

汉英对照 Chinese-English

THE STORY OF THE STONE 3

异兆悲音

THE WARNING VOICE

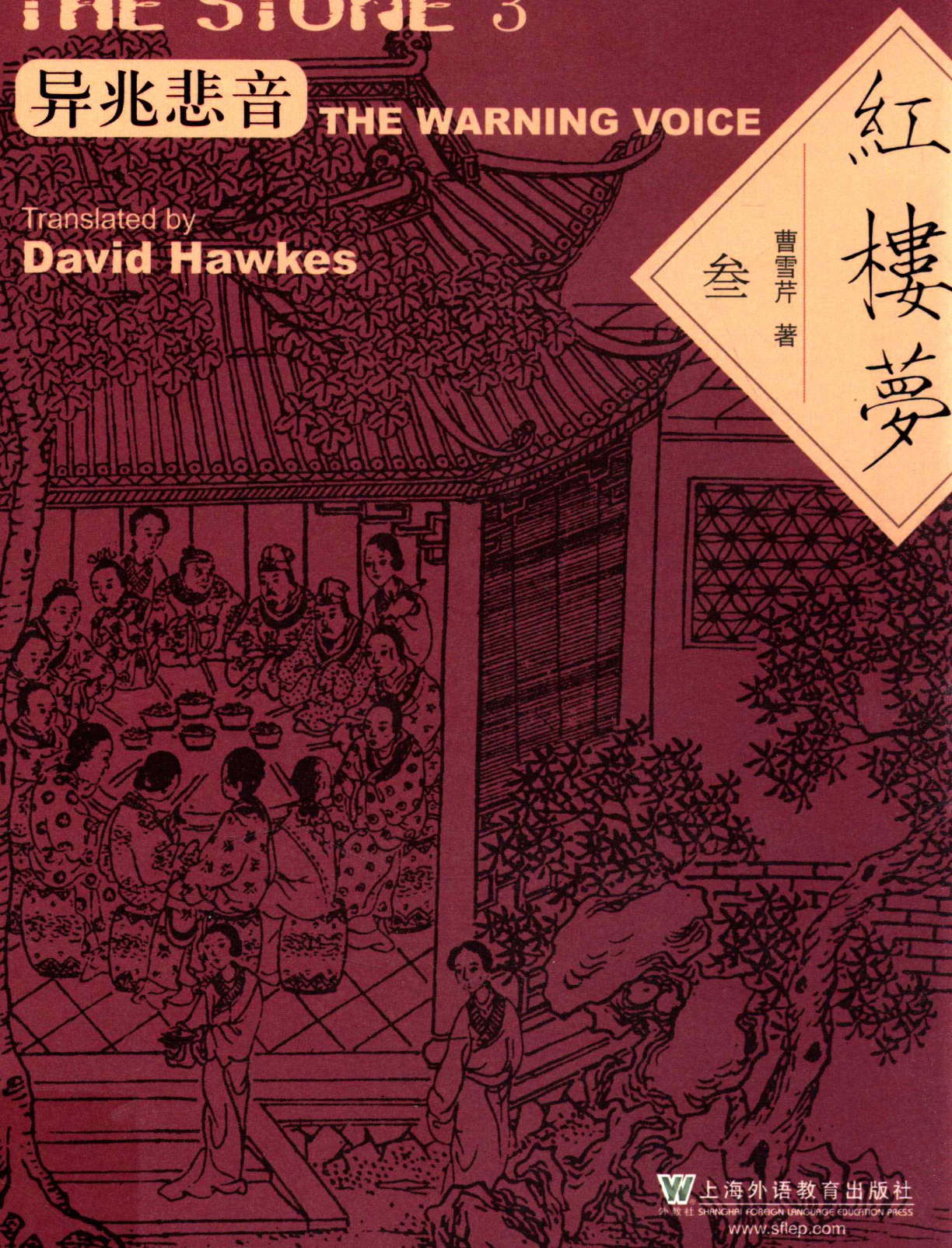
Translated by

David Hawkes

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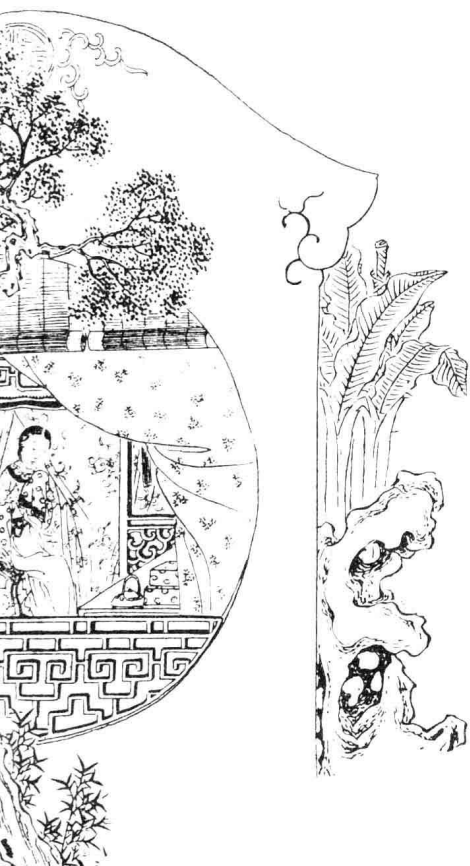
霍克思

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电子邮箱/ bookinfo@sflep.com.cn

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The Story of the Stone

A Chinese Novel by Cao Xueqin

Volume 3

The Warning Voice

Translated by David Hawkes

Collated by Fan Shengyu

 上海外语教育出版社
外教社 SHANGHAI FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION PRESS



PENGUIN BOOKS

FOR JEAN



Note on Spelling

Chinese proper names in this book are spelled in accordance with a system invented by the Chinese and used internationally, which is known by its Chinese name of *Pinyin*. A full explanation of this system will be found overleaf, but for the benefit of readers who find systems of spelling and pronunciation tedious and hard to follow a short list is given below of those letters whose Pinyin values are quite different from the sounds they normally represent in English, together with their approximate English equivalents. Mastery of this short list should ensure that names, even if mispronounced, are no longer unpronounceable.

c = *ts*

q = *ch*

x = *sh*

z = *dz*

zh = *j*

CHINESE SYLLABLES

The syllables of Chinese are made up of one or more of the following elements:

1. an initial consonant (b.c.ch.d.f.g.h.j.k.l.m.n.p.q.r.s.sh.t.w.x.y.z.zh)
2. a semivowel (i or u)
3. an open vowel (a.e.i.o.u.ü), *or*
a closed vowel (an.ang.en.eng.in.ing.ong.un), *or*
a diphthong (ai.ao.ei.ou)

The combinations found are:

- 3 on its own (e.g. *e*, *an*, *ai*)
- 1+3 (e.g. *ba*, *xing*, *hao*)
- 1+2+3 (e.g. *xue*, *qiang*, *biao*)

INITIAL CONSONANTS

Apart from *c = ts* and *z = dz* and *r*, which is the Southern English *r* with a slight buzz added, the only initial consonants likely to give an English speaker much trouble are the two groups

j q x and zh ch sh

Both groups sound somewhat like English *j ch sh*; but whereas *j q x* are articulated much farther *forward* in the mouth than our *j ch sh*, the sounds *zh ch sh* are made in a 'retroflexed' position much farther *back*. This means that to our ears *j* sounds halfway between our *j* and *dz*, *q* halfway between our *ch* and *ts*, and *x* halfway between our *sh* and *s*; whilst *zh ch sh* sound somewhat as *jr*, *chr*, *shr* would do if all three combinations and not only the last one were found in English.

SEMIVOWELS

The semivowel *i* 'palatalizes' the preceding consonant: i.e. it makes a *y* sound after it like the *i* in *onion* (e.g. **Jia Lian**)

The semivowel *u* 'labializes' the preceding consonant: i.e. it makes a *w* sound after it, like the *u* in *assuages* (e.g. Ning-guo)

i. Open Vowels

- a is a long *ah* like *a* in *father* (e.g. **Jia**)
- e on its own or after any consonant other than *y* is like the sound in French *auf* or the *er, ir, ur* sound of Southern English (e.g. Gao **E**, Jia **She**)
- e after *y* or a semivowel is like the *e* of *egg* (e.g. Qin Bang-ye, Xue Pan)
- i after b.d.j.l.m.n.p.q.t.x.y is the long Italian *i* or English *ee* as in *see* (e.g. Nannie **Li**)
- i after zh.ch.sh.z.c.s.r is a strangled sound somewhere between the *u* of *suppose* and a vocalized *r* (e.g. Shi-yin)
- i after semivowel *u* is pronounced like *ay* in *sway* (e.g. Li **Gui**)
- o is the *au* of *author* (e.g. **Duo**)
- u after semivowel *i* and all consonants except j.q.x.y is pronounced like Italian *u* or English *oo* in *too* (e.g. Bu **Gu-xiu**)
- u after j.q.x.y and *ü* after *l* or *n* is the narrow French *u* or German *ü*, for which there is no English equivalent (e.g. Bao-yu, **Nü-wa**)

ii. Closed vowels

- an after semivowel *u* or any consonant other than *y* is like *an* in German *Mann* or *un* in Southern English *fun* (e.g. Yuan-chun, Shan Ping-ren)
- an after *y* or semivowel *i* is like *en* in *hen* (e.g. Zhi-yan-zhai, Jia **Lian**)
- ang whatever it follows, invariably has the long *a* of *father* (e.g. Jia **Qiang**)
- en, eng the *e* in these combinations is always a short, neutral sound like *a* in *ago* or the first *e* in *believe* (e.g. Cousin Zhen, Xi-feng)
- in, ing short *i* as in *sin, sing* (e.g. Shi-yin, Lady **Xing**)
- ong the *o* is like the short *oo* of Southern English *book* (e.g. Jia **Cong**)
- un the rule for the closed *u* is similar to the rule for the open one: after j.q.x.y it is the narrow French *u* of *rue*; after anything else it resembles the short *oo* of *book* (e.g. Jia **Yun**, Ying-chun)

iii. Diphthongs

- ai like the sound in English *lie, high, mine* (e.g. **Dai-yu**)
- ao like the sound in *how* or *bough* (e.g. **Bao-yu**)
- ei like the sound in *day* or *mate* (e.g. **Bei-jing**)
- ou like the sound in *old* or *bowel* (e.g. **Gou-er**)

The syllable *er* is a sound on its own which does not fit into any of the above categories. It sounds somewhat like the word *err* pronounced with a strong English West Country accent, (e.g. Bao **Er**).



Preface

Before talking about the characteristics of a particular volume as I did in the Preface to Volume Two, I ought perhaps to have explained that the division of this novel into five volumes, of which each but the last ends with a request to the reader to 'wait for the next volume', is my own invention. Both the manuscript and early printed editions *were* divided into volumes, but they were volumes much shorter than these — ten chapters each or even fewer — ending not with a reference to the next volume but with the usual appeal to the reader to 'read the following chapter'. However, although my division of the novel is as arbitrary as those earlier Chinese ones, the first three volumes as I divide it do seem to correspond with stages in its structural development, so that it is, I believe, meaningful to talk about the characteristics of a volume.

One characteristic of this third volume which will, I suspect, strike many readers is the important part that hitherto unknown or undeveloped minor characters are made to play in it. To the translator, on the other hand, its most striking characteristic is the intensification, to a point at which the novel almost breaks down beneath them, of those textual problems already mentioned in my prefaces to the two earlier volumes. These two characteristics of Volume Three — the development of minor characters and the growing number of contradictions in the text — have a causal connection which I shall presently try to explain.

As a preliminary I should like to examine three statements, each made by one of the people by whom the text was produced. The first is by the author himself.

Vanitas ... subjected *The Story of the Stone* to a careful second reading. He could see that it consisted quite simply of a true record of real events, and that it was entirely free

from any tendency to deprave or corrupt. He therefore *copied it all out from beginning to end* and took it with him to look for a publisher ... Cao Xueqin in his Nostalgia Studio worked on it for ten years, in the course of which he rewrote it no less than five times, dividing it into chapters, composing chapter headings, renaming it *The Twelve Beauties of Jinling* and adding an introductory quatrain ...

These words are found in a recension of the text dating from 1754, nine years before the author died. Although the statement is dressed in allegorical terms, there is no uncertainty at all about its meaning: *years* before he died Cao Xueqin completed his novel and subjected it to several revisions, and *at least* as early as 1754 he was engaged in producing what was to be its final version. Whether or not the 'five times' is to be taken literally does not now concern us — though the fact that this same passage lists five different titles which the novel is said at one time or another to have been given inclines me to think that it is: the most important thing to bear in mind is that there had been several already completed versions prior to the version he was then writing.

The second statement is by Cao Xueqin's kinsman-collaborator Red Inkstone who produced the manuscript recensions of the novel from which most of the still extant manuscripts were copied. It appears in a comment dated September 1764.

Only one who understood the message of this book *could* have the hot and bitter tears with which to finish it. Xueqin, having run out of tears, departed this life on New Year's Eve of the year *ren-wu* (12 February 1763) leaving this book unfinished. I have wept so much for Xueqin that I fear I too shall soon run out of tears ...

Whatever 'unfinished' means in this second statement, it certainly does not mean that this is a novel like *Edwin Drood* or *Weir of Hermiston* which was never completed because its author was struck down in the midst of writing it. Apart from what Xueqin himself tells us in the first chapter, there is a marginal comment by Odd Tablet dated April 1762 (a few months before the author died) on the manuscript recension of 1760 telling us something about the contents of the final chapter. This proves that there must have been one version at least which the author succeeded in finishing.

The third statement comes in the Prefatory Remarks to the revised edition of the novel printed only a few months after the first edition of 1792. The Prefatory Remarks were published under Gao E's and Cheng Weiyuan's joint signatures, but as it was Gao E who did the editing, it was probably he who wrote the Remarks. (In a short preface to the first edition Cheng Weiyuan had already explained how he spent many years combing the book markets for the missing forty chapters, and how he eventually handed over what he had managed to collect to his friend Gao E to edit.)

The text of the last forty chapters represents a patchwork of different fragments collected over the years. It is a unique text: we have no other text to collate it with. For this reason our editing has been confined to making a continuous narrative and removing the

inconsistencies. We have not ventured to tamper with the text beyond those minimal requirements. Until some better text comes along which would justify a thoroughgoing revision, we are unwilling that any of its original features should be obscured.

What is one to make of these three apparently irreconcilable statements? Merely to say that one of the witnesses, *viz.* Gao E, must be lying leaves too many questions unanswered. Cao Xueqin and Red Inkstone still seem to be contradicting one another. Merely to insist that the last forty chapters of Gao E's edition are spurious still does nothing to explain what happened to the *genuine* last forty chapters. I suggested in my Introduction to Volume One that the family may have suppressed them for political reasons, but I am not at all convinced that that is the correct explanation.

Let me return for a moment to the question of what Red Inkstone and Odd Tablet meant by 'unfinished'. We know that in some cases it refers to small parts missing from otherwise completed chapters. Red Inkstone wrote a note in 1756 at the end of chapter 77 to remind himself that he was still waiting for Cao Xueqin to supply the Mid Autumn poems which were to be inserted in that chapter. He was still waiting for them when Xueqin died seven years later. But there are several mentions elsewhere of whole chapters missing. A note dated 'summer of *ding-hai*' (i.e. early autumn, 1767: four years after the author's death) made by Odd Tablet on the 1760 recension of the first eighty chapters mentions a borrower losing 'five or six chapters' from the last third of the book 'when we were making the fair copy'. The date of this loss is impossible to determine, but I should hazard a guess that it occurred not later than 1754 when Red Inkstone was making a fair copy of what was to be the 'final' version of the novel — the version in which the author refers to his ten years' labour and many revisions of the text. Odd Tablet says that what was lost was the *drafts* of these chapters, i.e. Cao Xueqin's own autograph of them, which had not yet been fair-copied.

A great deal has been made by those wishing to discredit Gao E and Cheng Weiyuan of the fact that the titles or subjects of the lost chapters mentioned by Odd Tablet do not correspond with any of the titles or contents of the last forty chapters of the Gao E-Cheng Weiyuan edition; but it must be remembered that these chapters were lost before Red Inkstone could copy them; and it is by no means obvious that so compulsive a reviser as Xueqin would have reacted to the loss by simply sitting down and rewriting them. In fact he *cannot* have done so if Red Inkstone and Odd Tablet are to be believed, because when Xueqin died, seven years after the recension of 1756, they were still waiting not only for the last forty chapters but even for the pages and the few odd poems that were still missing from the first eighty.

What happened after the 'five or six chapters' were lost? The answer to that question can only be guessed, and before making the guess, it is necessary to guess the answers to several other questions. First of all, what was the method by which the fifth and 'final' version was being produced? My guess — it is nothing more — is that Cao Xueqin was

rewriting his finished fourth version and sending the manuscript to Red Inkstone for copying in batches of ten chapters. Second question: which were the missing chapters? The titles or descriptions (whatever they are) suggest that they belonged to the section of the novel immediately following the confiscation of the Jia family's estate. In the Cheng-Gao edition we read today the confiscation occurs in chapter 105. Assuming that it came in about the same place in the missing version, my guess would be that Red Inkstone had fair-copied all or most of the novel up to chapter 100 and had just received the manuscripts of 101-10 when the loss occurred. He and Odd Tablet had already read through all ten chapters and the anonymous friend had already read the first four. He was allowed to take away and read 105-10 while Red Inkstone was busy copying 101-4. After the loss Xueqin asked to have the manuscripts of 101-4 back, as well as everything that had been fair-copied from chapter 81 onwards, in order to help him reconstruct the missing section.

It would of course be possible to imagine something much more sinister: for example that the anonymous borrower or one of his family or acquaintance actually destroyed the manuscripts and gave Red Inkstone to understand, when he informed him of their 'loss', that they were highly subversive and dangerous and that Xueqin must be urged in the strongest terms to alter that part of the novel.

As for what Xueqin did or did not do during the years which followed: we can guess that he was so disgusted that he did nothing at all, or that he 'dried up', as authors sometimes will, or that he worked on the last part of the novel intermittently but was too busy scratching a living to do so effectively — there are a hundred compelling reasons for not completing a book. In this mass of guesswork only one thing seems certain: Red Inkstone and Odd Tablet got nothing more out of him until he died.

And when he did die, what remained of that last third part of the book? Presumably all of the last forty chapters¹ in their fourth version, some twenty of them (81-100) in the fifth version fair-copied by Red Inkstone, and a few chapters (101-4) of Xueqin's autograph of the fifth version which had never been copied. All of this may have been worked on to some extent by Xueqin himself before his death, and it is reasonable to suppose that after his death Red Inkstone or Odd Tablet or someone else may have tried reworking them. The important thing to remember is that if anything emanating from Cao Xueqin — however much it had been tinkered with by others in the meantime — *did* ever find its way into Cheng Weiyuan's hands (and one must not exclude the possibility that Cheng Weiyuan may himself have made an unsuccessful stab at editing it before handing it over to Gao E) a large part of it would still represent the obsolete fourth version and therefore be at odds in places with the text of the fifth version represented by the 80-chapter Red Inkstone manuscripts,

1. Or however many chapters this last part of the novel was divided into. Xueqin's statement in chapter 1 and certain features of the Red Inkstone manuscripts suggest that the earliest versions may have had no chapter divisions at all.

particularly in cases involving the names of minor characters, which, as I attempted to demonstrate in the Preface to the last volume, appear to have remained unstable until a fairly late stage in the novel's development. This in fact is what we seem to find.

Take the case of Cook Liu's consumptive daughter Fivey. In chapter 77 in the Red Inkstone manuscripts we learn from Lady Wang's lips that Fivey is now dead, yet she appears again in chapter 109 of the novel alive and well. In accordance with the principle enunciated in his Prefatory Remarks, Gao E's solution is to leave the relevant passage in chapter 109 untouched and remove the reference to Fivey's death in chapter 77. In the manuscript I have elsewhere referred to as 'Gao E's draft' we can actually see where he has crossed it out. In an appendix to this volume I have tried to show that something similar to this must have happened in the case of Lady Wang's maid Suncloud, though in her case the confusion in the text was so complete that Gao E failed to spot it.

As a matter of fact, though, the discrepancies between what is found in the last forty and what is found in the first eighty chapters which so exercised Gao E are probably not as numerous as those occurring inside the first eighty chapters themselves. They represent Xueqin and Red Inkstone's failure, even in the 'final' version, to root out all obsolete survivors from the earlier version.

Such survivals are easiest to spot in the poems. Verse is much harder to alter than prose and would tend to get copied out intact from one revision to another, preserving relics of the earlier versions inside it like flies in amber. The maid Sandal, evidently one of Bao-yu's principal maids in an earlier version of the novel, gradually dwindles out of the prose narrative in various successive editions and in Gao E's edition has all but vanished, yet we meet her several times as it were mummified inside the poems.

Most of the textual problems of Volume Three occur in that section of the novel which centers on the story of the You sisters, chapters 63 to 69. Chapters 64 and 67 were missing from copies of the Red Inkstone manuscripts circulating in Xueqin's lifetime, and even in Gao E's day, thirty years later, manuscript copies of the first eighty chapters sometimes still lacked chapter 67. Two quite different versions of that chapter are now extant. It is generally assumed that the two chapters were omitted because, like the 'five or six chapters' from the latter part of the novel, they had been lost. I think myself that they were not lost but deliberately held back for recasting because of discrepancies caused by the insertion of new material. In my view the story of San-jie and her tragic betrothal was grafted on to the novel at a very late stage, and the insertion of this sub-plot into the narrative of Jia Lian and Er-jie's secret marriage and Xi-feng's revenge created problems of timing and consistency so great that no amount of tinkering was — or ever has been — able to remove them. It is a measure of Xueqin's genius that he has been able to charm generations of readers into regarding this as one of the most moving and delightful parts of the novel while overlooking the quite extraordinary discrepancies which it contains. Only a spoil-sport, it might be thought — a 'kill-view', to use the eloquent Chinese expression — would want to break the

enchantment by pedantically pointing them all out. I do so only because once or twice, in the interests of clarity and consistency, I have felt obliged to take some trifling liberties with the text (as for instance in the killing-off of Mrs You — not that she was ever very much alive, poor old lady) and hold myself honour bound not only to say what I have done — which I have tried to do in the Appendices — but also to explain, if I can, the circumstances in which I have felt obliged to do it.

*

While preparing this volume I have been greatly indebted to the generosity of that indefatigable *Hong lou meng* enthusiast Mr Stephen Soong, both for written encouragement and for several times supplying me with books or articles that I might otherwise have missed, and to Professor Chao Kang for sharing the fruits of his meticulous scholarship in several long and highly instructive letters. I am also deeply grateful to the following friends for having at one time or another — in some cases many times — during the past few years furnished me with books, articles or advice: Dr Chan Hing-ho, Dr Cheng Te-k'un, Professor Chow Tse-tsung, Dr Glen Dudbridge, Mr Tony Hyder, Dr Bill Jenner, Dr Michael Lau, Professor Li Fu-ning, Mrs Dorothy Liu, Professor Piet van der Loon, Dr Joseph Needham, Professor P'an Ch'ung-kwei, Dr Laurence Picken and Miss Mary Tregear. And although I have never either met or corresponded with him, I feel bound to acknowledge my indebtedness to Professor Itō Sōhei, whose painstaking notes to his Japanese translation of this novel (*Kōrōmu*, Heibonsha, 1970) have saved me many an hour of wearisome research.

DAVID HAWKES



译者序

在谈论《红楼梦》某一卷的特色(就像我在第二卷序言中所做的那样)之前,我也许应该先说明一下,把这部小说分成五卷的做法(除了最后一卷,每卷结束时都让读者“静候下一卷”)是本人自己的发明。这部小说的抄本和早期刻本也是分卷的,但是每卷比我分的要短得多,大约每卷十回,甚至更少。结尾不提下一卷,而是如常所说,让读者“且听下回分解”。虽然我的分法与早期中文版的分法一样,都有些随意,然而根据我的分法,前面这三卷大体与故事的发展脉络相呼应,因此我相信,谈论每一卷的特点还是颇有意义的。

我认为第三卷中会给许多读者留下深刻印象的一个特点是:在第一、第二卷中未出现或未充分展开的次要人物在这一卷中所起的重要作用。另一方面,对译者来说,其最显著的特点则是文本问题更加严重,小说几乎因此而分崩离析,这些文本上的问题我在前两卷的序言中已经提及。第三卷的这两个特点,即次要角色的发展与文本矛盾冲突的增多,是有因果关系的。下面我就试图加以解释。

首先,让我们来研究一下三种说法,它们都是参与文本创作的人所写的。第一种是作者本人的说法:

空空道人将《石头记》再检阅一遍,因见上面亦不过实录其事,决非伤时骂世之旨,方从头至尾抄录回来,闻世传奇……后因曹雪芹于悼红轩中披阅十载,增删五次,分出章回,纂成目录,则题曰《金陵十二钗》,并题一绝云……

这些话是在1754年(离作者去世还有九年)的一个校订本中找到的。虽然这些话以寓言的形式出现,意义却是明确的:曹雪芹在去世的前几年就已经完成了这

部小说，并已修改多次，至少早在1754年，他就已经在做最后一次修改了。至于是否真的“增删五次”并不重要(但同样是上面这段引文里罗列了该小说曾先后用过的五个书名，这使我相信确实是五次)：最重要的一点是，在他当时创作的那个版本之前已经存在几种完整的版本了。

第二种说法是曹雪芹的亲属兼合作者脂砚斋提出的。绝大多数现存的抄本来源于脂砚斋修订的本子。这一说法出现在1764年9月的一条脂批中。

能解者方有辛酸之泪，哭成此书。壬午除夕(1763年2月12日)，书未成，芹为泪尽而逝。余尝哭芹，泪亦待尽……

无论怎么解释，这里的“书未成”都与《德鲁德疑案》或《赫米斯顿的魏尔》不同，后两部小说的作者在创作过程中就去世了，因而它们是未完成的作品。除了雪芹本人在第一回告诉我们的之外，另有畸笏叟于1762年4月(作者死前数月)在庚辰本里所写的一条眉批告诉了我们一些关于最后一回的内容。这证明作者至少完成过一个完整的版本。

第三种说法出自1792年第一版后仅仅几个月即再版的修订本序言里。该序言由高鹗、程伟元联合署名，但既然小说是高鹗修订的，那么很可能序言也是他写的。(在第一版的简短序言中，程伟元已经说明了他如何耗时多年竭力搜罗那遗失的后四十回，以及最后交给友人高鹗细加厘剔、截长补短的经过。)

书中后四十回系就历年所得，集腋成裘，更无他本可考。惟按其前后关照者，略为修辑，使其有应接而无矛盾。至其原文，未敢臆改，俟再得善本，更为厘定，且不欲尽掩其本来面目也。

对于这三种明显不一致的说法，到底该如何解释？仅仅认定作为见证人之一的高鹗在撒谎，并不能解释诸多疑团。曹雪芹与脂砚斋似乎也是相互矛盾的。单单指责高鹗修订的后四十回是伪作，也仍然不能解释真正的后四十回到底遭遇了什么命运。我在第一卷的前言中说，也许是考虑到政治因素，曹家把后四十回隐藏了起来，但是我终究觉得这不是确切的解释。

让我们暂时回到脂砚斋和畸笏叟所说的“未成”这个问题上来。我们知道，在某些情况下，它指的是原本完整的章节里遗漏了小部分内容。1756年，脂砚斋在第七十七回的末尾写了几行文字，提醒自己：“缺中秋诗，俟雪芹。”七年后雪芹去世时，他还在等待这些诗。不过，在其他地方还多次提到整回遗失的事情。畸笏叟在前八十回1760年的校订本里写了一条注释，日期注明是丁亥夏(即1767年初秋：作者死后四年)。注释中提到小说的后三分之一在“有一次誊清时”“五六稿被借阅者迷失”。丢失的时间已无法确定，但是我妄自猜测应该不会晚于1754年。那时脂砚斋正在誊清稿子，即小说的定本。这个定本就是作者所说的披阅十载、增删五次后的本子。畸笏叟说所丢失的是这些章回的草稿，即曹雪芹亲笔书写的还未誊清的手稿。

畸笏叟所提到的丢失章回的标题及内容，与高鹗、程伟元版本后四十回的标题及内容毫无相符之处，那些试图诋毁程、高信誉的人便抓住这件事大做文章。但这些章回是在脂砚斋抄写之前丢失的，而像曹雪芹这样不断修改稿子的作者是不太可能在稿件丢失后只是坐下来重写那些丢失的章节的。事实上，如果脂砚斋和畸笏叟的话是可信的，他是不可能这样做的，因为在抄本校订（1756年）七年后曹雪芹去世时，他们不仅仍然在等待着后四十回，而且还有前八十回所缺的几页文字和几首诗。

那“五六稿”丢失之后到底发生了什么事？我们只能进行猜测。在猜测这个问题之前，有必要先猜测一下其他几个问题的答案。首先，第五稿即“最终”定稿是如何产生的？我的猜测——仅仅是猜测而已——是曹雪芹一边对已完成的第四稿进行重写，一边将手稿分批次送给脂砚斋抄写，每批次十个章回。第二个问题是：遗失的章回到底是哪些？回目或描述（无论它们是什么）表明这些章回属于紧接在贾府被抄家之后的那一部分。在我们今天读到的程高本中，抄家出现在第一百零五回。假定在丢失的版本中，抄家也是出现在这一回，那么我可以猜测，当手稿丢失时，脂砚斋已经誊清前一百回的所有或大部分内容，并且刚刚收到第一百零一到第一百一十回的手稿。脂砚斋与畸笏叟已经浏览了这十回，那位不知名的朋友也读了前面四回。然后那位朋友把第一百零五到第一百一十回带回去读，同时脂砚斋也忙着抄写第一百零一到第一百零四回。“五六稿”丢失之后，雪芹把第一百零一到第一百零四回的手稿和已誊清的第八十一回及之后的部分要回去，为的是帮助他重写丢失的部分。

当然，也可能发生了某些更加不幸的事情：比如说，那位不知名的借阅者或他的某一亲友实际上销毁了那些手稿，然后在告诉脂砚斋手稿“丢了”的时候，让他明白这些手稿的内容极具颠覆性和危险性，必须力劝雪芹改写小说的那一部分。

至于曹雪芹在随后的几年里做了些什么或者没做什么，我们可以猜测他或者是因为深感厌恶以致于什么都没做；或者正如作家们有时会经历的，他才思枯竭了；或者是他断断续续地重写最后那一部分，但因忙于生计而力不从心了——未能完成一本书可以有一百个充足的理由。在这些猜测中，只有一条可以肯定：脂砚斋和畸笏叟在雪芹去世前再也没有从他那里得到任何东西。

雪芹去世的时候，全书的后三分之一到底还留存了哪些内容？根据推测，最后四十回^①以第四稿的形式呈现，约二十回（第八十一到第一百回）在脂砚斋誊清的第五稿中，还有几回雪芹亲笔书写的第五稿（第一百零一到第一百零四回）尚未被誊写下来。所有这些在雪芹去世前可能都由他本人或多或少地修改过，而且我们有理

① 或者不论小说最后一部分的稿子有多少回。雪芹在第一回里的说明以及脂砚斋批语的一些特点都表明最早期的版本也许根本就没有分回。