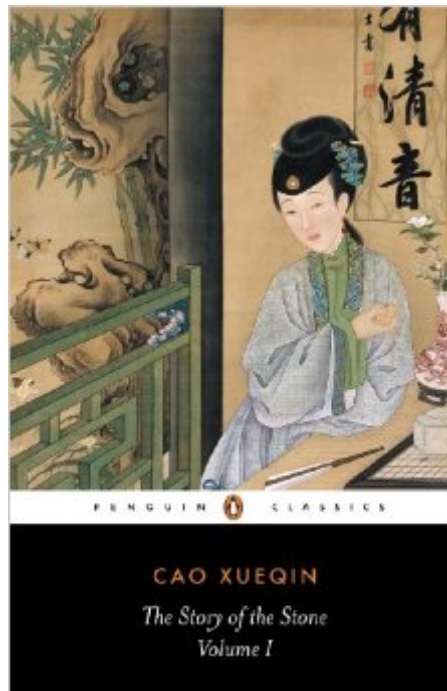


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The Story Of The Stone, Or The Dream Of The Red Chamber, Vol. 1: The Golden Days



Synopsis

The Story of the Stone (c. 1760), also known by the title of The Dream of the Red Chamber, is the great novel of manners in Chinese literature. Divided into five volumes, The Story of the Stone charts the glory and decline of the illustrious Jia family. This novel re-creates the ritualized hurly-burly of Chinese family life that would otherwise be lost and infuses it with affirming Buddhist belief. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

Book Information

Series: The Story of the Stone (Book 1)

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Customer Reviews

I spend a lot of time wandering through bookstores. One particular book has caught my eye over the years, and the other day I bought it - Volume 1 of Cao Xueqin's eighteenth century epic, "The Story of the Stone: The Golden Days". As a developing eighteenth century scholar, I was doubly attracted to it. "The Golden Days" absolutely blew me away - used as I am to eighteenth century novels (British, French, American), this is wholly unlike anything I've read from the era. It bears structural similarities to the Laurence Sterne's "Tristram Shandy" and "Sentimental Journey," but aside from that bears more in common with ancient Greek novels like Longus's "Daphnis and

Chloe" or Heliodorus's "Eithopian Romance," as well as the mysticism of the ancient Egyptian "Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor." And yet, Cao's attention to actual life experiences, and the detail he conveys about tradition and ceremony, along with frank dealings with human relationships and sexuality makes "The Golden Days" much more than any quick summary of style or content can relate. "The Golden Days" begins in amusing, but sympathetic fashion: the goddess Nǎ-wa is repairing the sky with 36,501 stones. When she finishes, one remains, which is cast off. Having been touched by a goddess, this stone has magical properties, able to move, change size, and even talk. One day, a Buddhist monk and a Taoist come upon the stone, and promise to let the stone have an adventure - to become human. As the stone waits by a pond, it falls desperately in love with a Crimson Pearl Flower, which is also selected for incarnation by the Fairy Disenchantment.

This is one of the most entertaining, satisfying "big baggy"-type novels of all time. Readers who like long Victorian or Russian novels, or got all the way through "Clarissa," will get many hours of enjoyment from "Story of the Stone" ("Dream of the Red Chamber" is the more common title). It is about a cultured, wealthy family in early Ching dynasty China, with a teenaged hero called Bao-yu. Bao-yu spends all his time in the women's quarters, which is unheard-of for a boy his age but allowed because his grandmother spoils him. Instead of fulfilling his filial duty by studying for the civil service exams, he indulges in the same idle pleasures as the women of the household, eating, dressing, gossiping, composing poetry, and/or playing drinking games with his many girl cousins, aunts, mother, doting grandmother, myriad serving maids, a troupe of actresses, and the occasional nun from a convent located on the grounds. Bao-yu is a dreamy, precocious romantic, very spoiled but charming, and always (usually platonically) in love with several girls at once. However, his deepest feelings are for his cousin Dai-yu, his soulmate, who is sickly, orphaned, frequently whiny, and not considered a good match by the family. It is hard to believe that Cao Xueqin wrote about 300 years ago on the other side of the world, because he gives such a touching, ironic depiction of romantic love unfolding between two sensitive, self-conscious, and precocious kids. His characterizations of women are also sympathetic and insightful, aware of the suffering that society's conventions inflict on them.

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