Abstract

Cao Xueqin (曹雪芹) of mid-Qing China has often been called the Bard of the East. He is widely acclaimed for his bold departure from his contemporaries in both literary style and craft. His sole novelistic effort, Hong Lou Meng (A Dream of the Red Mansions) (《红楼梦》), is hailed as China's greatest piece of writing. Verse in its various forms has been used as a literary device in the novel. It has been so skilfully orchestrated that verses have become an integral and inseparable part of the novel proper. Verses not only form part of the plot but also have literary responsibilities to deliver. It is the purpose of this exercise to find out what these responsibilities are.

Verses in the first 80 chapters of the novel, confirmed to be largely written by Cao, will be categorised according to their forms and analysed. Verses in the remaining 40 chapters will not be considered for discussion since its writer has misconstrued and distorted many of Cao's original intentions. What are these intentions and how has Cao made use of verses to convey them? And in the process of doing so, how has he contributed to the legacies of Chinese literary writing?

The introductory chapter looks at when and how writers before Cao have employed verses in their literary works and how Cao has differed from them. Then individual chapters will be allotted to the analysis of each of the 4 types of verses most prevalently used and whose functions are most representative of
verses found in Hong Lou Meng, namely shi(诗), ci(词), qu(曲) and lianyu(联语). An appraisal of Cao’s creative genius will be done in the concluding chapter.

And with that we come to a resounding affirmation of the artistry and talent of Cao Xueqin. Once again, he has been proven the master of Chinese literature.

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