

## Naming the Whirlwind: Cao Xueqin and Heidegger

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In the following essay I should like to take an approach to the *Dream of the Red Chamber* which is experimental for myself and perhaps for other students of Cao Xueqin's novel as well. I wish to explore the possible relations between literature and philosophy through an explication of the *Dream* in terms of the thought of the late German philosopher of existentialism and phenomenology, Martin Heidegger. Heidegger's language provides a critical medium through which Cao Xueqin's concept of fiction might be "translated" for Western readers and, in so far as the *Dream* proves an exception to Heidegger's philosophy, it may point to distinctive features of the *Dream* which can only be understood through Chinese aesthetics and world views.

A brief explanation of the title of this paper is in order. In one of the Wisdom books of the Hebrew Scriptures, the *Book of Job*, we read how Job, a faithful servant of God and a rich and happy man, is put to the test by Satan with the permission of Yahweh. In the first two chapters of the work, Satan causes Job to lose his home and possessions, his seven sons and three daughters, and then to experience sickness and disease:

He struck Job down with malignant ulcers from the sole of his foot to the top of his head. Job took a piece of pot to scrape himself, and went and sat in the ashpit. Then his wife said to him, "Do you now still mean to persist in your blamelessness? Curse God, and die." "That is how foolish women talk," Job replied. "If we take happiness from God's hand, must we not take sorrow too?" And in all this misfortune Job uttered no sinful word.<sup>1</sup>

From the divine point of view, what is in question is whether Job will remain faithful despite his sufferings, but from the human perspective of the authors of Wisdom literature, the central problem is the question of

human suffering itself as well as the meaning of divine justice.

In the main body of the *Book of Job*, the protagonist is beset by three friends who argue on behalf of the traditional law of retribution. Job suffers, they insist, because he must have sinned. Job, however, is innocent, and he clings to his piety. Neither he nor his friends can explicate the mystery of his own suffering. He attempts to reason with God, but it is a hopeless effort. God's justice is beyond the comprehension of man. Job never shrinks from the truth for he knows that in his suffering he is dealing with God. It remains inconceivable to him that God would attack him since he is a just man, and he will not give in to the argument of retribution or the admonishments of his friends. God has shattered the personal relationship, not Job, and his whole case rests on God. He goes to the limits of piety and blasphemy to force God to answer him. Job's question is one concerning the credibility of God.

God accepts the challenge and speaks to Job in the last chapters of the book. His response is in terms of a series of counter questions and ironic demands for answers such as the following:

Then from the heart of the tempest Yahweh gave Job his answer. He said:

Who is this obscuring my designs  
with his empty-headed words?

Brace yourself like a fighter;  
now it is my turn to ask questions and yours to inform  
me.

Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations?  
Tell me, since you are so well-informed!

Who decided the dimensions of it, do you know?  
Or who stretched the measuring line across it?

What supports its pillars at their bases?

Who laid its cornerstone  
when all the stars of the morning were singing with joy, and the  
Songs of God in chorus were chanting praise?<sup>2</sup>

Job withdraws his complaint because he knows his destiny is protected by God. In his failure to name the whirlwind, he is answered in a whirlwind, and he discovers the wisdom of acceptance and the mystery of Being. Typical of the genre of Wisdom literature, the *Book of Job* does not resolve the problem of suffering but offers an approach through an experiential realization of the

limits of human wisdom.

The reader may be struck by a minor parallel between the above passage and the Creation Myth which begins the *Dream*. Yahweh is the maker of the pillars of the world just as Nugua, who also repairs them when they are broken. And of course there is a major contrast—the suffering Job is hardly to be likened in his mid-life crisis to the curious Stone whose career is just underway. *Job* and the *Dream* are entirely different works, but in as much as the latter can be shown to be a revelatory text which struggles with the problem of mutability and attempts to name the unnameable, I wish to suggest the analogy. Both works are concerned with laws of retribution and moral causality (*yin-guo* 因果), and the many words of their protagonists regarding the mystery of suffering and mutability are reduced to silence in the end. The *Dream* is not a trial of faith, like *Job*, but it does test desire and, above all, the attachment to things that change. The divine sphere is far more limited and finite as we see in the Creation Myth. The pillars of heaven are broken, and there is a hole in the firmament. However, despite the omnipotence and perfection in *Job*, Yahweh's answer, "be still," does not explain divine justice. It simply points a direction. I want to take up this direction by considering the *Dream* as a revelatory book which provides an answer to *Job* in the spirit of Wisdom literature, an answer we may begin to understand through the language of Heidegger.

Our starting point is the prevailing mood with which the *Dream* begins. "Attunement" or "mood" (*Befindlichkeit*) in Heidegger is the given sense of the way one is in the world, a kind of psychic aura.<sup>3</sup> In the Creation Myth, the prevailing mood is one of fundamental dis-ease and restlessness. Heaven is in need of repair, the Stone itself is not used, and it is filled with longing for the Red Dust. This desire and dis-ease are juxtaposed to a determinism which is the dominant force in the heavenly realm. The Immortals constantly speak of fated lovers and predestination. In the main body of the novel, the prevailing mood which underlies all others is anxiety in the face of mutability and change. In the case of Bao-yu, there is a childish fear of the kinds of changes that come in the guise of the marriages of the Garden maidens, but more profoundly he has a dread of nothing in particular, a deeply felt anxiety which ripens as he discovers he is not at home in the world (*nicht zu Hause*).<sup>4</sup> Even in the Creation Myth there is a type of anxiety, for the Stone is estranged from its surroundings and bored by them.

As a being-in-the-world (*Dasein*) subject to moods of dis-ease, desire,

and anxiety, Bao-yu may be considered in terms of other characteristics of human existence, according to Heidegger, such as "facticity" (*Faktizität*) and "fallenness" (*Verfallenheit*). Facticity has to do with the pre-determined context in which Bao-yu is thrown and over which he has no control, as well as his own given character and individuality.<sup>5</sup> He is born into a noble family which is on the decline (2:17),<sup>6</sup> one in which male children are said to die young or turn out badly (2:18). More significantly, he belongs to a world in which everyone acknowledges the working of fate, himself included. Wealth and poverty, life and death are determined, as he tells Bao-chai (45:481). Though his relation to her as to Dai-yu is fated (28:299), he avoids recognizing what others know, that according to the destiny of "jade and gold" he and she are to be married (8:34). Bao-yu and Dai-yu are "soul mates" (知己) but predestination means they are fated to be enemies. At the same time, part of the givenness of this determined world is that in the language of both narrator and characters, everything that happens in it is presented in terms of the language of change (偶, 奇遇, 不料, 可巧). The fact that Jia Rui, the hapless lover of Wang Xi-feng, is hit squarely on the head with a bucket of human excrement while awaiting his beloved is considered simply "amazing" (可巧) when of course the event is planned (12:122). Facticity also incorporates the circular movement of complementary opposites in Bao-yu's world, the fluid movement between dream and reality, love and hate, real and unreal, true and false. The more he and Tai-yu love one another, the more they argue (5:45). Qin Ko-qing leads him to her bedroom for an afternoon nap and also leads him in a dream experience of romantic love which ensues (5:47).

The facticity as seen in Bao-yu's inherent individuality is well celebrated—his feminine leanings, his fondness for rouge and powder (2:19; 19:195), his antipathy toward study, his foolishness. He is a boy fond of talking to animals, birds, and the stars (35:371). What is perhaps less appreciated is that Bao-yu's idiosyncratic individuality in the context of his "thrownness" (*Geworfenheit*)—his high rank—is destructive as well as endearing. Being-in-the-world implies being-with-others (*Mitsein*).<sup>7</sup> But while the young ladies of the Garden poetry club find Bao-yu's presence exhilarating, it can be inauthentic as well—witness his domination and exploitation of maid servants. He kicks Xi-ren when he is locked out of Wang Xi-feng's apartments during a rain storm, causing her to vomit blood (30:322). He is the source of Jin-chuan-er's dismissal and her eventual suicide. Such negative

behavior is rarely intended, but its cause is not simply chance or accident. Part of Bao-yu's facticity is the position of dominance he holds. As a being-in-the-world, he lives and plays in it, but there is also a counter tendency within him to turn away from the world (his refusal to study and work) and destroy it.<sup>8</sup>

Another side of the coin of facticity is Bao-yu's "fallenness" (*Verfallenheit*), which is in fact a flight from facticity.<sup>9</sup> In Heidegger "falling" is an inevitable inclination of the human person to lose sight of the truth of one's being. Existence itself is a departure from permanence, a declination from primary Being which may end in non-being. This existential portrait of being-in-the-world bears a striking resemblance to Bao-yu. From the Immortal's viewpoint in the Creation Myth, the transformation of the heavenly Stone into the form of Bao-yu is a declination from a primary state of *wu* (無 "absence" or "non-being") into a lesser state of *you* (有 "presence" or "becoming"), and the return of the Stone to its true home at the end of the novel is a return to nothingness or emptiness (*kong* 空). Elsewhere in the *Dream* Bao-yu is viewed as one who has fallen and become part of the illusory world (落草 25:260). In falling away from his own Stone being, Bao-yu is subject to a tragic distortion of reality which he experiences as an alienated adolescent. In the ideal Garden world of endless little pleasures and favored treatment, he has a childish vision of himself as an essential being for-the-sake-of-which everything revolves. His facticity conflicts with his fallenness, the insistent tasks his father presents contrast to his absorption in a world of complex personal feminine relationships, poetry and otherworldly philosophy. Uprooted from the mythic world, he has temporarily lost his power to be his authentic self, the Stone. He is constantly tempted to surrender to and be absorbed in a world in which he really is not at home, to enjoy a false contentment and to flee from himself.

One sign of Bao-yu's falling is his relation to the "precious jade" (*baoyu* 寶玉), his birthstone, which he wears around his neck. As a Stone in the mythic world he is a being which has ontological prior unity. In the Red Dust, we see the life of an adolescent caught by a false metaphysics. He experiences a duality of subject and object, a contrast between self and other, and a conflict between facticity and fallenness. As an example of his falling, we find him interpreting his self on the model of a non-human object,<sup>10</sup> the jade amulet, which is as inadequate a paradigm for human behavior in the Red Dust as is humanness for the Stone in the heavenly realm. The

“precious jade” is a sign of predestination and as such belongs to the world of facticity. Initially, Bao-yu unabashedly accepts the jade which he bears in his mouth on the day of his birth (2:18), after all, as his Grandmother and others are fond of saying, it is the “root of his life” or “life force” (命根). In fact, towards the end of the novel Bao-yu’s mother points out that the jade piece is not just a sign of a love destiny, but she interprets it as a universal symbol of life (116:1242).<sup>11</sup> When Bao-yu falls mysteriously ill through the magic machinations of Zhao Yi-niang, the jealous mother of Jia Huan, a scabby headed Buddhist monk and a lame Taoist recover his health for him by restoring the jade’s miraculous powers which have been corrupted by contact with the sound and color of the world (25:261). The identification of self and stone is part of the givenness of his life.

On the other hand, an aspect of Bao-yu’s fallenness is his absorption with Dai-yu and his corresponding resistance to the stone, a symbol of his pre-determined destiny with Bao-chai to which Dai-yu herself alludes (29:309). Indeed, the jade glows with a red color at the approach of his marriage (85:922). When Bao-yu discovers upon first meeting Dai-yu that she does not have a jade amulet such as his, he tries to throw it away (3:30—31). Later his jade piece becomes a source of conflict between himself and Dai-yu, and he acknowledges that it is not the first time (30:314). He smashes the amulet as a barrier to his love, but as Dai-yu remarks pointedly, it is but a “dumb” thing (啞吧) and he ought to attack her instead, since it is she he really hates (29:310).

Using Heidegger’s conceptualization of human existence, we can see that Dai-yu’s observations are full of insight. Bao-yu should not view his self in terms of a non-human object. Yet, from the point of view of the pre-determined context of his life, his facticity, he has to. This in turn conflicts with his falling, the fact that he has “fallen” in love with Dai-yu. At the deepest level of reality, the metaphysical (the realm and destiny of the Stone), she is his “enemy.” Indeed, when the “precious jade” appears to be truly lost and Bao-yu is reduced to idiocy (94:1017), Dai-yu herself becomes happy (95:1025) with the hope that the destiny of “gold and jade” may be thwarted. She herself is attuned to the prevailing mood of anxiety and insecurity as she is caught by her own falling (her love for Bao-yu) and her resistance to her thrownness.

The relation between self and “precious jade” is most graphically represented in the famous dream of Dai-yu in which she tells Bao-yu she

is to be sent away to be married. He cuts out his heart and hands it to her as a proof of his love and fidelity (82:891-893). In the next chapter he has a nightmare in which he hears a ripping sound, that is, he experiences a psychic sharing of Dai-yu's dream (83:899). In the *Dream*, dreams are of course a manifestation of a deeper reality. Bao-yu and Dai-yu cannot communicate when awake—Dai-yu cannot help touching Bao-yu in the dream whereas they are alienated from one another when conscious. But the true meaning of such dreams is revealed after the death of Dai-yu. In chapter 98 Bao-yu goes to the underworld to the realm of death to seek Dai-yu, but he cannot find her. She belongs to the mythic order. The Lord of the underworld throws a stone at Bao-yu which lodges in his empty chest cavity (98:1060). As an analogue of the "precious jade," the stone is identified with Bao-yu's self. The emptiness of his being cannot be filled with the being of Dai-yu nor with his worldly self. This episode is a realization of the ideal of purity in the novel. Like the stone lions which affront the Jia compound and are said to be the only pure things in the family (66:741), Bao-yu is not "clean" (*ganjing* 乾淨).

In Bao-yu's recognition of facticity and fallenness, there is an awareness of the truth of his being, but he is not yet free, for he is still dependent on a relationship to the non-human object, the Stone. He has not yet arrived at what Heidegger calls "transparency," an awareness of his thrownness into death.<sup>12</sup> As a human being, he cannot avoid falling, but his authenticity is dependent on his preventing a blind absorption in the world. He has to see himself as mediating between an ontic (empirical) and ontological understanding of reality. I believe this understanding is approached in chapter 117 when Bao-yu tries to give back his jade amulet after it has been returned to him by an otherworldly monk (117:1246-47). Xi-ren and his mother oppose him, thinking he has gone crazy. Bao-yu's beginning enlightenment is his realization that worldliness means giving symbols too much significance. His mother and favorite maid servant value the jade more than his person, he claims. The jade is inhuman. He "mediates" by playing a game with the monk about whether to make a payment for his returned jade, or whether to return the jade itself. His playful mediation between a this worldly and an other worldly orientation is an indication of transparency just as it is a sign of his indifference to his jade. In this awareness he becomes free from his mechanical following of an established relationship with the jade, and he transcends both facticity and fallenness. However, as I shall demonstrate

later, we cannot speak of this transcendence as Bao-yu's own achievement.

We have noted the prevailing mood of disquiet and restlessness in the presence of ceaseless change, and the being-in-the-world of Bao-yu, an adolescent with a limited vision who is subject to a preordained givenness in life and absorbed in his fallenness. I should like now to consider the *Dream* in the Heideggerian sense of a book of revelation.

In his approach to an art work Heidegger avoids the term "aesthetics" because the word implies a subject-object relation with an art-object in terms of sense apprehension or experience. Heidegger's conception is that the work of art is a functional instrument which points to more than functionality, that is, it has a transcendent quality which discloses Being, truth, and the relation between Being and beings. Beauty, rather than being something made, is the *appearing* of truth, the *disclosure* of Being. The reader by the act of reading may stand within the text and contribute to the preservation of its beauty, and enter its original truth. In this primordial sense of truth, truth is not a matter of judgment or assertion, nor a correspondence between the mind and its object, but rather one of discovery. Being is discovered and is brought out of concealment into disclosure. Truth is a relation between the discoverer, the being-in-the-world (*Dasein*) and that which is discovered. The way in which this truthful disclosure of Being is achieved, according to Heidegger, is through the dialectic of opposites, the dialectic of truth and un-truth.<sup>13</sup>

This dialectical pattern of discovery which also incorporates the obscuring of truth seems to me to be an authentic portrait of Bao-yu's ontology in the *Dream*, but it is one I shall have to modify towards the end of this paper. Bao-yu constitutes and is constituted by truth and un-truth at one and the same time. His truthful discovery comes about through a dialectic with un-truth, and to the extent that the reader shares this discovery, the *Dream* is revelatory to him or her as well. The dialectical pattern is pervasive in the *Dream*, and all characters, major and minor, participate in it along with Bao-yu. One recalls the aid of Jia Yu-cun who comes searching for Zhen Shi-yin in chapter 2 and says he does not know *zhen* from *jia* ("true" from "false"), he simply is obeying Jia's orders to find Zhen (2:14). In this slight but revealing play on *zhen* and *jia*, *Zhen* and *Jia*, we have the pattern of the novel: the true will be reached through the false, *zhen* through *jia*, Mr. Zhen through Mr. Jia. The magic two sided mirror in which Jia Rui sees the figure of his lust on the "false" side (Wang Xi-feng) and his skeleton on

the "true" side (Death) is a notable case in point of the Real-Unreal dialectical movement towards truth (12:123). Dai-yu herself falls victim to this pattern of reaching the true through the false when she takes false rumours of Bao-yu's marriage to be true and falls deathly ill as a consequence (89:967), then determines to live when she wrongly interprets the false rumors to mean she is the prospective bride (90:973). Again, like Bao-yu and in accordance with the pattern of the dialectic, her truth is constituted of truth and un-truth.

While the dialectic reveals truth, Cao Xueqin discloses the beauty of language and literature by celebrating their diversity. Bao-yu and Dai-yu are among his experts. They are fond of engaging in games of Chan (Zen) dialectics, a private language Bao-yu tells Xi-jen, which no one else can comprehend (91:989; 92:990), and he himself creates animal fables to entertain Dai-yu (19:198) or gives allegorical interpretations of *Zhuang zi* to attack those girl cousins and servant maidens who make him mad (21:211-212).

Besides Bao-yu's private view that art speaks a language that is both didactic and esoteric, we find in the *Dream* a variety of viewpoints about the relationship between literature and life. Again this rich account suggests the attempt of literature to point beyond itself. When Bao-yu and Dai-yu are introduced to the *Romance of the Western Chamber* (*Xi xiang ji*), they find themselves consciously and unconsciously reciting its lines and playing the roles of its romantic hero and heroine. Dai-yu is furious that Bao-yu allegorizes literature—it is *their* story, he claims, but she herself becomes swept away by its imaginative power. Even the garden scene in which Bao-yu reads the drama reflects scenes in the play (23:234). Life and nature imitate literature and this world and the fictive world are identical. Bao-yu's elegy to Qing-wen, written partly in boyish imitation of Qu Yuan's *Li sao*, is another instance of life imitating literature. In his attempt to find fresh and original language, he lays down a whole juvenile theory of literature. What is interesting for our purpose is that the dirge, written at a moment of great personal tragedy, is an instance where a subject both evokes and eludes a writer, and gives literature that dimension of otherness about which Heidegger speaks. The young Bao-yu is trying to bring beauty out of concealment into disclosure.

This striking idea that nature and human life imitate literature and that in imitation they become identified may be compared with other passages in

which the relationship is altogether different. Xi-chun's painting of the Garden is completed as the Garden falls into ruins (81:894). For the former members of the Garden world, nature becomes a vivid contrast to art, rather than its imitation. At other times, nature transcends art. When Bao-yu accompanies his father on a tour of the Garden we are given numerous accounts and poems in celebration of its beauty, but the narrator comments that the Garden really is indescribable. He can only express his gratitude that thanks to the Stone's limitations, it had to leave the mythic world and be led to this Garden so that it might be seen (17-18: 176). Once again we have literature as a functional instrument which serves to point beyond itself. In the series of Garden poems in celebration of ineffability, literature takes on a transcendent quality of its own.

What the above examples reveal is Cao Xueqin's attempt to make the ineffable immediately accessible through all the mediations of language and literature he knows. What is directly before us always seems to elude our grasp, whether it be the emotions of young lovers, the presence of death, or the beauty of cultivated nature. By means of private language, childish allegories, and the voices of imitation and wonder, the author discloses the being of literature and uncovers literary truth. Having gained some perspective on the ways in which literature functions in the *Dream*, let us now give attention to one aspect of its style, that is, the way in which the disclosure of artistic truth unfolds.

One of the more attractive and revelatory features of the *Dream* when considered as a functional instrument with a transcendent dimension is Cao Xueqin's habit of undercutting or overlooking what Heidegger calls the "Ontological Difference," that is, the difference between being and Being.<sup>14</sup> Here it is important to point out that Heidegger's Being is not transcendent but present in time and space, that is, it belongs to the evolutionary world of becoming. "Being," says Heidegger, "is not God nor a world-ground. For being is further than any being, be it a rock or an animal, a work of art or a machine, an angel or God. Being is the nearest. Yet the near is what is farthest for man."<sup>15</sup> According to the linguist Johannes Lohmann, the Chinese language itself is ontologically indifferent, and he cites as evidence binoms (天地 "heaven-earth"; 白馬 "whiteness-horseness") to show that in Chinese the distinction between concept and object is blurred. In the Chinese binom we have an expression of ontological indifference and the unmediated immediacy of knowledge itself, according to Lohmann.<sup>16</sup>

Whether or not Lohmann is correct in making a somewhat romantic point about the Chinese language, I should like to modify and apply his concept of ontological *indifference* by pointing out that the immediacy of relationship between being and Being in the *Dream* is readily recognized and reveals a particularly fluid sense of truth which is also aesthetically compelling.

In my view, ontological indifference in the *Dream* is represented in the great ease with which the text moves between worlds and opposites. Examples are multiple: Qin Ke-qing's bedroom which becomes the fairy world of romance for Bao-yu (chapter 5); the appearance in dreams of deceased or otherworldly figures, for instance Qin Ke-qing's announcement of her death to Wang Xi-feng (12:126), or the direct intervention of the spirit world in every day mundane reality, such as the appearance of the magic mirror which contributes to Jia Rui's death through sexual excess (12:123), the arrival of otherworldly spirits at the death of Qin Zhong (16:123), or the miraculous healing of Wang Xi-feng and Bao-yu who have been afflicted by the black magic of Jia Huan's jealous mother (25:259). Everyone in the novel of course presupposes that Bao-yu's jade amulet and Bao-chai's gold piece are of heavenly origins—the narrator himself exclaims over this fact (8:83). In terms of characterization, only Bao-yu has a living opposite in the figure of Zhen Bao-yu with whom he can be compared, but many characters in the *Dream* are in the process of becoming their opposites in some sense in the course of the novel, after the initial pattern set in chapter 1 by Zhen Shi-yin and Jia Yu-cun. Perhaps the most striking example of ontological indifference in regards to character is Miao-yu, the Buddhist nun. She is an other-worldly ascetic with highly cultivated worldly tastes whose passionate love for Bao-yu is expressed in a vision of seduction while she is in the midst of zen meditation (87:949). Her religious and romantic beings are one.

Language itself is used in the novel in the spirit of ontological indifference. For example, in chapter 5 the same image of rain depicts emotions of love and terror in Bao-yu's dream vision of sexual union and his nightmare of death in which his sweat pours out like rain (5:57). But to return to our theme of literature, perhaps the most interesting lack of distinction between modes occurs in the identification of art and life, not simply by means of imitation as in the example of Bao-yu and Dai-yu playing roles from the *Romance of the Western Chamber*, but through ontological indifference. A delightful example is found in one of the visits of Liu Lao-lao, the country

bumpkin, to see the Matriarch of the Jia clan. She becomes drunk and mistakes a painting for a real woman with whom she talks, and she takes her own image in a mirror for an old woman she believes she knows from her home village (41:440). The being of image and person, and of self and other, are the same.

The same pattern of the mirroring of art and life is found when Bao-yu recalls a painting of a beauty (美人) he has seen and goes off to view it—he thinks the lady in the painting must be lonely. In the course of his search he imagines the painting has come to life, for he discovers his servant Ming-yan making love with a lovely maiden (19:195). Bao-yu's subsequent surreptitious visit outside the Jia family compound to see Xi-ren who is staying with her family, and his clandestine meeting with Dai-yu whom he awakens from an afternoon nap, are all episodes bathed in the initial atmosphere of ontological indifference set by the painting incident. Bao-yu's refusal to make a distinction between master and maid, male and female, is characteristic of him, but in this chapter it also results from his encounter with a painting which comes to life.

Perhaps the most unusual example of ontological indifference in the *Dream* occurs among the troop of actresses who perform plays for the Jia family ladies. The episode is a very minor one, but is illustrative of the sliding relation between opposite sexes and roles in the novel. Bao-yu finds an actress named Ou-guan burning paper money as a sacrifice to her dead "wife." It seems that the pair, both women, performed the parts of husband and wife in a play and fell in love. In real life, they became lovers and continued to live as husband and wife. When Ou-guan's "wife" dies, Ou-guan remarries. Now however, she takes the female role because as she explains herself to Bao-yu, a husband may remarry while a wife may not, and a dead wife would not want her husband to be lonely (58:647). So much interplay of the true and the false! Bao-yu finds the story *both* tragic and comic—again we note the absence of difference. He is very attracted to the idea of the loss of sexual identity, because to him sexual distinction spells separation. Only through literature does the imagination reconcile all opposites and envision life as a whole. The entire episode is an exquisite example of ontological indifference.

Before ending this discussion of ontological indifference, it may be useful to forestall the objections of the realistic critic by recalling the narrator's commentary on Bao-yu's precious jade:

I'd like to tell you what is on the Stone, dear reader, but it is so small and hard to see. Therefore I'll enlarge the original so you can inspect it even by lantern light and when you are drunk.

He goes on to remark that the reader ought not to have in mind reservations of the following sort:

How big is a baby's mouth that it could hold such a large and awkward thing? (8:83-84)

The realistic critic cannot fathom the transference of modes, the absence of difference between opposites, the fluid relation between worlds and realities, the mirroring of art and life, and the identification of being and Being. As a work of imaginative grace, the *Dream* transforms the dialectic of opposites, and the reader may stand in its transcendence through the practice of ontological indifference.

I suggest that we have thus far perceived one answer to *Job*. The language of ontological indifference in the *Dream* implies that mutability and determinism (which are admittedly omnipresent) are relative terms once we discover the unity of being and Being which the novel reveals. I should like now to present one final response to *Job* offered by the *Dream* by introducing two more concepts from Heidegger, namely, event and clearing.

*Ereignis* or "appropriating event" is as difficult to translate, says Heidegger, as the Greek *logos* or the Chinese *tao*.<sup>17</sup> It is "the one and only, unique and simple subject matter of thought, inaccessible in its simplicity, approachable only through a manifold thought, and *ipso facto* through a manifold language."<sup>18</sup> Event is the "primal experience" upon which our experiences are grounded," and which "has always passed irrevocably away by the time our attention is directed to it."<sup>19</sup> The inaugural event of Being is where meaning first takes hold in experience. It is the immediate present which is never accessible immediately but which evokes our thought because it withdraws from us.<sup>20</sup> As Heidegger says, "What withdraws from us thereby draws us along."<sup>21</sup>

This mysterious withdrawing of event is the origin of "clearing" or "lighting" (*Lichtung*). Clearing takes place against a backdrop of obfuscation and is found in the interplay of the presenting or absencing of Being, in other words, the presence or withdrawal of event. "Clearing . . . is that

within which beings can present themselves, the free and open space which grants us access to the beings which we are not and to the beings which we are, the leeway and playing field of the world."<sup>22</sup> For the human subject, clearing is "an enabling element" which allows the removal of our own self-concealing and permits us to see ourselves as we are.<sup>23</sup> As a creative writer, Cao Xueqin uses words in his functional instrument, his text, to intimate the ineffable. In observing a writing style "which orients itself to the silent event," we discover a hermeneutical language in which we participate by "listening for the unsaid to be said in what has already been said."<sup>24</sup> The appropriating event comes about "through the saying of language." Language as the "clearing" and "illuminating open space" gives the possibility of literary truth.<sup>25</sup>

In the *Dream*, there is a pattern of epiphany and concealment which draws Bao-yu and the reader forward within the rhythm of the dialectic I described earlier. But as I mentioned before, our picture of Bao-yu's ontology needs modification. What is in question in my mind is whether these primal experiences of clearing take hold of the protagonist's life, that is, are they reconstructed and elaborated so as to account for his enlightenment? Within the limits of this paper, I do not have the space to present an exhaustive analysis of possibilities, but allow me to offer for your consideration the following tentative conclusions I have reached after tracing the evolution of Bao-yu's life. (The Appendix to this paper points to the evidence for these conclusions. The reader may find suggestive the enumeration there of appropriating event and clearing).

Generally speaking, there are a series of "clearings" throughout the novel in which, as it were, Bao-yu walks into an open space and an insight is revealed. One thinks of his dream visions of romantic love, the impact of the many deaths and suicides of girl cousins and maid servants, and the gradual destruction of the Garden paradise. But I cannot say that Bao-yu *evolves* from inauthentic to authentic being, from a denial of facticity and fallenness to an affirmation of his thrownness so that we can agree he achieves transparency on his own. This is partially because of the twin threads of predestination and complementary opposites which are woven into the texture of the novel from the inception of the Creation Myth, and which are neatly knotted in the ending. But as I have shown in *Masks of Fiction*, Cao Xueqin mocks an understanding of the novel which is dependent on divine machinations or the manipulations of scabby headed monks and lame footed

Taoists.

Enlightenment in the *Dream* is more of a *discovery*, a gift perhaps, than something strictly fated or earned. It *happens* to Bao-yu spontaneously following many realizations about mutability and suffering, but it is not *caused* by these realizations. Often the withdrawal of being from the playing field of the world produces an obfuscation rather than clarity. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that the exquisitely sensitive Bao-yu registers no response when his mother admits she loves his dead elder brother more than him, and wishes he had died in his brother's place—an admission that is revealed to Bao-yu after his father viciously beats him (33:346–349). The second extended loss of Bao-yu's jade amulet, another withdrawal of being, does not remove his own self-concealing (94:1017), but simply renders him idiotic as on the first occasion. When Bao-yu and Dai-yu sit staring crazily at one another not long before the latter's death, it is perhaps a moment of epiphany for the reader, but the lovers' withdrawal of their beings does not evoke clarity for them (96:1041). They do not see themselves as they are.

As we observe Bao-yu as he draws up, we do not find a concomitant linear growth in character. Of course he does not follow a developmental model which we might expect in a traditional Western protagonist. Indeed Bao-yu may be an interesting exception in several respects to Heidegger's basic paradigm. In many ways he is the same character at the end of the *Dream* that he was at the beginning, with the addition of a profound cumulative experience of change and mutability. In the several clichés about his relations with women towards the end of the novel, the sexual competition of Bao-chai, Xi-ren, and Wu-er for his affections (109:1168–1169), and various sentimentalisms, I suspect the heavy hand of redactors, and I find the presentation of his enlightenment mechanical and disappointing (chapter 116). My main point is that there is no reconstruction of character from the glimpses and with-drawals of Being that he experiences. He remains opaque in the end, for Being always seems to elude his grasp, even as it draws him along.

As we have seen, Bao-yu is a being-in-the-world who suffers a world-lessness and an inauthentic life because of a limited vision. He is dominated by a mood of dis-ease and he is not at home. His adolescent masquerade is gradually removed through the discovery of what Heidegger calls "facticity" and "fallenness," the pre-determined context of existence and the awareness that to exist is to depart from permanence, and perhaps to end in non-being.

Bao-yu realizes some degree of "transparency" or the awareness of his own falling when he interprets himself on the model of a non-human object, the stone, but it remains questionable whether he consciously enters upon a way to authentic existence and a renewed vision of his fate. However, there is a kind of radical regression in this dialectic between clearing and self-concealing which may be interpreted as a fuller answer to *Job*. Bao-yu's will-lessness and nonrepresentational thinking at the moment when he is most the fool are a form of "releasement" (*Gelassenheit*) or "letting be," rather than of intellectual domination over mutability and suffering. It is a patient waiting which is a release into openness and the acceptance of the coming forth of truth.<sup>26</sup> The new pervasive mood after self-reduction is receptivity. Bao-yu is no longer the being-for-the-sake-of-which, the center, but an open and receptive contemplative spirit.

We have perceived the *Dream* as a functional instrument which points to transcendence through dialectics, the mirroring of art, and ontological indifference. The language of this work of fiction is the source of event and clearing which draws protagonist and reader towards silence. The problem of mutability is not solved any more than it is in other Wisdom literature, but in the free and open space of world literature, the *Dream of the Red Chamber* is a powerful naming of the whirlwind.

#### Notes

1. *The Book of Job* 2: 8-10. Quotation from *The Jerusalem Bible*, ed. Alexander Jones (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1966). In presenting this paper, I should like to offer my thanks to Professor William Toupounce of Tamkang University who first introduced me to Heidegger.
2. *Job* 38: 1-7. *ibid.*
3. See John Macquarrie, *An Existential Theology: A Comparison of Heidegger and Bultmann* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1955), pp. 67-68; Edward G. Ballard, "Heidegger's View and Evaluation of Nature and Natural Science," in *Heidegger and The Path of Thinking*, ed. John Sallis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1970), p. 45.
4. Macquarrie, *ibid.*, p. 70.
5. Ballard, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
6. Numbers in parentheses refer to chapter and page, respectively. The edition of

*Hong lou meng* I am citing is *Hong lou meng bashihui jiaoben* 紅樓夢八十回校本, ed. Yu Pingbo (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1958).

7. Macquarrie, *op. cit.*, p. 89.
8. For the destructive aspect of existence in Heidegger, see Ballard, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
9. Macquarrie, *op. cit.*, pp. 101–102; Ballard, *ibid.*, pp. 54–55.
10. Ballard, *ibid.*, p. 58.
11. References to passages in the last 40 chapter of *Hong lou meng* are to the Xingjiu shijie shuju 120 chapter edition.
12. Ballard, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
13. This summary is from C. D. Keyes, "Truth as Art: An Interpretation of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (Sec. 44) and *Das Ursprung Des Kunstwerkes*," in *Heidegger and the Path of Thinking*, *op. cit.*, pp. 66–75.
14. Heidegger, *The Essence of Reasons*, trans. Terrence Malick. Bilingual edition (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1969, pp. 15–29.
15. Theodore Kisiel quoting Heidegger in his article, "The Language of the Event: The Event of Language," in *Heidegger and The Path of Thinking*, *op. cit.*, p. 97.
16. Johannes Lohmann, "M. Heidegger's 'Ontological Difference' and Language," in *On Heidegger and Language*, ed. Joseph J. Kockelmans, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), pp. 359–60.
17. Kisiel quoting Heidegger, *op. cit.*, p. 100.
18. William J. Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), p. xxiii.
19. G. Van Der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1963), vol II, p. 672.
20. Kisiel, *op. cit.*, p. 94.
21. John Sallis quoting Heidegger, *Heidegger and The Path of Thinking*, "Introduction," *op. cit.*, p. 7.
22. Kisiel, *op. cit.*, pp. 90–91.
23. For the above general description of *Lichtung*, see Kisiel, *ibid.*, pp. 90–92.
25. Joseph J. Kockelmans, "Language, Meaning, and Existence," in *On Heidegger and Language*, *op. cit.*, pp. 27 & 29.
26. Ballard, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

### Appendix: Appropriating Event and Clearing

Bao-yu experiences a number of potential illuminations in a dream vision of romantic love and a subsequent nightmare, but these events remain obscure to him. He does not understand the warning of the Beware Illusion Fairy against love (5:47), and once he does experience it, his appetite is

awakened (5:47-57). This event does not become a clearing until the end of the novel.

When he visits Xi-ren in her family home, she threatens to leave his service unless he reforms (19:194). He responds by saying he will become mist and ashes blown about by the wind. Then his cousins and serving maids will no longer be able to care about him, nor will he care about them. He will go where he pleases, and they may do likewise. The episode is a clearing in the sense that it prefigures Bao-yu's end, but for Bao-yu at this point his speech is simply a child's tactic to win back Xi-ren's loyalty. The meaning of what he says does not penetrate his consciousness. Later on, his reading of philosophical texts such as the *Zhuang zi* again mirrors his insecurity—this time because he is faced with what he considers crippling distinctions and useless male activities (21:211 - 12; 22:221). He does have an inkling that he is not of this world—he is a single strand with no place to tie to—and he writes a poem about the unreality of everything, after which he feels he is “enlightened.” Bao-ch'ai makes great fun of his supposed illumination, for he cannot even figure out riddles about *bao* and *yu*, that is, his own name (22:222). When he overhears Dai-yu's “Flower Burial Song,” he does have a realization that all earthly and feminine beauty will one day disappear, but his only reflection about this truth is to ask himself how he can bear to remain behind (28:285). Dai-yu's charge that he is “cruel hearted and short lived” (狠心短命) has an impact only because the protagonists believe in fate. One must not utter evil thoughts or curses because they will have an effect. Bao-yu does not know that he *is* cruel or that his life span *will* be brief.

When Bao-yu is severely beaten by his father, Jia Zheng, for his alleged “rape” of Jin-chuan-er and her subsequent suicide, the real feelings of his parents are revealed. To Jia Zheng, his son is a wicked child, a retribution for some evil in a past life (孽障), while Madame Wang in her moment of anguish expresses the wish that Bao-yu had died earlier in place of Bao-zhu, her favorite first born son who is dead (33:346-49). The whole episode is cast in terms of the ideal of purity (乾淨) to which Bao-yu will gradually be drawn. Jia Zheng wants his home to be “clean,” the Matriarch orders Jia Zheng to kill her instead of Bao-yu so everything will be “clean,” then changes her tactic and says she will abandon Jia Zheng to his duty in order that he will feel “clean.” Bao-yu ignores his parents' disapproval of him. His sole reaction comes immediately afterwards when he witnesses the pity Xi-

ren and Bao-chai have for his wounded body, and he concludes that they would have much greater affection for him if he should die (34:351). While Bao-yu is unenlightened about the real meaning of becoming "clean," his final disappearance into purity and the restoration of the family's earthly blessedness is prefigured here. At this point, he has not yet won truth through un-truth.

One day Bao-chai overhears him talking in his sleep. In his dream he denies the destiny of "gold and jade" (his future marriage with Bao-chai) and insists instead on the union of "wood and stone", that is, the union of Dai-yu and himself (36:778). He knows the future but refuses to affirm it. Yet, there is a change in his sensibility which comes about when he is rebuffed by an actress, Li-guan, who suffers an unrequited love for another. He agrees with his father that he is inexperienced, he had not realized that all human love is full of sorrow, and he admits that he would not be happy to die just to have Xi-ren cry over him (36:381). His limited experience is further brought home to him with the visit of some distant women relatives. He had not known the world was so full of great beauties outside his immediate family, and he compares himself to the frog in the well in the *Zhuang zi* which has a limited vision of the sky (49:522).

One of Bao-yu's more significant experiences of event occurs in his dream vision of his double, Zhen Bao-yu. In the dream he is drawn to his identical twin (56:619-21), but he will be deeply disappointed when he meets the "real" Bao-yu in real life. What is planted in his mind at this point is a question—is there really another like me? It is an experience of being which withdraws from him and draws him on.

The lessons of mutability are finally brought home to Bao-yu following a series of tragic events—the suicides of the Yu sisters, Er-jie and San-jie, the disappearance of his good friend Liu Xiang-lian, the death of Qing-wen, the dismissal of the female actresses, and the exit of Bao-chai and her mother from the Garden. When a tree dies in the Garden Bao-yu interprets the phenomenon to Xi-ren as a sign of total decline (77:877). He theorizes that what happens in nature parallels human life. Or conversely, when he notes that the scent and greenery of the Garden remain after Bao-chai leaves, the contrast between nature and man fills him with grief (78:891). There is an illumination in the dream of Dai-yu in which she sees Bao-yu cut out his heart (82:890-893), but the parallel whereby he hears a mysterious tearing sound is not clear to him (83:899). At any rate, we see a change in their rela-

tion. He cannot understand her playing of the *qin* (89:968)—their difference over music reveals that these former “soul mates” (知己) are becoming separated. They do still enjoy a game of Chan (Zen) dialectics, however, but it is essentially meaningless (91:989).

Bao-yu's loss of his jade amulet makes him idiotic, a motif which repeats itself in the novel, but he himself has no greater awareness (94:1017). Indeed, the archetypal symbol of fool becomes dominant for both Bao-yu and Dai-yu when they sit staring crazily at one another (96:1041). The lovers are returning to the mythic world and to the state of symbols. In these moments of epiphany they seem to have less clarity about themselves. When Bao-yu removes the veil from his bride and finds she is not Dai-yu but Bao-chai, he thinks he is dreaming (97:1055). Again, on one level he is becoming less clear, less in touch with reality, as the novel progresses. A shift occurs when in both a dream visit to the underworld and a straight forward talk with Bao-chai he learns the truth of Dai-yu's death (98:1059–61). The shock seems to effect a change in his health for the better, and he gains some positive insight into his relation with Bao-chai (98:1058), and their marriage is finally consummated (98:1065). Bao-chai herself becomes a source of his understanding about mutability—he cannot expect to have been able to live with his cousins in the Garden forever she tells him (100:1082). He begins to appreciate the needs of his family (106:1138).

Still, despite a kind of awakening at one level and a greater maturity, Bao-yu returns to his old familiar self. He likes to watch Bao-chai dress, and he becomes ecstatic when Wang Xi-feng gives him a new maid servant, Wu-er (101:1092). He meditates in the lotus position and prays that Dai-yu's spirit will come to him, but when Wu-er arrives and he mistakes her for the deceased Qing-wen, they engage in sex. Bao-chai, Xi-ren, and Wu-er are all three engaged in a competition to administer to Bao-yu's “disease” (109:1168–69). Bao-yu muses that he is “dirty” (濁人), so Dai-yu's spirit will not come to meet him (109:1165). The Garden itself has become a symbol of death and decay. Xi-ren says it is not “clean.” When Bao-yu does enter the Garden, he cannot distinguish his old quarters from Dai-yu's, and he imagines he hears her crying—a sign that he is again losing his identity (108:1158). He weeps over the death of the Matriarch, a symbol of the end of an era in the family (110:1184), and when her favorite servant girl, Yuang-yuang, commits suicide out of loyalty, he admires her purity and contrasts it to himself (111:1189).

The seduction and abduction of the Buddhist nun, Miao-yu, is one of the more important clearings. Bao-yu had thought that at least she would be an exception to the pattern of change (113:1214). Dai-yu's old servant, Zi-juan, tells Bao-yu it is better to be like a stone without feelings, than to live, for then one's heart is "clean" (113:1217). When Bao-yu meets his counterpart, Zhen Bao-yu, he feels he is meeting an old friend, for there is an external recognition—he recognizes himself. But his discovery is that they are opposites (115:1229–31). His return to the mythic world of chapter 1 and his enlightenment are not clearings for the reader, for the presentation is mechanical (chapter 116). Bao-yu's attempt to give back the jade that has been returned to him and his ecstatic craziness symbolize his enlightenment (117:1247; 1249). Another sign is his desire that Xi-ren become a nun (118:1258). Still another indication of clearing is that he masters the Confucian Classics and wants to burn his collection of esoteric books (118:1265). After passing the examinations, he and the jade vanish leaving not a trace (119:1277).

