

literary cathedral, Ts'ao Hsueh-ch'in sculptured with his heart blood his twelve female saints. Somehow, East or West, art and human imagination had not found it possible to express concretely the highest ideal of beauty, of goodness, and of purity, except by incorporating it in the feminine sex.

And so, following his destiny to the end, we get an impression that the jade was a symbol of supramundane intelligence that really did not belong to the world at all. Toward the very end, his father at last understood him. That was why, as the author finally explains in the Epilogue, the jade *had to disappear* before Paoyu got married. The jade must not be contaminated.

Some Western Evaluation

The Dream of the Red Chamber, the fascinating eighteenth-century Chinese novel . . . is to its native literature very much what *The Brothers Karamazov* is to Russian and *Remembrance of Things Past* is to French literature. . . . This Chinese author of the eighteenth century is saying, with the same technique and with the same voice, what the great nineteenth-century Russians were to say—that the entire basis of our lives is corrupt, that life must be transformed from the bottom upward by a vast awakening of the spirit. This, though it makes his novel interesting, and an unexpected product of its time and culture, does not affect its quality as literature; what demonstrates that is its richness of invention, both of incident and of character, and the authenticity of its psychological insights, insights that, though sometimes hard to recognize in their exotic trappings, are often thrilling in their penetration. By virtue of these aspects of its content, it is beyond question one of the great novels of all literature.

—ANTHONY WEST
The New Yorker,
November 22, 1958

All realistic novels are, of course, autobiographical, the writer's knowledge of realities being drawn chiefly from his own experience. But *The Red Chamber* is autobiographical in a more complete sense. Indeed, one even feels that, were it not for the rigid framework imposed by tradition, Ts'ao might easily have fallen into the error of transcribing with too careful a fidelity the monotonies of actual life. . . . It is in his accounts of dreams that as an imaginative writer Ts'ao Hsueh-ch'in rises to his greatest heights; and it is in these passages that we feel most clearly the symbolic or universal value of his characters—Pao-yu, the hero, standing for Imagination and Poetry; his father, for all those sordid powers of pedantry and restriction that hamper the artist in his passage through life.

—ARTHUR WALEY
in Preface to translation
by Chi-Chen Wang, 1929