.

"Is there water?" he asked.

"There is," came the reply.

"What water?"

"Water from the Yangtze River."

Then, with a clanging sound, the master took his pickaxe and made a furrow along a cross-shaped pattern which the geomancer had marked out in lime. Where, thought Tiangou to himself, can you not find water in a fort right next to a river? He suppressed a laugh.

Along the line marked out in lime, they dug a waist-deep hole two feet in diameter. This was known as "shaping the well" and the dimensions had to be just right, neither too big nor too small. Here the greatest skill was required and so the master took care of it personally. When he'd finished he climbed out and settled himself comfortably into a rattan chair with a cigarette and a cup of tea, while Tiangou jumped in to dig according to the proportions established by the master. Having long arms and legs Tiangou had to crouch down, and even only using a small pickaxe he still hardly had room to move. No matter how many times he wielded the axe he was never able to get into his stride, and he found the work intensely frustrating. The deeper he went the less freedom he had. Like a silk-worm spinning its thread out of soil, he slowly enveloped himself in a cocoon of earth. When he reached ten or twelve metres in depth the world went dark, so he lit an oil lamp and placed it in a niche hewn in the side of the well wall. Gradually his eyes became cat-like, his pupils dilating and glistening with greenish light, and from there on in he had to rely entirely on his senses.

In the courtyard above, various neighbours had gathered to watch the digging of the well. The master had a wide circle of acquaintances and he kept himself busy having tea and cigarettes, saying to people that, thanks

to the good weather and the policies of the current government, enough grain had been harvested this year. He told them what an advantage it was to have a well, how this carpenter had one fifty metres deep and that stonemason a sixty-metre well with a steel hoist and pulleys. He occupied himself gossiping with the women and played with a baby cradled in its young mother's arms, complimenting her on its fair complexion and sparkling eyes. In short, with an apprentice as industrious as Tiangou, the master's own tasks were limited to the skilled jobs like shaping and finishing, and above ground he had more than enough time and energy to do whatever he felt like doing.

Down below, however, Tiangou led the life of a condemned man. His ears were no use to him, his mouth was no use to him and, to stop himself from becoming completely numb, he conjured up a world full of songbirds and insects, which sang songs of life and songs of joy to him so that he no longer felt isolated and alone. He fervently wished the master would shout for him to come up, but those above didn't concern themselves with those below, and they just got on with the business of enjoying themselves. The master treated Tiangou with indifference, and worked him so hard that Tiangou couldn't help cursing him. He stopped for a moment, looked up and saw above his head a shining sphere. As the sun grew stronger, shafts of light of varying lengths pierced down and, in one, as slender as a well rope, Tiangou could see a host of infinitesimal creatures darting in all directions. How he wished he could grab hold of this rope of light and fly up to the top. Then, suddenly, he heard a sound which made him cry out from his earthen pit.