



P E N G U I N



C L A S S I C S

CAO XUEQIN

The Story of the Stone
Volume III

PENGUIN  CLASSICS

THE STORY OF THE STONE

VOLUME 3

ADVISORY EDITOR: BETTY RADICE

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*, of which this is the third volume. The first two volumes, *The Golden Days* and *The Crab-Flower Club*, and the last two volumes, *The Debt of Tears* and *The Dreamer Wakes*, are also published in Penguin Classics.

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THE STORY OF THE STONE

A CHINESE NOVEL BY
CAO XUEQIN
IN FIVE VOLUMES

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VOLUME 3
'THE WARNING VOICE'

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TRANSLATED BY
DAVID HAWKES

PENGUIN BOOKS

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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 *ab* 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 *ben* (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

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