

孫述宇：水滸傳的煽動藝術

The Seditious Art of The Water Margin¹

—Misogynists or Desperadoes?

By Phillip S. Y. Sun

I

Shui Hu Chuan (*The Water Margin*)² strikes one as a very peculiar book of masculine creation. It not only is centered about men and may deservedly be called "male-chauvinistic", but also is exceedingly cruel to women. Other books may focus on men's business, take note of only manly virtues, or present a cast of men without women, yet few appear to be so hostile to the other sex. Dripping as it is with men's blood, this book has an even higher mortality rate for females. These females are mostly lewd or mean, and the tone in which they are presented alternates between the abusive and the derisive. Most readers will agree with Professor C. T. Hsia's use of the term *misogyny* in characterizing this attitude.³ Many had observed before Prof. Hsia that the novel was unfair to the fair sex; since the May Fourth Movement volumes have been written to apologize for and vindicate the luckless lady P'an Chin-lien (Golden Lotus). However, *misogyny* has different meanings. To say descriptively that the novel is not sympathetic to women is one thing, to assert interpretatively that its authors and their audiences show symptoms of abnormal sexual psychology is quite another. Beyond question, *The Water Margin* is not friendly toward women, but this unfriendliness should be analysed and studied rather than branded summarily if we want to understand the art of the novel. What this attitude owes to the society and culture of China of those days is a subject that merits our attention.

Since the old Chinese society was man-centered, *The Water Margin*, reflecting this reality,

naturally relegates women to an inferior position. However, virocentricity has not received any particular and excessive emphasis in the book, and therefore cannot very well be considered as its special feature. An episode in Chapter 38 even pokes gentle fun at this ideology. It tells how, when Sung Chiang, Tai Tsung, and Li K'uei meet Chang Shun for the first time and the four drink together in a restaurant, a songstress comes along and sings to them, and Li K'uei, dying to "pour out all the heroic sentiments in his bosom" but finding his companions entirely absorbed by the singing, flares up in anger and manhandles the poor girl. An outlook that tends to belittle women comes quite naturally in an outlaw story like *The Water Margin*, for it is about nothing but killing, plundering and other lawless acts of violent men, acts in which women commonly take no part. Hence it is not really unreasonable that only three of the 108 seats in the great Hall of Loyalty and Fraternity are occupied by ladies and all three ladies are not in the category of Celestial Stars; on the contrary, it would be cause for comment indeed if one half of the seats had lady occupants. Besides, women enjoy good artistic positions in the novel, however low their social position. The novel, albeit without female protagonists, has several negative roles assigned to women that are pivotal to the development of its plot. And one cannot be more mistaken than to think that the authors of *The Water Margin* were not good at portraying women. Quite a few of them in the book are expertly delineated, much better than the common run of its men. Few readers will

¹ This is part of a study of the novel translated by the author from his original Chinese article in *Chung-kuo hsueh-jen (The Chinese Scholars)*, No. 5, July 1973, published by the Institute of Advanced Chinese Studies and Research, New Asia College, Hong Kong.

² The edition used in this article is the variorum *Shui hu Ch'uan chuan* (水滸全傳, 北京人民文學出版社, 1954).

³ C. T. Hsia, *The Classic Chinese Novel* (New York, 1968), pp. 105-6.

forget the two crones Grandma Wang and Grandma Yen, who have more vividness and vitality than Juliet's nurse; by their side, men like Hsi-men Ch'ing or Sung Chiang look dull. And Golden Lotus, called the arch wicked woman, is in fact superb as an artistic creation. Witness how, in Chapter 24, scheming to seduce her brother-in-law Wu Sung, she chirps and chirps, and sprinkles her alluring words with the siren address "Shu-shu". The story goes on to tell that afterwards Wu Sung, saying good-bye to his brother, suggests that henceforth she should mind her conduct as a wife, and she, nettled by the sarcasm in his words, reacts in this way:

Her face reddened from her ears and finally became all purple. Pointing at Wu Ta (her own husband), she railed. "You dirty fool! What words have you leaked to outsiders that are now repeated to insult me? I'm a real man in lady's garb, a sterling woman that lifts up men with her hands and horses with her forearms, not one of those old turtles whose heads you can't jolt out! Since I was married to Wu Ta, not an ant has dared to enter the house. What is this talk about loose fences admitting dogs? All falling bricks and tiles will hit the ground, and you can't get away with your rubbish!"

Wu Sung laughed and said, "Splendid, sister, if that is the way you keep house, and so long as what you say is what you think. I'll remember every word of yours, and do pledge me with this bowl."

The woman pushed away the bowl and ran straight downstairs. Halfway down the stairs, she stopped and opened her mouth again. "Wise guy that you are," she said, "how come you don't know that an elder brother's wife is to be respected like your mother? I never heard of a brother-in-law when I first married Wu Ta, so where is this guy come from? 'Relation or no relation, he will boss the whole family.' It's just my luck to run into all this God-damned trouble!" Crying, she then descended the stairs. (Page 365)

When and where has oral folk literature attained

刀筆
小吏
爾乃
好義

呼
保
家
宋
江



SUNG CHIANG the Timely Rain
From a drawing by Chen Lao-lien,
Ming Dynasty.

such levels of artistic accomplishment? Violent emotion is often attempted in fiction but rarely well presented. The above passage, using words in keeping with Lotus' background of having been a maidservant in an affluent household and having long henpecked her husband, vividly dramatises her ire that comes from shame and a guilty conscience. It cannot have been authored by anyone not observant of women.

The hostility toward females in the book has nothing to do with their social position. To hold the old Chinese society responsible for this hostility is to be unfair and confuse the question. This point perhaps needs stressing, for our contemporaries seem to have developed a habit of laying random blame upon traditional Chinese culture. A significant fact that has so far not received due notice is that in China women enjoyed unequal positions in the real world and in the world of art. It is but a shaky *ergo* type of inference to suggest that Chinese literature ill-used women because the society looked down upon them; the inference is not supported by the facts. The cruelty toward

women in *The Water Margin* exists as an isolated phenomenon in Chinese literature; a few plays dramatising Liang-shan stories and a few later imitations of inferior quality excepted, it is not found in other works, certainly in none of the masterpieces, and therefore cannot be regarded as an important trend. The female sex has never received much ill-treatment in the hands of Chinese authors since the times of *The Book of Odes* and *The Songs of Ch'u*. A most common theme in Chinese poetry, for instance, is the deserted woman (棄婦). Although the image reflects well the low social position of the sex, yet since poems of this type are invariably the poet's self-lament in an allegorical scheme, the lady receives all the compassion, the implicit blame going to the deserter, the fickle lover-king. Beginning in the dynasties of the Jurchen Chin and Mongol Yuan, a trend extolling women over men gradually gathered momentum in romantic drama of love, a literary form with numerous monuments like *Hsi-hsiang chi* (Story of the West Chamber), *Han-kung Ch'iu* (Autumn in the Han Palace), *Wu-t'ung yu* (Rain on the Wu-t'ung Trees) and *Mou-tan ting* (Peony Pavilion). Ladies in these plays not only hold their own against men, but often excel them outright, being endowed with or having acquired greater intelligence, gift, learning, and moral virtue, to say nothing of beauty. Such talented ladies soon invaded and replenished the novels. They congregate most densely in *Hung lou meng* (*Dream of the Red Chamber*), and are present in all other novels of romantic love or even novels about courtesans, like *P'in hua pao chien* (*The Precious Mirror of Enjoying Flowers*). Readers see ravishing noble maidens, young wives, maid-servants and courtesans who, after songs and dances, divert themselves with composing parallel couplets, versification, as well as subtle discourse in *Ch'an* (Zen) buddhism. They are, in other words, playing men's games, and playing them better than men. One can quite fairly say that in the battle of the sexes women have long taken revenge upon their arrogant opposites in drama and fiction. Having fared well in the literary-language drama and long novels read by the leisure class, they do no worse in the colloquial short stories meant for the populace. Here they have less opportunity to show off their literary gifts but more occasion to display their courage and will.

The most prominent example is the tragic serpent White Lady, who, throughout the centuries that she was suppressed under the famous tower not far from the West Lake, lived veritably in the hearts of millions. Innumerable are those who would have her exchange positions with her spineless lover, Hsu Hsuan. Other ladies, such as Tu Shih-niang or Hsiu-hsiu, are likewise much stronger than their men. Extolling women is indeed a massive current in Chinese literature, not less powerful than the so-called tradition of courtly love in West Europe. Tales like "The Oil Peddler Wins the Queen of Courtesans" ("*Mai-yu-lang tu chan hua-k'uei*") state unequivocally that a lady's heart is to be valued above all things, and the only sure way to win it is to serve her faithfully, as the Oil Peddler does the Courtesan. It was not accidental that the translation of Dumas *filis'* *Camille* by Lin Shu around the turn of the century was well received. After the May Fourth Movement, people needed to go but one step forward before they could talk about Ibsen's Nora, freedom and happiness of the individual, denigrate the concept of responsibility and, by and by, vindicate Golden Lotus along with other "lascivious women" of traditional literature.

II

The hostility against women in *The Water Margin* stems from a basic attitude that frowns upon amorous passion. Since passion is not good, charming women are received with suspicion and generally regarded as inauspicious. From this we have the pronouncement that true heroes have no use for feminine beauty. Despite the fact that in China as elsewhere people consider a hero's image incomplete without an attractive lady companion, the Liangshan heroes stay away from women, keeping the vow of celibacy more religiously than many monks and priests. In Chapter 32, Sung Chiang, urging Wang Ying the Short-legged Tiger to foreswear Liu Kao's wife, states in so many words that to be a true hero one must be pure in mind and impregnable to lust and temptation. The attitude toward physical desire in the novel is coloured by religion and superstition; the Liangshan heroes are more mythical than realistic creations in this respect. When measured by the yardstick of realism, they amuse us with their incongruities. The idea of abstinence may be less unexceptionable with some heroes, but certainly

not with Lu Chih-shen the Flower Monk, Wu Sung the Tiger Slayer, and Li K'uei the Black Whirlwind, heroes with bulging muscles stronger than bullocks, whose stomachs are filled with meat and wine and whose hands are drenched in human blood. Lu Chih-shen, according to the story, finds outlets for his pent-up energy in uprooting willow trees, beating up vajra-bearing guardian deities outside the temple gate and the monks within, and "emitting loud cries". When Golden Lotus first meets Wu Sung, she is struck by his gigantic stature, and, saying in her mind that "he who can vanquish a tiger must be really strong", begins to dream of an illicit affair with him. The poor ignorant woman has no idea at the time that his Herculean strength is put to no other use than subduing tigers and slaying people. Wu Sung and Li K'uei are not content to be pure themselves: they go out of their way to play police and spill the blood of adulterous strangers. We find all this rather ridiculous, but the novel refuses to give an inch in this matter. The brothers gathered in the Hall of Loyalty and Fraternity, we are given to know, are Puritans all, inclusive of Yen Ch'ing who is nicknamed "the Profligate" and Sung Chiang who has kept a mistress, Yen P'o-hsi. Yen Ch'ing is shown to have withstood the advances of Li Shih-shih, the courtesan patronized by none less than the connoisseur emperor Hui-tsung. And the novel explains to readers that Sung Chiang takes Yen P'o-hsi because he has done her mother a good turn and the old woman somehow imposes the daughter upon him by way of repaying his kindness. Later she becomes unfaithful for precisely the reason that he, being a true hero, does not take to voluptuous pleasure. "The woman turns unfaithful as her heroic man is abstemious in bed" seems to be a formula in the novel; both Lu Chun-yi and Yang Hsiung are made to wear horns for this reason. The world of *The Water Margin*, needless to say, condemns these wives unreservedly, for in its view they should have suppressed their ungratified desire and managed the home like a good matron, so that their husbands could spend all their time befriending like-minded heroes, exercising their bodies and practising weapons together. This is the way of life of the married Liangshan heroes, who all prefer the battlefield to the bed. It will be remembered that Kao Ch'iu's son gets a chance to make a pass at Lin Ch'ung's

beautiful wife because our "leopard-headed" hero leaves her unescorted, goes away to watch Lu Chih-shen perform with his Buddhist staff and, soon enough, enters into blood brotherhood with him. No hero ever allows his wife to meddle in his "manly affairs". Had Milton's Eden been peopled with such characters, the paradise would never have been lost.

To be accurate, the world of *The Water Margin* does not hate the female sex as a whole. There are individual good women commended in the book; on the other hand, traits commonly held to be feminine shortcomings, such as pusillanimity, narrow-mindedness and naïveté, have not been singled out for stricture. What is detested here is lascivious thought and behaviour. Women slain in the book have either committed adultery, or aided and abetted it. Slain too are the male offenders, e.g., Hsi-men Ch'ing and P'ei Ju-hai; when heroes like Li K'uei meet a pair of adulterous "dog and bitch", they put both to the sword without discrimination. This is actually fairer, and more respectful, to the fair sex than what often happens in the tales of Chaucer or Boccaccio and other medieval *fabliaux*, where the adulteress customarily gets away unscathed. However, owing to the distaste for carnality, women in the novel seldom combine beauty and virtue in their persons. The whores and lewd women all look pretty, but the good woman of Liangshan, as typified by Ku Ta-sao (Elder Sister Ku), may well have "thick eye-brows, big eyes, fat face, and broad waist". When a hero comes onto the stage, the narrative slows down to admire him; but when an attractive woman comes in, it adopts a roguish tone in taking inventory of her beauties. Ultimately, a hostility toward feminine charm becomes nothing less than a hostility toward the female sex. Wicked females appear in other works as well, and receive animadversions of various kinds, but some are at least represented as lovable and desirable *femmes fatales*. Helen and Cleopatra of the West and T'an-chi and Hsi-shih in China, among many others, furnish good examples: well as you may know that they are wicked, you nevertheless desire them. Figures in histories like Messalina or Wu Tse-t'ien bear similar images. Our present novel, apart from ruling out women both true and fair, ridicules feminine charm and insists that true heroes will treat it like so much dirt. Adding insult

to injury in this manner, it cannot be cleared of the charge of discrimination against the female sex. An incredibly high percentage of rotten apples in the basket well documents the distrust.

We may now ask, "Why does *The Water Margin* hate carnality and distrust the female sex in this manner?" To obtain an answer more easily, let us re-fashion our question as "What sort of people hate carnality and distrust the female sex?" In our times when "love" is revered and psychoanalysis becomes a household word, many will answer that it is the psychopaths. Actually, others do too. Speaking in general, all men who crave for life have some tendency to loath carnality — unlike other animals, man often desires individual survival more than prolongation of the species. We know how the monks of many religions, disgusted with the flesh, view women with great suspicion; what they care for is everlasting after-life, not a long lineage in this world. Another group of people, one that will explain the phenomenon of our novel, are those who move in hostile and dangerous environments. These include bandits, thugs, rebels, revolutionaries, guerrillas, and sometimes, soldiers; these men — we shall call them *desperadoes* generically for the sake of convenience — all feel threatened with death and long to survive. They frequently rape, which fact gives them the image of a satyr or incubus and hinders people from realizing that they, too, are wary about women; but the incidents of rape occur only when they feel reassured of their own safety, i.e., when enemies have departed or have been routed. Generals and brigand leaders customarily unleash their men to rape as a form of reward and encouragement after victory, but will enforce discipline prohibiting licentious behaviour when engaged in action. Leaders of desperadoes cannot help but entertain some suspicion and fear toward women, for if they are good, they tend to be burdensome inasmuch as they are supposed to weaken their men's physique and morale and impede warlike action, and if they are bad, they take up with men of the other side and hurt the cause. Opposite to the notion of gallant outlaws popularized by tales of Robin Hood and the like, absence of courtesy and chivalry marks the way desperadoes treat women. In former times, Chinese bandits propagated the conception that "females were inauspicious" in order to keep them

at a distance and minimize their influence. Contrasted with that preventive measure, European partisans fighting Nazis during World War II punished local women who consorted with German soldiers by shaving their heads or stripping them naked in public. Today we still hear of the Irish underground using tar and feathers on girls that go out with British boys. The Californian Hell's Angels, not an abstemious band to be sure, show nonetheless very little respect for their female companions. The "old ladies" are not supposed to be present in their meetings, nor permitted to ask questions afterwards.

In the sworn brotherhood of *The Water Margin* we find a complementary phenomenon that illustrates alike the desire for survival and the need of security. Even as they are on guard against women, the desperadoes seek some form of union among themselves. The most common name in which the union is effected must be that of "fraternity", which has been used by groups as varied as Christ's disciples and the Mafia of today. In China, the bond of sworn brotherhood has united outlaws or soldiers for innumerable generations; the Republic era still saw the warlords pledging loyalty to and exchanging *data vitae* with one another. Other literary works have recorded this phenomenon, but none gives it such emphasis as the present novel. Apart from the grand ceremony of collective entrance into brotherhood that involves all the hundred and eight in Chapter 71, we see the individual heroes meet and establish fraternal relationship with amazing alacrity — more frequently, in fact, than we see adulteresses executed. The term used in the book to describe the relationship is "*chieh yi*" (結義) "union in fraternity"; from this is derived the meaning that outlaws, in the novel as elsewhere, attach to "*yi ch'i*" (義氣), viz., the solidarity and mutual support of likeminded persons, rather than the traditional Confucian idea of right action. The story of Yang Hsiung and Shih Hsiu adumbrates for us the desperado mentality of relying upon comrades and watching out against females. Yang Hsiung is bullied in the street, Shih Hsiu as a stranger gives him succour, and the two become sworn brothers right away; Yang Hsiung's wife, P'an Ch'iao-yun, carrying on a liaison with a monk, P'ei Ju-hai, views Shih Hsiu as an obstacle and causes her husband to expel him from the

house by slander; Shih, a sturdy and understanding brother, bears no grudge against Yang Hsiung, and, seeking to disclose the secret to him, manages to kill the lascivious monk and an accomplice near Yang Hsiung's home; Yang Hsiung, now brought to his senses, takes his wife to a secluded place on a mountain where Shih Hsiu is awaiting, points out that her crimes against him are the attempt to destroy his fraternal bond with Shih Hsiu and the liaison which poses a threat to his own life, and metes out the punishment that befits the crimes by dismembering her.

III

What do these pieces of "internal evidence" show? They show that in the evolution of *The Water Margin* desperadoes have played a significant role. Scholars believe that the tales of the Liangshan heroes had existed in story-telling for three hundred years or more before they were incorporated in the form of a novel in the Ming Dynasty, but not much has been advanced about the men who narrated, created, and revised the tales during these years. The vague term "folk artist" will describe many of them no doubt, but that does not help much. From the foregoing discussion, one would infer that some desperadoes took part in the long line of oral delivery of the tales. These desperadoes were most likely connected with some or more branches of the militia forces formed by the common people, paupers, dispersed soldiers and brigands fighting the Jurchens or Mongols in the years between the time the Sung court moved south and the founding of the Ming Dynasty. They told, redacted, and made up more Liangshan tales to propagate to the populace in the hope of receiving recruits and support on the one hand, and on the other to provide their own rank and file with entertainment as well as guide for action. These forces are mentioned by Yen Tun-yi in his discussion of the background of the evolution of the novel, but unfortunately he has not concentrated upon the possibility of their recounting the tales among themselves.⁴

The involvement of some desperadoes in the creation and delivery of the tales makes *The Water Margin* probably unique in older literature. The

⁴ Yen Tun-yi, *Shui-hu-chuan ti yen-pien* (嚴敦義「水滸傳的演變」), Peking, 1957. See particularly the chapter on the formation of the legends, pp. 26-54.

desperado's suspicion and fear of women that we have analysed are almost never found elsewhere in literature composed before this century except, again, in the few inferior imitations of this novel — that will explain why readers of the novel are so puzzled by its "misogynistic" incidents. We miss these sentiments even in the numerous stories of brigands and other outlaws. The reason is that most, if not all, of these stories, though about desperadoes, were not created by desperadoes, nor created for desperadoes' consumption. We may call them "pseudo desperado literature" or, to borrow a word from Empson, "pastoral desperado literature". The pastoral authors had presumably little true knowledge about those dangerous men. Hence we see Robin Hood and his carefree followers roaming the Greenwood forests leisurely, more like a group of men of independent means vacationing there than a band of brigands. Their lives do not appear to be in any danger, and they have no other worries. They do not worry about provision, for instance; they pillage only to teach the unkindly rich a lesson or give the poor a hand, they themselves taking no interest in the spoils. The Liangshan heroes' interest in the spoils is unabashedly keen; the novel never neglects to inform how the enemy's riches are afterwards appropriated by the vanquishing hero, carted back to the mountain, or disposed of in other manner. Critics, applying the pastoral standard consciously or unconsciously, have condemned this interest as greed. It may not have occurred to them that stories of Robin Hood and other chivalric brigands together with their lofty principles would cause real outlaws to split their sides with laughter.

The true face of a desperado — a man anxious about his own life, tense, suspicious, self-centered and ruthless — has not much chance of winning our admiration. Propagandists eulogizing the revolutionaries or guerrillas tend therefore to discard strict realism in presenting them. *The Water Margin*, be it said, shows the desperadoes not by portraying them squarely and with verisimilitude; the Liangshan heroes have been white-washed and, if you believe the narrator, they have no suspicions and certainly know no fear. However, these human weaknesses are uncovered ironically in the idealization of the heroes, for when the militia forces of Sung-Yuan times or other desperadoes perpetuated the tales to their

own men, they idealized the heroes into exemplary figures to be imitated in desperado actions, figures that fully meet what the leaders expected of their followers, viz., to keep a distance from females and to succour comrades without reservation, besides being brave, loyal to the cause, etc. Needless to say, the Liangshan heroes are said to meet these conditions not out of fear for death, but out of ideal and virtue: abstinence from voluptuous pleasure is a challenging ideal that only true heroes can aspire to, and the brotherhood grows out naturally from the heroes' genuine mutual admiration.

We can still detect the traces of revision by the desperadoes. At the early stages of the evolution of the story cycle, some of the heroes obviously did not stay away from women. The head of the band, Sung Chiang, furnishes an instance in point; his having a paramour whom he later slays is recorded in *Hsuan-ho yi shih* (Stories of the Hsuan-ho Period) and meticulously repeated in the resumé of his life story whenever he appears in the Water Margin plays of the Yuan Dynasty. Our novel, while keeping the unalterable skeleton of this well-known part, spares no pains in adding and retouching its details to make Sung Chiang meet the heroic criterion of abstinence. On the one hand, the cohabitation is blamed upon the girl's mother who insists on repaying Sung Chiang's kindness by this means, and on the other, the girl's betrayal is accounted for by precisely the fact that Sung Chiang, being a hero, "dotes on weapons and does not care much about women". This, as we have said, is also the reason given for the cuckoldry of Lu Chun-yi and Yang Hsiung, and, as a matter of fact, is rather ill-applied on Sung Chiang, since he is no warrior. Two other heroes, Yen Ch'ing and Lu Chih-shen, should also have had some episodes of wenching. Yen Ch'ing's nickname is "the Profligate", and Kung K'ai mentioned the brothels in the commentary on his portrait.⁵ The *tz'u* poem to the tune of "Garden-pervading Spring" in the novel (p. 1027) retains a line that describes him as "topping all lovers" (風月叢中第一名), but the details of his philandering are not to be found. Lu Chih-shen's nickname is "*Hua ho-shang*" or "Flower Monk",

which warrants the surmise that he has broken the vow against carnality in addition to the one against slaughter. The saying that the nickname comes from the tattoo on his spine (p. 1130) represents in all likelihood a re-interpretation of the word *hua* to complete the bowdlerizing of his vow-breaking episodes. It is incredible that Lu Chih-shen and Wu Sung, two reckless and muscular outlaws exuding energy, should have never been vignettted with libidinous episodes during their exceptionally long history of fictional existence. It is told in Chapter 4 that Lu Chih-shen slips out from Manjusri Monastery to drink and eat dog meat with meshed garlic, which Chinese have long considered aphrodisiac: these may well be details from older stories about him. Also noteworthy is that Lu should gang up with Wu Sung through the intercession of a woman, Sun Erh-niang, the proprietress of a shady inn who specializes in enticing travellers with her charms. The antecedent of the present story of Sun Erh-niang must have been incomparably more colourful, but even in our novel now, we can see Wu Sung is far from a Joseph. In the beginning he makes a pass at the woman with indecent language, then he feigns



胡母天虫碩大嫂
提胡舌唱麝古酒家

KU TA-SAO the Female Tiger
From a drawing by Chen Lao-lien,
Ming Dynasty.

⁵ 龔開 (聖手) 「三十六人贊」
(Commentaries on the Portraits of the Thirty-six Men).

drugged, and when Sun Erh-niang disrobes herself to carry him to the kitchen for dissection he grabs and gets on top of her, causing her to "squeal like a pig being slaughtered". Lu Chih-shen, as we know, meets his Waterloo in Sun Erh-niang's hand; he is spared of his life only because her husband returns in the nick of time and recognizes a hero from Lu's buddhist staff. According to our novel, he is overwhelmed after he has gulped down her drugged wine; in older versions of the story he may not be so innocent. The story of Sun Erh-niang is basically licentious, and survives in the novel in a severely revised form. She is now presented as an ugly woman, with "a thick, round waist like a windlass and limbs like staffs, covered with mulberry bark". Would the original creator of the story have visualized her in this shape and still expected her to perform her role?

Just from the internal evidence we cannot ascertain who the desperadoes were that revised the stories of the cycle; all we know is that revision has been done, and done thoroughly, so much so that a desperado ethos permeates the whole book. The highest morality is identified as the fraternal loyalty between comrades, the lofty slogans like "Weed out oppressors, give peace to the good and rescue people in danger" receiving only lip service, not dramatised with concrete incidents. Carnality is considered unspeakable, and the exemplary heroes are all above temptation, while almost none of the women can be both true and fair. Stories of men injured by women are told repetitiously to serve as warning. Wicked females—those "lascivious women", "old robberesses", songstresses and whores—harm your life and career to be sure, but have the good ones—like Lin Ch'ung's wife, a veritable Penelope—not brought good men to despair? These cases amply show that women are unpropitious and must be kept at a safe distance. In sum, the novel is eminently fit for telling among the militia forces that fought the Jurchens or Mongols or other similar desperadoes. This is literature serving a cause, not "pure" literature made for no other purpose than those of the author's self-expression and the readers' entertainment. To write a history of Chinese propagandist literature, one will have to accord this novel a prominent place as a great forerunner, if not indeed the prototype.

If our argument stands, we shall do well to adjust our angles accordingly in essaying critiques of the book. It has been charged that the Liangshan heroes are unrealistic for being immune to sex. The charge is not wrong, only not very weighty in case the intention of the authors or revisers was to idealize them as model heroes: it carries much less force when applied to literature of political propaganda than when it is applied to "pure" literature. Another charge often voiced is that the authors were incapable of presenting good women, that they were good at portraying adulteresses and evil crones only, and the females in the Liangshan camp are either a Ku Ta-sao, ugly, tough, and virile, or a Hu San-niang who, though nice-looking, has so little life in her that she hardly ever speaks a word. This charge has likewise a weakness in that what it objects to is rather inevitable in the kind of literature to which *The Water Margin* belongs, and not the result of artistic deficiency, since desperadoes are not supposed to pay too much attention to the fair sex. There is logic in turning Sun Erh-niang into a plain woman as well as in letting us see Lin Ch'ung's good wife ruin him and not serve him, give him joy, and sustain him in distress. We may go further and suggest that, beyond a certain point, the characters of the Liangshan heroes are not worth analysing and their minds not worth delving into, for they are not creations of free imagination but parts of a concerted effort of propaganda and consequently do not lend themselves readily to analysis in the terms and concepts of "pure" literature. Still another criticism leveled at the book is that it sings the praise of cruel, geedy men and the despicable morality that binds these rascals. We cannot say the critics here are entirely off the mark, though we may point out that the word "rascal" does not fairly describe all the desperadoes. In the last analysis, the criticism is a matter of personal taste. As the Romans have said, *de gestibus non disputandum*, but if we are to discuss *The Water Margin* as a work of art, rather than be fastidious about the desperado characters' looks and behaviour, we would do well to focus attention on the desperado authors, to see how they strove in terms of propaganda technique to further their cause.