

DREAM ILLUSION VOID

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ABSTRACT

The dream of an unused or useless stone to be in and participate in the world of Passion. The stone reincarnates ... to find itself in the Illusory world, submerged in all its preoccupations. Finally, it goes back to its original state, back to the great Void. This process brings to mind the philosophy of not a few philosophers, particularly that of Zhuang Zi and Western philosopher Rene Descartes.

The paper is a philosophical treatise on the great eighteenth-century Chinese novel, "*Hónglóu mèng*," otherwise known as "*Dream of the Red Chamber*." The author, Cao Xueqin's, extensive perspectives on dream, illusion, and void as illustrating "life" embodies and surrounds the entirety of the literature. The author makes use of the phenomena, the human experiences of "Dream," "Illusion," and "Voidness," to highlight the life process a human being goes through.

The paper, being based on a work of classic literature, also finds application in the general appreciation of Chinese literature (of novels in particular) and of better understanding of Chinese culture and way of thinking. The paper, designed for the dissemination of information for the greater number of people. As such, only important names and relevant terms in the novels are presented in Chinese characters, albeit with a presentation of the Chinese pinyin, a romanized version of such.

《三国演义》; Shui Hu Zhuan: 《水浒传》. Of these, *Dream of the Red Chamber* is often taken to be the zenith of classical Chinese fiction.

The Author

Being a classical work of literature, the novel has mutated to produce many version throughout the years, Also contributing to this fact is its originally having been read by the common people in hand copied version -- all of which are 80 chapters and incomplete. These hand copied versions are provided with annotations in red ink to further explain or give clues as to the author's intention or meaning. Scholars later, though deeper inquiry into the author's life, attributed these annotations to the author, or to someone very close to the author. These versions were known as "The Red Inkstone" 脂砚斋 or "Rogue versions" 脂本. These hand copied versions have at least 12 independent manuscripts, with minimal differences in wording, characters, paragraphing rearrangements and possible rewritings made each of them vary a little from another. It was only in the twentieth century, after Hu Shi's confirmatory studies, that is was generally agreed that the author of the novel of the first 80 chapters in indeed Cao Xueqin.

Annotations provided by the Red Inkstone say that Cao revised his novel five times, and died before he finished the fifth version. Due to this unfortunate event, many of the latter chapters were lost, and only the 80 that are recovered are ascertained to be that of Cao's.

Other less popular names addressed to the book are: “The 12 Beauties of Jinling” (Jinlin Shi Er Chai) 《金陵十二钗》¹; “The Love and Passion in the Mirror” (Feng Yu Bao Jian) 《风月宝鉴》²; “Record of the Passionate Monk” (Qing Seng Lu) 《情僧录》³.

“A Dream of the Red Mansion” “*Hónglóu mèng*” 《红楼梦》 generally called and normally known, may refer to “World Void” “世空”; as it was illustrated in chapter 1, E. C. BOWRA translation:

Whither they went, it is impossible to say, nor is it known how many ages had passed, when a priest, seeking the truth of Metempsychosis, passed by this hill side and saw a stone with the traces of writing clearly visible on its face. The priest read the story from the beginning, and found that the stone was one which, having been found useless for repairing the heavens, had assumed shape and form and had been brought into this world by the Buddhist priest Mang Mang, and the Taoist priest Miao Miao.

¹ Mention in chapter 5, in the dream of Jia Baoyu.

² A metaphor where Cao Xueqin used feng 风, means wind; and yue 月 means moon, together feng yue 风月, means the love and passions of male and female: baojian 宝鉴, (precious witness) means baojing, a precious mirror 宝镜.

³ Cao Xueqin, Foreign Language Press, Beijing translation, “Dream of the Red Mansions”, 1978, p6. “... si the Taoist changed his name to the Passionate Monk and changed the title of the book from “The Tale of the Stone” to the “Record of the Passionate Monk”.

Buddhist's perspective which sees the secular world as "red, painful dust" - merely illusory and to be shunned, a world painful and hard for an impassioned man. Red, because it primarily tells of the woman's life in the material, domestic and emotional lives of the period. Red, because of love and suffering; mansion for power and wealth, were the dream of each character.

A world that is man's dream is that of a "Red Mansion." Cao Xueqin views man as living in an artificial world, manipulated by politics and government; power and wealth; knowledge and ethics. This is also the reason that many scholars draw a parallelism between Cao's real life and Jia Baoyu's (the protagonist).

A general Redologist would say that the novel is conjectured to be semi-autobiographical, mirroring the fortunes of Cao Xueqin's own family. It was also intended to be a memorial to the women Cao knew in his youth: friends, relatives, and servants. But these observations are at best conjectural; reading the first chapter as an introduction does not in any point to us in certainty which of the interpretations are correct. What is certain from a cursory reading of the novel; however, is the obscurity of the language, with supernatural Taoist and Buddhist overtones.

The chapter lends itself to a long but equally revealing title: "*Relating how the Amulet was revealed to Zhen Shi Yin in a dream, and how Jia Yu Cun, while in obscurity, became enamoured of a secluded beauty.*" Seemingly reminding his readers of the main theme of the fiction (that of "Dream" "梦" and "illusions" "幻"), "the

Hills⁷. Thirty-six thousand, five hundred of these she used, and the one solitary stone which was rejected as useless, was thrown at the foot of the Qing Geng Peak.⁸ The fusion of this stone had, however, endowed it with spiritual perception, with power of motion and of self contraction and expansion. Perceiving that all its companion stones were used for repairing the heavens, and that it was only rejected and useless and shut out from the selected ones, the stone was vexed and grieved, and passed its days and nights in pining and lamentation.

One day, while the stone was thus sighing and sorrowing, a Buddhist and a Taoist priest came unexpectedly within view. Arrived at the foot of the hill, they sat down to rest and talk. Seeing the stone lying there, fresh, glossy, bright and smooth, contracted to about the size of a fan handle, they were immensely pleased with it.

Taking it in his hand, the Buddhist priest said smiling, “One may see from the appearance of this stone that it is endowed with life and spiritual perception, but it is without any practical value; we must engrave a few characters on it, so that men may know that it is an extraordinary stone.”

“Then we will take you, Oh stone! to a brilliant and flourishing country, to a cultivated and courteous family employed in the service of the state, to a place of luxury and Delight, -- where there are

⁷ Great Waste Mountain

⁸ Blue Ridge Peak (FLP, Beijing translation) Qing Gen, homophone for “roots of love”

the “world of wealth and power,” consumed the stone. The dream, like a fervent wish, is a desire, a dream of something he never had nor experienced and wanted to have. Ironically, though, when the stone in “A Dream of the Red Mansion” “*Hónglóu mèng*” 《红楼梦》 starts its adventure, it starts dreaming again.

Zhen Shiyin, on one long hot summer day falls asleep and dreams of the Amulet¹⁰, and also a large stone archway on which was inscribed: “Illusory Land of the Great Void. A couplet on the two pillars read: When false is taken for true, true becomes false; If non-being turns into being, being becomes non-being.”¹¹ Cao Xueqin tells the story of the Amulet through the dream of Zhen Shiyin. What is the reality that is hiding in the person of Zhen Shiyin? Is it the life of the author? Who is Zhen Shiyin? This passage takes us to his personality:

“Adjoining this Temple was the residence of a family of good positioning of the surname Zhen, the head of which was usually known as Shi Yin. His wife, a member of the Feng family, was a woman of intelligence and virtue, well versed in propriety and the rites. Although not very rich, Zhen Shi Yin was looked up to by the people of the neighborhood with considerable

¹⁰ “A Dream of the Red Mansion” “*Hónglóu mèng*” 《红楼梦》, (FLP, Beijing translation), pp 7-9.

¹¹ Ibid, p 9.

the Universe, and the Dew of Heaven, it threw off the form of grass and assumed the human shape, attaining only to the state of woman -- not to the full dignity of manhood. Daily she wandered beyond the Heaven where no grief is known eating when hungered of the Fruit of Hidden Love, and drinking when athirst the water which dispel Sorrow; unable to repay the tender care with which the Ruby Amulet had nourished and tended her, her mind was continually filled with a sense of gratitude, and she constantly said to herself: "The Amulet has nourished me with rain and dew, and I cannot repay its care in the same manner, when it becomes a man and descends into the world, *I will accompany him, and endeavor by the tears of a whole lifetime to repay his kindness.*" In this way many other predestined actors in this Love Drama were drawn into the world to bear their parts in this dream of Destiny, and among them was the Gem of the Ruby Pearl Grass. Now that the Amulet¹³ is in the place from whence it came, why should not we take it before the Geni who warns in Dreams and Fables, give it a definite place and name, and send it into the world to join these others and assist in bringing the matter to an end?" "You are

¹³ Red Jade

Beware what will follow the Lantern Feast, 好防佳节元
宵后,
The vanishing like smoke when the fire burns out”¹⁶便
是烟消火灭时。

Ying Lian¹⁷ was destined to be the wife of Xue Pan, there was no way of avoiding that. Here, life for Zhen Shiyin is just like a dream.

These bring to mind the Pre-Qin Philosopher Zhuangzi¹⁸, who once dreamed that he turned into a butterfly.¹⁹ When he awoke from the dream, he started wondering whether he was Zhuangzi or a butterfly. For Zhuangzi man's life is determined, destined from the time he is born. Man has to face these two worlds. These worlds are fate. Man: thus, has no alternative but to face it, take it, and live it. This is “life.” “In the world, there are two great degrees: one is fate and the other is duty.”²⁰ He continues thus: “that a son should love his parents is fate - you cannot erase this from his heart. That a

¹⁶ Ibid. p 10. Other translation like that of E.C. Bowra, “Infatuate man thus to fondle and nourish, A child who will soon find a mate in the snow. On the eve of the feast, though your household may flourish. The morrow shall see it overwhelmed with woe.”

¹⁷ Later in the story has another name ‘Linhua’

¹⁸ ‘Zhuangzi’ is the name of the second foundational text of the Daoist philosophy and the name of the putative author of this text, who early historical sources say flourished between about (350 and 300 B.C.E.)

¹⁹ One day about sunset, Zhuangzi dozed off and dreamed that he turned into a butterfly. He flapped his wings and sure enough he was a butterfly... What a joyful feeling as he fluttered about, he completely forgot that he was Zhuangzi. Soon though, he realized that that proud butterfly was really Zhuangzi who dreamed he was a butterfly, or it was a butterfly who dreamed he was Zhuangzi! May Zhuangzi was the butterfly, and maybe the butterfly was Zhuangzi?

²⁰ “Zhuangzi” Chapter 4 Ren Jian Shi section 2

Goddess of Disenchantment in Her Kindness Secretly Expounds on Love”, to the instance when Jia Baoyu fell asleep, and let him travel “Now having reached the young matron’s room, they were met at the threshold by a subtle perfume which misted over Baoyu’s eyes and melted his bones.”²² Cao, obviously not to be left behind the field of human psychology, masterfully created an ambience pleasurable to Baoyu’s senses...

“Entering he saw on the wall a picture by Tang Yin²³, of a lady sleeping under the blossom of a crab-apple tree in spring. On the two scrolls flanking it, Chin Kuan²⁴ the Sung scholar had written:

Coolness wraps her dream, for spring is chill;
A fragrance assails men, the aroma of wine”²⁵

Pretty soon Baoyu fell asleep and dreamed...and travelled... Baoyu gradually entered into the dream, the dream of illusion. He gets passionately involved in the dream and forgets the world he was in before he fell asleep. He first heard someone singing a song, and before the song had ended he saw the singer.²⁶ Baoyu asked her to lead the way, and she answered with a smile.

²² “A Dream of the Red Mansion” “Hónglóu mèng” 《红楼梦》, (FLP, Beijing translation), pp 69.

²³ Tang Yin, a Ming painter and a poet, celebrated especially for his paintings of beautiful women.

²⁴ A Sung poet, author of many love poems

²⁵ “A Dream of the Red Mansion” “Hónglóu mèng” 《红楼梦》, (FLP, Beijing translation), pp 69-70.

²⁶ Ibid, p71 Cao’s description of the Sister Fairy

