



The Warning Voice

Cao Xueqin , David Hawkes (Translator)

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"The Story of the Stone (c. 1760)", also known by the title of "The Dream of the Red Chamber", is the great novel of manners in Chinese literature. Divided into five volumes, of which "The Warning Voice" is the third, it charts the glory and decline of the illustrious Jia family (a story which closely accords with the fortunes of the author's own family). The two main characters, Bao-yu and Dai-yu, are set against a rich tapestry of humour, realistic detail and delicate poetry, which accurately reflects the ritualized hurly-burly of Chinese family life. But over and above the novel hangs the constant reminder that there is another plane of existence - a theme which affirms the Buddhist belief in a supernatural scheme of things.

The Warning Voice Details

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From Reader Review The Warning Voice for online ebook

Meeg says

This book is so addictive. I don't want to say goodbye to the characters.

Rowan Sully Sully says

Probably the best volume so far. You'll get to know more of the lesser characters and some of the side characters become all-important such as Tan-Chun who takes over from Xi-Feng whilst she's ill.

How household managed?

Financial situation = not good - Pawn shops

Power struggle in house

Bullying amongst staff

Side story of San Jie and Er Jie with Jia Lian

Martin says

Where to start? Volume 2 was as good as it was going to get in terms of consistency, character and plotting. Although Volume 3 often feels like it is falling apart despite the editors' (Rouge Inkstone, Odd Tablet, translator David Hawkes) best efforts. Still, I continue to rate this five stars and place it on par with earlier volumes. The first reason is for the author's audacity to introduce a whole slew of new characters midway through the overall story and sidelining major characters such as Xi-feng, Grandmother, Lady Wang, Jia Zheng. The novel, in keeping with its subject, this massive family, cannot help itself from expanding until it breaks. This greatly enhances the reader's vicarious experience.

After Xi-feng's miscarriage and with all responsible adults away at the Dowager Consort's funeral, the inhabitants of the Prospect Garden have nothing holding them back from constant bickering (at best), culminating in an all-out throwdown between Aunt Zhao and the former actresses. I love how no one can decide what the actresses should be following the dissolution of the troupe for financial reasons. Are they pets, or are they indentured servants with zero abilities? The situation brings out the worst in everybody, from the cook to Aunt Zhao (and much later, Lady Wang) to Xi-feng who, from her convalescent bed, wants to torture the maids by making them kneel on broken dishes in the hot sun! Although this cluster of chapters is brilliantly humorous in its depiction of a comedy of bad manners, one ultimately senses without being told that the cracks are beginning to show in this small society's basic structure. However, we still subscribe to the notions of respect for elders, how feudalism works and why it often doesn't, and how the conflicts among the upper strata of the family are often enacted among their inferiors (particularly anyone in contact with Xi-feng). We remain aware of the severe limitations of women, such as the isolation of the concubine sister (and Bao-yu's continuing transgressive gender role, as he is the only male allowed to see her face to face). By the end of this volume marriage matches are being made and play out horribly.

The second reason that I give this five stars is for the multi-chapter story arcs, involving either fighting while the responsible adults are away, or the saga of Er-jie and San-jie, or the fallout from the naughty embroidery.

This expansive quality reminded me of dramatic television when a show decides to throw side characters into the spotlight for an episode. These also make me excited to watch the 1987 CCTV series as soon as I finish volume 5. However, in focusing on new characters I lost the sense of our main characters on the periphery. In previous volumes, a chapter might have very little to do with Bao-yu or Dai-yu, but their relatives and maids play out their relationship by talking about their masters. In previous volumes we were always aware of Aroma and Precious because they popped up in every other scene according to circumstance. The chapters are now less meandering but also less rich in character detail. This makes me fear for volumes 4 & 5, not written by Cao Xueqin himself, though probably from his notes and fragments.

Less parties seem to be thrown, the exception being the lavish dinners for Cousin Zhen's archery parties. I cannot tell whether this is only because of the family's imposed mourning, or if they really understand they need to stop. Every chapter seems to have the selling of more possessions, whereas in volume 2 every scene involved throwing a party. If anyone embodies this volume's titular warning voice, it is Tan-chun who says to Xi-feng: "No doubt our time too is coming, slowly but surely. A great household like ours is not destroyed in a day. The beast with a thousand legs is a long time dying." In order for the destruction to be complete, it has to begin from within. Tan-chun has emerged as one of my favorite characters. Basically I love anyone with any common sense, so I put her up there with Aroma, Bao-chai, Adamantina, and to a lesser extent Patience. Probably my favorite scene (there are so many!) is when Tan-chun stands up to Xi-feng and her marauders Zhou Rui's wife and Wang Shan-bao's wife when they search all the young maid's belongings. However, if the author wants me to love Tan-chun, it probably means something bad will befall her. They do often say that it is a pity she was born to the wrong mother.

It is quite sad to see Bao-yu become increasingly lonely as the garden slowly de-populates; "Five more decent people were lost to the world," he observes after Ying-chun and four maids move to the Sun household. It is a telling remark about how utopian the garden had been just two years ago, coupled with his other observation that unmarried girls are good and married women become horrible or receive horrors. To illustrate his point, his mother sacks several maids and actresses, another preview of future calamities. Although it is quite painful to see certain maids dispatched, it is worth it for the long discussion between Bao-yu and Aroma afterwards. They have such a great chemistry and I don't believe we've had a major scene with them at all in this volume.

Bao-chai continues to interest me: she is incredibly respectful of social mores and often is the voice of propriety. Her mind is like a steel trap so she appears to know everything. Yet she often has difficulty when others are emotional, especially when they are rightly so. Bao-chai will tell them they are not being rational, or she will spout off some maxim that she thinks should correct the situation.

Helmut says

Die warnende Stimme

Nachdem man bisher 60 Kapitel lang die Geschicke der Jia-Cousins hat verfolgen können, gibt es in diesem Band eine zumindest mir sehr willkommene Abwechslung von den langsam etwas ausgeleierte gegenseitigen Besuchen und Festen: Jia Lians heimliche Affäre mit Er-jie. Interessant sind dabei insbesondere die Anmerkungen des Übersetzers über die Textprobleme, die an dieser Stelle auftreten - das Verschmelzen eines älteren Textfragments in die bestehende Erzählung, was nicht wirklich geglückt ist.

Besonders gefallen hat mir in diesem Band aber Kapitel 56; die Beschreibung eines Traums Bao-yus baut auf einem typisch chinesischen Topos auf (der Traum innerhalb eines Traums) und ist sehr gut durchgeführt.

Ansonsten fällt auf, wie die in den vorherigen Bänden geschilderte Feierlaune nun oft durch Streitereien innerhalb des Haushalts durchbrochen wird. Der gezeigte Neid, die allgegenwärtige Mißgunst und Vetternwirtschaft bringt erste Sprünge in die bisher so makellose Vase. Immer öfter wird auf die Finanzprobleme der über ihre Verhältnisse lebenden Familie hingewiesen, und man ahnt nun langsam, dass die ganze Geschichte nicht gut enden wird.

Aufmachung ist identisch zu den ersten beiden Bänden; sehr hilfreiche und kluge Anhänge, die diesmal auf einige Eigenheiten des Textes bezüglich Nebenpersonen eingehen, und die immer noch unverzichtbaren Stammbäume vervollständigen die gelungene Präsentation.

Patrick says

Quite a change from the last two volumes. In many ways it feels like it comes off the rails, as more and more time gets spent on digressions and the love triangle that's ostensibly at the heart of the plot fades to nothingness. The poetry also all but disappears and gets replaced by high melodrama and a creeping sense of doom. "The beast with a thousand legs is a long time dying," but by Chapter 80 everyone in the household can see the end. It might seem like so many changes to something already perfect would cause the quality to drop, but the growing sense of emptiness and decay produces some of the most beautiful moments of the entire novel so far: the lonely Mid-Autumn Festival, Bao-yu's elegy for Skybright, the flower cards, and of course the long, long saga of Er-jie and San-jie which explodes into the quiet lives of the Jias to reveal just how bad things have been allowed to get. Almost no one makes it out of this book unaltered except, maybe, Dai-yu, but as the last few chapters make clear her fate as well is closing in on her. Despite minor continuity errors and some strange pacing, the writing in this volume is some of Cao Xueqin's finest. If the lost 40 chapters had never been "found," I would say that what we have by the end of the volume would both be enough to make most of the rest of the plot clear, and to confirm *The Story of the Stone* as an awe-inspiring, life-changing work of art.

Matt says

The Warning Voice is a good title for this third volume, which starts with a growing sense of foreboding and ends with more and more members of the extended Jia clan in unhappy circumstances. The volume retains some of the comedy, beauty, and elegant circumstances of the prior two, but there's also a growing frequency of conflict, pettiness, and ugly selfishness.

Adelaide McGinnity says

Definitely the best of the volumes thus far, in that I think it is here that we really get to see the individuality of the characters in the garden (both maids and mistresses) on full display. I also like the almost Greek tragic nature of the anecdotes and the family at large; the reader can see the end coming for each of the fated characters in turn, but is powerless to save them, and the resulting pathos is enough to bring tears to the eyes. Skybright, I am still crying for you!

Connie Kronlokken says

Warning voice indeed! This volume is full of discussion of money. The family must pawn things, and they begin to talk of having fewer servants. Bao-yu loses Skybright to innuendo. Xi-feng is horrified to find her husband has taken a secret wife. Chaos and infighting upset everyone, though there are several lovely holiday scenes, such as the mid-Autumn moon-viewing festival, and some poetry writing.

I discuss the book further on my blog, as an example of a thoroughly un-Western paradigm:

<http://soareyoutomythoughts.blogspot....>

Paulo Santos says

Reaching the third volume of *The Story of the Stone*, one feels like one's meeting old acquaintances; and what fabulous characters they are - Bao-yu, Xi-feng, Grandmother Jia, Jia Lian, Tan Chun, and so many others. The fortunes and misfortunes of this aristocratic 18th century Chinese family make for a remarkable period piece, one goes from feeling annoyed by so much silliness and petty problems (the kind that today would be called First World problems), understanding how the French revolutionaries would wish to cut the head of Marie Antoinette, to feeling engaged by such human and everyday feelings. The writing is simultaneous classically elegant and extremely contemporary - obviously the translator's merit, but I'm sure it's true to the original. Reading this book feels somehow like a guilty pleasure, but I don't regret it. And I'm totally committed to read the next volumes.

Chris says

The following review is my review for all five volumes as a whole.

I'm going to put forth an argument that books can be compared to relationships. There are books that are guilty pleasures with no literary value beyond straightforward entertainment, such as potboiler mysteries or the much maligned Harlequin style romance. These are your one-night stands of the book world.

Then there are brief forays readers take out of curiosity or biblio-style peer pressure, such as best-seller lists or perceived literary acclaim. Examples of this could be a summer spent reading Swedish detective fiction, or reading the latest Young Adult series (*Hunger Games Trilogy*, perhaps) or whatever Oprah's new favorite thing is. These would be your "flings" or summer romances. They are short term pleasures which you may outgrow or simply move on from after finishing.

And then you have a book like "*The Story of the Stone*." This is a long term relationship. It sucks up your soul and being, and perhaps becomes a part of you. It is impossible to start another book after this without giving yourself time to process the experience, at least it was the case for me. When the final page of this journey is turned, you are physically and maybe even emotionally drained.

The Jia family, with whom you get to spend 2500 pages with, becomes an extended family of your own. At

the core is Jia Bao Yu, a spoiled somewhat effeminate boy, who is more than just a boy. He is the human incarnation of a rock fashioned by a goddess in her efforts to repair the sky, but is never used. Left alone for eons, this stone begins to ponder the purpose of existence until it is given a chance to live as a human.

The story proper begins when Bao Yu is around 13. He is a member of a wealthy family who spends his days wiling away his time with his numerous girl cousins, maids and even a Buddhist nun. The narrative follows the daily life of his extensive family, their staff, and many hangers-on. An astounding number of characters make up the cast, from the 80 year old Lady Dowager who is the matriarch of the family, down to her great-granddaughter Qiao-Jie, but the amazing thing is the author's ability to make each of the many characters feel fully human and real, with hopes, desires, , talents and weaknesses of all their own.

As can be expected with such an immense novel, the narrative structure is complex. It is often episodic, bouncing around from one plot line to another. The main plot line concerns Bao Yu and the question of which of his two girl cousins he'll marry, the ethereal Dai Lin or the ideally modest and respectable Bao Chai. Surrounding this love triangle are the various soap operatic endeavors of the many family members, and surrounding the family dramatics is the decline of the family fortune and its rapidly growing debts. And above all of these worldly concerns is a spiritual and philosophical exploration from the Buddhist and Taoist point of view all of life is a fleeting illusion.

Ironically, despite the novel's length, it can be considered an unfinished or incomplete masterpiece. The original novel was never published in the author's lifetime. For thirty years the novel consisted of the first 80 existing chapters being passed around in manuscript form. The first printed edition, which came out in the 1790s was published with 120 chapters, with the editors claiming to have pieced together the remaining 40 chapters from fragments and the author's notes. The first 80 chapters make up the first three volumes of this translation, and the remaining 40 chapters make up the final two volumes. I'll leave the question of authorship of the final 40 chapters to the scholars. Whether it is different authors, or (as the translators suggest) perhaps the author died before revising the final 40 chapters, there is a decided difference between the two sections.

The first section is chock full of poetry and character driven narrative, while the second section is plot-driven, workmanlike and flat, as if there is a stated goal in wrapping up all of the loose plot lines in as tidy a manner as possible. The difference between the two sections is accentuated by the fact that one translator worked on the first 80 chapters, and another translator worked on the final 40 chapters. While there is a difference in translating styles, nothing is diminished from the impact of the book. It is a big commitment to read this book, but one well worth the experience. Bao Yu and his family will linger for a long time in my imagination.

nostalgebraist says

After greatly enjoying Volume 2, I found this long middle volume a bit of a slog.

I can't tell how much of this is due to any intrinsic difference (after all, the 5-volume division was made by the translator, not the author) and how much of it is due to the fact that I have a finite, if large, patience for this kind of story. In my review of Vol. 2 I made a big deal out of how formless the plot is -- sometimes dramatic, sometimes very mundane for long stretches, never following predictable "arc" structures -- and how this struck me as enjoyably lifelike. Vol. 3 is, if anything, more extreme in this regard. In particular, it focuses more than the earlier volumes on a wide array of "minor" characters, to the point that the putative

main characters disappear for long stretches. There is a thin line between the sublime "lifelikeness" I praised in Vol. 2 and just *being really really boring*, and a lot of Vol. 3 crossed that line for me.

That said, there is a stretch near the middle of the book -- the story of the You sisters -- that is atypically exciting and dramatic, and I found myself racing through it. This section ends with the appearance of a character, "the lame Taoist," who had originally appeared way back in Vol. 1 when the story involved more supernatural elements, and the translator comments that in fact this entire section might have been spliced in from another more dramatic, more supernatural novel which Xueqin never finished or showed to the world. I found this quite disappointing; it made me feel as though I had been reading something haphazardly made, which expressed no unified artistic vision but instead just consisted of a bunch of disparate pieces slapped together. This feeling is of course only worsened by the fact that Xueqin himself did not finish the novel -- the sections definitely written by him end with Vol. 3, and Vols. 4-5 are thought to be written at least in part by someone else.

What is this thing I have been reading for several years now? It has been called the greatest work of Chinese literature. Mao Zedong claimed to have read it 25 times and recommended that others read it 5 times (it is 2500 pages long!). It has beautiful and hilarious moments, incredibly dull stretches, a strange and problematic structure and textual history. It definitely doesn't have fit the model I have in mind for a "great work." But I am determined to see it through to the end, in part because I have no idea where it could possibly be going. On to Vol. 4.

Andrew Fairweather says

SPOILERS

Volume three give the reader hints of what must be the downfall to come—it's like milk that "seems fine" even though the sell-by date has passed. This volume contains a lot of references to how the fortunes of the Jia family are "not what they used to be". The protection of possessions and pawning of goods seem to be a major concern of the characters in this volume, which is a stark contrast to the dreaminess of the first and the poetic fabric of the second. There are, in fact, some very gorgeous works of poetic art in this one (most notably, Bao-yu's piece written after the death of Skybright, which certainly trumps the studied inspiration of the ballad written in his father's presence in the proceeding chapter), but much of what we have here is squabbling.

The masters all go on a trip, and Xi-feng, my love, is bed ridden (there's a whole lot of people getting sick in this story...) so calamity ensues. The acting troupe is disbanded and becomes a part of the everyday life of the Garden, injecting more characters into the epic's common rota. This is a move in contention with many of the other Garden dwellers—people bicker, slap each other, and things go missing. Other characters begin to take more strident roles in the narrative. Tan-chun, for example, takes on a lot of the administrative duties while Wang Xi-feng is sick.

A similarity to volume two is that there is a suicide. After having been set up to marry the honorable Xiang-lian, Xiang-lian begins to have his doubts about the arrangement, owing mostly to the question of honoring a previous betrothal to a girl named by his aunt... San-jie cannot bear to be a part of something suspect, especially in the eyes of Xiang-lian, so she takes her life. This seemed like some sort of stand-alone romance tale of old. And it was also a part of volume three that perked my interest more than usual—you see, San-jie ends up paying Xiang-lian a visit from the Fairy Disenchantment's tribunal in the Land of Illusion... which

drives Xiang-lian nuts, causing him to turn to Taoism...

"From love I can; from love I now depart. I wasted my life for love, and now that I have woken up, I am ashamed of my folly. From now on we are nothing to each other, you and I--nothing."

Bao-yu continues to be his wayward self—

"We can't all be as happy-go-lucky as you are,' said You-shi. 'All you think about is amusing yourself with the girls, eating when you are hungry and sleeping when you are tired. Each year to you is like the last. You haven't a thought in your head about the future.'"

[...]

"Man's life is uncertain,' said Bao-yu. 'Which of us knows when his time will come? Even if I today or tomorrow or this year or the next year, at least I shall have lived my life as I wanted to.'"

But he's getting older, and the facts of life begin to thrust themselves upon him, eventually being victim to a woman's unwanted advances. Sexual jokes are made that go right over Bao-yu's head. One would think that his losing his virginity to Aroma in volume one was already his initiation into the sexual life—but I feel this would be a misunderstanding of master Bao's relationship with the girls/women at the Daguan-yu-ari. Bao-yu has a strong distaste for "things of the world", and women, sex and the lot are no exception. A paradox to some, perhaps, but Bao-yu's love is for 'the female' rather than the woman—

"Strange, the way they get like this when they marry! It must be something in the male that infects them. If anything they end up even worse than the men!"

The old women on duty at the gate overheard this and could not help laughing at him.

'In that case all the girls must be good and all the women must be bad,' they said. 'You don't really believe that, do you?'

'Indeed I do,' said Bao-yu feelingly. 'That's precisely what I *do* believe!'

And then at the end of this volume, as if to prove Bao-yu's theory correct, Xue Pan seems to be getting a reality check via his marriage to a Jin-gui, whose tenacity can best be summed up by this excellent passage—

"Sometimes in the intervals between quarreling, if she was feeling cheerful, Jin-gui would gather a few people together to play at dice or cards. She was inordinately fond of gnawing bones, especially the bones of fowls. To satisfy this craving she had ducks and chickens killed every day. The meat she gave to other people; it was only the bones, crisp-fried in boiling fat, that she kept for herself, to nibble with her wine. Sometimes, if the bone she was gnawing was giving her trouble and she grew impatient, she would swear like a trooper."

Volume three was a pleasure. I can't wait for the next! Hopefully it will arrive tomorrow while volume three is still fresh in my mind.

Mel says

Memorable moments from Vol. 3: Grandma Jia gives her speech about how songs aren't realistic because the young girls only have one maid. Xifeng becomes ill and the girls take over. The garden is divided up. 200 pages of mostly maids' stories. The singers are assigned as maids, love affairs, and cross dressing ensues. Baoyu has his birthday party where everyone gets drunk, Zheng dies and the story of Jie Er and Jie San. Interesting to see that it is only after Xifeng's miscarriage that her husband goes off in search of this "2nd wife". Hawkes mentions how the story of jie san seems thrown in from a different story about the monk with the magic mirror and messes up the chronology of the er jie story. Still it was interesting this time to get that the person she was in love with was the straight opera singer who'd beaten up Huan. I think he kinda deserved such misery. It's interesting to see how after this despite her best efforts, Xifeng starts to lose some of her credibility and power within the households. Whether this is due to the new concubines, the death of erjie or the fact that she was ill for so long after her miscarriage is hard to say. Time seems to be going quite quickly in this book, and on page 400 it's already "over a year" since the last meeting of the poetry club. I wish I could find a list of what was supposed to happen when and how old everyone is supposed to be as it can be quite confusing. The last part of the book looks has Grandmother Jia's 80th birthday, and the Moon Festival, Dai Yu and Xiang yun composing poetry was great. I also loved how fiesty Tan Chun got towards the end. And I have to say I really enjoyed Bao-Yu's elegy for "Skybright". Xue pan and his wife were amusing, I realised that xue pan is so the normal leading character of novels, (such as jin ping mei) but here he is gently ridiculed for his behaviour instead. It seemed like things were slowly starting to unravel and everyone was growing up and dying. The families were starting to become seperated and money was becoming more of an issue, and as Xifeng became less powerful the servants gained more freedom to cause trouble. It is a shame that the next 40 chapters were not successfully kept. But will start the next volume of this translation now.

Hadrian says

I've been taking my time with this volume because I want to savor the story, of course, but also it contains the last chapters written by Cao Xueqin. The last 40 or so chapters, reconstructed from his notes, are of dubious quality, but I'm so invested that I still need to know how the story ends.

Mary-Jean Harris says

Yet another excellent book in the Story of the Stone series! It was long, but definitely worth it. The part with Jia Lian and Xi Feng trying to sabotage each other was the best, as well as the poetry parts, though I can understand how some people wouldn't enjoy that. The feel of this book was similar to the previous one, though we can definitely see a decline in the management and order of the family that was only seeding previously. I wouldn't say that there was one overarching climax or even central adventure because it is really a story about many people's lives who live within the Jia household. In most books like this, I would get bored, but the characters in Xueqin's novels and the descriptions and interesting events made up for it. The character evolution could have been improved, but, as before, the story covers such a great extent of

different people that it didn't matter.
Highly recommended!
