

張竹坡：金瓶梅讀法

How to Read *Jin Ping Mei*

By Zhang Zhupo

Translated by David T. Roy

第一奇書

Introduction by David Rolston

UNTIL QUITE RECENTLY, information concerning the life and career of Zhang Zhupo was limited. His real name, for instance, was unknown. Aside from his extensive commentary on *Jin Ping Mei* (of which the *dufa* forms the lengthiest section), only scattered comments attributed to him in works such as *Youmeng ying* 幽夢影 (Quiet Dream Visions), compiled by the scholar Zhang Chao (1650-c.1703) and *Dongyou ji* 東遊記 (Journey to the East),¹ plus a few scattered letters and poems were available to the scholarly community. However, a very interesting cache of material was recently found among the books in the Shi Youheng 時有恒 collection in the Xuzhou Teachers College Library in Zhang Zhupo's hometown of Xuzhou in Jiangsu.

The most important of this material dealing with Zhang Zhupo is a genealogy of the Xuzhou branch of the Zhang family with a preface by Zhang's brother, dated 1721.² According to the biography of Zhang Zhupo by the same brother included in the genealogy, Zhang Zhupo's given name was Daoshen 道深 and his courtesy name Zide 自得. He came from a locally prominent family that included holders of military and civil degrees. His father, however, was not as successful as his brothers, and Zhupo himself complains in several places in the newly found material about his poverty and his lack of success. These sentiments are also echoed in his commentary on *Jin Ping Mei*.

This Introduction, in considerably revised form, will appear in the forthcoming anthology, How to Read the Chinese Novel, edited by David Rolston.

¹See Sun Kaidi, *Zhongguo tongshu xiaoshuo shumu* (A Bibliography of Popular Chinese Fiction; Peking: Renmin wenzue, 1982), p. 180.

²Information on the new material presented here is based on unpublished articles provided by Professor

Andrew H. Plaks. The articles include two by Li Shiren of Xuzhou Teachers College, "Yipi youguan Zhang Zhupo de zhongyao ziliao jianjie" (A brief introduction to a collection of important material concerning Zhang Zhupo) and "Zhang Zhupo shiwen jicun" (The collected extant poetry and prose of Zhang Zhupo), and one by Liu Hui, "Zhang Zhupo zongpu shixi biao" (A chart of Zhang Zhupo's family tree). The last work also outlines the contents of the genealogy, on which it is based.

If the genealogy is reliable, Zhang Zhupo was born in 1670 and died in 1698. This is in accord with the fragmentary information we have about him in other sources, such as the mention of his age as twenty-six in his essay, "*Jin Ping Mei* is not an obscene book", included in the earliest extant edition of his commentary (preface dated 1695), and the statement that he did not live long after the publication of his commentary, made by Liu Tingji in his *Zaiyuan zazhi*.³ The newly discovered material contains one of Zhang Zhupo's poems entitled "Playfully written on the evening of the Lantern Festival, 1695," in which he mentions that he is more than twenty-five years old. The genealogy also contains information on Zhang's literary career. We are told, for instance, that he took the civil service examinations many times without success, but that a trip to Peking brought him some measure of literary fame prior to his publication of the *Jin Ping Mei* commentary.

An extract from the biography of Zhang Zhupo, written by his younger brother Zhang Daoyuan 張道淵

*My brother read so quickly it seemed as if he could take in ten lines of text with every glance. Occasionally I would see him browsing through works of fiction like Shuihu zhuan and Jin Ping Mei; the leaves of the book would turn as quickly as fallen leaves blown by the wind. Before long, he would already be finished with his reading. He once said to me, "Jin Ping Mei is a very finely constructed work 針綫縝密, but since the death of Jin Shengtan there are few people alive who know about this. I am going to pick out all of its fine points and make them manifest." Thereupon he closeted himself in his room and in a little more than ten days his commentary was finished. Someone said to him, "If you sell your manuscript to a book publisher, it would fetch a very good price." My brother said, "Do you think that I wrote this for money? I intend to have it published so that all the people of the realm can also enjoy the beauty of its composition. Is this not a good enough reason?" Therefore, he had the blocks cut for printing, and then took them to Nanjing. People came from far and near to purchase copies and his fame spread widely. Of the famous literary men who came to Nanjing, the number of them who paid visits to my brother in a single day could be counted by the tens. Zhupo was by nature very fond of society, and even though he was staying in rented lodgings, his parlour was always crowded with guests. However, his income was just enough to cover his expenses. One day he exclaimed, "How can a real man allow himself to be tied down by this!" He then turned over the printing blocks for the edition to his landlord, and set out for the North empty-handed.**

*The text appears in Hou Zhongyi 侯忠義, Wang Rumei 王汝梅, eds., *Jin Ping Mei ziliao huibian* 金瓶梅資料匯編 (Collection of materials on *Jin Ping Mei*), (Peking: Peking University, 1985), pp. 197-207; and in an article by Wu Gan 吳敢 in the magazine *Wenxian* 文獻 1985. 3:18-33.

³See Sun Kaidi, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

Another of Zhang Zhupo's poems quoted in the genealogy states that by the time he was twenty his writing was known throughout China. Whether or not that was so, it is for his commentary on *Jin Ping Mei* that Zhang Zhupo is of interest to us today. In addition to the essay entitled "How to Read *Jin Ping Mei*" translated below, the commentary contains several lists of different character types appearing in the novel, a collection of interesting sayings taken from the novel, an analytical table of contents, and several essays on a variety of topics, such as whether or not the book is obscene; allegorical meanings behind the names of the characters; filiality and the composition of the novel; the importance of the physical layout of the dwellings described; and the interplay of "heat" and "cold" in the novel.⁴ Besides this prefatory material (a total of fifteen separate pieces not counting the preface signed Xie Yi) the remainder of the commentary consists of pre-chapter and interlineal comments. Although he was in many ways indebted to a previous commentary on *Jin Ping Mei*,⁵ and to the work of Jin Shengtan (1608-1661), an influential critic of vernacular fiction, Zhang Zhupo raised Chinese fiction criticism to a new level of achievement.

Over the years there have been many editions of *Jin Ping Mei*, but they can be divided into two main traditions. On the one hand we have the editions with prefaces dated 1617.⁶ The other textual line of filiation is dated to the Chongzhen reign period (1628-1644) and includes the edition of the novel that Zhang Zhupo used.⁷ Critical opinion holds that the first group of editions comes closer to the author's original conception of the novel, but by Zhang Zhupo's time, those editions had become exceedingly rare and were apparently unavailable to him. However, though certain features of the text are distorted in the edition used by Zhang Zhupo, if we remember that these emendations and deletions are essential to the study of the changes in fiction writing and reading taking place between the time of the original composition of the novel and the subsequent editions, this may lessen our disappointment about the fact that Zhang used an inferior edition for his commentary.

This translation of "*Jin Ping Mei dufa*" is based on a collation of texts from several editions. References to the text of the novel are to the 1695 large-character edition which contains Zhang Zhupo's commentary, recently reprinted in Taiwan.⁸ The reader is also referred to the corresponding sections of the translation of this version of the novel by Clement Egerton.

⁴For a description and selected translations from these essays, see David T. Roy, "Chang Chu-p'o's Commentary on the *Chin Ping Mei*," in *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays*, Andrew H. Plaks, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 115-123.

⁵The so-called *yuanben* (original edition) with headmargin comments. See Sun Kaidi, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

⁶The A editions, in Patrick Hanan's terminology. See his "The Text of the *Chin Ping Mei*," *Asia Major*,

N.S., 9.1:1-57 (1962).

⁷These editions are labeled B and C in Hanan's terminology. See footnote above.

⁸An impression from the same blocks was reprinted in Hong Kong by Huiwenge Bookstore in 1975 in the collection entitled, *Liangzhong Zhupo pingdian hekan tianxia diyi qishu Jin Ping Mei* (Combined edition of two versions of the world's number-one unusual book, *Jin Ping Mei*, with commentaries by Zhang Zhupo).

批評第一奇書金瓶梅讀法

劈空換出金瓶梅三個人來。看其如何收攏一塊。如何發放開去。看其前半部比做金瓶。後半部止做春梅。前半人家的金瓶。被他千方百計弄來。後半自己的梅花。却輕巧的被人奪去。

起以玉皇廟。終以永福寺。而一回中。已一齊說出。是大關鍵處。

先是吳神仙總覽其盛。便是黃真人。少扶其衰。未是普淨師一洗其業。是此書大照應處。

水鑑定終身。是一番結果。然獨遺陳敬濟。嘻笑下龜。

第一奇書

讀法

1

The author has invented the three characters [whose names make up the title], Pan Jinlian, Li Ping'er, and Chunmei. Notice how he brings them together in one place and then disperses them again. In the first half of his work the focus is on Pan Jinlian and Li Ping'er, but in the second half it is on Chunmei. In the first half Ximen Qing manages, by hook and by crook, to obtain for himself the gold [Jinlian] and the vase [Ping'er] which had belonged to other men; but in the second half the plum blossom [Chunmei] which was his to begin with falls easily into the hands of another man.

2

The action begins in the Yuhuang Miao [Temple of the Jade Emperor]⁹ and ends in the Yongfu Si [Temple of Eternal Felicity],¹⁰ and both these temples are introduced in the first chapter.¹¹ These two are places of pivotal importance in the book.

The research that helped to make this work possible was materially assisted by a grant from the American Council of Learned Societies. David Rolston supplied the keys to the Chinese text and to Clement Egerton's translation.

⁹*Diyi qishu*, 5 vols. (Taibei: Liren, 1981), 1/10b-18a. This reprint of a 1695 edition is hereafter abbreviated as *DYQS*. Citations indicate chapter and page

number. For an English translation of this passage, see Clement Egerton, tr., *The Golden Lotus*, 4 vols., (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 1.1.11-20. This translation will be referred to as *TGL* and citations will indicate volume, chapter, and page number.

¹⁰*DYQS* 100/11a-17b, *TGL* 4.100.367-374.

¹¹*DYQS* 1/10b, *TGL* 1.1.11-12.



First, Wu Shenxian [Wu the Immortal] surveys Ximen Qing's household at its height,¹² then Huang Zhenren [His Holiness Huang] sustains it somewhat in its decline,¹³ and finally Master Pujing purges the sins of the main characters.¹⁴ The way in which these episodes are correlated is highly significant.



Wu Shenxian's mirror-like forecast of the fates of the members of Ximen Qing's household¹⁵ is a kind of summation, but Chen Jingji is conspicuously absent. Pan Jinlian is not present when her fellow ladies light-heartedly have their fortunes told by means of the tortoise,¹⁶ but she makes good the deficiency by what she says when she comes on the scene immediately afterwards,¹⁷ so she is not really left out. It is only Ximen Qing and Chunmei who are not included here, but Li Ping'er's two appearances in Ximen Qing's dreams¹⁸ supply the missing data for him. It is not until Chen Jingji is physiognomized by Ye Toutuo [Ye the Ascetic],¹⁹ however, that his final fortune is foretold.



Before introducing Pan Jinlian,²⁰ the author introduces Li Ping'er.²¹ Only after Ximen Qing takes Pan Jinlian into his household²² does the author introduce Chunmei.²³ However, before Ximen Qing takes Pan Jinlian into his household, he first marries Meng Yulou.²⁴ Again, before Ximen Qing takes Li Ping'er into his household,²⁵ the author introduces Chen Jingji.²⁶ The skill with which these elements of the plot are dovetailed cannot be described in words. But the way in which the author goes on to weave in the stories of Song Huilian, Wang Liu'er, Ben the Fourth's wife, Ruyi, and the rest, only demonstrates once again that he has mastered the creative skills of Heaven itself.



Those who really know how to read *Jin Ping Mei* appreciate the second half, yet it is also only those who really know how to read it who prefer the first half. You can only understand this after having fully savoured such scenes, and there are too many to enumerate, as those in which the play about Han Xiangzi's quest for his uncle, Han Yu, is performed²⁷ and the song "Alas! Life is Like a Dream" is called

¹²Ch. 29.

²⁰DYQS 1/22b, TGL 1.1.25.

¹³Ch. 66.

²¹DYQS 1/10a-11a, TGL 1.1.12.

¹⁴Ch. 100.

²²DYQS 9/1b, TGL 1.9.122.

¹⁵Ch. 29.

²³DYQS 9/2a, TGL 1.9.122.

¹⁶DYQS 46/14b-17a, TGL 2.46.262-265.

²⁴DYQS 7/12b, TGL 1.7.107-108.

¹⁷DYQS 46/17a, TGL 2.46.265.

²⁵DYQS 19/12a-b, TGL 1.19.271-272.

¹⁸DYQS 67/17b-18a, 71/6b-7b; TGL 3.67.221-222, 3.71.293-294.

²⁶DYQS 17/3a-b, TGL 1.17.234.

¹⁹DYQS 96/11b-12b, TGL 4.96.317-318.

²⁷DYQS 32/3a, TGL 2.32.60.

for²⁸ during the celebrations that mark the birth of Guan'ge and Ximen Qing's appointment to office.



Jin Ping Mei exhibits certain regular structural devices. For example, whenever Pan Jinlian gets angry about something, the author arranges to have Meng Yulou at her side. This is done without any variation each time and is a seasoned stylistic technique. Another example is the way that every time Ximen Qing is about to go out drinking at someone else's place, some guest or official turns up for a visit and he has to delay his departure in order to entertain him. This is a structural device used in the chapters after the birth of Guan'ge and Ximen Qing's appointment to office.



Each of the hundred chapters of *Jin Ping Mei* is constructed by means of the structural device of juxtaposing two episodes, so that there are two hundred episodes in all. However, there are some chapters in which the transition between the two episodes is effected by means of a single expression, while there are others in which the two episodes are mortised by a hidden tenon. For example, Zhao Yuantan's tiger performs this function in chapter One.²⁹

There are some chapters in which the two episodes are further subdivided; the author narrating the first half of the first episode, shifting to the first half of the second, then going back to finish off the first, and only then going on to complete the second episode. There are some chapters in which the two episodes are completely intermingled, and there are some in which the treatment of other matters is inserted into the narration of the two main episodes. In short, the two episodes form the framework of each chapter. If you savour carefully the way in which they are handled from one chapter to another, you will know what I mean.



It is true that two episodes are juxtaposed in every chapter of *Jin Ping Mei*, but there are also cases of episodes in different chapters which parallel each other at a distance. Examples of this include the parallel episodes of Pan Jinlian playing the *pipa*³⁰ and Li Ping'er playing elephant chess,³¹ and the paired episodes of the hiding of the wine-pot³² and the theft of the gold bracelet.³³ I could go on, but there are too many to fully enumerate.



In the first half of the book, the motif of "cold" is repeated so effectively that one can hardly bear to read on, whereas in the second half the motif of "heat"

²⁸DYQS 31/13b, TGL 2.31.55.

³⁰DYQS 38/9a-12b, TGL 2.38.161-165.

²⁹DYQS 1/14b, TGL 1.1.16. Talk about the tiger portrayed in a painting of Zhao Yuantan leads to mention of a man-eating tiger that is presently terrorizing the countryside. The tiger is killed by Wu Song, who figures in the latter half of the chapter.

³¹DYQS 44/5b-7a, TGL 2.44.234-235.

³²Ch. 31.

³³Chs. 43-44.

recurs but is not readily apparent to the reader. In the first half the motif of "cold" occurs where the greatest "heat" is being described. If you savour these passages you will know what I mean. The way that the motif of "heat" occurs in the second half can be seen in the description of Meng Yulou's visit to Ximen Qing's grave where the author provides an elaborate description of the beauties of spring on the Qingming festival.³⁴



In this book there are examples of the most dubious and unimportant characters who nevertheless play significant roles, such as Han Aijie. Innumerable women appear in the work, but why does the author choose to end it with the example of Han Aijie's integrity?³⁵ He has a profound reason for doing so. Han Aijie's mother, Wang Liu'er, becomes a prostitute, and Han Aijie herself, after her return from the Eastern Capital, also engages in this profession,³⁶ but as soon as she becomes interested in Chen Jingji, she remains faithful to him until death.³⁷ If we compare this with the way in which Li Ping'er and Chunmei treat their husbands, Hua Zixu and Zhou Xiu, it certainly puts them to shame. If we compare Pan Jinlian's conduct after meeting Ximen Qing with that of Han Aijie after meeting Chen Jingji, we see that she is unfaithful first with Qintong,³⁸ later on with Chen Jingji,³⁹ and finally even with Wang Chao,⁴⁰ so that she is not even the equal of a repentant prostitute. Thus the author concludes his book with Han Aijie in order to put to shame the other female characters and to emphasize the contrast between a repentant prostitute who can preserve her integrity and those who not only fail to correct their faults while living in luxury but, abandoning all integrity and shame, go unrepentant to their deaths.



In reading *Jin Ping Mei* we must pay attention to the significant features of the spatial setting. These include the location of Pan Jinlian and Chunmei in one place and Li Ping'er in another and the placing of all three of them in the single larger setting of the front garden. The fact that Pan Jinlian and Chunmei are placed together accentuates the isolation of Li Ping'er. The fact that Pan Jinlian and Li Ping'er live close to each other in the garden allows their jealousy to flourish, while the fact that Wu Yueniang lives far removed from them gives Chen Jingji his chance to get at Pan Jinlian.



In reading *Jin Ping Mei* we must pay attention to the points at which one element in the narrative is used to lead into another. For example, the theme of

³⁴DYQS 89/3b-4a, TGL 4.89.212-213.

³⁷DYQS 100/9a-b, TGL 4.100.365.

³⁵DYQS 99/10a-12b, 100/1a-9b; TGL 4.99-100.353-365.

³⁸Ch. 12.

³⁶DYQS 98/8a (the text of this edition is defective here), TGL 4.98.338.

³⁹Ch. 53.

⁴⁰DYQS 86/12b-13b, TGL 4.86.178-179.

slaying a tiger is introduced amid the joking in the Yuhuang Miao.⁴¹ The fact that Hua Zixu is Ximen Qing's next-door neighbour is introduced when he is proposed for membership in the brotherhood.⁴² In chapter 8, when Pan Jinlian is suffering from the heat, her tirade at Dai'an elicits the information that Ximen Qing has taken Meng Yulou into his household.⁴³ Li Guijie is introduced when Ximen Qing asks Ying Bojue where he has been the last few days.⁴⁴ Chen Jingji establishes his intimacy with Pan Jinlian on the occasion of the completion of the summerhouse.⁴⁵ Wang Liu'er submits to Ximen Qing's demands as a result of Zhai Qian's request for a concubine.⁴⁶ Li Ping'er's pregnancy is revealed in the course of her bout with Ximen Qing in the Feicui Xuan [Kingfisher Pavilion].⁴⁷ The origin of Li Ping'er's illness is the trial of the Indian monk's medicine.⁴⁸ The monk Pujing comes into the story as a result of the events in the Bixia Gong [Temple of the Goddess of the Iridescent Clouds].⁴⁹ Li Gongbi is introduced on the occasion of the visit to Ximen Qing's grave,⁵⁰ and the first indication that there is anything going on between Dai'an and Xiaoyu occurs when he is sent home for the fur coats.⁵¹ Such examples of the author's ability to accomplish his aims without leaving a trace are innumerable. This is due to the skill with which he employs indirect and unexpected techniques to tell his story. He is not willing to start a new narrative thread from scratch or to use direct or straightforward techniques to tell his story. There is no end to the separate narrative threads in this book, and if each of them were started from scratch, one could not even count them. When I take up my brush I also try to use indirect and unexpected techniques, but unlike the author, I am unable to be indirect without leaving traces or to be unexpected without tipping my hand. This is what makes his book so marvelous.



There are many episodes in *Jin Ping Mei* in which the clandestine activities of some of the characters are disclosed to others. For example: Ximen Qing's sexual intercourse with Pan Jinlian during the funeral service for her husband is overheard by the monks outside the window.⁵² Pan Jinlian's affair with Qintong is discovered by Sun Xue'e, and the even more incriminating perfume box that Pan Jinlian has given him is also found on Qintong's person.⁵³ Pan Jinlian discovers Ximen Qing's secret assignations with Li Ping'er over the garden wall,⁵⁴ and stumbles upon Song

⁴¹DYQS 1/14b-15b, TGL 1.1.16-17.

⁴⁸DYQS 50/9a-11a, TGL 2.50.321-322.

⁴²DYQS 1/9b-10a, TGL 1.1.11.

⁴⁹Ch. 84.

⁴³DYQS 8/3b, TGL 1.8.111. Read *ba* for *liu*.

⁵⁰Chs. 89-90.

⁴⁴DYQS 1/8b, TGL 1.1.10.

⁵¹DYQS 46/6b-11b, TGL 2.46.252-257.

⁴⁵DYQS 18/12b-13b, TGL 1.18.258-259.

⁵²DYQS 8/11a, TGL 1.8.120.

⁴⁶Ch. 37.

⁵³DYQS 12/6b-8a, TGL 1.12.161-163.

⁴⁷DYQS 27/4b, TGL 1.27.378.

⁵⁴DYQS 13/7a-10a, TGL 1.13.183-186.

Huilian's affair with Ximen Qing.⁵⁵ Li Ping'er's remarks in the Feicui Xuan are overheard by Pan Jinlian,⁵⁶ but her own antics in the grape arbour are witnessed by Tiegun.⁵⁷ No sooner does Ximen Qing accept the bribe of stolen goods from Miao Qing than he incurs the wrath of the Regional Inspector.⁵⁸ No sooner does Wu Yueniang implore the aid of the magistrate in her suit against Chen Jingji⁵⁹ than Ping'an gives false testimony against her in the court of Wu Dian'en.⁶⁰ Immediately after Pan Jinlian's affair with Chen Jingji is first consummated, Ximen Qing actually touches the evidence without realizing it,⁶¹ and when Ximen Qing burns moxa on Wang Liu'er's pudendum, Hu Xiu is an unseen witness to the scene.⁶² Examples of this kind are too many to enumerate. In general, the author uses the technique of exposing his characters to danger in order to show the predicaments to which human emotions can lead. But even more remarkable is the way in which he enables the characters whose clandestine activities are disclosed to cover their tracks with plausible alibis so that he does not have to waste his energy on tedious explanations. This is why his technique is so miraculous.



There are instances in *Jin Ping Mei* in which the author seems to have deliberately created episodes or characters which appear and disappear for no apparent reason. Shutong is an example. Who knows how much planning went into the author's creation of this single character? It goes without saying that he serves the purpose of depicting Ximen Qing's depravity and polymorphous promiscuity, but it is not so apparent that the author has created Shutong in order to prepare the ground for the departure of another character from Ximen Qing's household. What is the explanation for this? Li Ping'er and Wu Yueniang start out estranged but end up on intimate terms. Pan Jinlian and Wu Yueniang start out on intimate terms but end up estranged. Although the rift between them develops over the expulsion of Lai Zhao⁶³ and the banishment of Lai Wang,⁶⁴ it need never have been as serious as it becomes when Pan Jinlian throws her tantrum.⁶⁵ This tantrum is precipitated by Yuxiao's willingness to repeat every word of Wu Yueniang's private conversation to Pan Jinlian.⁶⁶ Why should Yuxiao tell her everything? Because she has accepted her three conditions.⁶⁷ Why does she accept these three conditions? Because Pan Jinlian discovers her affair with Shutong.⁶⁸ The author does not want to have to account for

⁵⁵DYQS 22/4a-b, TGL 1.22.313-314.

⁶³DYQS 29/4a, TGL 2.29.15.

⁵⁶DYQS 27.4a-b, TGL 1.27.378.

⁶⁴DYQS 26/9a-10b, TGL 1.26.364-365.

⁵⁷DYQS 28/5a-b, TGL 2.28.5.

⁶⁵DYQS 75/22a-24b, TGL 3.75.375-377.

⁵⁸Chs. 47-48.

⁶⁶DYQS 75/14b-15b, 21a-22a; TGL 3.75.368-370, 375.

⁵⁹DYQS 92/14b-15b, TGL 4.92.262-263.

⁶⁷DYQS 64/2b-4a, TGL 3.64.167-168.

⁶⁰DYQS 95/4a-b, TGL 4.95.295.

⁶⁸DYQS 64/2b-4a, TGL 3.64.167-168.

⁶¹DYQS 53/3b-4a, TGL 2.53.370-371.

⁶²DYQS 61/5a-6a, TGL 3.61.103.

the affair between Yuxiao and Shutong from scratch at this point in the narrative, so he describes the hiding of the wine-pot and the ill will it engenders at an earlier point.⁶⁹ But why should the author go to such pains to account for Pan Jinlian's tantrum? This episode is needed to account for the fact that when she has to depart from the household, Wu Yueniang abandons her to her fate without the slightest regret and Pan Jinlian's downfall is complete.⁷⁰ How can anyone say that there is a single example of irrelevant writing in *Jin Ping Mei*?



In *Jin Ping Mei* the author devotes serious attention to the description of six women, and of these, he really concentrates on only four, i.e., Wu Yueniang, Meng Yulou, Pan Jinlian and Li Ping'er. But he describes Wu Yueniang only because of the requirements of the plot, and uses different techniques to depict Meng Yulou because she is a person of superior gifts who resents her unjust neglect. Thus he describes Wu Yueniang only because he has to, and is unwilling to describe Meng Yulou the way he does his other characters. Neither one of them is given the full treatment, which is reserved for Li Ping'er and Pan Jinlian. But again, he describes Li Ping'er by what he does not say about her, which is to say, he describes her indirectly. This is because the focus of his description is always on Pan Jinlian. Because his focus is always on Pan Jinlian, it is no wonder that she emerges as the most vicious of all his characters. Such, indeed, is the awesome power of the writer's brush.



There are two characters in *Jin Ping Mei* to which the author devotes special attention and whose final fates are also noteworthy: Chunmei and Dai'an. While she is still only one of the maidservants, the author indicates in numerous passages that Chunmei possesses a sense of self-esteem and ambition which sets her apart from the others. While he is still only one among the many manservants, the author describes in passage after passage how adept Dai'an is at pleasing people in everything he does. Why does the author insist on having Chunmei become a lady of rank⁷¹ and Dai'an a man of wealth and position⁷² at the end of the book? In order that his novel on the theme of "heat and cold" should illustrate the reversal of fortunes. Notice how the other characters can only see that the Chunmei before them is merely a maidservant—they have no idea that later she will become a lady of rank. Notice how they only see that the Dai'an before them is merely a manservant—they have no idea that later he will become a man of wealth and position. When their status changes, not only do the others look upon Chunmei and Dai'an in a new light and pay court to them, even Wu Yueniang has to look on them differently, treating Chunmei as her social superior⁷³ and placing herself under Dai'an's protection after

⁶⁹DYQS 31/7b-10b, TGL 2.31.47-52.

⁷²DYQS 100/18a, TGL 4.100.374.

⁷⁰DYQS 86/8a-12b, TGL 4.86.174-178.

⁷³Ch. 96.

⁷¹DYQS 95/6b, TGL 4.95.297-298.

the decline of the Ximen family.⁷⁴ Of what utility then is judging people according to transitory social status? The author's acupuncture uses satiric barbs instead of regular needles. In order to make the later reversal of their fortunes plausible, the author must first demonstrate the special qualities of Chunmei and Dai'an.



What need does the author have for the characters Li Jiao'er and Sun Xue'e? He uses Li Jiao'er to imply that even before Ximen Qing meets Pan Jinlian or Li Ping'er he is already a dissolute wastrel who is capable of any crime. In his treatment of Pan Jinlian and Li Ping'er, he describes certain of Ximen Qing's crimes in full, whereas in his treatment of Li Jiao'er he describes some of his other crimes by implication. If the crimes that are actually described are as bad as they are, those that are not portrayed leave us free to wonder how many other indescribable crimes he has committed in the past. How deep is the author's hatred of Ximen Qing!

As for Sun Xue'e, why should the author devote the space that he does to this person of humble origins whose status is only that of a maidservant who has been seduced by her master? This is an example of the author's Bodhisattva-like compassion. How could the retribution due a character as vicious as Ximen Qing be complete without his wife's becoming a prostitute? But since the author has already decided to handle Wu Yueniang in a different way, he certainly could never bring himself to reduce her to this. Meng Yulou is an innocent victim of Ximen Qing's depravity, so the author could scarcely endure to expose her to any additional suffering for the sake of punishing Ximen Qing. Li Jiao'er is a prostitute to begin with. Li Ping'er is destined to play a role in Ximen Qing's retribution while he is still alive. As for Pan Jinlian, not only does she have a nemesis of her own, but even if she were to become a prostitute, it would not harm Ximen Qing and might even be beneficial to Pan Jinlian, who would probably be nothing loath. How could this be called retribution? Thus the author describes Sun Xue'e as being reduced to prostitution⁷⁵ in order to accentuate the retribution visited upon Ximen Qing and at the same time to unobtrusively bring to a conclusion the case of Song Huilian.⁷⁶ As for the subsequent incidents involving Zhang Sheng and Chen Jingji, they are merely dictated by the exigencies of the plot and the need to bring Sun Xue'e's life as a prostitute to a conclusion.⁷⁷



Li Jiao'er represents the role of money in the realm of sex. This is apparent from the fact that she takes charge of the household accounts⁷⁸ and that she lines her pockets before leaving the household.⁷⁹ Wang Liu'er represents the role of sex in the realm of money. When she meets with Ximen Qing she is always talking about

⁷⁴DYQS 100/18a, TGL 4.100.374.

⁷⁸DYQS 11/3b, TGL 1.11.146.

⁷⁵Ch. 94.

⁷⁹DYQS 79/24b, 80/7a-9a; TGL 4.79.98, 4.80.110-112.

⁷⁶Chs. 22-26.

⁷⁷DYQS 99/9a, TGL 4.99.352.

business deals,⁸⁰ getting maid-servants and houses,⁸¹ fixing up things for Miao Qing,⁸² and so forth, all of which profitable subjects are broached by way of sex.



The author needs Song Huilian in his book in order to bring out as completely as possible the viciousness of Pan Jinlian. This early trial of her powers against Song Huilian foreshadows what she does later on out of jealousy of Li Ping'er. How can we see this? When Song Huilian succeeds in attracting her master's attentions, it is Pan Jinlian who first becomes aware of it,⁸³ just as it is she who first catches sight of Yingchun pretending to call the cat as a signal for Ximen Qing's assignation with Li Ping'er.⁸⁴ How does Pan Jinlian's willingness to send Chunmei with a brazier to warm the grotto for Ximen Qing and Song Huilian⁸⁵ differ from her urging Ximen Qing to take Li Ping'er into his household and offering to share her quarters with her for the time being?⁸⁶ How does her apparent willingness to forgive Song Huilian when she kneels and throws herself upon her mercy, and all the other tricks by which she keeps the upper hand over her⁸⁷ differ from her pretending to be drunk when Li Ping'er first enters the household and saying to her "Now we walk together on the same path"?⁸⁸ How does her double-tongued trouble-making between Sun Xue'e and Song Huilian⁸⁹ differ from her telling tales about Li Ping'er to Wu Yueniang?⁹⁰ To make a long story short, Lai Wang's narrow escape from death⁹¹ and the needless suicide of Song Huilian⁹² are both Pan Jinlian's doing. The author times this sub-plot to coincide with Li Ping'er's entry into the household for the express purpose of providing her with a warning, but she does not realize her danger and actually befriends Pan Jinlian. How fitting that disaster should not be long in overtaking her and that she should suffer the fate of which she has been so clearly forewarned. This episode, which I interpret as an early trial of her powers, greatly accentuates Pan Jinlian's viciousness, but the author has also created here a cautionary example for those who do not know how to keep danger at a distance. If you read this episode inattentively you may think that it describes nothing more than Ximen Qing's having another affair with the wife of one of his servants. But Ximen Qing is a man who kills husbands in order to take their wives and money,⁹³ protects servants who have killed their masters,⁹⁴ and puts the law of the land up for sale, so the author scarcely needs to create this episode merely to add another item to the roster of his crimes. The reader, however, is often deceived by the author.

⁸⁰DYQS 50/6a, 61/5b; TGL 2.50.317-318, 3.61. 103.

⁸¹DYQS 38/4a, TGL 2.38.156.

⁸²DYQS 47/6b-7a, 48/4a; TGL 2.47.272-273, 2.48.281-282.

⁸³DYQS 22/4a-b, TGL 1.22.313-314.

⁸⁴DYQS 13/7a-10a, TGL 1.13.183-186.

⁸⁵DYQS 23/6b-7a, TGL 1.23.324.

⁸⁶DYQS 16/3b-5b, TGL 1.16.222-224.

⁸⁷DYQS 23/10a-11a, TGL 1.23.327-328.

⁸⁸DYQS 21/17a-b, TGL 1.21.309-310.

⁸⁹DYQS 26/15a-b, TGL 1.26.371.

⁹⁰DYQS 51/1a-3b, TGL 2.51.324-326.

⁹¹DYQS 26/9a-b, TGL 1.26.364-365.

⁹²DYQS 26/16b-17a, TGL 1.26.372.

⁹³Chs. 5 and 14.

⁹⁴Ch. 47.

21

Why does the author in the later part of his narrative depict the relationship between the wet-nurse Ruyi and Ximen Qing? This is also clearly directed against Pan Jinlian, for it demonstrates that her successful elimination of Song Huilian and Li Ping'er has been an exercise in futility. How can we see this? When Song Huilian dies,⁹⁵ Pan Jinlian is delighted, but then Guan'ge is born and Li Ping'er wins Ximen Qing's favour.⁹⁶ When Guan'ge dies⁹⁷ and Li Ping'er follows him to the grave,⁹⁸ Pan Jinlian is again delighted; but before she knows it, the fragrance of Ruyi's cosmetics attracts Ximen Qing's attention by the very side of his dead favourite's spirit tablet.⁹⁹ Every time Pan Jinlian eliminates a rival another comes to take her place. No matter how good she may be at maintaining her lover's favour and gaining the upper hand, what can she do in the face of a situation like this but acknowledge the futility of her efforts and retire from the field? Thus the author's portrayal of Ruyi is really a means of getting at Pan Jinlian and of expressing the indignation he feels on behalf of Song Huilian and Li Ping'er.

22

But why does the author devote space to the various singing girls such as Li Guijie, Wu Yin'er, and Zheng Aiyue? They serve the purpose of demonstrating the insatiability, frivolity, and vulgarity of Ximen Qing. Li Guijie and Wu Yin'er also serve as foils for Pan Jinlian and Li Ping'er, respectively, demonstrating that by taste and affinity they are indistinguishable from prostitutes, and that though they may never have actually engaged in that trade, their wantonness and depravity are such that they not only show the same proclivities as prostitutes, but will go even further than they do. The author portrays Zheng Aiyue in yet another way—as fragrant, smooth, and soft—in order to bring out the unrelieved boorishness of Ximen Qing, who is depicted by contrast as being incapable of fully appreciating even the refinements of a high-class whore.¹⁰⁰

23

Why has the author created Wang Liu'er, Ben the Fourth's wife, and Lady Lin? These three characters are depicted in different ways and serve different purposes. The depiction of Wang Liu'er is solely intended to illustrate the theme of the venality of sex. If you observe the lengths to which she goes to ingratiate herself with Ximen Qing when he is alive, and the alacrity with which she absconds with his property as soon as he is dead,¹⁰¹ you will see that in the relationship between them, Ximen Qing is using money to seek sex and Wang Liu'er is using sex to seek money. Ximen Qing's death follows upon a visit to Wang Liu'er,¹⁰² so that in the end he

⁹⁵DYQS 26/16b-17a, TGL 1.26.372.

⁹⁶Chs. 30ff.

⁹⁷Ch. 59.

⁹⁸Ch. 62.

⁹⁹DYQS 65/10a, TGL 3.65.185-186. The descrip-

tion of this incident in the novel varies somewhat from Zhang Zhupo's summary here.

¹⁰⁰DYQS 65/10a, TGL 3.65.185-186.

¹⁰¹DYQS 81/4b-6a, TGL 4.81.119-121.

¹⁰²Ch. 79.

finds both sex and money to be empty. When Wang Liu'er subsequently meets He Guanren, she ends up using sex to seek money just as before.¹⁰³ Indeed, though sex can move people, it is no match for money which can be used anywhere for any purpose and is loved by everyone. Thus the author does not conclude the story of Wang Liu'er, who symbolizes the lust for money, until his last chapter.

The author has created Ben the Fourth's wife as a means of revealing Dai'an's character. He shows that Ximen Qing, who seeks only to indulge his own insatiable desires, is unaware of the fact that the example he sets will be followed by his subordinates, who have already learned from him how underlings can take advantage of their masters. Thus Dai'an's seduction of Xiaoyu, which eventuates in his marriage to her,¹⁰⁴ is foreshadowed in his relations with Ben the Fourth's wife.¹⁰⁵ You may say that Ben the Fourth's wife is depicted as a foil to Wang Liu'er, but this is a subsidiary function.

As for Lady Lin, she serves as a vehicle for expressing the incalculable resentment the author feels in his heart for Pan Jinlian. Not only does he have her murdered and mutilated,¹⁰⁵ but he is not satisfied until he has damned even the household in which she got her start in life and the persons who taught her to be what she is. How can we see this? Pan Jinlian is sold as a child into the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang where she is taught to sing and dance.¹⁰⁷ To argue that she is utterly devious and shameless from birth is not consonant with the doctrines that conscience is innate and that human nature is basically good. I am sure that she was not necessarily as dissolute as this at the age of three or four. During the time when she was a member of Imperial Commissioner Wang's establishment, if the male members of the household had shown respect for propriety and righteousness, and the female members of the household had honoured chastity and integrity, so that obscene words and deeds were neither to be heard nor seen, then, even if she had been dissolute to begin with, she would have been transformed into a chaste girl. How is it that this imposing Imperial Commissioner neither pacifies distant peoples in the name of the Son of Heaven nor proclaims the imperial majesty and virtue, but instead, when the ten-year-old daughter of a tailor enters his household, devotes his leisure time to teaching her how to paint her face with cosmetics and encourages her to put on airs. If he carries on like this with a lowly serving maid, the way he conducts himself with his legitimate wife can be imagined. How fitting that his son, Wang Sanguan, should be a good-for-nothing profligate and his own wife, Lady Lin, a dissolute adulteress. Who is there to blame but himself? But what the Imperial Commissioner teaches Pan Jinlian results in incalculable harm to many people, from Wu Da in the beginning to Ximen Qing at the end. It is certainly fitting that the Imperial Commissioner's retribution should come in the form of Lady Lin's adultery with Ximen Qing.¹⁰⁸ This is why I say the author has a profound hatred for Pan

¹⁰³*DYQS* 98/11a-b; 100/1a-b, 9a-b; *TGL* 4.98. 341; 4.100.357, 365.

¹⁰⁴*DYQS* 95/1b-2b, *TGL* 4.95.292-293

¹⁰⁵Ch. 87.

¹⁰⁶*DYQS* 87/10a-11b, *TGL* 4.87.193-194.

¹⁰⁷*DYQS* 1/22b, *TGL* 1.1.25.

¹⁰⁸Ch. 69.

Jinlian, a hatred which extends even to the household in which she got her start in life, and this is why he devotes attention to Lady Lin.

But Zhang Dahu also contributes to Pan Jinlian's corruption,¹⁰⁹ so why does the author neglect him? The answer is that it is his nephew, Zhang Erguan, who takes over Ximen Qing's official post after the latter's death, and it is he whom Ying Bojue persuades to take Li Jiao'er into his household.¹¹⁰ Clearly, he is another Ximen Qing who will suffer a similar indescribable retribution for his own sins. In this novel, undescribed but implied incidents occur without number. In the case of Zhang Erguan, the author has hidden another large book between the lines of his text. This is an example of material implied but not directly written out on the page.



As for the depiction of Wu Yueniang in *Jin Ping Mei*, people all say that Ximen Qing is lucky to have such a wife. They do not understand that the author describes Wu Yueniang's crimes in such a subtle way that people do not realize what he is up to. How can we see this? A husband is the person whom a wife looks up to and depends upon for the remainder of her life. If her husband spent large sums of money on concubines in order to secure a male heir and Wu Yueniang raised no objections, this would truly be an ideal marriage and she would be an exemplary wife. But Ximen Qing murders husbands in order to steal their wives, which is the conduct of a gangster. Now when a husband engages in the conduct of a gangster and his wife does not tearfully remonstrate with him but instead neither expresses approval nor disapproval, treats him as a stranger whose welfare is no concern of hers, and regards her compliance as a virtue, can such an attitude withstand scrutiny? As for her relationship with Chen Jingji, the author goes out of his way to emphasize Wu Yueniang's responsibility for bringing the fox into the chicken-coop,¹¹¹ an act of indescribable folly. When she finally gets wind of her son-in-law's adultery with Pan Jinlian, she can think of nothing better to do than to keep the doors locked in the daytime.¹¹² Afterwards, when she drives Chen Jingji out of the household,¹¹³ sends his wife back to him,¹¹⁴ and agrees to sell Chunmei to Zhou Xiu,¹¹⁵ she is merely adjusting her rudder to the wind without any convictions of her own. Moreover, her fondness for hearing Buddhist nuns recite pious texts and her indiscriminate burning of incense are not proper activities for a wife to engage in. It follows from all this that the words "did not pay much attention to his studies"¹¹⁶ are the source of Ximen Qing's ruination and Wu Yueniang's retribution. How can we see this? If Ximen Qing had adhered to the rules of propriety himself he would have been able to mould his wife accordingly. But instead, merely because he pays no attention to his studies, Wu Yueniang, who has the capacity for goodness, also ends up lacking any understanding of the dictates of propriety. Her every-

¹⁰⁹DYQS 1/22a-23b, TGL 1.1.24-27.

¹¹⁰DYQS 80/10b-11a, TGL 4.80.114.

¹¹¹DYQS 18/7b-13b, TGL 1.18.254-259.

¹¹²DYQS 85/3a-5a, TGL 4.85.157-159.

¹¹³DYQS 86/8b-9a, TGL 4.86.174-175.

¹¹⁴DYQS 91/1a-b, TGL 4.91.235.

¹¹⁵DYQS 86/4a-b, TGL 4.86.169-170.

¹¹⁶DYQS 1/4b, TGL 1.1.6.

day activities show no evidence of the protocol a wife should observe in her relations with her husband, but only a lot of superficial gestures in that direction. Wu Yueniang is described as a woman with good intentions who is ignorant of propriety. But good intentions alone are not enough, for ignorance of propriety can lead to incalculable harm. If Wu Yueniang is ultimately responsible for Chen Jingji's evil deeds, how much worse might things have been if she were not even well-intentioned? However, although it is Wu Yueniang who makes Chen Jingji's crimes possible, it is Ximen Qing who must bear responsibility for having failed to set a proper example for his wife.

25

In the art of writing there is a mode of description characterized by the incremental repetition of a motif. This book excels at this type of incremental description. For example, after describing Ximen Qing's "heat" the author goes on to describe that of the two censors, Cai and Song,¹¹⁷ then that of Grand Marshal Huang,¹¹⁸ then that of Grand Preceptor Cai,¹¹⁹ and finally the "heat" of the imperial court itself.¹²⁰ This is the incremental repetition of the motif of "heat". After describing Ximen Qing's "cold" the author goes on to describe Chen Jingji in the Beggar's Rest,¹²¹ Grand Preceptor Cai's exile,¹²² and finally the captivity of the emperors Huizong and Qinzong.¹²³ This is incremental repetition of the motif of "cold". In brief, the author could have multiplied such incremental repetitions of the motifs of "heat" and "cold" indefinitely, but people like Ximen Qing would only continue to rely on their wealth to commit crimes while remaining as oblivious as ever to all warning signs.

26

The author insists upon describing Wu Yueniang as a pious Buddhist. Does the reader understand the reason for this? In his opening remarks the author enjoins us to purify our six senses,¹²⁴ so we can anticipate that he will certainly conclude his work by showing that the two words money and sex are empty. But only a monk will do to exemplify the conclusion that everything is empty. Ximen Qing is not the sort of person to repent before his dying day, and after his death who is there to play this role? Even if Wu Yueniang, after her husband's death, were to disregard the family property and take the tonsure, what would that have to do with the author's use of Ximen Qing to exemplify Buddhist doctrine? Thus the only thing is to have Ximen Qing himself take the vows. But how is one to get around the fact that he is already dead? The author, after some hesitation, arranges to have Xiaoge born at the very hour of Ximen Qing's death,¹²⁵ so that in the end he may repent

¹¹⁷Ch. 49.

¹²²DYQS 98/8b, TGL 4.98.337.

¹¹⁸DYQS 65/13a-15b, TGL 3.65.188-191.

¹²³DYQS 100/7a, TGL 4.100.363.

¹¹⁹DYQS 55/5a-9b, TGL 3.55.17-22.

¹²⁴DYQS 1/3b, TGL 1.1.4.

¹²⁰DYQS 71/10b-12a, TGL 3.71.297-299.

¹²⁵DYQS 79/24a-25a, TGL 4.79.98-99. In Chapter 100, the monk Pujing tells Wu Yueniang that Xiaoge is Ximen Qing.

¹²¹DYQS 93/2b-6b, TGL 4.93.267-271.

and achieve deliverance.¹²⁶ The author's mind is that of a Confucian sage, but he has taken the compassionate vow of a Bodhisattva in the hope that there should be no one in the world who conceals his faults to the end or fails to correct them. He hopes that even those who die unrepentant may be able to correct their faults in the life to come. What magnanimity and compassion the author shows for Ximen Qing, and how great are his efforts to admonish future generations! The author has this denouement in mind from the outset, but he does not want to simply introduce Master Pujing all of a sudden at the end to spirit Xiaoge away without preparing the reader for such a development. Firstly, to do that would be to use a hackneyed narrative cliché. Secondly, the ending would then seem unconnected with the body of the text and would appear contrived. Therefore he must depict the motif of Wu Yueniang's Buddhist piety off and on throughout his narrative so that it appears and disappears like a snake in the grass or a [discontinuous] chalk-line. He especially describes Wu Yueniang's pilgrimage to the Bixia Gong¹²⁷ in order to lead up to the scene in the Xuejian Dong [Snow Stream Cave], where he gives the reader a glimpse of Pujing.¹²⁸ It is not until ten years later in the narrative that he brings them together again in the Yongfu Si, where all the major characters in the novel reappear in a phantasmagoria only to fade finally from sight, one after the other.¹²⁹ Thus the biography of each of the characters, all of whom are fated to suffer separation in this life and the next, is brought to a conclusion. This is the grand finale in which the myriad threads of the author's narrative are all resolved and allowed to recede into the great void from whence they came.

Thus in depicting Wu Yueniang's Buddhist piety the author is certainly not merely describing in a general way the everyday practices of a lay believer for the benefit of pious village women. The marvelous quality of this book lies in the skill with which the arteries which connect widely separated elements of the plot are concealed. The author never resorts to the facile introduction of narrative developments for which the groundwork has not been laid. That is why *Jin Ping Mei* surpasses all other books.



It is also necessary to keep in mind that the author, in the course of his depiction of Wu Yueniang's Buddhist piety, also describes the numerous secret plots and devious schemes of the three Buddhist nuns, such as inducing Wu Yueniang to burn incense at night [as a means of effecting a reconciliation with Ximen Qing],¹³⁰ and procuring for her a drug to insure conception.¹³¹ There is nothing they will not stoop to. Thus, the author's description of Wu Yueniang's Buddhist piety is also a means of depicting the darker side of her character. The reader should be aware of this.

¹²⁶DYQS 100/16b-17b, TGL 4.100.373.

¹³⁰DYQS 21/1a-4a, TGL 1.21.293-296.

¹²⁷Ch. 84.

¹³¹DYQS 40/1a-2b, 50/11a-b, 53/4a-5b, 64/4a; TGL 2.40.182-183, 2.50.322-323, 2.53.371-373, 3.64.168.

¹²⁸DYQS 84/7a-8a, TGL 4.84.153-154.

¹²⁹DYQS 100/11a-17b, TGL 4.100.367-374.



Meng Yulou is the only major character in the book whom the author allows to come to a decent end.¹³² Why is this? She functions as a contrastive foil to Li Ping'er and Pan Jinlian. After suffering the misfortune of the early death of her first husband, although she is unable to remain faithful to his memory, at least she lives in quiet seclusion and leaves it to a go-between to find her a match. When she enters Ximen Qing's household,¹³³ although she may be open to criticism for her unseemly haste, this is a common enough occurrence among widows. She suffers grievously from her husband's neglect, but bears it patiently, and is willing to make the best of her fate. This is where her superiority to all the other women in the novel shows up. Chunmei consistently gives herself airs, while Meng Yulou is consistently circumspect. Thus, it turns out that Chunmei falls victim to her desires,¹³⁴ whereas Meng Yulou, after undergoing a period of hardship, achieves long-lasting happiness.



The episode in which Chen Jingji goes to Yanzhou [in an abortive attempt to blackmail Meng Yulou]¹³⁵ seems superfluous at first glance, but, in fact, the author uses it for three purposes. First, it provides the cause for Chen Jingji's sudden descent in the world to the point that he is forced to resort to the Beggar's Rest.¹³⁶ Secondly, it prepares the way for the suicide of Chen Jingji's wife, the daughter of Ximen Qing.¹³⁷ Thirdly, it demonstrates that Meng Yulou in her marriage to Li Gongbi has really allied herself with an understanding mate whose life-long companionship will make up for the three or four years of unhappiness she has endured in the household of Ximen Qing. How can we see this? The reason why Meng Yulou is unmoved by Chen Jingji's blandishments is that she is in love with her husband, and Li Gongbi, in turn, would rather die than give up his wife. Can a love which one would rather die for than forsake be anything but true love? Clearly, Meng Yulou will not have to complain of her husband's infidelities in her old age. If we take a look at Meng Yulou's attractive personality, it is clear that she is really a beauty of the first rank, but Ximen Qing remains infatuated by his prior conquest, Pan Jinlian. Thus, the author's description of Meng Yulou is clearly intended to emphasize the fact that Ximen Qing is a vulgar plebian who is only bent on slaking his lust, but has no appreciation for true beauty.



When Meng Yulou enters Ximen Qing's household she does so with full observance of the proprieties.¹³⁸ If we compare this with the furtive way in which Ximen Qing carries off Pan Jinlian¹³⁹ and his adulterous liaison with Li Ping'er,¹⁴⁰ the

¹³² Chs. 91-92.

¹³³ Ch. 7.

¹³⁴ *DYQS* 100/1b-6b, *TGL* 4.100.357-362.

¹³⁵ Ch. 92.

¹³⁶ *DYQS* 93/1b-3a, *TGL* 4.93.266-268.

¹³⁷ *DYQS* 92/12b-14a, *TGL* 4.92.260-262.

¹³⁸ Ch. 7.

¹³⁹ *DYQS* 9/1b, *TGL* 1.9.122.

¹⁴⁰ Ch. 13.

difference is greater than that between Heaven and earth. These modes of matrimony also differ in what they portend of good and ill. Meng Yulou's marriage to Li Gongbi is also arranged for and carried out with full observance of the proprieties.¹⁴¹ If we compare this to the way in which Li Jiao'er departs from the household after haggling over the old bawd,¹⁴² Sun Xue'e elopes by night with Lai Wang¹⁴³ and Pan Jinlian is led away by Dame Wang without a farewell tear,¹⁴⁴ the difference between the auspicious and the inauspicious is clear. Thus, the author has made a point of depicting this true beauty in order to prove how incapable Ximen Qing is of appreciating any refinement.

31

Pan Jinlian and Li Ping'er no sooner enter Ximen Qing's household than they are subjected to humiliation.¹⁴⁵ Meng Yulou is the only person in the household who is never criticized from beginning to end. Truly, the author had a point in doing this.

32

Ximen Qing is an undiscerning scoundrel, Wu Yueniang is an artful hypocrite, Meng Yulou is endearing, Pan Jinlian is inhuman, Li Ping'er is infatuated, Chunmei is unruly, Chen Jingji is a frivolous nonentity, Li Jiao'er is lifeless, Sun Xue'e is stupid, Song Huilian does not know her place, and Ruyi is a mere surrogate. As for the rest, Wang Liu'er, Lady Lin, Li Guijie, and the like can scarcely be considered human. Ying Bojue, Xie Xida and company are utterly unconscionable, and Grand Preceptor Cai and the Censors, Cai and Song, might just as well never have been born.

33

Shizi Jie [Lion Street] is the setting in which Wu Song finally murders Pan Jinlian to avenge his brother's death.¹⁴⁶ It is there that Ximen Qing almost loses his life,¹⁴⁷ and where Hua Zixu also comes to grief not long afterwards.¹⁴⁸ Ximen Qing frequents it [in order to carry on his affair with Li Ping'er],¹⁴⁹ and later on Wang Liu'er moves there on Ximen Qing's account.¹⁵⁰ Pan Jinlian twice visits it to enjoy the Lantern Festival.¹⁵¹ The author uses this street to depict to perfection the way in which petty people, in their self-importance, indulge their evil desires while remaining oblivious to their ominous surroundings.

¹⁴¹Ch. 91.

¹⁴²DYQS 80/8b-9b, TGL 4.80.112.

¹⁴³DYQS 90/8b-11b, TGL 4.90.230-233.

¹⁴⁴DYQS 86/8a-12b, TGL 4.86.174-178.

¹⁴⁵DYQS 12/7a-10b, 19/12a-16b; TGL 1.12.161-165, 1.19.271-276.

¹⁴⁶Ch. 87.

¹⁴⁷DYQS 9/9b-11b, TGL 1.9.131-133.

¹⁴⁸DYQS 14/8a, TGL 1.14.197.

¹⁴⁹DYQS 16/1a-13b, 17/1a-3a; TGL 1.16.217-231, 1.17.232-234.

¹⁵⁰DYQS 38/4a-7b, 39/1a-b; TGL 2.38.156-160, 2.39.166.

¹⁵¹Chs. 15 and 24.



Jin Ping Mei is a veritable *Shi ji* [*Records of the Historian*, by Sima Qian, b. 145 B.C.], but the *Shi ji*, though it contains both individual biographies and collective biographies, treats each biography separately. The hundred chapters of *Jin Ping Mei*, on the other hand, constitute a single biography in which hundreds of characters are treated. Though the presentation is discontinuous, each character has a biography of his own. Thus it is obvious that the author of *Jin Ping Mei* could have written a *Shi ji*. Since he has already accomplished a more difficult task, what difficulty would he have found in accomplishing an easier one?



I have often noticed that those who write commentaries to any particular book often insist upon criticizing other books as a means of raising the status of the one they are concerned with. They do not realize that literature is in the public domain. The fact that one work of literature is marvelous does not prevent other works from being marvelous too. If I happen to appraise the marvelous qualities of a particular work, the marvelous qualities of other works do not eclipse the marvels of the one with which I am primarily concerned. If I were to write a work myself, I could not claim that once my work appeared, the other works in the world had ceased to be marvelous. Nor could I claim that there were not in the world any works more marvelous than mine. Why should one, then, when writing a commentary on any work, treat it as if it were one's own and feel the necessity to prove that no work in the world is its equal? This only reveals a selfish and narrow mind that would certainly be incapable of producing good writing. If one is incapable of writing well oneself, how can one comment on the good writing of others? When I say that it would have been easier to compose *Shi ji* than *Jin Ping Mei*, I refer to the fact that its component parts are presented separately whereas those of *Jin Ping Mei* are integrated. If Sima Qian himself were to be reborn, I am sure that he would not say that I was being partial to *Jin Ping Mei*. I am not claiming that *Shi ji* is any less marvelous than *Jin Ping Mei*; yet *Jin Ping Mei* has succeeded in capturing the marvelous qualities of *Shi ji*. The successes and failures of works of art can only be understood by the discerning. I confine myself to appreciating the marvelous qualities of the works with which I am particularly concerned. Why should I worry about whether the authors are ancient or modern, engage in debates on their behalf, or apologize for them?



The writers of novels never divulge their names, either because they have some axe to grind in their works or because they contain covert references to real people. Since the authors are considerate enough to conceal the real names of the people on whom their characters are modelled, and since they choose not to divulge their own real names, why are men of later times so anxious to search for clues to the underlying reality and call every person by his right name? How petty such desires are! Moreover, hearsay in such matters is generally apocryphal and not to be taken seriously. To sum up the matter: if the author had not had intense feelings he would never have written the book. If the persons whom he wished to describe duly make their appearance in his book, but the author, who had such intense feelings

about them, could not bring himself to name them explicitly, it would be the height of inanity for us, who have no such intense feelings ourselves, to insist on identifying them. Therefore I shall ignore the theory that Ximen Qing was intended to represent Yan Shifan [1513-1565], whose *biehao* was Donglou [Eastern Tower] and whose childhood name was Qing'er.¹⁵² As for the person who wrote this book, I shall simply refer to him as the author. Since he did not choose to attach his name to the book, why should I try to second-guess him?

Recently I saw a work called *Diqi caizi shu* 第七才子書 [*The Seventh Work by and for Men of Genius*: an edition of *Pipa ji* with commentary by Mao Lun and his son Mao Zonggang] which is full of speculation about Wang the Fourth.¹⁵³ Although every commentator is entitled to his own views, I wonder if the time spent on these inconclusive speculations might not be better devoted to appreciation of the literary techniques employed in the work. I merely record this here in order to make my position clear to my contemporaries.



Shi ji contains chronological tables and *Jin Ping Mei* is also full of specific dates. At the very outset it is stated that Ximen Qing is twenty-seven *sui*.¹⁵⁴ When Wu Shenxian physiognomizes him he is said to be twenty-nine *sui*.¹⁵⁵ On his death bed he is said to be thirty-three *sui*.¹⁵⁶ But Guan'ge is stated to have been born in the fourth year of the Zhenghe reign period [1114], during the cyclical year *bingshen* [1116],¹⁵⁷ and to have died in the fifth year of the Zhenghe reign period [1115], during the cyclical year *dingyou* [1117].¹⁵⁸ Now if Ximen Qing's son was born when he was twenty-nine *sui* during the cyclical year *bingshen* [1116], then he should have been thirty-three *sui* during the cyclical year *gengzi* [1120]. But Ximen Qing is said to have died during the cyclical year *wuxu* [1118].¹⁵⁹ The death of Li Ping'er should also have taken place in the fifth year of the Zhenghe reign period [1115],

¹⁵²The similarity of his *biehao* and the main character's surname, Ximen (West Gate) and the identity of the other set of names was cited to prove a connection between the two. On this theory see Wu Han, "*Jin Ping Mei de zhuzuo shidai ji qi shehui beijing*" (The date of the composition of *Jin Ping Mei* and its social background), in his *Dushi zhaji* (Notes on the histories) (Peking: Sanlian, 1956), pp. 1-38, *passim*.

¹⁵³The commentary was dictated by the blind Mao Lun to his son, Mao Zonggang. It contains two prefaces, dated 1665 and 1666 by personal acquaintances. Throughout the commentary, the Maos champion the theory that the play is a satirical work aimed at a man called Wang the Fourth. See *Shengshan yuanping*, *Diqi caizi shu* (Seventh work by and for men of genius, original commentary by Mao Lun), Dawentang edition with 1735 preface, *Zonglun* (General Comments), 1/4a. One of the proofs given for this is the fact that the character *wang* 王 appears four times in the title of the play.

¹⁵⁴*DYQS* 1/4a, *TGL* 1.1.6. *Sui* is the unit of measure in the Chinese system of counting a person's age and is generally one "year" greater than according to the Western system.

¹⁵⁵*DYQS* 29/5b, *TGL* 2.29.16.

¹⁵⁶*DYQS* 79/21a, *TGL* 4.79.96.

¹⁵⁷*DYQS* 30/9b, *TGL* 2.30.39. Both the *DYQS* and other editions of the novel (Chongzhen edition, 30/49b; and *cihua* edition, Dai'an reprint, 30/248.6) give the cyclical year as *wushen*, for which the nearest possible years are 1068 and 1128. At a later point, Zhang Zhupo notices the discrepancy and ascribes it to the author's use of allegory (*DYQS* 39/5b, interlinear comment).

¹⁵⁸*DYQS* 59/16a, *TGL* 3.59.85.

¹⁵⁹*DYQS* 79/21a, *TGL* 4.79.96.

but is stated to have occurred in the seventh year of that period [1117].¹⁶⁰ These are all places where the author has deliberately introduced discrepancies into the chronology. Why has he done so? Because this book is different from other novels. The events of these three or four years appear to be accounted for day by day, hour by hour. We are told whether it is spring or autumn, cold or hot, that such and such a day is someone's birthday, that such and such a person is invited for a visit on such and such a day of such and such a month, that such and such a day is the day of a particular festival. All elapsed time seems to be scrupulously accounted for. But if the author had arranged the chronology of these three to five years so that there would be no discrepancies whatever, his work would really have constituted no more than a daily record of the events in Ximen Qing's household, as some benighted critics have alleged.¹⁶¹ Thus the author has deliberately introduced discrepancies into the chronology. The multitudinous events of these three to five years of prosperity are brought vividly to life, day by day and festival by festival. They are not mechanically strung together. Although they are arranged in order and you can tick them off one by one, they still have the power to dazzle the reader into feeling as though he has lived through each and every day. This is miraculous writing. When skill reaches this level a new plane is reached. I dare not treat such a timeless literary masterpiece as just a work of ordinary fiction.



The hundred chapters of this work constitute a single chapter. Only if you expand your view until you can read it as a single chapter will you be able to appreciate its overall structure.



These hundred chapters were not written in a day, but they were conceived on particular days at particular times. If you try to imagine how the author conceived of this wealth of individually structured episodes you will come to realize how much planning, interweaving, and tailoring was required.



If you read *Jin Ping Mei* as a description of actual events you will be deceived by it. You must read it as a work of literature in order not to be deceived by it.



If you read *Jin Ping Mei* as a work of literature by the author you will still be deceived by it. You must read it as though it were your own work in order not to be deceived by it.

¹⁶⁰DYQS 63/8b, TGL 3.63.159.

¹⁶¹Yuan Zhongdao (1570-1624), for example. See Patrick D. Hanan, "The Text of the *Chin Ping Mei*," *Asia Major*, N.S., 9.1:44 (1962).

42

Though you should certainly read it as though it were your own work, it is even better to read it as a work which is still in its early planning stages. Only if you start out with the assumption that you will have to work out every detail for yourself in order to avoid being deceived will you avoid being deceived.

43

The prerequisites for a successful literary creation can be summed up in the two words emotion and reason. The key to this long work of a hundred chapters is also only these two words, emotion and reason. If you can determine the particular mixture of emotion and reason in a character's heart you have captured the character. Though this character's speech may be mixed in with those of many others, whenever he opens his mouth, what he says will express his particular balance of emotion and reason. It is not that his emotion and reason are revealed only when he opens his mouth, but that only after the author has determined his balance of emotion and reason is he able to open his mouth. Thus the process involved in depicting any number of characters is the same as that involved in depicting any one, and it is possible in this way to produce a work with the plenitude of this great hundred-chapter novel.

44

In *Jin Ping Mei* descriptions of seemingly unrelated events are often inserted at points of high tension in the development of the plot. Thus, the episode in which Ximen Qing marries Meng Yulou¹⁶² is inserted into the narrative just before Pan Jinlian is taken into his household.¹⁶³ The marriage of Ximen Qing's daughter, Ximen Dajie, is inserted into the episode about his marriage to Meng Yulou.¹⁶⁴ Wu Dian'en's loan from Ximen Qing is inserted right after the birth of Guan'ge.¹⁶⁵ Chang Shijie comes to request a loan just at the point when Guan'ge is about to die.¹⁶⁶ The episode in which Yuxiao accepts Pan Jinlian's three conditions is inserted at the time of Li Ping'er's death.¹⁶⁷ The invitation to Grand Marshal Huang is inserted in the middle of the arrangements for Li Ping'er's funeral.¹⁶⁸ All of these are examples of deliberate retardation at points of high tension in the narrative. How could anyone but an author richly endowed with talent be capable of such effects?

There are also cases like that in which Wu Song demands to know Ximen Qing's whereabouts from Manager Fu. At this point of high tension, the information that the manager receives a salary of two taels of silver a month is slipped in.¹⁶⁹ These are examples of the incidental use of a light touch to bring out an essential truth, and do not belong under the heading of the technique discussed above.

¹⁶²Ch. 7.

has Xie Xida's name here by mistake.

¹⁶³DYQS 9/1b, TGL 1.9.122.

¹⁶⁷DYQS 64/2b-4a, TGL 3.64.167-168.

¹⁶⁴DYQS 8/1a, TGL 1.8.109.

¹⁶⁸Ch. 65.

¹⁶⁵DYQS 31/1a-4a, TGL 2.31.42-45.

¹⁶⁹DYQS 9/9b, TGL 1.9.131.

¹⁶⁶DYQS 59/14a, TGL 3.59.83-84. Zhang Zhupo



One of the marvelous things about *Jin Ping Mei* is the expert use of the device of duplication without being repetitive. For example, the author depicts an Ying Bojue and then goes on to depict a Xie Xida, but throughout the work, Ying Bojue remains Ying Bojue and Xie Xida remains Xie Xida. Each of them retains a distinct identity and mode of conversation so that there is never the slightest confusion between them. He depicts a Pan Jinlian and then goes on to depict a Li Ping'er. This could be described as repetitive, yet from first to last, whether they are together or apart, there is never the slightest confusion between them in their words or acts. He depicts a Wang Liu'er and then insists upon going on to depict the wife of Ben the Fourth. He depicts a Li Guijie and then insists upon going on to depict a Wu Yin'er and a Zheng Aiyue. He depicts a Dame Wang and then insists upon going on to depict an Auntie Xue, a Dame Feng, an Auntie Wen, and a Dame Tao. He depicts a Nun Xue and then insists upon going on to depict a Nun Wang and a Nun Liu. All of these are examples of the marvelous way in which the author purposely duplicates characters and yet succeeds in individualizing each character so that all remain distinct.



In *Jin Ping Mei* the characterization is such that Ximen Qing is never cultivated, Wu Yueniang is never obvious, Meng Yulou is always engaging, Pan Jinlian is never dull, Li Ping'er is never deep, Chunmei is always disdainful, Chen Jingji is never attractive, Ximen Dajie is never refined, Ying Bojue is never dull-witted, and Dai'an is never stupid. Thus, each of the characters is successfully individualized.



At the beginning of *Jin Ping Mei* the author introduces a man and a woman into his narrative only to let them go, and then proceeds to do the same thing with another man and woman at the end. Bu Zhidao and Zhuo Diu'er are the characters he lets go at the beginning and Chuyun¹⁷⁰ and Li An are the characters he lets go at the end.

Bu Zhidao is let go at the beginning in order to create a vacancy in the brotherhood and thus leave room for his place to be filled by Hua Zixu. The author is unwilling simply to introduce Hua Zixu into his narrative directly, nor does he wish to give his game away by describing only nine of the ten sworn brothers and thus leaving a vacancy which he will have to bring in Hua Zixu to fill. Therefore he introduces Bu Zhidao only so that he can remove him at his convenience and thereby create a vacancy in the brotherhood which will provide an opening for the introduction of Hua Zixu.¹⁷¹ Moreover, the introduction of Hua Zixu into the narrative provides a convenient occasion for the introduction of Li Ping'er at the same time.¹⁷² Otherwise, if he had initially introduced Hua Zixu as one of the sworn

¹⁷⁰Zhang Zhupo gives her name here as Qinyun by mistake.

¹⁷¹DYQS 1/5b-9b, TGL 1.1.7-11.

¹⁷²DYQS 1/9b-11a, TGL 1.1.10-12.

brothers, it would have necessitated additional explanation when the time came to introduce Li Ping'er. Thus although Bu Zhidao is created for the purpose of providing a vacancy for Hua Zixu to fill, he also serves to provide an opening for the introduction of Li Ping'er. Since his only function is to provide an opening of this kind, what point would there be in making up a significant name for him? But since a name of some kind is required, why not simply call him Bu Zhidao [puns with "do not know"]? Thus his name becomes Bu Zhidao.

As for Zhuo Diu'er, she too is let go in order to create a vacancy in Ximen Qing's household for Meng Yulou to fill. Before marrying Meng Yulou, Ximen Qing had taken Zhuo Diu'er into his household, but after she has been replaced by Meng Yulou, Ximen Qing forgets about her completely.¹⁷³ How different this is from Ximen Qing's response to the death of Li Ping'er. Day after day he keeps vigil by her coffin or has paper money burnt on her behalf. Her servant girls and the wet-nurse keep vigil in her empty chambers¹⁷⁴ and she twice appears to Ximen Qing in his dreams.¹⁷⁵ Zhuo Diu'er, by contrast, is allowed to drop completely out of Ximen Qing's mind. This is why she is called Diu'er [puns with "drop"]. Thus the author lets these two characters go at the beginning of his work in order to make room for the introduction of other characters.

What about the other characters the author introduces at the end of his work only to let go of them? Chuyun [Chu Clouds] is introduced to foreshadow the fact that Ximen Qing's household will disperse as readily as luminescent clouds.¹⁷⁶ Though beauty may be inexhaustible, man's life is finite; when death comes to your door, though you should possess beauties such as Xi Shi and Wang Qiang, what will they avail you? Thus the author introduces Chuyun only in order to reinforce the truths expressed in the prologue of his book.¹⁷⁷

Li An is introduced for the same reason as Han Aijie and like her is accorded the author's most favourable treatment. He introduces this filial son, a man of rectitude and honour, to serve as a rock in midstream which is unmoved by the torrent. Why is this? Of the hundreds of characters in this book, from the Grand Preceptor Cai Jing at the top of the social scale to Hou Lin'er and his ilk at the bottom, there is hardly a decent person to be found. Those of them who are not the sort who welcome their own defilement or voluntarily prostitute themselves are the kind who attach themselves to the powerful or toady to the rich. If there were no Li An, the sole example of a filial son, would this not be tantamount to the extinction of men of conscience? Observe how the author tells the tale of the mutual reliance of Li An and his mother to show him as a filial son who maintains his chastity as though it were jade, and will let no injury befall the body which he has inherited from his parents,¹⁷⁸ in contrast to the likes of Ximen Qing and Chen Jingji who are really inferior to pigs and dogs.

¹⁷³DYQS 1/6a-18b, 2/12a, 7/1b; TGL 1.1.8-21, 1.2.44, 1.7.95.

¹⁷⁴Chs. 62-67.

¹⁷⁵DYQS 67/17b-18a, 71/6b-7b; TGL 3.67.221-222, 3.71.293-294.

¹⁷⁶DYQS 77/16b-17b, 81/3a; TGL 4.77.44-45, 4.81.117.

¹⁷⁷DYQS 1/1a-4a, TGL 1.1.1-5.

¹⁷⁸DYQS 100/2a-b, TGL 4.100.358-359.

Thus, at the end of his narrative the author lets these two characters go, but cannot do the same for the rest of his cast. In fact, he makes a special point of letting them go in order to stimulate critical self-examination on the part of his readers.



If the author had chosen to describe Hua Zixu as one of the brotherhood of ten at the beginning of the book, why could he not have simply introduced Li Ping'er at the same time? Before the author took up his brush, his conception of Li Ping'er had already taken shape. Since his conception of Li Ping'er had already taken shape, her secret assignation and willing adultery with Ximen Qing,¹⁷⁹ her marriage to Jiang Zhushan,¹⁸⁰ and her subsequent marriage to Ximen Qing¹⁸¹ had all been worked out in the author's mind before he thought about the problem of what name to give her husband. Since her husband is not required to do anything more than supply the function implied by that term, though his presence may be necessary, he scarcely seems to have any real existence; and so the author gives him the name Zixu [empty or unreal]. A vase [*ping*] exists to hold flowers [*hua*], so the author gives him the surname Hua.

It occurred to the author, as he was beginning his task, that he should provide a biographical sketch of Ximen Qing. If he did not introduce Li Ping'er in the course of his account of Ximen Qing, how was he to work her case into the story? If he had chosen to deal with her separately, he would not have had Ximen Qing say in the opening scene that his next-door neighbour is named Hua So-and-so and his wife's name is such and such.¹⁸² Her introduction at a later point would have been an intrusion for which the reader was unprepared. Suppose he had waited until after Pan Jinlian had been taken into Ximen Qing's household¹⁸³ to introduce Li Ping'er into his narrative? Other novels tend to narrate one incident after another, providing the necessary exposition for each incident as it occurs, but *Jin Ping Mei* relies purely on the technique of the Grand Historian [Sima Qian]. Now, among the writings of Sima Qian which were designed to focus on a particular person, how could any piece be considered worthy of him if it did not prefigure at the very beginning the pivot on which events would turn, so that it would function like the collar of a coat or the calyx of a flower? Nowadays when people write a play they always introduce the roster of major characters in the first few scenes. How much the more might one expect this to be true of *Jin Ping Mei*, which is one of the most extraordinary books in the world. Thus, the author could not begin a new section from scratch to introduce Li Ping'er, but instead took advantage of the introduction of Hua Zixu into the brotherhood of ten to touch on Li Ping'er.¹⁸⁴ Now, if Ying Bojue and the other members of the group had not already been introduced as the boon companions

¹⁷⁹Ch. 13.

¹⁸⁰Ch. 17.

¹⁸¹Ch. 19.

¹⁸²This is how Li Ping'er is actually introduced

into the narrative, see *DYQS* 1/9b-11a and *TGL* 1.1.11-13.

¹⁸³Ch. 9.

¹⁸⁴*DYQS* 1/9a-18a, *TGL* 1.1.8-20.

of Ximen Qing, what reason would there have been for an oath of brotherhood? If the author had introduced Hua Zixu as one of the original ten members of the brotherhood, then they would have been in constant contact with each other. In that case, in chapter 1, when Ximen Qing and Ying Bojue meet, Hua Zixu would be familiar to both of them, and there would be no reason for Ximen Qing to mention his wife, let alone the fact that they are next-door neighbours or that his wife is a fine person.¹⁸⁵ Thus the author has chosen not to make Hua Zixu a member of the original brotherhood so that he can use this occasion to bring him into it and give Ximen Qing a reason for mentioning the fact that they are next-door neighbours. By these means Li Ping'er is introduced, the fact of their being next-door neighbours is made clear, and the whole situation of Hua Zixu's household is vividly implied without being explicitly described in words. This in turn has led the author to think of the death of Bu Zhidao¹⁸⁶ as providing a reason for Ximen Qing to think of asking Hua Zixu to join the brotherhood.

The author achieves his effects with such supernatural skill that the twists and turns of the plot beguile the reader without permitting him to see where the golden needle has done its work. That is why I say that his mode of composition is purely that of the Grand Historian. Whenever I concentrate my attention on this kind of writing, following its every twist and turn, and exploring its structure, I feel just as though I were discovering the extraordinary sights of the Five Sacred Mountains and the Three Islands of the Immortals. I can never tire of such pleasures as these.



In *Jin Ping Mei* even the jokes and songs are all pertinent to the occasion and contribute to the desired effect. They may reveal something of the meaning of the chapter in which they occur, develop something from a previous chapter, or divulge something about the chapters to come. I will devote a separate comment to each of them as they occur.



There is no feature of the art of writing which is not illustrated in *Jin Ping Mei*. It would be impossible to describe them all adequately at one time, so I will point them out in my comments at the beginning of the chapters in which they occur.



In *Jin Ping Mei* lewd language is used more often by Pan Jinlian and Wang Liu'er than by anyone else, with Li Ping'er running a poor third. Among the others, Wu Yueniang and Meng Yulou are each shown using it only once, and Chunmei's practice in this respect is only hinted at. Why is this? The only time Wu Yueniang is shown using lewd language is on the night before she sweeps the snow to make tea.¹⁸⁷ This scene is intended to show both Wu Yueniang and Ximen Qing in an unfavourable light. The only time Meng Yulou is shown using lewd language is on the

¹⁸⁵DYQS 1/9b-11a, TGL 1.1.11-12.

¹⁸⁶DYQS 1/9a-10a, TGL 1.1.10-11.

¹⁸⁷DYQS 21/3b-4a, 9b-10a; TGL 1.21.295-296, 302.

night when her bitterness culminates in an upset stomach.¹⁸⁸ This scene is intended to indicate the injustice which Meng Yulou has to suffer and to show Ximen Qing in an unfavourable light. It is not really the author's intent in these scenes to depict Wu Yueniang or Meng Yulou as lascivious. As for Chunmei, the author wishes to save her for the task of illustrating the reversal of fortunes; so he has to preserve her dignity, and can only hint at her sexual behaviour. The author has put into the mouths of Pan Jinlian and Wang Liu'er totally shameless and utterly unspeakable things, so intolerable that even Li Guijie and Zheng Aiyue could never have brought themselves to say them. By so doing the author expresses his profound condemnation of Ximen Qing, who is really less than human, for when he is exposed to such bestiality he actually expresses a preference for it. It follows that when Wang Liu'er and Pan Jinlian both get a crack at Ximen Qing on the same day, it is the death of him.¹⁸⁹ This is the real point that the author wishes to make.

As for Li Ping'er, she is capable of forbearance, yet she brings her troubles on herself; she doesn't meddle in other peoples' affairs, yet she causes Hua Zixu to die of chagrin, invites her own seduction, and remarries without a qualm. Thus she is not really very different from Pan Jinlian, and there is no reason why the author should not also exhibit her in an unfavourable light. But Li Ping'er is weak whereas Pan Jinlian is ruthless, so the author has depicted her lewdness somewhat more favourably than Pan Jinlian's. Moreover, Li Ping'er signs her own death warrant when she permits Ximen Qing to try out his aphrodisiac on her while she is in her menstrual period.¹⁹⁰ Thus the author emphasizes the point that when women are given to concupiscence, if they do not hurt others they will hurt themselves. Alas! It is a fearful thing indeed.

As for the likes of Song Huilian and Ruyi, they do not possess anything in the way of moral character that might inhibit the author from portraying them in an offensive light. As I have already pointed out [see item 23 above], the author is motivated to create Lady Lin of the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang by his desire to visit retribution upon the household in which Pan Jinlian got her start in life, so there is no reason for him not to depict her in an offensive light.



Jin Ping Mei should not be read in a desultory fashion. If you read it that way you will only read the obscene passages. Only if you take several days and read it all the way through will you perceive the single thread of continuity upon which the author has strung his succession of rising and falling actions.



Anyone who says *Jin Ping Mei* is an obscene book has only taken the trouble to read the obscene passages. I read this book exactly as though it were a work by the Grand Historian.

¹⁸⁸DYQS 75/15b-20a, TGL 3.75.370-373.

¹⁹⁰DYQS 50/9a-11a, TGL 2.50.321-322.

¹⁸⁹DYQS 79/3a-23b, TGL 4.79.80-98.

54

If the author of *Jin Ping Mei* were to have written another book about loyal ministers and filial sons, he would have been certain to produce an original work on these subjects which depicted its characters with uncanny fidelity to life. How do I know this? I know it from his success in depicting adulterous men and lascivious women.

55

Nowadays, if a Buddhist monk reads *Jin Ping Mei* openly he is sure to be criticized, so he can only read it on the sly. People do not understand that only a true monk is fit to read *Jin Ping Mei*.

56

Nowadays, if a scholar reads *Jin Ping Mei* his parents and teachers are sure to forbid it, and they themselves do not dare to read it openly. People do not understand that only a true scholar is able to read *Jin Ping Mei* properly. Anyone who reads it on the sly is really reading it as an obscene book.

57

The author of *Jin Ping Mei* must have been an avatar of Sudhana in order to be able to escape so dexterously from all his narrative problems and always find a happy solution. Otherwise, it is hard to imagine how he could have done it.

58

The author of *Jin Ping Mei* must have had the capacity to become a Bodhisattva in order to be able to achieve such extraordinary literary effects.

59

The author of *Jin Ping Mei* must have experienced danger, difficulty, poverty, and sorrow, and been thoroughly acquainted with the ways of the world in order to be able to depict his characters with such verisimilitude.

60

However, if the author had felt it necessary to have personally experienced everything he describes in order to produce this book, *Jin Ping Mei* could never have been written. Why is this? The various licentious women in the book engage in illicit relations with men in a variety of different ways. If the author had to have personally experienced all of these things in order to understand them, how could he have done it? Thus, it is apparent that there is nothing a genius cannot apprehend if he concentrates his mind upon it.

61

Once his concentration has enabled him to apprehend what he needs to know about a character, the author must be able to become that character himself before he can speak for him. Thus, he has actually become the various licentious women whom he describes, and he is able to expound his lesson through them.



The author succeeds in portraying each of the characters in his book with utter fidelity to human nature. He transforms himself into a multitude of guises, representing all sorts of people in order to expound his lesson through them.



While portraying each of his characters with utter fidelity to human nature, the author is also faithful in his portrayal of the way of Heaven. From ancient times it is in ways such as these that Heaven has punished the wicked, rewarded the good, and overthrown the powerful and unscrupulous. When we read this book, it seems as though there must have been a person with brush in hand inside the household of Ximen Qing, across from the district yamen in Qinghe, recording everything that happened, great and small, first and last, down to the very plates and bowls. It seems so real that we can hardly believe that the author took brush in hand, spread out a sheet of paper before him, and made it all up. That is why I say that the author's portrayal is faithful to the way of Heaven.



In reading *Jin Ping Mei* one should pay attention to the points which are only sketched in outline. The novice who can appreciate the points which are only sketched in outline will learn to write with unusual economy and skill.



In reading *Jin Ping Mei* one should pay attention to the points where a particular narrative line is sloughed off. The novice who appreciates the points where a particular narrative line is sloughed off will learn to be original in his handling of transitions.



In reading *Jin Ping Mei* one should pay attention to the points where the author gets out of his difficulties. The novice who appreciates the way in which he finds easy ways to get out of his difficulties will learn to prefer the light touch to the heavy, and how to make his writing deft and ingenious.



In reading *Jin Ping Mei* one should pay attention to the points where the author handles a proliferation of events with apparent ease. The novice who learns how to do this will be able to delineate complex situations.



In reading *Jin Ping Mei* one should pay attention to the points where plot elements are intertwined. The novice who learns how to do this will be able to write ornate and dazzling passages.



In reading *Jin Ping Mei* one should pay attention to the points in the text where narrative sections come together, where new sections begin, and where the

episodes are linked or correlated with each other. The novice who learns how to do this will be able to appreciate *Zuo zhuan*, *Guo yu*, *Zhuangzi*, *Li sao*, the histories and the philosophers.

70

In reading *Jin Ping Mei* one should pay attention to the points where the author takes special pains. Only if one understands why the author takes special pains at the points where he does, is one fit to read *Jin Ping Mei*, or to say that he knows how to read literature.

71

When I was a child learning to read and write in school I once saw the teacher punish one of my fellow students while saying to him, "I've told you to study the text word by word, not swallow it whole." I was still very young at the time and on overhearing these words took them very much to heart. Thereafter, when reading a text I would linger over each character as though it were a syllable from an aria in Kunqu opera, drawing out its pronunciation and repeating it over and over again. I would not stop until I had made each word my own. I particularly remember doing this with the phrase "to love antiquity and be diligent in investigating it."¹⁹¹ No more than three days after I had begun to do this, the teacher gave us, as a topic for an examination essay, the line "The superior man maintains his dignity and does not wrangle."¹⁹² I felt as I wrote that the task did not seem too hard. When my essay was completed the teacher was greatly surprised and thought I must have copied from someone else, for he had no other way to account for my rapid progress. I was unable to explain it myself. After this the teacher made a point of keeping an eye on me. When he saw that I sat with my head bent over the table, following the text with one hand as I read out loud, one character at a time, he exclaimed with delight, "So you weren't deceiving me after all," and turning to the rest of the class admonished them to follow my example.

Although I do not claim to have mastered anything yet, I am convinced that in reading a book one should not try to digest it in large chunks at a time. This is true not only of works in the literary language, but even of novels like *Jin Ping Mei*. If one tries to take in large chunks of it at a time it will seem as tasteless as chewing wax. The only thing one will be aware of is page after page of women's talk, and one will be unable to see it for the marvelous work of literature that it is. If one is not concerned with it as a marvelous work of literature, but only anxious to read about the marvelous things it contains, one deserves only contempt.

72

Before reading *Jin Ping Mei*, one should sit in contemplation for three months. Otherwise his vision may be so clouded that he will miss the point.

¹⁹¹ *Confucian Analects*, VII.19. See James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 5 vols. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), I, 201.

¹⁹² *Confucian Analects*, XV.21. See Legge, *op. cit.*, I, 300.



Lack of talent is due to carelessness, and carelessness is due to inattention. These two traits tend to reinforce each other. Not only will such a person be unable to write well himself, but he will not even be able to recognize good writing when he sees it. Such a person should never be permitted to read *Jin Ping Mei*.



If a person who writes indifferently to begin with does not write better after reading *Jin Ping Mei*, he should burn his writing implements and take up the plow for his enjoyment. There is no longer any need for him to trouble himself with trying to write.



The author of *Jin Ping Mei* is certainly a genius, but his learning is that of a Bodhisattva, not that of a Confucian sage, for his message is that everything is empty. If he had taken the further step to non-emptiness he would have written a different book.



Jin Ping Mei concludes with emptiness, but if we look carefully we will see that it is not complete emptiness. This is apparent from the fact that the author brings his work to a conclusion with the transfiguration of Xiaoge [filial son], which signifies the fact that filiality has the power to transform all evils.



Jin Ping Mei is characterized by an air of resentful indignation, but then its author is certainly a reincarnation of Sima Qian [who was wrongfully castrated].



Jin Ping Mei is a book which is intended to correct people's faults, as can be seen from the role played by Han Aijie in the conclusion. The pun in her name expresses the idea of "seeking *ai* [moxa] that is three years old in order to cure an illness that has lasted seven years."¹⁹³ [That is to say, though there may be a cure for your illness, you won't be able to find it when you need it unless it is prepared in advance.]



Jin Ping Mei is the work of a person who has achieved great enlightenment. That is why he describes all the failings of Buddhist monks and nuns. Only by so doing could he reveal himself to be a real Bodhisattva, or truly enlightened.



If the author of *Jin Ping Mei* had not chosen to write about the mundane affairs of the vulgar world he could certainly have written works as elegant and romantic as *Xixiang ji* [*The Romance of the Western Chamber*] and its like.

¹⁹³Mencius, IVA.9. 161 4a. See Legge, *op. cit.*, II, 301.

81

People who are unable to write themselves ought never to be permitted to read *Jin Ping Mei* or it may affect them just the way vulgar people say it will. For people who are writers themselves, reading *Jin Ping Mei* is just like reading *Shi ji*.

82

Jin Ping Mei is a work that women should never be permitted to see. Nowadays there are many men who read passages out loud to their wives or concubines while taking their pleasure with them inside the bed curtains. They do not realize that even among men there are few who recognize the force of exhortation and admonition, or respond appropriately to what they read. How many women are there who are capable of responding appropriately to what they read? What would be the consequences if they were to imitate, however slightly, the things they read about? Its literary style and technique are not such as could or should be studied by women. If they are well educated enough to do so they should be encouraged to read *Zuo zhuan*, *Guo yu*, *Shi jing* and other classics and histories.

But if *Jin Ping Mei* is a book that ought not to be read, why should I write a commentary on it and thus do an injury to the world? Such a question does not take into account the fact that I really believe *Jin Ping Mei* to be a literary masterpiece that cannot be allowed to go unread; but that at the same time it is a book which is unfit for the eyes of women. It is the fear that some may fail to heed this admonition and then hold *Jin Ping Mei* to blame for the consequences that has led me to raise this issue here, for I am unwilling to acknowledge that it is the book itself which is at fault.

Now among those men who have some knowledge of how to read a book, who does not read *Jin Ping Mei*? Those who read it and find it enjoyable are a source of anxiety to *Jin Ping Mei*; anxiety lest they not know why it should be enjoyed, and only enjoy it for its licentiousness. Where this is the case, *Jin Ping Mei* may do the reader an injury. But, in fact, it is not *Jin Ping Mei* that injures him, but the reader who injures himself. Those who read it and find it objectionable are a source of sorrow to *Jin Ping Mei*; sorrow over the fact that although it actually contains nothing objectionable, they insist on objecting to its descriptions of licentiousness. Where this is the case, the reader is doing *Jin Ping Mei* an injury. But, in fact, it is not the reader who does the injury, nor *Jin Ping Mei* itself, but Ximen Qing.

What does it mean to say that *Jin Ping Mei* does the reader an injury? People who are not good readers are careless and superficial. If you give them the classics and histories to read, they will not be able to get all the way through them. By contrast, they may enjoy reading *Jin Ping Mei*, but will dislike reading the second half of the book. In such a case, *Jin Ping Mei* may be thought to do the reader an injury.

What does it mean to say that the reader injures himself? If one person explains the meaning of theft to another, so that he will know what to guard himself against, but the other person takes advantage of the information to acquire the art of thievery, it is not the fault of the original informant. The one who heard the explanation of theft was already a thief by nature. In like manner, *Jin Ping Mei* ought not to be held responsible for the responses of its superficial readers.

What does it mean to say that the reader does *Jin Ping Mei* an injury? The

author of *Jin Ping Mei* employed all the power, wisdom, and intelligence at his disposal to depict his adulterous men and lascivious women, corrupt officials and wicked servants, pimps and whores. He drained himself mentally and physically in order to create this literary masterpiece. Now, if benighted readers should succeed in convincing the rest of society that this literary masterpiece should be regarded as an obscene book and kept out of sight, then the labours of the author who drained himself mentally and physically to create this masterpiece not only for his own benefit, but also for that of the gifted writers of all time, would be undone by vulgar men and prove to have been expended in vain. This is what is meant by saying that the reader does *Jin Ping Mei* an injury.

What does it mean to say that it is Ximen Qing who does *Jin Ping Mei* an injury? If the reader would not read the book as an account of Ximen Qing's affairs, but employ his own literary imagination in an attempt to discover retroactively the secrets of the author's marvelous effects, it would be more valuable to him than reading *Shi ji* in its entirety. But, unfortunately, no sooner does he begin to read than he becomes absorbed in what Ximen Qing is doing and becomes oblivious to the pains expended on the composition by the author. That is why I say that Ximen Qing does *Jin Ping Mei* an injury. Nevertheless, readers continue, as before, to misread it as a novel about Ximen Qing rather than appreciating it as the work of its author. I have seen someone's comment on *Jin Ping Mei* which states that it is a voluminous daily record of the events in Ximen Qing's household.¹⁹⁴ This is so benighted as to be laughable. On what day of what month in what year did he see the author employed in the household of Ximen Qing, engaged in writing a daily record of the events there? But there is even someone who, when he reaches the point where Chen Jingji seduces Pan Jinlian and gets Chunmei into the bargain,¹⁹⁵ waxes indignant on Ximen Qing's behalf over the fact that Chen Jingji should have been able to steal these two pearls. This pedant does not realize that he has misread the situation as usual. Pan Jinlian did not originally belong to Ximen Qing, neither did the author create Chunmei so that she might be a permanent possession of his. This episode is deftly drawn with the author's subtle brush as part of his marvelous design. What need is there for this pedant to vent his blind indignation from the sidelines?

Thus the readers of *Jin Ping Mei* are many, but those who do not read it well are also many. Although I would not be so presumptuous as to say that I have succeeded in getting to the bottom of the author's mind, I have felt compelled to write, despite my own inadequacies, by the desire to defend him against all the undeserved calumnies that have been heaped upon him. I would also like to be able to open the drowsy eyes of aspiring writers to the author's achievement while at the same time making some small contribution to the study of literary composition. Who can say that this is not worthwhile?

¹⁹⁴ See note above.

¹⁹⁵ *DYQS* 82/5a, *TGL* 4.82.130-131.

83

Jin Ping Mei consists of two halves. The first half is "hot" and the second half is "cold", but in the first half there is "cold" in the "heat" and in the second half there is "heat" in the "cold".

84

In the course of describing the household of Ximen Qing, the author of *Jin Ping Mei* also describes quite a few other households, such as those of Wu Da, Hua Zixu, Qiao Hong, Chen Hong, Wu Kai [Wu Yueniang's elder brother], Zhang Dahu, Imperial Commissioner Wang, Ying Bojue, Zhou Xiu, and Xia Yanling. This list does not include the households of Zhai Qian in the Eastern Capital or those of Ximen Qing's employees, or the relatives by marriage with whom Ximen Qing is not on intimate terms. These households alone would account for most of the important officials and prominent families in Qinghe. Thus, through the description of one man the author has described an entire district. Alas! "Such a chief criminal is greatly to be abhorred."¹⁹⁶ I have not even taken into account the households which suffer complete ruination or gross abuse at Ximen Qing's hands. How detestable! How detestable!

85

The author of *Jin Ping Mei* depicts Ximen Qing as being without a single relative. He has no parents alive from the preceding generation, no children or grandchildren to succeed him, and no siblings in his own generation. Luckily for him Wu Yueniang does not insist upon her prerogatives as legitimate second wife. If she had persisted in giving him the silent treatment on Pan Jinlian's account,¹⁹⁷ what pleasure could Ximen Qing have found in life? Yet even with this reprieve he does not correct his faults or engage in self-cultivation, but abandons himself to evil without compunction. It is no wonder that he should go to his death unrepentent.

86

All the relatives of Ximen Qing described in the book are false relatives. Kinsman Qiao [Qiao Hong] is a false kinsman. Kinsman Zhai [Zhai Qian] is an even falser kinsman. Whose paternal aunt is Aunt Yang? She is a false paternal aunt. Ying Bojue is a false brother. Xie Xida is a false friend. As for the Hua brothers [cousins of Hua Zixu], they are even more laughable. This is really carrying falseness to the point of incomprehensibility. Chen Jingji dresses up in mourning twice,¹⁹⁸ but he is a false filial son. As for the brothers-in-law Shen [husband of Wu Yueniang's eldest sister] and Han [husband of Meng Yulou's eldest sister], we hear nothing of their wives,¹⁹⁹ so they are also false brothers-in-law. The only relatives Ximen Qing has are Wu the First [Wu Kai] and Wu the Second [Wu Yueniang's second brother], and the latter is a very shadowy figure. Wu the First is not a bad sort, and that is

¹⁹⁶*Book of Documents*, V.9.16. See Legge, *op. cit.*, III, 392.

¹⁹⁸*DYQS* 63/6b, 79/26b; *TGL* 3.63.156, 4.79.101.

¹⁹⁷Chs. 18-20.

¹⁹⁹Zhang Zhupo is in error here.

why in the end he helps Wu Yueniang out on a number of occasions.²⁰⁰ Ximen Qing does not have a single relative from his own family. The retribution meted out by Heaven is cruel enough, but the author's hatred for him is also virulent. How is it that people today who have a full complement of relatives treat them so coldly and only wish they could find a way of getting rid of them? What sort of attitude is that?



Why does the author of *Jin Ping Mei* feel it necessary to describe Ximen Qing as being alone in the world without a single relative? Only by so doing can he bring out the laughableness of his "heat" at the beginning and the completeness of his "cold" at the end, a coldness that can never become warm again.



Although the author's allegorical purpose is served by making the fate of Ximen Qing's family in Qinghe so utterly "cold" that not a single person is left to perpetuate it, it is also his hatred for such people that causes him to make sure that there can never be so much as the hope of a rekindled ember. Indeed, a writer too can be ruthless!



In *Jin Ping Mei* there is a Li An who is a filial son,²⁰¹ a Wang Xuan who is a charitable man,²⁰² an Antong who is a faithful servant,²⁰³ a Huang Mei who is a generous friend,²⁰⁴ a Zeng Xiaoxu who is a loyal official,²⁰⁵ and a Wu Song who is both a hero and a devoted brother.²⁰⁶ Who can say that in this novel's world of lust and desire the will of Heaven and the virtue of the people have been completely obliterated?



Although there are numerous good characters in *Jin Ping Mei*, all of them are men. There is not a single good woman. If we count them off, the only one who remains faithful to a single mate is Wu Yueniang. But she does not understand that the role of a wife is to govern her household with propriety and that she herself is responsible for much of the trouble which occurs. Han Aijie's final fidelity to the memory of Chen Jingji is certainly commendable, but the relationship to which she shows such fidelity is not itself a proper one, and her earlier life is anything but

²⁰⁰ See Ch. 84 and *DYQS* 92/14b-15a, 95/5a-6a; *TGL* 4.92.262, 4.95.296-297.

²⁰¹ *DYQS* 100/2a-b, *TGL* 4.100.358-359.

²⁰² *DYQS* 93/3a-9a, *TGL* 4.93.268-274.

²⁰³ *DYQS* 47/2b-11a, 48/1a-3b; *TGL* 2.47-48.267-281.

²⁰⁴ *DYQS* 47/2a, 11a, 48/1a-2b; *TGL* 2.47.267,

276, 2.48.278-279. On page 276 Egerton has left out a section that mentions Huang Mei's name and on page 278 he has mistranslated his name as Huang Tuan.

²⁰⁵ *DYQS* 48/1a-3b, 9b-12a, 49/1b; *TGL* 2.48.278-281, 286-290, 2.49.293-294.

²⁰⁶ Chs. 1-10, 87.

blameless.²⁰⁷ As for Ge Cuiping, her mother takes her away,²⁰⁸ and since the author does not tell us what becomes of her, we cannot be sure how she turns out. Egregious, indeed, is the *yin* nature of women. Although it can hardly be said that there are no examples of chastity among them, they find it all too easy to abandon it. Everything depends on the sort of family instruction each woman receives. Only one who recognizes this can take on the fearful responsibility of setting a proper example for his womenfolk. This is a matter in which the head of a family cannot be too careful.

91

In *Jin Ping Mei* there are two Taoist masters [Wu Shenxian²⁰⁹ and Huang Zhenren]²¹⁰ and a living Buddha [Pujing],²¹¹ and yet they are unable to undo the damage done by a single profane monk. Who is this profane monk? The one who gives Ximen Qing the aphrodisiac.²¹²

92

Since it is Ximen Qing who provides the poison that kills Wu Da,²¹³ someone is bound to appear with the poison that proves to be Ximen Qing's undoing.²¹⁴ How can an immortal [Wu Shenxian], a Taoist master [Huang Zhenren], or a living Buddha [Pujing] be of any avail against the will of Heaven?

93

Jin Ping Mei should not be read inattentively. If the reader allows his attention to wander he will go astray.

94

The reader of *Jin Ping Mei* should keep a spittoon handy in order to have something to bang on.

95

The reader of *Jin Ping Mei* should keep a sword ready to hand so that he can hack about him to relieve his indignation.

96

The reader of *Jin Ping Mei* should hang a bright mirror in front of him so that he can see himself fully revealed.

²⁰⁷Chs. 98-100.

²⁰⁸DYQS 100/7a, TGL 4.100.363.

²⁰⁹Ch. 29 and DYQS 79/20b-21b, TGL 4.79.95-96.

²¹⁰DYQS 65/11b-12b, TGL 3.65.186-187, and Ch. 66.

²¹¹DYQS 84/7a-8a, 100/10a-17b; TGL 4.84.153-154, 4.100.366-374.

²¹²DYQS 49/11b-16b, TGL 2.49.305-311.

²¹³DYQS 5/7a-9a, TGL 1.5.81-84.

²¹⁴Chs. 49 and 79.



The reader of *Jin Ping Mei* should keep a good wine by his side so that he can drink lustily in order to dispel the reek of worldliness.



The reader of *Jin Ping Mei* should burn fine incense on his desk in order to express his gratitude to the author for creating this literary masterpiece, in all its intricacy, for his enjoyment.



The reader of *Jin Ping Mei* should keep fragrant tea on his table as an offering of thanks to the author for his pains.



Jin Ping Mei is a clear example of what the Zen school calls exercising one's powers after having attained perfect mastery. In my commentary on *Jin Ping Mei* I call attention to the places where the author's perfect mastery is evident.



The author of *Jin Ping Mei* did not know that he had achieved any such thing as perfect mastery. In my commentary I also call attention to the places where he did not know what perfect mastery he had achieved.



Jin Ping Mei begins and ends with "emptiness".²¹⁵ In my commentary I do no more than to call attention to this fact. I would certainly not presume to use the word "emptiness" to denigrate the Confucian sages.



The author of *Jin Ping Mei* is faithful in every particular to the emotions of men and the principles of Heaven. This shows that he has truly attained complete enlightenment, and in this he is not empty.



Jin Ping Mei is a work of enormous scale and yet it required the most meticulous thought to produce.



Jin Ping Mei is a cautionary work which may be said to be admonitory in intent. Nevertheless, it has also been described as a book which immerses its readers in the ways of the world. But one could also say that it is a book which enables its readers to escape from the ways of the world.

²¹⁵DYQS 1/1a, 100/10a-17b; TGL 1.1.4, 4.100. 366-374.



The three characters of the title *Jin Ping Mei* [plum blossoms in a golden vase] constitute a metaphor for the author's accomplishment. Although this book embodies so many of the beauties of spring, every blossom and every petal of which cost the author the creative powers of spring itself to evoke, these beauties should be placed in a golden vase where they can diffuse their fragrance in a cultivated environment, and adorn the desks of men of literary talents for all time. They must never be allowed to become the bedtime playthings of the rustic or the vulgar. Indeed, plum blossoms in a golden vase depend for their effect on the ability of human effort to enhance the handiwork of Heaven. In like manner, the literary quality of this book is such that it seems, in passage after passage, to have stolen the creative powers of nature itself.



This book was written as a continuation of *Sha gou ji* [*The slaying of the dog*, a famous play on the theme of brotherly love]. In place after place it alludes to the relationship between brothers. Even He the Ninth has a younger brother, He the Tenth,²¹⁶ Yang the First has a younger brother, Yang the Second.²¹⁷ Zhou Xiu has a younger brother, Zhou Xuan,²¹⁸ and Han Daoguo has a younger brother, Han the Second.²¹⁹ As might be expected, it is only Ximen Qing and Chen Jingji who do not have any brothers.



The story begins with Meng Yulou playing the guitar [*tanyuan* 彈阮, puns with *tanyuan* 歎怨, to sigh with resentment] and ends with Han Aijie carrying her guitar [*baoyuan* 抱阮, puns with *baoyuan* 抱怨, to harbour resentment].²²⁰ This is because the author had a bellyful of outraged tears but no place to shed them. Therefore, he created *Jin Ping Mei* as an outlet for his tears.

²¹⁶ DYQS 76/16b-21a, TGL 4.76.16-20.

²¹⁷ DYQS 93/1b-2a, TGL 4.93.266-267.

²¹⁸ DYQS 100/3a-7a, TGL 4.100.359-365.

²¹⁹ Chs. 33-34, 38, and 100.

²²⁰ DYQS 27/6b-7a, 100/7b; TGL 1.27.381, 4.100.363. The name of this instrument is now pronounced *ruan* in Standard Chinese, but in Zhang Zhupo's dialect it could be read as *yuan*. In the text, Han Aijie holds a *yueqin* (balloon guitar) and not a *yuan*, but the two instruments are quite similar.