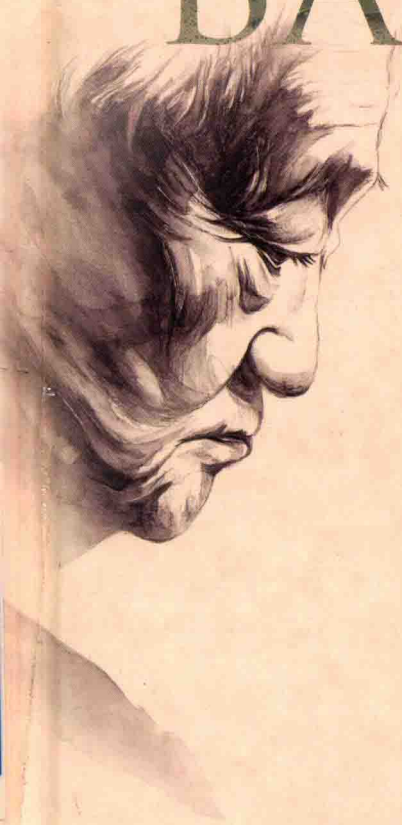


SELECTED WORKS *of* BA JIN



I

THE FAMILY
AUTUMN IN SPRING



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS



孔子学院总部 / 国家汉办
Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban)

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BA JIN

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(1)



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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

巴金文集. 1: 英文 / 巴金著; 沙博里, 王明杰译.

-- 北京: 外文出版社, 2014

ISBN 978-7-119-09298-0

I. ①巴… II. ①巴…②沙…③王… III. ①巴金(1904~2005) - 选集 - 英文 IV. ①I217.2

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2014)第287940号

责任编辑: 刘芳念 范淑娟

封面设计: 黄思颖

内文制作: 北京杰瑞腾达科技发展有限公司

印刷监制: 冯 浩

巴金文集(一)

巴金 著

沙博里 王明杰 译

©2015 外文出版社有限责任公司

出版人: 徐 步

出版发行:

外文出版社有限责任公司(中国北京西城区百万庄大街24号)

邮政编码: 100037 网址: <http://www.flp.com.cn>

电 话: 008610-68320579(总编室)

008610-68995852(发行部)

008610-68327750(版权部)

印 刷: 北京蓝空印刷厂

开 本: 787mm × 1092mm 1/32

印 张: 14.875

2015年1月 第1版 2015年1月 第1次印刷

(英)

ISBN 978-7-119-09298-0

08600

(精)

SELECTED WORKS OF

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First Edition 2015

ISBN 978-7-119-09298-0

©Foreign Languages Press Co. Ltd, Beijing, China, 2015

Published by Foreign Languages Press Co. Ltd

24 Baiwanzhuang Road, Beijing 100037, China

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

E-mail: flp@cipg.org.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



In Shanghai (1947)

FOREWORD

I began writing novels in spring 1927, when a friend of mine and I were living in lodgings in the Latin quarter in Paris. In an essay entitled "Reminiscences," written later, I described the room:

It was a small room. The window was open all day. Below it was a quiet street with only a few people. At the corner of the street was a small café and from my window I could see people walking in through its wide open glass door. But I never heard any noise of drunkenness or gambling. Directly opposite me was an old, high building, which obstructed not only my view but also the rays of the sun, thus making my small room, already filled with the smell of gas and onion, look even more gloomy and depressing.

In the same essay I wrote about my life at the time:

My life was very simple and monotonous. Every morning, I went for a walk in the Luxembourg Park. In the evening, I went to night school for my French lessons. During the day, I stayed at home and let the old and shabby books eat away my youth, books which nobody would bother to read. Very often, after some unbearably quiet moments, the air suddenly began trembling. So, too, the street and even my room. The rumbling sound reverberated in my ears and I completely forgot where I was. Everything

around me seemed to be undergoing great changes. Gradually, however, the sound died away. Experience told me that a heavily loaded lorry had gone past on the cobbled street below. Soon, silence resumed its reign. Slowly I stood up, walked to the window and leaned out to look at the seemingly wounded street. I looked at the small café, which was also very quiet, and I could see a few people drinking and humming a tune or two. An unbearable feeling of loneliness once again overwhelmed me.

After eleven o'clock, my friend Wei and I came out of the night school and we walked on the quiet street, which was drenched with rain. With my eyes set on the almond-coloured sky and the two tombstone-like towers of Notre Dame, I could feel the inextinguishable flames again burning in my heart. One evening, I was walking by myself on the path beside the Panthéon and came to the bronze statue of Rousseau. Unintentionally, I stretched out my arm and stroked the icy stone base as if I were stroking someone very dear to me. I looked up at the giant who was holding a straw hat and a book in his hand, the thinker whom Tolstoy called "the conscience of the whole eighteenth-century world." For a good while, I stood there, all my miseries forgotten until the heavy footsteps of the policeman made me realize all of a sudden what kind of world I was living in.

Every night, I got back to the lodging-house, tired. After a short rest, I lighted the gas stove and made tea. Then the bells of Notre Dame began ringing out their mournful notes, which knocked heavily at my heart.

In circumstances like these, memories of my past again came back to torture me. I thought of my life in Shanghai, my friends in their battles. I thought of my past loves and hates, joys and sorrows, hopes and struggles, pains suffered and sympathies received. As I thought of all my past, I felt a severe pain in my heart, as if it had been cut through by

a sharp knife. The inextinguishable flames began to burn fiercely again.

Then it happened.

In order to alleviate the pain in my young and lonely heart, I began writing about the few things I had gleaned from life. Every night, listening to the chimes of Notre Dame, I wrote in my exercise book something which read like parts of a novel. Within three months, I completed the first four chapters of *Destruction*.*

So, even I myself had never expected that I would turn out to be a writer. I went on writing for the next thirty years and whiled away, at my desk, the best time of my life. Many a time, I have said that I would "give up art" and "put an end to my writing career." But I have not been able to do so.

My major works were all written in the twenty years from 1927 to 1946. In the long period before Liberation (1949), my life as a writer was painful. I have confessed before: "When I am burning with passion, my heart is about to explode and I don't know where to place it; I feel that I must write. I am not an artist, and writing is only part of my life, which, like my works, is full of contradictions. The conflicts between love and hate, thought and action, reason and emotion — these combine to weave a net enwrapping my whole life and all my works. My life, as well as my works, is a painful struggle. Every novel of mine carries my cry in my pursuit of light.... At the same time, the picture of extreme pain and suffering is like a whip lashing me from behind." Inevitably, I could only pick up my pen and write. I wrote to my heart's

* Ba Jin's first novel. — *Trans.*

content, throwing all caution to the winds.

Time marches on. Read in the present new age, my works appear to have so little force; they are so colourless.

Even so, I have made selections from my past writings to represent the fruits of several decades of my literary endeavour. What gives me courage in reprinting these old pieces is my firm belief in writing, which is still very much with me. In 1935, I wrote:

I will never lose hope. There may be different styles and emphases in my works, but the basic thinking which prompts their creation is the same. Ever since I started writing, I have never stopped attacking my enemies. And who are they? All the outmoded, old ideas, all the absurd systems which have been obstructing the path of social progress and man's development, all the forces which seek to destroy love — these are my enemies....

My works, I hope, will bear witness to my words above. I have been writing for over fifty years. I have been searching, all my long life. I am nearing eighty now, but I am still searching. During the ten calamitous years of the "cultural revolution" (1966-76), I was forced to give up writing for a long time. But now my pen is finally back in my hand. In my heart, the fire is still burning. In my mind is still the same old voice, which continually urges me, "Keep writing, keep writing." I feel inside me emotions rising and falling like mighty waves, waiting for a free outlet. So deep is my love for my country and my people!

I want to write. I will continue to write. Let that fire burn me out, fiercely. When only the ashes of my body are left behind, even then, I know my love and my hate

will never disappear.

Ba Jin

Shanghai, February 1981

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THE FAMILY

(1931)

Translated by

SIDNEY SHAPIRO

The wind was blowing hard; snowflakes, floating like cotton fluff from a ripped quilt, drifted down aimlessly. Layers of white were building up at the foot of the walls on both sides of the streets, providing broad borders for their dark muddy centres.

Pedestrians and sedan-chair porters struggled against the wind and snow, but to no avail. They looked weary, and the snowfall was becoming heavier. Snow filled the sky, falling everywhere — on umbrellas, on the sedan-chairs, on the reed capes of the chair carriers, on the faces of the pedestrians.

The wind buffeted the umbrellas in all directions; it blew one or two out of their owners' hands. Howling mournfully, the wind joined with the sound of footsteps in the snow to form a strange, irritating music. This snowstorm will rule the world a long, long time, it seemed to warn the people on the streets, the bright warm sun of spring will never return....

It was nearly evening, but the street lamps had not yet been lit. Everything was gradually disappearing into a pall of grey. Water and mud filled the streets. The air was icy cold. Only one thought sustained the people struggling through these dismal surroundings — they would soon be back in the warmth and brightness of their homes.

"Walk faster, Juehui, or we'll be late for dinner," said a youth of eighteen. He carried an umbrella in one

hand and held up the skirt of his cotton-padded gown with the other. His round face was red with cold as he turned around to speak to his brother; a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles rested on the bridge of his nose.

Juehui, the boy walking behind him, although the same size and wearing the same kind of clothes, was a bit younger. His face was thinner, his eyes were very bright.

"No, we won't," Juehui replied. "We're almost there." But he quickened his pace, mud splashing the legs of his trousers.

The two brothers soon entered a quieter street. Here the oil lamps had been lit, and their dull gleam, casting pale shadows of the lamp posts on the snow, looked particularly lonely in the frigid windy atmosphere. Few persons were abroad, and these walked quickly, leaving their footprints in the snow and silently vanishing. The deep imprints rested exhausted, without even a thought of moving, until new feet pressed down upon them. Then they uttered low sighs and were transformed into queer shapes; on the interminably long, white-mantled street the regular patterns of footprints became only large and small dark shapeless holes.

A row of residential compounds, with large solid wood gates painted black, stood motionless in the icy gale. Pairs of eternally mute stone lions crouched outside their entrances — one on each side. Opened gates gave the appearance of the mouths of fantastic beasts. Within were dark caverns; what was inside them, no one could see.



Gate of the house of the Gao family.