

汉英对照 Chinese-English

# THE STORY OF THE STONE 4

绛珠还泪

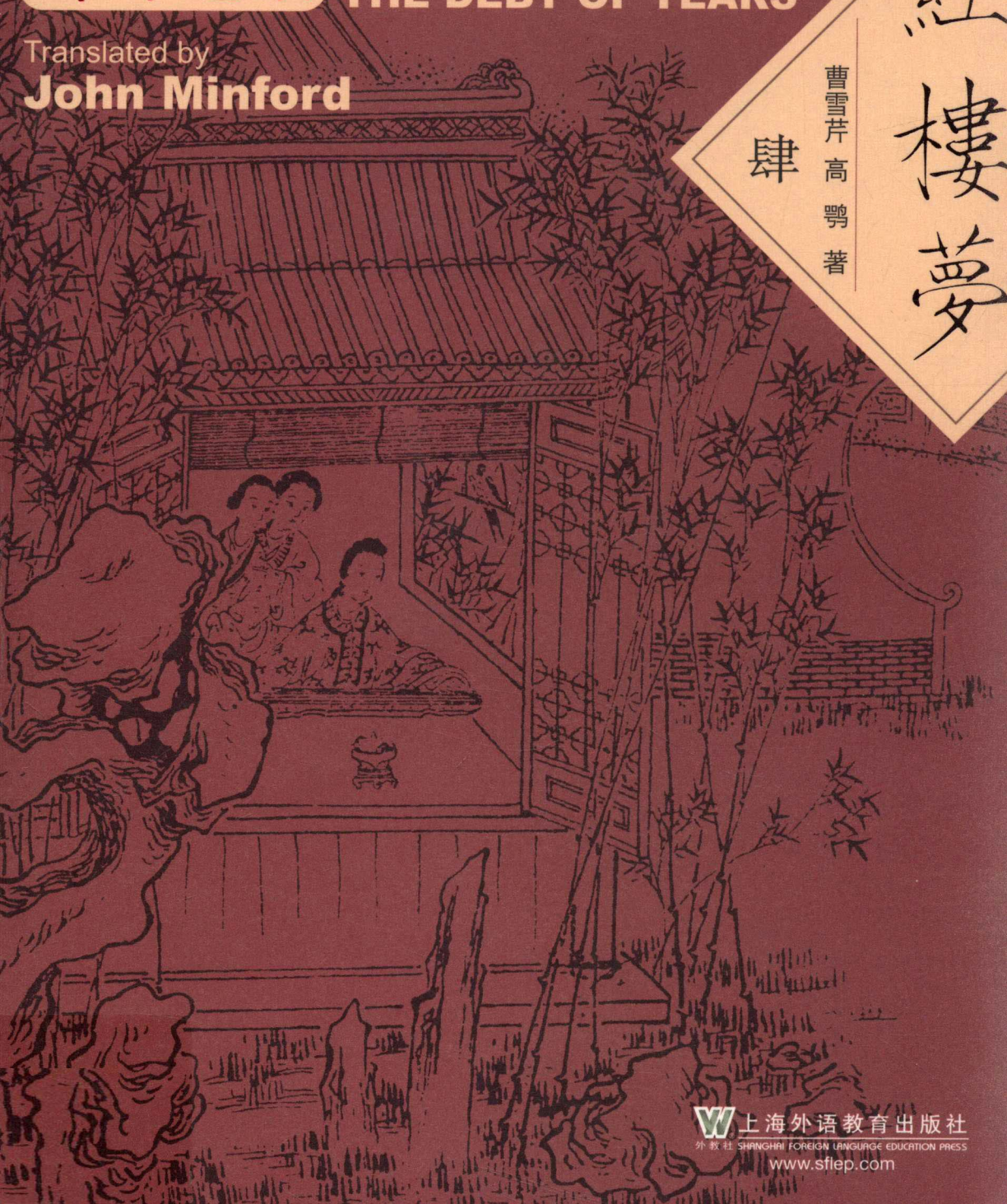
THE DEBT OF TEARS

Translated by  
**John Minford**

紅樓夢

曹雪芹 高鹗 著

肆



# 紅樓夢

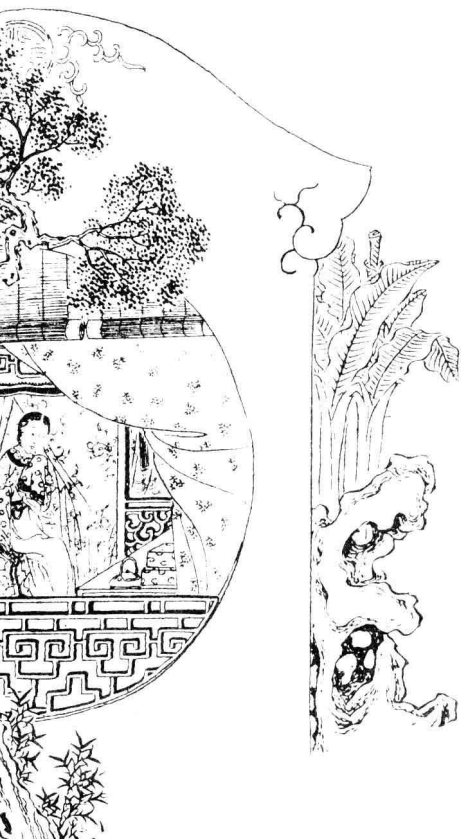
肆·絳珠還泪

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闵福德 译

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## ***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 sound 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)

## VOWELS AND DIPHTHONGS

### 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 *œuf* 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 *bowl* (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



Mid-January in Peking should be bitterly cold. But this turned out a warm, sunny day, more like spring than winter. It was a Sunday, and families were walking in the streets, strolling through Beihai Park, skating on the lakes. North of the broad avenue running along the site of the old northern wall of the Imperial City is an area of small lanes, or *hutong*, which still retains something of the atmosphere of seclusion it had during the Qing dynasty, when princes and wealthy Bannermen had their palaces here, and it was a 'poetical, cultivated, aristocratic, elegant, delectable, luxurious, opulent locality,' a sort of Manchu Kensington.

Skirting the west bank of the lake called Shichahai, I came to a point where five or six of these lanes intersected, and stopped for a moment to try and get my bearings. In those mazes of bare, grey walls it is the easiest thing to get lost, even if you know exactly where you are going. And I only knew that I was looking for a palace, and that it lay vaguely somewhere in this north-west corner of the old Tartar City. A friend had, the previous evening, described the whole expedition as foolishly romantic, doomed to failure, in a country where everything happens either as the result of some elaborate bureaucratic procedure, or through some privately arranged back-door.

Squatting by one of the walls, I took a little book from my knapsack. This book, published recently, expounds the view of one of the most eminent Stone-scholars, Zhou Ruchang, that Cao Xueqin's Rong-guo Mansion and Prospect Garden were in some sense based on the site of the palace I was looking for. This place at one time belonged to Qianlong's favourite Heshen (1750-99). It was then bestowed in turn upon various princes, the most famous of whom was Prince Gong (1833-98), younger brother of the Emperor Xianfeng and doyen of Chinese foreign relations in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the 1930s, the palace was bought by Furen Catholic University. Studying the

little sketch map at the front of Zhou's book, I found it hard to superimpose its eighteenth-century topography onto the crude tourist street-plan I had with me, and harder still to relate the two to the anonymous walls before me. I was just beginning to give up, when a voice shouted 'Firecrackers for sale!' about six inches from my ear. I looked up and saw an old man smiling down at me. 'Looking for Prince Gong's palace?' he asked, pointing at the cover of my book. 'It's right in front of you.' He gestured along one of the many walls. But I had just come from there, and remembered seeing nothing but a block of large institutional fifties-style buildings, and a forbidding gateway through which I had glimpsed only buses, a few limousines and a long red screen-wall with some faded revolutionary slogan peeling from it.

The old man ignored my doubtful reaction and started off in the direction in which he had just pointed, clearly intending me to follow him. Several firecracker-sales later, he deposited me at the very same forbidding gateway. This time I read the writing: 'Chinese Academy of Music,' inscribed vertically on the right-hand side. I shook my head at the old man again in disbelief. This was not what I had come to find. He assured me that this was the place, made a vigorous gesture in the direction of the screen-wall, which seemed to mean 'on the other side of that', and set off at a great pace, to sell more firecrackers.

Half an hour later, having with great difficulty convinced an unsympathetic gateman that I was not a spy, and having left my bundle of books in his lodge, I was allowed to wander in on my own, in search of my palace. Once I had negotiated the screen-wall, to my amazement I saw before me, set among utilitarian classroom buildings, 'two great stone lions, crouched one on each side of a gateway.' Inside this outer gateway was indeed a 'raised stone walk running up to the main gate'. Here was the palace, embedded in its modern surroundings like a jewel set in concrete.

It took me only five minutes of exploration to understand why some scholars have been led to see a connection between this palace and the Jia mansion in *The Stone* (a connection denied with equal emphasis by another school of scholars). The layout is so similar ('Grandmother Jia's courtyard', for example, is exactly where it should be in relation to the rest of the buildings), the architectural style and scale are so exactly what one would have expected, grand but in exquisite taste. Does it ultimately matter whether Cao Xueqin 'in fact' modelled his fiction on this reality, or whether those who lived here modelled their 'reality' on Cao's fiction? After all, as Cao himself wrote:

*Truth becomes fiction when the fiction's true;*

*Real becomes not-real where the unreal's real.*

What struck still deeper than these resemblances was the discovery — which came soon afterwards — that this marvellous building was being lived in by the very same kind of people — musicians, artists, dreamers — as those whose aspirations were voiced in *The Stone*. As I emerged from one of the long passageways connecting different parts of the palace, the sound of the two-stringed fiddle, played with passion and melancholy, wafted into the sunlit courtyard in front of the Hall of Auspicious Joy. And later, the same young musician began to play on the piano, with feeling and lightness of touch, a set of Mozart piano variations. Just as *The Stone* has over the years miraculously survived the assaults of



ideology and intellect, so this palace has come through two hundred of the most turbulent years in Chinese history unscathed, and is still very much a living place — though it seems ultimately destined to become a museum. Palace and novel still perpetuate the same dream.

The garden to the north of the palace is not accessible from the Academy of Music. To reach it, you have to walk out again into the street, turn left, and follow the wall round to another gateway belonging to another institution, to the north-east. It was late in the afternoon by the time I reached this gate. Anxious to see the garden before dark, and slightly inebriated by my success in entering the palace alone, I did not bother this time to make my presence known at the lodge, but walked boldly in. I could just see in the distance what looked like a tall rockery, and had quickened my step, when I was rudely arrested by a woman's voice. It was no fairy either, coming to complain of the arrival of some disgusting creature to pollute her pure maidenly precincts, but an extremely aggressive old lady carrying a large green kettle, who informed me that I had no right to come poking my nose in there, that I had better get out at once, and who was I anyway? I said nothing in reply, but hurried back to the lodge. There I was lucky to find a smiling and rather sleepy old man on duty, who assured me that there was no harm in my going in, and that I should tell anyone who asked that I had his permission. He then withdrew into his cosy little room and went back to the afternoon's Peking Opera broadcast.

In mid-winter, the prince's garden has a desolate charm. Entering it, I felt, even more than with the palace, that I was entering a world of vanished romance, a lost domain. The past, the world of illusion and dreams, hung heavily, almost stiflingly, in the air. Finding a gap in the eastern end of the extended artificial mountain which runs all the way along its southern side, I clambered up through weirdly shaped stones to a vantage point from which the first buildings were visible. Directly below, a moon-window gave on to a little partly dilapidated courtyard, withered creepers rambling over its cloister. Over to the left, at the foot of the 'mountain range', stood a small octagonal pavilion, and beyond it a pond (drained of water). On the far side of the pond stretched more miniature mountains and buildings. Looking down, I estimated the total area of the garden at two or three acres — far smaller than I had imagined Prospect Garden to be. But a sense of great space was created by the subtle disposition of the landscape elements. It was a masterpiece of imaginative design.

Climbing down the hill again, I found a plump, red-cheeked boy (he must have been about nine years old) staring at me with friendly curiosity. I asked him if he lived in the garden, and when he replied that he did, I expressed my great envy. He seemed unaffected by this, and offering in a business-like fashion to carry my knapsack, led me off to inspect rocks, grottoes, inscriptions — all his favourite haunts. There had been no other outsiders in the garden that afternoon, he said. A little while later, as we walked along an intricately constructed covered-way that led to the foot of the 'master-mountain' behind the central pond, another (less ferocious-looking) old lady accosted us. She spoke first to the boy, and turned out to be his aunt. When he told her of the purpose of my visit, she laughed and said to me: 'That's our house up there.' She pointed along the covered way to the little house it led to, on the top of the hill, and went on excitedly: 'That's Green Delights, you know, where Master Jia Bao-yu used to live!' At that moment another old lady appeared as if from

nowhere and laughingly chided her: 'Come on now, don't you go leading the young man astray with your tall tales!' I laughed too, and went on to explore the rear part of the garden, where the main path ran in front of several little 'lodges', boring its way at one point through the rocks behind the 'master-mountain.'

Returning at length to the southern end of the garden, I found my young companion with three of his friends, playing football in the open space between the pond and the octagonal pavilion. I watched them for a while, and reflected that if it was fitting for the 'Jia mansion' to be inhabited by artists, it was equally fitting that 'Prospect Garden' should be a playground for children — and that their games should be occasionally interrupted by the voices of old women, fretting or gossiping as they made their way from 'Green Delights' to the 'Naiad's House'.

It was growing late, and I had to leave. On my way out I stopped briefly again at the lodge, and inquired of the sleepy old man what institution it was that now occupied the garden. There had been no writing whatsoever on the gateway. He told me it was used as residential quarters by the Ministry of Public Security. As I walked away down the dark lane, I kept turning this last little piece of information over in my mind. That Prince Gong's garden — a sort of *doppelgänger* of Prospect Garden — should have become a home for security officials and a playground for their children, that the mansion should have been turned into dormitories and practice-rooms for musicians — this new metamorphosis said much of the complexity, the contradictions, the light and shade of Chinese culture. It also seemed to me to symbolize the indestructibility of imagination and innocence.

\*

The reader who reaches Volume Four of *The Stone* may be surprised to see the name of Gao E on the title-page, side by side with that of Cao Xueqin, and will want to know who this Gao was, and precisely what part he played in the completion of Cao's unfinished masterpiece. The answer to the second question is still highly controversial; but we do know enough about Gao's life to be able to piece together a biography of sorts. He was a Chinese Bannerman of the Bordered Yellow Banner, whose family were originally from Tieling, north-east of Mukden (present-day Shenyang), in what is now Liaoning province. Who his father was is still unknown (we only know that he died in 1781). There were many Chinese Bannermen of the Bordered Yellow Banner named Gao, and many of them achieved wealth and distinction during the eighteenth century. One, Gao Qipei (d. 1734), whose family also came from Tieling, was renowned for his fingerpainting (a style of painting much practised by Bannermen); Wu Shichang, to whose pioneering work on Gao E I am greatly indebted, has speculated that there might be some connection between these two men. But unfortunately, although the past sixty years have seen exhaustive research done into Cao Xueqin's family background, nothing of the same nature has been done for Gao E. Perhaps the next decade will see work of this kind, based on the relevant archives, clan genealogical registers, etc., done in China.

Gao E was born around the year 1740, and probably died in 1815. He seems to have supported himself by tutoring until he passed his examinations at a rather late age (in 1788 and 1795), and became a minor official in Peking, working in the Grand Secretariat and in the Censorate. The highest rank he ever reached (5 A) was that of Junior Metropolitan

Censor, in 1812. During his life he had something of a reputation as a writer of Octopartite Compositions<sup>1</sup> (as did his contemporary the poet Yuan Mei, whom Gao resembles in more ways than one). He was also an amateur poet, and two collections of his work have survived, a rough manuscript of early lyrics written between 1774 and 1788, entitled *Inkstone Fragrance*, and a collection of his regulated and examination-style verse, compiled and published by two former students in 1816, a year or so after his death. Gao was certainly not a distinguished poet, but his work, though lightweight, hardly deserves the vituperation that has been hurled at it. In fact, I find one or two of the pieces rather attractive. This lyric, for example, to the tune *Qing-yu-an*, is contained in *Inkstone Fragrance*:

*Threads of incense  
Denser than mist;  
A tapestry  
Of green shadows and red rain.  
A baby swallow flies past  
The office curtain.  
Catkins like snow,  
Clouds of pear-blossom like a dream —  
Another Qing Ming Festival evening.*

*The gravestone  
Bars the road of love;  
The cuckoo  
Is sung out of voice.  
Cut off like this,  
With whom can I share this feeling?  
The East Wind (that seems to care)?  
The sentimental moon?  
It's certainly all wasted  
On the noble families  
Gathered today.*

And this quatrain is one of many pleasantly atmospheric pieces contained in the 1816 collection:

*Taiping Hermitage*

*A slight breeze  
Stirs the blinds and flags;  
Now and again  
The clear tinkle of windchimes.  
From the inner sanctum  
Of the Meditation Hall,*

---

1. For these, see Appendix II, p. 440.

*Listen to the orioles*

*Flitting in the cherry blossom.*

When Gao and his friend Cheng Weiyan brought out their complete printed editions of *The Stone* (1791-2), they wrote altogether two Prefaces (one each) and a joint Foreword. I have included complete translations of these in Appendix. I myself believe that what they wrote was substantially the truth. The questions that I want to pose here are: Why did Cheng ask Gao to undertake this particular task? Was he wise in his choice? In other words, did Gao's background enable him to enter fully into the world of Cao Xueqin's dream? Did he have the necessary editorial ability — an eye for detail, order and consistency? And did he have the right temperament, did he share Cao Xueqin's outlook on life?

Cheng Weiyan himself used to be written off as a common bookseller with an eye for a quick profit. This was until half a dozen years ago, when new evidence came to light showing him to have been not a bookseller at all, but quite an accomplished painter (he practised fingerpainting) and *littérateur*, whose only other venture into publishing was to edit a volume of poems written by his patron, the Manchu Military Governor of Mukden, Jinchang. Cheng earned his living as a private secretary — as did his contemporary Shen Fu, author of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*. In fact, Shen Fu was secretary to a close friend of Gao E's brother-in-law, Zhang Wentao. All of them, Cheng Weiyan, Gao E and Shen Fu, belonged to a generation that we might call late-Qianlong/Jiaqing. But Gao differed from the other two in that he was a Bannerman, and it was very probably because Cheng knew how close Gao's environment was to Cao Xueqin's that he turned to him for help in editing this fragmentary manuscript. Although not having the *entrée* to quite the same circle of princes and Imperial Clansmen as the one in which the Cao family had moved, Gao was certainly on calling terms with some of the leading figures in the Bannerman literary world of his (slightly later) day. One of these, the Mongol Fashishan, lived on the west bank of Shichahai, a stone's throw from the palace that was later occupied by Prince Gong. Another friend of Gao's was the Chinese Bannerman poet Wang Lengcun, for an anthology of whose poems Gao E wrote a Postscript in 1782. Gao, Wang and another friend went, one autumn day, to visit the Ji Gate Pavilion, a little to the north-west of Peking. The view from this pavilion (groves of trees as far as the eye could see) was famous as one of the Eight Views of Peking, and Qianlong personally wrote an inscription for a tablet stood in the yellow-tiled building: 'Here stood one of the gates of the ancient city of Ji.'<sup>2</sup> Gao wrote a poem to celebrate their excursion which includes the lines:

*Hazy trees stretch beyond the cold walls,*

*Autumn light bathes the Forbidden City.*

*In stylish caps and climbing boots, Ji, Ruan and I*

*Roam the high hills, expressing our delight in verse.*

---

2. For this, see Tun Li-ch'en (trans. Bodde), *Annual Customs and Festivals in Peking*, 2nd edn, Hong Kong, 1965, p. 69.

It is interesting that Gao should refer to his two friends as Ji (Ji Kang, 223-62) and Ruan (Ruan Ji, 210-63), two famous individualist poets of the Bamboo Grove coterie. Cao Xueqin used as one of his sobriquets the words 'Dreaming of Ruan (Ji)'. It was only natural that Bannermen of the late eighteenth century with literary aspirations should like to think of themselves as reincarnations of these earlier romantic figures, these 'literary rebels or eccentric aesthetes'.<sup>3</sup> And what was true of Bannermen in general was particularly true of Imperial Clansmen. As Arthur Waley remarked, 'these relations of the Emperor led a curious existence, locked away in the Forbidden City and intent upon proving, by a parade of unworldliness and exaggerated aestheticism, that they had no political aspirations.'<sup>4</sup>

Another Bannerman family which Gao E was connected with was that of the brilliant young Manchu Linqing (1791-1846). He wrote a Preface for an anthology of verse by Linqing's mother, and was a friend of Linqing's, in spite of the fifty-year difference between their ages. Linqing, as a young man, to judge from his autobiography,<sup>5</sup> was something of a latter-day Jia Bao-yu.

We know from his poems, and from the Prefaces and Prefatory Poems written by Gao's friends for his collections of Octopartite Compositions, that Gao knew a great many more eminent Bannermen of this period. He would in this respect had little difficulty in recapturing some, if not all, of Cao Xueqin's world.

As for his editorial ability, Cheng Weiyuan probably felt that his craftsman-essayist friend would find this kind of work congenial — sorting out a patchwork manuscript and making some sort of consistent whole of it. In this respect too, I think his expectations were fulfilled. While not himself a creative or distinguished prose stylist, Gao was a literate, intelligent and conscientious editor (though not a perfect one — who could have been, in the circumstances?).

Gao's own temperament and philosophy can best be seen in his own poems. He certainly shared Cao's predilection for Zen (as did so many Bannermen of the time), and expressed his feelings on completing his work on *The Stone* in the following terms:

*Gone are the days  
When the sun would find me  
Still in bed at noon,  
Days of thoughtless pleasure  
And delight.  
Last night  
I chanced to see  
The Goddess of the Moon,*

---

3. See Jia Yu-cun's list in ch. 2, vol. 1, *The Golden Days*.

4. *Yuan Mei*, London, 1956, p. 187.

5. *Hong-cue yin-yuan tu-ji*. Extracts from this have recently been translated by T. C. Lai and published, together with some of the superb illustrations, under the title *A Wild Swan's Trail*, Hong Kong, 1978.



*And glimpsed the brightness  
Of Zen's unfettered light.*

We can also find in the poems evidence of a similar aesthetic sensitivity, and a love of watching drama, that bring Gao close to Cao Xueqin. We find a strong sense of pathos, and a liking for the slightly salacious — both of which are present throughout *The Stone*. But side by side with all of these, we find in Gao's poems many instances of comfortable occasional versification, of a sort we could hardly imagine from our proud, impoverished and probably drunken Brother Stone. And when we turn to the last forty chapters of the novel, there are a few of the same telltale signs — passages that have seemed to generations of readers to betray a slacker personality, a less boldly individualistic outlook, a weakness for platitude and compromise. After all, Cao Xueqin died in poverty in the Western Hills, while Gao E lived on to a respectable old age, a minor civil servant.

If at the end he became rather an Establishment figure, the first fifty years of his life, if we read between the lines of his poems, and eke the picture out with the one or two other scraps of information that have been handed down, must have had their share of turmoil and insecurity. And it is my guess that one of the reasons for his partial success as a creative editor (for this is essentially how I see him, sometimes rearranging incoherent material, sometimes bridging gaps, sometimes trying to account for abrupt transitions or tying up loose ends) was his ability to transfuse at least part (the first part) of the edited ending with a measure of his own autobiographical experience. It is fascinating to watch scholars gradually pulling to bits the magnificent structure of *The Stone*, until we see no longer one man's autobiography, but a composite novel incorporating autobiographical elements from several individuals' lives.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps Gao E should be included as one of these, and his achievement viewed in this light, rather than as the malicious tampering of an outsider.

To be more specific: the decade leading up to 1791 saw a sequence of events in Gao E's own life that would have made him feel particularly close to the mood of *The Debt of Tears*, especially if we bear in mind that during this time he had no permanent position, but was supporting himself probably by tutoring while continuing to sit unsuccessfully for the state examinations. In 1781, both his father and his first wife died; in 1785 he remarried, this time to the eighteen-year-old younger sister of the celebrated poet Zhang Wentao.<sup>7</sup> Only two years later, at a tragically young age, his second wife Zhang Yun died. She was herself a talented poetess, as her brother informs us in a touching poem written in her memory:

*I still seem to hear  
your stifled sobbing at death's door,  
A life of twenty years  
about to end...*

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6. For an introduction to the latest controversy on the authorship of *The Stone*, see David Hawkes, 'The Translator, the Mirror and the Dream', in *Renditions*, no. 13, Spring 1980.

7. Recent research, published in the *Journal of Stone Studies* (*Honglouneng xuekan*) in 2001, has cast serious doubt on this identification of Zhenjun's, which has done so much to blacken Gao E's reputation. It now seems more than likely that his second wife was not the sister of Zhang Wentao at all.

*Heaven begrudged you children  
 to tend your grave;  
 The shades should pity me, long absent,  
 come to bid you farewell...*  
*'Delicate clouds  
 slowly bear the moon aloft' —*  
 (a line from my sister's poem *Viewing the Moon from the River*)  
*I grieve to recall  
 your verses of old...*  
*You died full of remorse,  
 pining for home;*  
*Life brought you face to face with a raksha,  
 taught you meek submission...*

A Manchu historian, Zhenjun, writing at the beginning of this century, deduced from this that Zhang's sister died because of Gao E's harsh treatment of her — and this accusation has been frequently repeated since. But to blame her unhappiness and death wholly on Gao is somewhat arbitrary. The raksha referred to in the poem (which is the only source of information concerning Zhang Yun's death) could equally have been Gao's mother. After his father's death in 1781, Gao was responsible for looking after his mother, who lived on to a ripe old age (it was largely for this reason, perhaps, that he kept on trying to pass the exams). We know, besides, from various lyrics in *Inkstone Fragrance*, that Gao's mother was responsible for driving out of the household his concubine, a woman named Wan, who had borne him at least one child, and towards whom Gao seems to have felt a deep attachment. Wan took refuge in a nunnery, and it seems that Gao continued to visit her there occasionally. On one such visit, when they had talked together of the old days, he wrote the following lyric, to the tune *Xi yu chun man*:

*Spring is waning;  
 The East Wind restless blows.  
 How can I bear to see my flower  
 Without her lord —*  
*The Phoenix Hairpin broken,  
 The solitary Lyrebird in the glass?  
 Who paints  
 Those enticing eyebrows for you now,  
 In your boudoir?*  
*We used to talk of Past and Future Lives;  
 Now in your life of chanted prayer and meditation,  
 Who can you chat with  
 In the old easy spirited way?  
 That grace and beauty  
 In the half-lit window,*

*A forlorn sight ...  
Don't rail at Heaven for being unfair.  
Since time began  
Rosy cheeks have turned to dust.  
However hard you try  
To pierce the Void,  
Heaven will make you on reply.*

Could the 'broken Phoenix Hairpin' be a reference to the famous story of Song dynasty poet Lu You and his wife and cousin Tang Wan (even the name Wan is written in a similar fashion)? Lu You's mother took a dislike to the girl and she had to go, even though she and Lu loved each other. Years later, when they had both remarried, she and Lu met again by chance, and it is on this occasion that Lu is thought by some to have written one of his most famous lyrics, to the tune *The Phoenix Hairpin*.

Gao's work on *The Stone* was finished in 1791, only a few years after these events — the death of his young wife, and the expulsion of his concubine. Is it surprising that he was able to edit (and perhaps expand) so effectively a manuscript that dealt with the fates of characters like the Ailing Naiad, and Adamantina? This empathy of Gao's is most noticeable in *The Debt of Tears*. In the fifth and last volume, which I have entitled *The Dreamer Wakes*, the reader becomes more aware of 'something missing'. This is, I suspect, partly because there was probably less of the fragmentary original manuscript for Gao to work on in the first place, and partly because, although he had been able to follow through to the bitter end the tragic story of the love between Bao-yu and Dai-yu, and Dai-yu's death, he was unable to enter fully into the two other important elements of Cao Xueqin's grand theme, elements which take on a greater importance than ever after the death of Dai-yu: one of these is the thorough disenchantment and enlightenment of Bao-yu (his seeing through the Red Dust); the other is the ultimate débâcle of the Jia family fortunes. These were intense experiences, deep insights, of a sort that, so far as we know, Gao E did not share; perhaps it was for this reason that he was a less creative and less effective editor when he came to the very end of the novel.

But this is looking ahead. So far as *The Debt of Tears* is concerned, it can, I believe, stand side by side with the rest of the novel without shame. No amount of scholarly argument has succeeded in supplanting these last forty chapters as *the* ending, despite their shortcomings. They are here to stay, and indeed some of the scenes in them are deservedly among the most famous in the whole novel. As the mid-nineteenth-century commentator Yao Xie remarked of chapter 82:

This is written with such feeling and truth! It says all there is to be said. Theirs was a love that would never change, not if the seas ran dry and rocks crumbled! If the author had not experienced this feeling at first-hand, he would never have been able to enter into their minds with such passionate intensity.

\*

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JOHN MINFORD

*Tianjin,  
ten days before the Spring Festival,  
1981*