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To cite this article: Kar Yue Chan (2020) Love in Dreams and Illusions: Fate and Prognostication in *Honglouloumeng*, *Comparative Literature: East & West*, 4:1, 28-44, DOI: 10.1080/25723618.2020.1780053

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/25723618.2020.1780053>



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Published online: 09 Jul 2020.



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Love in Dreams and Illusions: Fate and Prognostication in *Honglouloumeng*

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ABSTRACT

Fate is denoted as an explicit theme in the classical Chinese novel *Honglouloumeng* 紅樓夢 [A Dream of the Red Mansion, a.k.a. *The Story of the Stone*]. The crucial ideas of love, fate and prognostication are entangled with and deliberately interrelated with the narrative techniques of *Honglouloumeng*. Hinted in the dreams and hallucinations, almost all female characters are unable to refrain from falling into the wheels of prognosticated fate.

The effects of fate and prognostication also fall upon Jia Baoyu 賈寶玉, amidst a group of charismatic females, who is depicted as being obsessed in feminine passion and desire. In the final chapters, his ultimate release from worldly attachments, believed to be fulfilled by the identity of a Buddhist monk, displays such metamorphosis accompanied by the transmigrated nature of the stone-jade that penetrates the whole story. Love, dreams, illusions and fate work closely in successfully rendering the plot of the novel, under which dreadful predictions disclose themselves in a subconscious sense. The Buddhist ideas that everything is never permanent, which must gradually return to their original void, and people's attachments to worldly riches and cravings are strongly fated to be hindrances to final enlightenment.

摘要

在中國古典小說《紅樓夢》(又名《石頭記》)中,「命運」為主旨之一。「愛情」、「命運」、「預兆」幾個重要命題,跟《紅樓夢》的特有敘事方式環環相扣。在貫穿夢境和幻覺的伏線下,幾乎所有女性角色都無一倖免墮進預示的命運之輪中。

命運和預兆的影響也深深紮根在主角賈寶玉身上。他陶醉於姊妹丫鬟堆中,並兼有女性化的感情、激情和癡迷的慾望。他隨著貫穿整部小說「既石亦玉」的本質,在《紅樓夢》書中最後幾回,終能以和尚的身份從世俗的束縛中釋放出來。小說的情節發展緊密糅合了愛情、夢境、幻覺、命運,而哀痛的命運預示也在他的潛意識中催化。佛家「色即是空」的觀念在《紅樓夢》中每每呈現,所有事物均須歸到原點。人們對世俗財富的渴求、依戀、執著只會窒礙人最終的頓悟。

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 21 August 2019

Accepted 4 June 2020

KEYWORDS

Dream; *dream of the Red Mansion*; fate; love; prognostication

關鍵詞

夢;《紅樓夢》;命運;愛情;預兆

1. Introduction: the aspect of fate in classical Chinese fiction

The theme of “fate” or “destiny,” which exists in various literary genres produced in imperial and modern China, is usually connected with fortune-telling and predictions

about the course of individuals' lives, and has also often been used as an explanation for mysterious occurrences within different religious traditions – especially in reference to the concepts of cause and effect and transmigration in Asian religions like Buddhism and Hinduism. As far as Chinese literature is concerned, the notion of “fate” is omnipresent, acting as the crucial linkage between a literary work itself and the cultural perceptions of its audience. Martin Huang notes that “in Chinese fiction, karmic retribution ‘became an important narrative device with which fiction writers could enhance the didactic power of their works’” (Ferrara, “Patterns” 16). The concepts of *karma* and fate have also been portrayed as having strong impacts on literary characters. These themes manifest especially strongly in genres such as the *zhiguai xiaoshuo* 志怪小說 [“tales of the supernatural,” sometimes translated as “Gothic novels”]. However, a narrower range of the typical fate-related topics are touched upon and play a crucial role in long novels like *Honglouloumeng* 紅樓夢 [*Dream of the Red Mansion*, also known as *The Story of the Stone*], a classical Chinese masterpiece consisting of 120 chapters in total, the first 80 Chapters of which are believed to have been written by Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 (1715?–1763?).¹ One of the most appealing narrative features of the novel has been described as follows,

[...] patterns of fate at work in the reincarnation of the Stone highlight[ing] Cao's use of *ming* [命 meaning “fate”] as karmic retribution in Buddhist soteriology, as well as [the] central motif of the novel, that of enlightenment as a hermeneutical device that facilitates knowledge about the future and workings of karma. (Ferrara, “Patterns” 20)

Thus, a reader of the novel frequently encounters the use of various foreshadowing techniques by the author. With “fate” being established as one of the pillars around which the whole story is constructed, it would also be feasible to analyze the meanings of the two channels of “love” and “dreams”: most of the characters in the novel meet their ends through love, and they are considered exposed to a premonition of their eventual fates in a series of dreams.

2. The structure and construction of *Honglouloumeng*

As Bai Xianyong puts it, the novel *Honglouloumeng* is characterized by the “vastness and enormity of its [narrative] structure, while its translucent and insightful vision has never been surpassed by any [later] literary works” (1015, author translation). Fated prophecies and warnings describe the eventual outcomes for the main characters from the very beginning of the novel; and through the songs chanted by Vanitas the Taoist monk [Kongkong Daoren 空空道人] in Chapter 1, the novel advances with a substantial number of forecasts that later prove reasonable, as shown in Feng's remark, “The finale of the novel has already been predicted from the very start [...] because the author is awakened from his dreams, as all incidents lie in his memories [...]” (Cao, *Guafanlou* 18, author translation). Throughout the entirety of the novel, explicit and implicit hints concerning “fate” are interwoven with the lines and the plot of the story. In particular, these themes are worked into the dreams that the author uses to create the overall structure of the novel, in which the sequence of illustrated dreams serves as an “outer frame” for “the narrative structure of the novel, as well as presenting its dominant theme of love [...] and its allegorical origin in other-worldly existence” (Yi 13). More succinctly, fate is denoted as an unambiguous subject through (mainly) the dreams (which

sometimes take the form of visions) of Jia Baoyu 賈寶玉, the protagonist. In compiling the overall illusory structure of the novel, the author Cao

[...] draws on the plurality of meanings that he inherits from the Chinese tradition, and he deliberately and consistently reinforces them through the use of anticipatory narrative devices such as poems, songs, lantern riddles, and dream sequences that speak meaningfully and consistently to the fate of the central characters. (Ferrara, “Patterns” 13)

According to Li, another interesting perspective from which to view the novel is the threefold relationship among spirit [*ling* 靈], dreams [*meng* 夢] and love [*qing* 情, also meaning “passion”] around which it is constructed, with each theme serving as one of the titles of the three different versions of *Shitouji* 石頭記 [*The Story of the Stone*], *Honglouloumeng* and *Qingsenglou* 情僧錄 [*A Record of an Infatuated Monk*] (338, author translation). Taking this assumption as a starting point, it is worthwhile to contemplate the intangible interrelations of the novel’s overall structure as hypothesized through the mutual cultivation of the three elements mentioned above: the *spiritual* communication of the characters in the novel is derived from their *dreams*, which crystalize through *love*, and are finally thwarted by an ultimate *enlightenment*. With such elusive combination of the three significant elements, readers are involved in the realization of spiritual dreams and illusions from an ancient myth commencing the novel, featuring the legend of *Nüwa bu tian* 女媧補天 [Nüwa mending the firmament]. The narrative begins naturally stemming from the predestined relationship between the leading characters, and thus moves on toward different levels of struggles and perplexities which lead to the final enlightenment upon the questions of life and death, love and bondage.

3. Between illusion and reality

Based on a number of studies, *Honglouloumeng* was believed by some to be an autobiographical account of the life of the author Cao himself, though it is only one of the possibilities in interpreting the novel.² At the same time, the readers’ attention is directed to the series of illusions and dreams peppered throughout the novel, which dance in and out of “reality” and “imagination.” The reader may assume that, on the one hand, Cao’s own tragic life is reflected in the life of the hero Jia Baoyu; on the other hand, the author has created a protagonist whose life includes a variety of fantastic and dramatic worldly experiences occasionally defying believability through the series of illusionary encounters in which he appears. Another enigma concerning the “reality” of the protagonist is directly embedded into the names of the characters: there is a dichotomy between the sounds of the names of Jia Baoyu, whose surname, *Jia* 賈, has the same pronunciation as the character for “fake” in Mandarin, and of Zhen Baoyu 甄寶玉, a character who appears in a “virtual” form in Chapter 56, whose surname *Zhen* 甄 has the same pronunciation as the character 真, meaning “real” or “true,” in Mandarin Chinese. Thus, the implied meanings of the surnames *Jia* and *Zhen* signify respectively conditions of “falseness” and “realism.” Ferrara views Zhen Baoyu as Jia Baoyu’s “second self” (Ferrara, “Bao-yu” 376); such “use of pairing and mirroring techniques to reinforce the structural motif of [a] complementary opposition between appearance and reality” (Ferrara, “Bao-yu” 372) provides an illustrative effect for the reader of the novel. One oft-

quoted couplet depicted in the novel in the Land of Illusion [*Taixu huanjing* 太虛幻境] reads: “Truth becomes fiction when the fiction’s true;/Real becomes not-real where the unreal’s real” (Cao and Gao 6, vol. 1).³ By drawing attention to the meaning of the couplet, the comments added by early interpreters of the novel and appearing in the lines (known as *jiapi* 夾批 in Chinese and roughly equivalent to exegesis) highlight one of the main themes of the novel (Cao, *Guafanlou* 75). Here, an early interpreter of the novel has paid significant attention to drilling into the echoing effect of this couplet, for which the concepts of *real* and *unreal* act as an enlightened voice outlining and defining on the arc of the characters’ lives, in turn pertaining to the ultimate fates that the characters are unable to escape from:

[T]he spatial totality of the allegorical vision of the novel is of an order that includes both being and non-being within its scope, so that the apparent opposition of being and non-being emerges as an example of the sort of interpenetration of reality and illusion for which the dream is the nearest analogue in human experience. (Plaks 223)

Illusion and consciousness may thus be deemed as essential elements of the story, as they serve as a great trigger for the final and absolute enlightenment that occurs in the latter part of the novel. Far away, in the Land of Illusion, the prognostications of the important female characters are all displayed as early as in Chapter 5 (entitled “Jia Baoyu visits the Land of Illusion; and the fairy Disenchantment performs the “Dream of Golden Days” in the English version. Cao and Gao 124–48), which serve as “an important mythical structure” and “fatal elegy [of the women],” (Bai 98, author translation) unbeknownst to the characters themselves. Cao may have deliberately made this prognostication visible in the very first part of the novel so that the reader possesses a general knowledge of the “ultimate judgment” to be realized well in advance. The true realization, though, has to be “proven” by the readers following the clues placed by the author along the lines of the development of the novel, and such proof could only be witnessed partially if the readers choose to follow strictly the way how Cao Xueqin manipulates the hints in the first 80 chapters. Some believe that these hints designating the female characters’ fates have not been fully perceived and preserved in the sequel written by Gao E 高鶚 (1758–1815), so the interpretations toward different prognosticated destinies also vary among different readers upon their manners in considering the contents of the novel itself. According to Bai, “The twelve ‘Dreams of Golden Days’ performed by Disenchantment [Jinghuan Xianggu 警幻仙姑] in the Land of Illusion have duly mourned the tragic fates of the characters in the Prospect Garden [Daguanyuan 大觀園] in a well-knitted structure [...], which vividly depicts [the doctrines of] the three Chinese philosophical schools of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism” (Bai 1015–16, author translation). All of these bewildering prophecies are presented in short poems, such that later on the reader will begin to realize the premonitions deep within the poetic lines.

Knight remarks, “In much Chinese fiction, both traditional and modern, the logic of the narrative accepts one version or another of destiny as an unassailable force, and resignation to destiny blinds characters, and perhaps readers as well [...]” (273). As ambiguously foreshadowed in the dreams and hallucinations that appear as early as Chapter 5 of the novel, almost all of the female characters are unable to escape

from falling into the wheels of their previously foretold fates – which portray death (such as Lin Daiyu 林黛玉), abandonment [and subsequently death] (such as Wang Xifeng 王熙鳳 and You Erjie 尤二姐 [who is described as an object of “obsessive love” (Yi 13)]), or banishment to a lower level of the social hierarchy (such as Adamantina [Miaoyu 妙玉]). Concerning the idea of passion and desire, Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877–1927) tries to relate the idea of “obsession” of desire, *yu* 欲, to the names of the characters containing the homophonous *yu* 玉 [jade, as seen in the names Baoyu, Daiyu, Miaoyu, etc.], which introduces a rhetorical generalization associating fictitious names and figurative meanings. This approach relates apparently to a rhetorical pun representation of spiritual passion which forms a gradating concept of desire eventually turning into various facets of love, and subsequently sublimating to recurring wheels of fate at the final stage.

The aforementioned female characters in the novel all pass through different stages in their lives, and *realize* their final destinations and enlightenment according to the pathways that they unconsciously move along, as driven by their respective fates. Eventually the whole story, as managed by the author, culminates in the realization of their ultimate destinies:

The profound paradox emerging from Cao Xueqin’s story seems to be that the illusion of life, itself a painful avowal of the nonreality and untruth of reality (a view that bears strong overtones of Buddhism), can only be grasped through the illusion of art, which is an affirmation of the truth of insubstantiality. (Yu 49)

4. Love as the prognostic root of the novel

A song that appears in a dream (or illusion) Baoyu has when he begins to fall asleep in Qin Keqing’s 秦可卿 (homophone for “Qing ke qing” 情可輕 [love can be taken casually]) (Liu Xinwu 280, vol. 2) boudoir relates a grand-scale prediction of the fates of nearly all of the female characters in his region, Jinling 金陵:

These idle reflections were interrupted by someone singing a song on the other side of a hill:

‘Spring’s dream-time will like drifting clouds disperse,
Its flowers snatched by a flood none can reverse.
Then tell each nymph and swain
’Tis folly to invite love’s pain!’ (Cao and Gao 128, vol. 1)⁴

The last line in the poem in particular, “’Tis folly to invite love’s pain,” is a subtle reference to the overall theme of the novel: *love*. The love and passion described in the novel, no matter how intimate and sweet, is but in vain, and all of those who have let themselves fall in love will just fall into the final judgment of the wheel of transmigration, with no exception. The interpreter Zhiyanzhai 脂硯齋⁵ made a careful *jiapi* against this last line, “A heavy blow to all characters in the novel” (Cao, Qianlong 4, Chapter 5, my translation).⁶ It seems obvious that this critic wished to establish a strong overall forecast on the fates of the characters – that love hurts, and love is the root of all evil. This idea also resonates well with the name of the original location of the stone-jade: *Qinggengfeng* 青埂峰 [“The Greensickness Peak” as translated by Hawkes (Cao and Gao 48, vol. 1),

which acts as a homophone for *qinggen* 情根 (literally “the root of love,” while the word “peak” may also function as a homophone for “insanity” [*feng* 瘋])). The name thus clearly suggests the idea of “lovesickness,” and successfully generalizes about the fatal nature of love, warning of the catastrophic consequences for the female characters. Another grand prophecy (perhaps warning) appears in Chapter 5 in a couplet inscribed in the Land of Illusion:

Ancient earth and sky
Marvel that love’s passion should outlast all time.
Star-crossed men and maids
Groan that love’s debts should be so hard to pay. (Cao and Gao 130, vol. 1)⁷

Tragically enough, Cao portrays almost all of the main female characters as suffering from various forms of physical and mental abuse, some because of their pride and dignity, in spite of their lowly status as maids (in the case of Skybright [Qingwen 晴雯]); some due to insistence on decency and orthodoxy in their lives (in the case of Xue Baochai 薛寶釵); some driven by their unconventional character (in the case of Parfumée [Fangguan 芳官]), and others due to their attachment to love, passion and emotion (in the case of Lin Daiyu). All of these afflictions are manifestations of the predictions that Jia Baoyu witnesses in the different “departments” of the Land of Illusion, the most appealing of which is the “Department of the Ill-fated Fair” [*Boming Si* 薄命司] (Cao and Gao 131, vol. 1), which coincidentally portrays the fates of most of the female characters in the novel. In a nutshell these females are intentionally exemplified in relation to their catastrophic destinies, while Cao still works to applaud their courage, their sensitivity and their sentimental pursuits of love in a circumlocutory way.

One of the epigrammatic poems shown in the “department” holds the message that a woman’s identity (as a woman) creates disastrous consequences. For instance, Jia Yingchun 賈迎春 and Jia Xichun 賈惜春, Baoyu’s second and fourth sisters respectively, suffer in similarly cruel ways. The respective prognosticatory poems describing each of the two characters reveal that tragic fates shall befall ladies yearning for true love:

[For Yingchun]
Paired with a brute like the wolf in the old fable,
Who on his saviour turned when he was able,
To cruelty not used, your gentle heart
Shall, in a twelvemonth only, break apart. (Cao and Gao 134–35, vol. 1)⁸
[For Xichun]
When you see through the spring scene’s transient state,
A nun’s black habit shall replace your own.
Alas, that daughter of so great a house
By Buddha’s altar lamp should sleep alone! (*Ibid.*)⁹

The above poems signify the shattering of a maiden’s dream, and the prophecies all come true by the end of the novel, as Jia Yingchun is at a later stage married off to an abusive man named Sun Shaozu 孫紹祖.¹⁰ Within one year of her marriage, she is tortured to death (Cao, *Guafanlou* 1405–18). The prophecy is accurate to the point that “in a twelvemonth only” the marriage is “br[oken] apart,” resulting in her death as well. In contrast, Xichun, with her unconventional personality, opts to leave her grand and wealthy home behind to become a nun, a cynical act meant to enable her to resist conforming to the constraints of

traditional society. She chooses to stay alone next to a “Buddha’s altar lamp” for the rest of her life although she is endowed with all the wealth of her family (Cao, *Guafanlou* 1933–47). There is a contradiction in juxtaposing the yearning for love between the poems, however, as Yingchun is illustrated as suffering physical oppression in her conjugal relationship, while Xichun is oppressed ideologically through the invisible bondage of orthodox society and lacks hope of ever obtaining true love given her identity as a nun. As mentioned previously, Xue Baochai provides the opposite case – although she greatly enjoys playing the roles of daughter and wife (and subsequently also mother-to-be in the final chapter of the sequel written by Gao E, she is also tragic in the sense that she is subjugated by the ideologies forced upon her by orthodox Confucian society, yet without receiving any intimate recognition from Baoyu, her then husband (Cao and Gao 1695–1707. See also Feng 19–21 about the fates of the women portrayed in the novel). Her efforts at striking a balance between being a traditional virtuous lady and enjoying a truly loving husband under the limitations of a pre-arranged marriage are presented by means of various contradictory situations.

Judging from these characters’ devastating fates, which are mostly realized in the later part of the novel, all that has already been foretold in the short poems in the Land of Illusion eventually comes to fruition. As has been suggested by Yi, “The juxtaposition of dream[s] and reality is merely a mechanism employed by the author to address the issues of love, lust, and self-enlightenment” (46). In order to ensure that early predictions prove prescient, the author pre-establishes the character of Baoyu as a witness to all of the dreadful events befalling his beloved sisters (and all other ladies as well). His character is strategically managed to ensure that he *experiences* and *undergoes* all of the necessary events leading to the final melancholic and fatal result. Lacking this knowledge, and with his sense of obligation and responsibility, Baoyu is portrayed as attempting to “save” these ladies from falling into their pre-destined, evil traps – this is perhaps inspiring to further assume a special role of “savior” for Baoyu the person especially when the Jia family and the Prospect Garden have been hypothesized as a world in miniature. However, while reading the novel, one unmistakable fact permeating the whole work is that Baoyu is also positioned as the stone-jade (alternatively, another interpretation is that his whole life is led by the stone-jade, unbeknownst to him). This metamorphosis may be considered to be the dreadful consequence of his fate, as foretold by heaven while he was still in the form of the stone, when he is bestowed with the title of “Chixiangong Shenyong shizhe” [赤瑕宮神瑛使者, translated as “Divine Luminescent Stone-in-Waiting in the Court of Sunset Glow” by Hawkes] by Disenchantment, the chief deity in the Land of Illusion (Cao and Gao 53, vol. 1).

5. Love from the land afar: the “love registers”

The effects of prognosticatory fate also befall Jia Baoyu himself, who is surrounded by a group of charismatic females and obsessed with love and desire, yet despite this, his fervent love cannot prevent him from falling into his ultimate destiny of enlightenment – a complete withdrawal from worldly passion. “His daze indicates his confusion, an expressive state [of] self-accusation and repentance [...] In short, his guilty conscience matches the tragedies in which he is involved” (Liu Zaifu 187).

As mentioned, the novel begins with the mythical story of “Nüwa mending the firmament,” which indicates that the characters of Baoyu and Daiyu have already experienced a karmic bond before Baoyu’s current rebirth in the human world. The author recounts this tale through the mouth of a monk,

[...] Most of his [Divine Luminescent Stone-in-Waiting’s] time he spent west of Sunset Glow exploring the banks of the Magic River. There, by the Rock of Rebirth, he found the beautiful Crimson Pearl Flower [Jiangzhu Xiancao 絳珠仙草], for which he conceived such a fancy that he took to water her every day [...] thanks to the vitalizing effect of the sweet dew, she was able to shed her vegetable shape and assume the form of a girl [...]

The consciousness that she owed the stone something for his kindness in watering her began to prey on her mind and ended by becoming an obsession.’

“The only way in which I could perhaps repay him would be with the tears shed during the whole of a mortal lifetime if he and I were ever to be reborn as humans in the world below.” [Crimson Pearl said to herself.] (Cao and Gao 53, vol. 1)

This myth is designated by the character of Zhen Shiyin 甄士隱 as a case of *yinguo* 因果 (Cao, *Qianlong* 10, Chapter 1), translated as “*karma*” by Hawkes (Cao and Gao 54, vol. 1). The description provides a circuitous forecast of the destinies of Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu, the pair of lovers who dominate almost two-thirds of the novel. The fascinating and mysterious love of Jia and Lin is rooted in the myth of Divine Luminescent Stone and Crimson Pearl, and their affection for one another is therefore described as a case of “*mu shi yuan*” 木石緣 [“wood-stone affinity,” (Ge 55) signifying a primitiveness and rawness], as opposed to the conventional “*jin yu yuan*” 金玉緣 [“gold-jade affinity,” (*ibid.*) implying richness and convention] advocated by defenders of feudal societies (and the type of affinity between Jia Baoyu and Xue Baochai).¹¹ The karmic idea is further strengthened by another song sung by Disenchantment’s team of deities in the Land of Illusion:

5.1. Second song: hope betrayed

One was a flower from paradise,
One a pure jade without spot or stain.
If each for the other one was not intended,
Then why in this life did they meet again?
And yet if fate had meant them for each other,
Why was their earthly meeting all in vain?
In vain were all her sighs and tears,
In vain were all his anxious fears:
All, insubstantial, doomed to pass,
As moonlight mirrored in the water
Or flowers reflected in a glass.
How many tears from those poor eyes could flow,
Which every season rained upon her woe? (Cao and Gao 140, vol. 1)¹²

Based on this poem, the reader cannot but be led to believe that Baoyu and Daiyu are bound together by fate as lovers, both in their previous lives (as Divine Luminescent Stone-in-Waiting and Crimson Pearl respectively) and in their “present” lives as depicted

in the novel.¹³ In lines 3 and 5 in the above prognostic song, “[i]f each for the other one was not *intended*” and “[a]nd yet if *fate* had meant them for each other” (author’s use of italics for emphasis), the Buddhist ideologies of (re)incarnation and transmigration are obviously seen in the destinies foretold for the two characters, and Daiyu can only repay her “debt of tears” to Baoyu through sacrificing herself,¹⁴ paying off her karmic debt through burning up the last bits of this life and thereby escaping from everlasting regret beyond the present life. Yu says of this:

It explains why the intense esteem in which both Stone and Plant hold each other must hurtle them along the karmic path of transmigration. Thrown into incarnation, they must settle their “case (*gongan* [公案])” in the human world by working through a life governed by memory and emotion, illusion and enlightenment . . .

Only when he [Jia Baoyu] has tasted the intoxication of romance, the ambivalence of age, the bitterness of betrayal, and the ineradicable pain of mortal separation can he lay claim to the perspicacity of Buddhist vision (*kanpodi*). (121, 125)

Therefore, from the very beginning of the novel, the mythical concept of “tear repayment” shapes and streamlines the intricately knit development of the story. The special image of tears has signified an overall perception of the pre-arranged fate concluding Daiyu’s life (resulting from the exhaustion of her tears), suggesting an entirely different scenario when compared to the scene portrayed in Gao E’s sequel in which Daiyu meets her end upon hearing the news of Baoyu and Baochai’s wedding. Just as Liu Zaifu says:

[i]n the allegory of the debt of tears, Lin Daiyu stands for tears [. . .] She dies because she has shed all her tears. [. . .] In that sense, the story in *Dream of the Red Chamber*, for all its complexity, can be summarized as a debt of tears [*qian lei* 欠淚], a payment for the debt of tears [*huan lei* 還淚], and the subsequent exhaustion of tears [*lei jin* 淚盡]. (196)

On the other hand, the structure of crossing between dreams and illusions guides the reader to perceive the intensity of Baoyu’s internal lustful desire from the time of his pre-destined encounter in the Land of Illusion, as his “love” could never be separated from “lust.” As Disenchantment comments in the novel:

The reason I like you so much is because you are full of lust. You are the most lustful person I have ever known in the whole world! [. . .] But your kind of lust is different. That blind, defenceless love with which nature has filled your being is what we call here ‘lust of the mind’” (Cao and Gao, 145-46, vol. 1).¹⁵

The concept of “lust,” or *yiyin* 意淫, translated by Hawkes above as “lust of the mind,” symbolizes an overwhelming obsession that dominates Jia Baoyu’s life, whose dreams torment both the character and the reader of the story. In the *Jiaxu* 甲戌 version of the novel, this concept of “lust” [*yin* 淫] is interpreted as follows: “With reference to Baoyu’s personality, this [lust] just signifies him as being thoughtful and caring, so it is called ‘lust of the mind’” (Cao, *Guafanlou* 87, author translation).¹⁶

Following the incredible encounter in the Land of Illusion, Jia Baoyu appears to begin developing into an emotionally complete human being, directing his considerable degree of love, care and passion toward his female cousins and the maids, an act that would have been considered “lustful” by many of his contemporaries. With his “progressive” turn of mind, he treats women with an especially high degree of respect, in opposition to the general low regard for women held by society at large at the time. This is also one of the

reasons why Baoyu feels such a passionate intensity of feeling toward each of the different women in the story, whether that takes the form of love, sympathy, care or decadence, and it explains why many of those around him consider him to be “lustful.” For instance, the characters in the novel hear Baoyu make statements such as: “Girls are made of water and boys are made of mud. When I am with girls I feel fresh and clean, but when I am with boys I feel stupid and nasty” (Cao and Gao 76, vol. 1).¹⁷ He also says, “The word ‘girl’ is very precious and very pure. It is much more rare and precious than all the rarest beasts and birds and plants in the world” (Cao and Gao 80, vol. 1).¹⁸ Feng says of this attitude of Baoyu, “This statement would be considered ground-breaking at a time the concepts of male superiority and female inferiority were still so prevalent” (Cao, *Guafanlou* 30, author translation). On many occasions, seeing various ladies being oppressed in different ways, Baoyu is the one to stand up against that oppression; the reader is made to feel strongly that the stringent female oppression in society serves to further intensify Baoyu’s prodigious love in the novel. His obsessive devotion to the topic of women is also echoed in various nonsensical actions, such as when he jokes about becoming a Buddhist monk should Daiyu die: “‘As if I were dead then.’ [Daiyu said.] ‘If you died,’ he [Baoyu] said, ‘I should become a monk’” (Cao and Gao 95, vol. 2).¹⁹ The reader is left with little doubt that this functions once again as a blatant prognostication of the final *karma* set to befall the two characters. One should note that Baoyu is also portrayed as being notorious for his obsessive “love of red” [*ai hong* 愛紅, author translation, literally referring to his love of all red objects] (Cao, *Honglouloumeng* 299),²⁰ which refers to his habit of extending his intense love also to inanimate objects and minutely small details of experience. For example, he collapses into “a fit of weeping” (Cao and Gao 42, vol. 2) upon hearing the melancholic song recited by Daiyu when she is collecting and burying fallen flowers, which once again serves as a secret foreshadowing for the reader of her eventual tragic fate:

Can I, that these flowers’ obsequies attend,
Divine how soon or late my life will end?
[...]
One day when spring has gone and youth has fled,
The Maiden and the flowers will both be dead. (*Ibid.*)²¹

Jia Baoyu’s love and lust ultimately result in the “Love Registers” [*Qingbang* 情榜] (Ge 52; also translated as “Love Registries” by Ge) in the final chapter [believed to have been revised and published based on Cao Xueqin’s own unpublished draft of the chapter], which measure the degree of passion and love that he has felt toward different female characters during his life [with the notable exception of Jia Baoyu] (Liu Xinwu 267–84, vol. 2),²² in response to the prognosticatory poems seen in *Jinling, Twelve Beauties of, Main Register* [*Jinling Shierchai Zhengce* 金陵十二釵正冊]; and *Jinling, Twelve Beauties of, Supplementary Registers* [*Jinling Shierchai Fuce* 金陵十二釵副冊 and *Jinling Shierchai Youfuce* 金陵十二釵又副冊] seen in the Land of Illusion in Chapter 5 (Cao and Gao 132, vol. 1). Liu Xinwu quotes Zhou Ruchang as speculating that nine “Love Registers” existed in the original draft of the novel composed by Cao, and in each of them 12 females’ names were recorded (adding up to the 108 characters in the novel) (qtd. Liu Xinwu 273, vol. 2). Various scholars have commented that there is “evidence” indicating that “labels” associated with “love” and “passion” have been assigned to the main characters in the

register, namely, *qing bu qing* [情不情 “in love with those without love”] for Jia Baoyu; *qing qing* [情情 “in love with love”] (also translated by Yi as “pure love” (13)) for Lin Daiyu; and *leng qing* [冷情 “indifferent love”] for Xue Baochai, each of which portrays the distinctive personality of the respective character. The hints concerning Daiyu and Baoyu are of special interest. Daiyu’s being “in love with love” could be understood as her having a strong passion and sentiment toward the target of her love, while Baoyu’s being “in love with those without love” could refer to his frequent sentiment or love not only for animate, but also for inanimate objects [those without love] – describing Jia Baoyu’s attitude of having “love for all” [*da ai* 大愛], or, “excessive attachment to love or beauty” (Yi 47). Yet, it is precisely because of the extraordinary love that Baoyu has fallen into and has become bound by that which he, according to Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936), becomes plagued by a growing feeling of guilt:

[...] Baoyu, having seen so many deaths, is convinced that most of the people he loves are confronted with all kinds of troubles and that most of the people in the world are unfortunate [...] Besides Baoyu, Lin Daiyu is also keenly aware of the tragedies in life. However, since she comes with purity and leaves with purity, she does not feel remorseful for what she sees. So, Baoyu is indeed the only person burdened with *guilt*. (qtd. Liu Zaifu 203, author’s use of italics for emphasis)

In the case of Baochai, her “obedient restraint, seemingly indicating a lack of feeling (*wu-ch’ing* [*wuqing*] 無情), comes to take on the opposite significance as she recites the line: 任是無情也動人 (‘Even though it is without feeling, it can still move the beholder’) in Chapter 63 (III, 806)” (Plaks 67). Plaks remarks of this that the characters in the story are “well aware of the identification of Lin Tai-yü [Lin Daiyu] with wood and Hsüeh Pao-ch’ai [Xue Baochai] with metal ... [.] Her [Xue Baochai’s] lantern riddle in Chapter 22 (I, 260), contain[s] the line: 恩愛夫妻不到冬 (‘the loving couple will not reach the winter’)[.] further foreground[ing] her association with the season of advancing mortality” (Plaks 61–64). The interrelationship between the prognosticatory registers seen in Chapter 5 and the “Love Registers” that appear at the conclusion of the work could be construed as a concerted effort to symbolically weave together the final fate for which the characters are destined with the main, conclusive theme of love and passion. The implication is that it is love that leads to the series of troubles, betrayals and attachments in one’s fate, and, at the same time, that the characters in the novel should follow their respective paths to realize every one of those predictions, thus redeeming themselves through “love” at the end of the novel. “Love” is a force that the characters are unable to escape from, and because of their pre-destined fates almost all of the characters in the novel are bound by, as well as destroyed by love, just as Baoyu ultimately becomes enlightened after experiencing love as well. Therefore, the “Love Registers” represent a grand, finalized tally of the experiences of each of the main characters, acting as a filter that exchanges each of the characters’ tears for the type of final enlightenment appropriate to their respective types of love.

Liu Xinwu opines that the establishment of the “Love Registers” toward the end of the novel perhaps provides a sociological and – more significantly – a philosophical contemplation on the place of women in society, who were deemed inferior to men and thus subjugated in the traditional feudal society, and it might have been Cao Xueqin’s

intention to console the lonely souls of the women of his day, which can be considered to represent a kind of highly progressive mentality well before the rise of feminism in the West (278, vol. 2, author translation). Although not explicit, this wise arrangement of various fates experienced by the *Red Mansion* ladies respects a certain level of resistance against the norms of society at that time, and it explains well that Cao shows his contempt adhering to the conventional story-telling ways. He has managed to elevate and diversify the female gender by creating characters such as Jia Baoyu, Qin Zhong 秦鐘 (Qin Keqing's brother) and Bijou [Qiguan 琪官] (one of the actors performing at the Prospect Garden) who possess effeminate manners and attributes. All in all, the complex compositions of this multi-layered novel have aggregated multi-faceted modes of narration and interpretations by lovers of classical Chinese literature.

6. Conclusion: final enlightenment through love

In the novel's final chapters, Jia Baoyu achieves ultimate release from worldly bondage through taking on the identity of a Buddhist monk (Chapter 120 in the sequel version), displaying a metamorphosis and accompanied by the transmigration of the stone-jade that permeates and guides the whole story. This ending, in which the stone returns to its original location on Greensickness Peak, has already been subtly foreshadowed in the epilogue in the Land of Illusion:

6.1. Epilogue: the birds into the wood have flown

The office jack's career is blighted,
The rich man's fortune now all vanished,
The kind with life have been requited,
The cruel exemplarily punished;
The one who owed a life is dead,
The tears one owed have all been shed.
Wrongs suffered have the wrongs done expiated;
The couplings and the Sunderings were fated.
Untimely death sin in some past life shows,
But only luck a blest old age bestows.
The disillusioned to their convents fly,
The still deluded miserably die.
Like birds who, having fed, to the woods repair,
They leave the landscape desolate and bare. (Cao and Gao 144, vol. 1)²³

Judging from the various clues in the above poem, dreams, love and fate all work closely together in creating the structure and plot of the novel, in which the dreadful predictions are disclosed one after another to the characters (and the reader) subconsciously. The above epilogue briefly describes the fates of almost all of the main characters while also serving as a reprimand, through the metaphor of the birds flying away, of all the members of aristocratic families, each of whom in the novel meets a merciless end. Yet, pre-destined to meet these ends, they are unable to undo what they have already done, as revealed in the words "fated" and "past life." Thus, the implication is that everything will ultimately deteriorate and fade away, no matter how hard one works, how senior one's ranking, or how much wealth one acquires. All of this is a manifestation of the

Buddhist ideas that nothing is permanent, that everything must gradually return to the original void (as seen in “[t]hey leave the landscape desolate and bare” above), and that human attachments to worldly riches and cravings are hindrances to achieving final enlightenment.

In an unfortunate twist of fate, Baoyu is portrayed (in both the original version by Cao Xueqin and in the sequel by Gao E) as having really become a monk who disappears into the void, just as he had earlier joked of doing. He has been designated by fate to experience all forms of mortal joy and hope in the prime of his life, followed by perpetual tears and bitterness late in life – all of which is driven by his obsessive love. Because of this obsession for different kinds of love, he is viewed by many as an eccentric misfit in society; and owing to the path that destiny has laid out for him, all of his worldly riches and accomplishments are cast aside for eternity. Moving from a state of eccentricity to Buddhist emptiness, Baoyu ultimately returns to his original state, as expressed in the song:

“On Greensickness Peak
I dwell;
In the Cosmic Void
I roam.
Who will pass over,
Who will go with me,
Who will explore
The supremely ineffable
Vastly mysterious
Wilderness
To which I return!” (Cao and Gao 360, vol. 5)²⁴

To a certain extent, this song resonates with the predictive epilogue discussed above. For final enlightenment to be achieved in the novel, Baoyu must do away with all worldly attachment and yearning. In the final chapter of the sequel (i.e. Chapter 120), an explicit philosophical idea is expressed: “From that moment [when Baochai and Daiyu were separated] the Stone’s worldly karma was complete, its substance had returned to the Great Unity” (Cao and Gao 371, vol. 5)²⁵ – a “strange destiny” [*qiyuan* 奇緣] as opined by Zhen Shiyin (Cao and Gao 370, vol. 5). Here, it would be worthwhile to reflect on the idea of “love” and its dual function as expressed in the novel: on one hand, love tortures mortals, yet at the same time love is destined to always be indulged in obsessively; at the same time, love can entail attachment. It cultivates but at the same time destroys one’s psyche. In short, “love” and “fate” are inseparable in the novel, as they are closely knit together to form the complicated illusory realizations experienced by characters during the course of their lives; that is, most of their fates are constituted by or driven by their emotions, love and passions. However, love is, specifically, fated to be conducive to each character’s eventual destruction in the final chapters of the novel. For this reason, the notions on fate and prognostication effected in *The Story of the Stone* have left an indelible mark on generations of readers, who could scarcely forget Jia Baoyu’s obsession with love, as reflected in the choices he makes in his life, most of which would have been considered unconventional and unacceptable in the feudal society in which he lived.

The crucial ideas of love, fate and prognostication are entangled with and deliberately interrelated with the narrative techniques of *Honglouloumeng*. As the fictional characters are generally kept ignorant of the prognostications embedded throughout the novel, the ways in which they unconsciously set foot on their karmic paths and fall into the “traps” foreshadowed by the author are made intelligible to the reader through such means as hints, poetic association and rhetorical devices. Illusions and dreams also serve as significant narrative devices for outlining the close connection between love and fate. Through them, hints of key karmic incidents in the characters’ past lives appear consecutively, providing an ever-present reminder for the reader about the coming, ultimate enlightenment. Love, in a nutshell, acts as the driving force for the progression of fate, and fate, in turn, adding to the accumulation of karmic rewards and punishments visited upon the characters in the novel according to their different types and degrees of love and passion. The final chapters of the sequel, in which Baoyu has become a monk who abandons any earthly love, is a clear example of literary irony; all of the passion felt by Baoyu for the female characters has perished eternally along with their bodies; all predictions have come true through the magnification of the grand looking glass of Buddhist enlightenment. In short, the conclusion of the novel provides a coda in which mental catharsis releases the protagonist from the series of love attachments and worldly cravings experienced throughout the novel.

Notes

1. For example, Hawkes, in an introduction to *The Story of the Stone*, says “Why did none of the Red Inkstone manuscripts go beyond the novel’s eightieth chapter? It used to be assumed that Cao Xueqin died before he had to write any more [...]” (Hawkes 39). See also Zhou, “Postscript” 849.
2. A comment in the *Jiaxu* 甲戌 version reads, “Who is the core member [central figure] involved [in the novel]? Is it Baoyu? Or the stone? Or the author? Or the readers?” The original comment reads, “甲戌批: 「不知誰是個中人。寶玉即個中人乎? 然則石頭亦個中人乎? 作者亦係個中人乎? 觀者亦個中人乎?」” (Cao, *Guafanlou* 83, author translation). Zhou Ruchang also lists a number of reasons justifying the interpretation that the novel was Cao’s autobiography (Zhou 151–53). In contrast, Feng Qiyong disagrees with the idea that the novel is autobiographical. He opines that Cao merely took reference from the social context in which he was living and drew from historical sources of information in writing the novel (4, author translation).
3. The original reads, “假作真時真亦假, 無為有處有還無” (Cao, *Qianlong* 6, Chapter 5).
4. The original reads, “正胡思之間, 忽聽山後有人作歌曰: 春夢隨雲散, 飛花逐水流。寄言眾兒女, 何必覓閑愁。” (Cao, *Qianlong* 4, Chapter 5).
5. The pen-name of a scholar believed to be in Cao Xueqin’s time, literally “Study of a Rouge Ink Stone” (translated by Hawkes as “Red Inkstone” [Cao and Gao 34, vol. 1]). He/she gave comments beside the lines (*jiapi*) or on top of the text (known as *meipi* 眉批 in Chinese), usually written in vermilion (see Cao, *Qianlong*).
6. The original comment reads, “將通部人一喝。”
7. The original reads, “厚地高天 堪歎古今情不盡/癡男怨女 可憐風月債難償” (Cao, *Qianlong* 6, Chapter 5).
8. The original poem reads, “子系中山狼, 得志便猖狂。金閨花柳質, 一載赴黃梁。” (Cao, *Qianlong* 9, Chapter 5).
9. The original poem reads, “勘破三春景不長, 緇衣頓改昔年粧。可憐綉戶侯門女, 獨卧青燈古佛傍。” (Cao, *Qianlong* 9, Chapter 5).

10. There is an interesting glyphomantic arrangement here: joining together “子系” [literally “you are”] in the original poem becomes “孫” [Sun, the last name of the man Yingchun is married off to] (Ma 140).
11. These ideas are well illustrated in the first part of the “First Song: The Mistaken Marriage” 第二支 終身誤 heard by Baoyu in the Land of Illusion: “Let others all/Commend the marriage rites of gold and jade;/I still recall/The bond of old by stone and flower made” (Cao and Gao 140, vol. 1). The original reads, “都道是金玉良姻, 俺只念木石前盟” (Cao, Qianlong 12, Chapter 5).
12. The original song “第三支 枉凝眉” reads, “一個是閨苑仙葩, 一箇是美玉無瑕。若說沒奇緣, 今生偏又遇著他; 若說有奇緣, 如何心事終虛話? 一箇枉自嗟呀, 一個空勞牽掛。一箇是水中月, 一個是鏡中花。想眼中能有多少淚珠兒, 怎經得秋流到冬盡, 春流到夏” (Cao, Qianlong 12, Chapter 5).
13. The predestined bondage and love between Baoyu and Daiyu can be remarked by Jeannie Jinsheng Yi, “Baoyu is characterized by ‘excess of the mind.’ His love for Daiyu, a love conceived in the immortal world, cannot be, like other love relations, realized as pure love either, devoid of lust. Just like Baoyu, Daiyu is also characterized by ‘mental excess.’” (23–24).
14. Feng comments, “[Daiyu] starts to weep already when she just joins [the Jia family], a signal of her repaying her tear debts” (52, author translation). The original reads, “[黛玉] 纔來, 就滴眼抹淚, 此是還債之始耳。”
15. The original reads, “吾所愛汝者, 乃天下古今第一淫人也。[.....] 如爾則天分中生成一段癡情, 吾輩推之為「意淫」” (Cao, Qianlong 16–17, Chapter 5).
16. The original comment reads, “甲戌批:「按寶玉一生心性, 只不過是體貼二字, 故曰意淫」。”
17. The original reads, “女兒是水作的骨肉, 男人是泥作的骨肉。我見個女兒, 我便清爽, 見了男人, 便覺濁臭逼人” (Cao, Qianlong 9, Chapter 2).
18. The original reads, “這女兒兩個字, 極尊貴、極清淨的, 比那阿彌陀佛、元始天尊的這兩個寶號還更尊榮無對的呢” (Cao, Qianlong 11, Chapter 2).
19. The original reads, “黛玉道:「我死了。」寶玉道:「你死了, 我當和尚去。」” (Cao, Hongloumeng 297).
20. This is further supplemented by Baoyu’s “filthy habit of stealing people’s lipstick and eating it on the sly” [吃人家嘴上的胭脂] (Cao and Gao 392, vol. 1).
21. The original reads, “儂今葬花人笑癡, 他年葬儂知是誰? [.....] 一朝春盡紅顏老, 花落人亡兩不知” (Cao, Qianlong 1, Chapter 28).
22. The “Love Registers” are not recorded anywhere in the circulated copies of the novel nowadays, because [they have] been generated from a comment made by a Qing scholar, Jihusou 畸笏叟 (Liu Zinwu 268, vol. 2).
23. The original reads, “第十四支 收尾 飛鳥各投林: 為官的, 家業凋零; 富貴的, 金銀散盡; 有恩的, 死裏逃生; 無情的, 分明報應; 欠命的, 命已還; 欠淚的, 淚已盡; 冤冤相報豈非輕, 分離聚合皆前定。欲知命短問前生, 老來富貴也真僥倖。看破的, 遁入空門; 癡迷的, 枉送了性命。好一似食盡鳥投林, 落了片白茫茫大地真乾淨!” (Cao, Qianlong 15–16, Chapter 5).
24. The original reads, “我所居兮, 青埂之峰。我所遊兮, 鴻蒙太空。誰與我遊兮, 吾誰與從。渺渺茫茫兮, 歸彼大荒。” (Cao, Guafanlou 2019).
25. The original reads, “[那年..... 釵、黛分離之日,] 從此夙緣一了, 形質歸一” (Cao, Guafanlou 2029).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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