



P E N G U I N



C L A S S I C S

CAO XUEQIN AND GAO E

*The Story of the Stone*  
Volume IV

## THE STORY OF THE STONE

## VOLUME 4

CAO XUEQIN (?1715-63) was born into a family which for three generations held the office of Commissioner of Imperial Textiles in Nanking, a family so wealthy that they were able to entertain the Emperor Kangxi four times. But calamity overtook them and their property was confiscated. Cao Xueqin was living in poverty near Peking when he wrote his famous novel *The Story of the Stone* (also known as *The Dream of the Red Chamber*), of which this is the fourth volume. The first three volumes, *The Golden Days*, *The Crab-Flower Club* and *The Warning Voice*, translated by David Hawkes, and volume five, *The Dreamer Wakes*, translated by John Minford, are also published in Penguin Classics.

GAO E (?1740-1815) was a Chinese Bannerman of the Bordered Yellow Banner, who for the last twenty years of his life worked in the Grand Secretariat and the Censorate in Peking. In 1792 he and his friend Cheng Weiyuan published for the first time a complete version of *The Story of the Stone* in 120 chapters. Previously, handwritten copies of the novel had circulated, which ended with the eightieth chapter. Cheng and Gao claimed that they edited the last forty chapters of their complete version from a fragmentary manuscript by the original author.

JOHN MINFORD was born in 1946. He studied Chinese at Oxford and at the Australian National University, and has taught in China, Hong Kong and New Zealand. He has edited (with Geremie Barmé) *Seeds of Fire: Chinese Voices of Conscience*, and (with Joseph S. M. Lau) *Chinese Classical Literature: An Anthology of Translations*. He is currently translating the *Strange Tales* of Pu Songling (1640-1715), Sunzi's *The Art of War*, and the Martial Arts fiction of the contemporary Hong Kong novelist Louis Cha (Jin Yong).



# THE STORY OF THE STONE

A CHINESE NOVEL BY  
CAO XUEQIN  
IN FIVE VOLUMES

\*

VOLUME 4  
'THE DEBT OF TEARS'

EDITED BY  
GAO E

\*

TRANSLATED BY  
JOHN MINFORD

PENGUIN BOOKS

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Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London, WC2R 0RL, England

Penguin Putnam Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA

Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia

Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 10 Alcorn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4V 3B2

Penguin Books India (P) Ltd, 11, Community Centre,

Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India

Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd, Private Bag 102902, NSMC, Auckland, New Zealand

Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 5 Watkins Street,

Denver Ext 4, Johannesburg 2094, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London, WC2R 0RL, England

This translation first published 1982

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Printed in Great Britain by Antony Rowe Ltd, Chippenham, Wiltshire

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ISBN 978-0-14-044371-4

FOR RACHEL



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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 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*)

### 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 *ben* (e.g. *Zhi-yanzhai*, *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-ying)
- 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 *hutongs*, 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 palace 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 Xianfeng Emperor 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 on to 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.