



On Not Becoming a Heroine: Lin Dai-Yu and Cui Ying-Ying

Author(s): Ann Waltner

Source: *Signs*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Autumn, 1989), pp. 61-78

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174706>

Accessed: 31/03/2010 16:00

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=ucpress>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The University of Chicago Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Signs*.

ON NOT BECOMING A HEROINE: LIN DAI-YU AND CUI YING-YING

ANN WALTNER

Why and how people read fiction is an issue that has increasingly come under the scrutiny of Western literary critics. In her recent *Becoming a Heroine*, Rachel M. Brownstein suggests ways in which fiction may serve a special role in shaping an adolescent girl's expectations of the future.¹ The fiction Brownstein discusses is chiefly nineteenth-century English novels; the readers she discusses are twentieth-century American adolescents. The novels of Jane Austen and Anthony Trollope, where the plot centers on finding a husband and the marriage is the happy ending, are read, so Brownstein suggests, as scripts for life by countless adolescent girls who view finding a husband as their central task in a life that will in many crucial ways end with marriage. Expectations about life and marriage are gathered not from observations of the real world but from ruminations within the realm of fiction.

Fictional heroines, too, may be readers of romance, and the ways in which the heroine reads the romance reveal a good deal about her, about the romance, and about the fictional world they both inhabit. Lin Dai-yu, a central character in Cao Xue-qin's eighteenth-century Chinese novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*, is a reader of romances, especially dramas such as *Romance of the*

¹ Rachel M. Brownstein, *Becoming a Heroine: Reading about Women in Novels* (New York: Penguin, 1984); see also Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

Western Chamber.² *Western Chamber* is one of the finest exemplars of the “scholar-beauty romance,” a genre in which a beauty and a talented youth meet, fall in love, overcome obstacles, and eventually marry. The genre mandates a happy ending.³ Dai-yu’s reading of *Western Chamber* leads her to see her own future with the image of Cui Ying-ying, the heroine of *Western Chamber*, firmly in mind. It is an image that both attracts and repels her. While Rachel Brownstein’s reader of Jane Austen’s novels finds an unambiguous map for the future, Dai-yu sees a warning in the story of Ying-ying. The resonances between *Western Chamber* and *Red Chamber* are not limited to the imagination of Dai-yu, but it is there that they find their sharpest resolution.

² Two excellent English translations of *Hong lou meng* exist: *The Story of the Stone* (vols. 1–3 by David Hawkes, vols. 4 and 5 by John Minford) (New York: Penguin, 1973–86); and Gladys Yang and Yang Hsien-yi, *A Dream of Red Mansions* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1978–80). Unless there seems compelling reason to do otherwise, I have followed the translations of David Hawkes. For ease of reference, references to *Red Chamber* are given by chapter number. When I have quoted Hawkes directly, I indicate that I have done so by (Hawkes, volume no.:page no.). The edition of the *Hong lou meng* that I have used is that published in Peking in 1982 by the Ren min wen xue chu ban she. Two translations of *Xi xiang ji* exist: Henry H. Hart, trans., *The West Chamber: A Medieval Drama* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1936); and S. I. Hsiung, trans., *The Western Chamber* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936). Both of these translations follow Jin Sheng-tan’s emendations of the play. Citations to *Western Chamber* are given by an uppercase Roman numeral (the *ben*) and a lowercase Roman numeral (the *zhe*). The edition of the *Xi xiang ji* that I have used is that edited by Wang Ji-si (Hong Kong: Yi shan chu ban she, 1980). Several works mention resonances between the two works in passing: Andrew Plaks, *Archetype and Allegory in the Dream of the Red Chamber* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976); Wong Kai Ming, “The Narrative Art of *Red Chamber Dream* (*Hung Lou Meng*)” (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1974), 174, 178–79. Richard C. Hessney, “Beautiful, Talented and Brave: Seventeenth-Century Chinese Scholar-Beauty Romances” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1979) discusses ways in which *Red Chamber* is heir to the scholar-beauty tradition. Several articles deal explicitly with the relationship between the two works: Jiang Xing-yu, “Guan yu Bao Dai suo du de shi liu chu ben *Xi xiang ji*” (About the sixteen-act *Romance of the Western Chamber* which Bao-yu and Dai-yu read), *Hong lou meng xue kan*, no. 3 (1981), 337–40, and “*Hong lou meng* dui *Xi xiang ji* de jie jian” (Reflections of *Western Chamber* in *Dream of Red Chamber*), *Hong lou meng yan jiu*, no. 12 (1982), 15–16; Li Meng-sheng, “*Hong lou meng* yu *Xi xiang ji*” (*Dream of the Red Chamber* and *Romance of the Western Chamber*), *Hong lou meng xue kan*, no. 1 (1983), 153–62; Xu Fu-ming, “*Xi xiang ji*, *Mu dan ting* he *Hong lou meng*” (*Romance of the Western Chamber*, *Peony Pavilion*, and *Dream of the Red Chamber*), *Hong lou meng yan jiu ji kan*, no. 6 (1981), 181–204.

³ For a discussion of the genre, see Richard C. Hessney, “Beyond Beauty and Talent: The Moral and Chivalric Self in *The Fortunate Union*,” in *Expressions of Self in Chinese Literature*, ed. Robert E. Hegel and Richard C. Hessney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 214–18.

Lin Dai-yu lived in a society where love was not a necessary or even a desirable prelude to marriage. In eighteenth-century China, marriage was a transaction involving the families of the bride and groom. While the interests of the young couple themselves might not be ignored totally, neither were their interests paramount. Furthermore, among the upper classes, female seclusion was such that a woman might not even see her husband until her wedding night. Chastity was celebrated as chief among the female virtues: women who went to extraordinary lengths to defend their chastity (up to and including suicide) were commemorated in local histories. It is no wonder that Lin Dai-yu sought refuge in the reading of romances.⁴

Dream of the Red Chamber, first published in 1792, is one of the masterworks of the Chinese novel. In 120 chapters, it juxtaposes an allegorical structure with a day-to-day description of the decline of the house of Jia.⁵ Central to the framing allegory is the assertion that human passion is illusion. The tension between allegory and realistic depiction is mirrored in a couplet that recurs in the novel, inscribed on an arch proclaiming entry into the "Land of Illusion." The couplet reads:

Truth becomes fiction when the fiction's true;
Real becomes not-real when the unreal's real.⁶

As we shall see, Dai-yu uses fiction to interpret her emotional life. The illusion of desire is seen refracted through the mirror of the illusion of fiction.

The action of the *Red Chamber* centers around the character of Jia Bao-yu, the adolescent scion of the house of Jia, and his young female cousins, the most important of whom are Lin Dai-yu and Xue Bao-chai. For much of the novel, Bao-yu, his cousins, sisters,

⁴ On the cult of chastity during the Qing dynasty, see Susan Mann, "Widows in the Kinship, Class, and Community Structure of Qing Dynasty China," *Journal of Asian Studies* 46, no. 1 (February 1987): 37-56; and Mark Elvin, "Female Virtue and the State in China," *Past and Present*, no. 104 (1984), 111-52.

⁵ It must of course be noted here that the final forty chapters of the novel are by a different hand, probably that of Gao E (1740?-1815?). This makes any interpretation of the novel as a whole somewhat problematic. Nonetheless, since the novel is read as a coherent whole, it seems plausible to interpret it as a coherent whole, no matter what the intent of the two authors might have been. For a convenient discussion of the issue of the novel's authorship, see John Minford's preface to vol. 4 of *Story of the Stone*, esp. 20-30.

⁶ The couplet, first occurring in chap. 1 (Hawkes, 1:55), is repeated in chap. 5 (Hawkes, 1:130).

and their maids live in dwellings in a garden at some remove from the supervision of their elders, where they live a life of ease burdened neither by the responsibilities of adulthood nor the restrictions of childhood. Bao-yu and his companions in the garden are adolescents who occupy a twilight world between childhood and adulthood. (At the beginning of the novel Bao-yu is thirteen; Dai-yu is two years younger.) The novel charts the progress of these charmed adolescents toward adulthood, a progress portrayed as a fall from grace.

The crucial ritual that will signify the transition to adulthood is marriage, and the essential plot revolves around which of the cousins, Dai-yu or Bao-chai, will marry Bao-yu. The tragedy of the novel is that, according to the allegorical structure of the novel, Dai-yu cannot marry Bao-yu. She is the human incarnation of the Crimson Pearl Flower, and Bao-yu that of the Divine Luminescent Stone. Because the Stone had watered the Flower, saving her life, the human Dai-yu owes Bao-yu a debt of tears. The allegorical structure enters the narrative several times during the novel, perhaps most prominently in chapter 5, in which the immortal Disenchantment reveals to Bao-yu the future fates of the most important female characters in the novel, fates that are inextricably linked with his own. Bao-yu does not understand the meaning of the poems that delineate each character's fate, but the reader does. The prophecy of a marriage between gold and jade (implying Bao-chai and Bao-yu) is first referred to in a song tellingly entitled "The Mistaken Marriage" (*Zhong shen wu*), thereby predicting that Bao-yu will marry Bao-chai, the wrong cousin. The prophecy recurs at several points throughout the novel. This tension between the allegorical mode that places strict demands on plot development and a diurnal realism that seems to leave the question of the marriage open-ended is one of the sources of the power of the novel.

Bao-chai and Bao-yu do marry. However, the marriage takes place at almost the precise moment of Dai-yu's death, and Bao-yu, half-mad, has been duped into thinking that it is Dai-yu he is marrying. The marriage is thus a perversion of the youthful dreams of all three of the cousins. Indeed, marriage in the novel almost never implies happiness. One by one, beginning with Xi-chun, the young women of the garden marry and leave. Their marriages decimate the garden and diminish its gaiety, but, more significantly, the marriages represent for the girls a fall from the idyllic state of the garden. Marriage does not mean a happy ending. Bao-yu himself regards marriage as polluting a woman. In chapter 59 the maid Swallow quotes him as having said: "A girl before she marries

is like a priceless pearl, but once she marries the pearl loses its lustre and develops all sorts of disagreeable flaws" (chap. 59; Hawkes, 3:138–39). Bao-yu's enchantment is an enchantment with the virginal, with women before their abstract sexuality is diluted by contact with men. He is entranced by the adolescent, by girls who have not yet taken on adult responsibilities.

The connection between sexuality and adulthood is made clear by the immortal Disenchantment in chapter 5. When she, somewhat improbably, tells Bao-yu that he is the most lustful person she has ever known, he protests his innocence: "I'm still young and don't even know what sort of thing lust (*yin*) is." She grants that his lust is not a common vulgar sort but maintains that it is nonetheless lust. She then provides him with a dream-bride, her sister Ke-ying, to awaken him to the illusion of sexuality. Disenchantment describes the charge laid upon her by the Jia ancestors: "Could you perhaps initiate him in the pleasures of the flesh and all that sort of thing in such a way as to shock the silliness out of him? In that way he might stand a chance of escaping some of the traps that people fall into and be able to devote himself single-mindedly to the serious things of life" (chap. 5; Hawkes, 1:137). This sexual initiation ought to lead to adulthood. Yet Bao-yu remains preternaturally unenlightened: he fails to comprehend the dream, which predicts the course of the rest of the novel, and, despite the fact that he later rehearses the lessons of love that he learned from the dream-bride with a human mate, he retains an innocence of sexuality and its implications.

This innocence is underscored by the androgyny of the garden. Normally in Chinese lore, gender confusion is symbolic of larger disorder: it is a blurring of the distinctions that make social order possible.⁷ However, in *Red Chamber* the gender confusions (especially those involving Bao-yu) symbolize Bao-yu's refusal to take his place in a masculine world that is portrayed as crude and corrupt. Bao-yu's preference for the feminine was evident early in his life. As an infant, when an array of objects was set out in front of him to determine where his inclinations for the future lay, he ignored those objects associated with male careers and instead picked up rouge, powder-boxes, hair-ornaments, and bangles

⁷ See, e.g., the *Shang shu* (Book of documents) V,ii,5–6: "The ancients have said: 'The hen does not announce the morning. The crowing of the hen in the morning indicates the subversion of the family.'" See the translation of the text in James Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (Taipei: Wen shi chu ban she, 1974), 3:302–3. For a discussion of perceptions of gender confusion at the Ming-Qing transition, see Frederic Wakeman, *The Great Enterprise* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 94–96.

(chap. 2). Bao-yu's feminine tendencies are noted throughout the novel. The matriarch Grandmother Jia says that Bao-yu ought to have been a girl (chap. 78), and in fact earlier in the novel she has mistaken him for one of the girls (chap. 50). The comical country cousin Granny Liu mistakes Dai-yu's room for that of a young gentleman (chap. 40) and Bao-yu's for that of a young lady (chap. 41). Musk mistakes Bao-yu's voice for that of Bao-chai (chap. 30); Bao-yu and the actress Parfumee are compared to be twin brothers (chap. 63);⁸ a doctor called to the house for the first time mistakes Bao-yu's room for a girl's room (chap. 51). When Xiang-yun dresses like Bao-yu, Grandmother Jia cannot tell the difference between them (chap. 31). Parfumee, too, dresses like a boy and cuts her hair like one, at Bao-yu's request (chap. 63). Bao-yu has not yet entered the external, male, adult world where gender distinctions are clear; the occasional androgyny of the world he does inhabit underlines this.

That all of the girls in the garden will marry and leave casts an air of melancholy and latent sexuality on events in the garden. The garden is a place of innocence, but there hovers over it an aura of unresolved sexuality. The innocence of the garden is transitory, and as the novel progresses, there are a series of rude shocks to that innocence, beginning with the discovery of a purse with pornographic scenes embroidered on it (chap. 73). The discovery of the purse prompts a search of the garden that turns up no more pornography but does expose a love affair involving the maid Chess. Sexual scandal or the threat thereof is one of the ways in which the crude adult world impinges upon the idyll of the garden.

The behavior of the adolescent young ladies in the garden is above reproach, but because they are half children, half adults, an aura of incipient sexuality hangs over them. It is a sexuality that Dai-yu perceives and Bao-yu does not. Much of the pattern of their intimacy was established when they were still children, that is to say, sexually innocent. They sleep in the same bed, share confidences, and have the easy intimacy of family members. Bao-yu, though giving little thought to the future, assumes that he will marry Dai-yu. Dai-yu, for her part, despairs of the future. Marriage to a man other than Bao-yu is a fate nearly unimaginable, as the unhappy marriages of the other girls from the garden show. Yet Dai-yu has no confidence that she will marry Bao-yu. All too conscious of her orphaned state, she perceives that there is no one who can act on her behalf in negotiating a marriage with Bao-yu. Moreover, she takes seriously the prophecy of the marriage of gold

⁸ Hawkes (3:222) translates the phrase *shuang sheng xiong di* simply as "twins," but the Chinese term *xiong di* clearly implies brothers.

and jade, and interprets Bao-chai's gold locket and Bao-yu's jade stone as talismans demonstrating that their owners will fulfill the prophecy and marry. In the absence of a properly negotiated marriage, all that could ensue from acknowledged sexual attraction between Bao-yu and Dai-yu would be sexual scandal. That a childhood friendship might blossom into an adolescent romance is clearly shown in chapters 71 and 72, where the maid Chess is discovered in the arms of a childhood sweetheart. The affair comes to no good; her cowardly lover flees and Chess, banished from the garden under the domination of bullying maids (chap. 77), ultimately kills herself (chap. 92). Childhood innocence is transitory; it is an artifact of time rather than a state with lasting moral consequences.

Dai-yu's perception that there are dangerous sexual possibilities where Bao-yu sees none is shown in the course of a quarrel when she exclaims, "Take your hands off of me! We're not children anymore. You really can't go on mauling me about like this all the time. Don't you understand *anything*—?" (chap. 30; Hawkes, 2:96). Aroma, Bao-yu's maid, also fears sexual scandal as a result of the growing attachment between the young cousins. Bao-yu, in a trance, makes a profession of his love to Dai-yu. He speaks his sentiments aloud and Aroma overhears him. Aroma, who was Bao-yu's sexual partner as well as his serving maid, is puzzled by the ardor of his professions, until she realizes that they were intended not for her but for Dai-yu: "She reflected with some alarm that if things between them were as his words seemed to indicate, there was every likelihood of an ugly scandal developing, and wondered how she could arrange matters to prevent it" (chap. 32, Hawkes, 2:135). Aroma, more worldly by far than Dai-yu, does not need the eyes of the romance to see evidence of budding sexuality and its dangers.

Cui Ying-ying, the central character in *Romance of the Western Chamber*, is an unlikely candidate for emulation by a proper young woman of the upper classes. The story of Ying-ying had its origins in a ninth-century tale by Yuan Zhen, in which the scholar Zhang (assumed by some to be Yuan Zhen himself) falls in love with and seduces Cui Ying-ying. He ultimately abandons her, and they each marry someone else. Later authors were entranced by the tale but found the ending unsatisfactory. The *Dong xi xiang* (Master Dong's western chamber romance) provided the lovers with a happy ending.⁹ This happy ending was retained in the Yuan drama *Xi xiang ji* by Wang Shi-fu. The plot of Wang Shi-fu's drama is, briefly,

⁹ Translated by Li-li Chen, *Master Tung's Western Chamber Romance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

as follows: the scholar Zhang and Cui Ying-ying fall in love. He saves her family from bandits, and so her widowed mother promises her to him in marriage. But the mother reneges on her promise because her late husband had already arranged a betrothal for the girl. The young couple, prodded by Ying-ying's maid Hong-niang, make love. When the affair is discovered, they are permitted to marry, provided that Zhang succeeds in the civil service exams. He does, and the drama ends happily.¹⁰

Romance of the Western Chamber, though now clearly regarded as one of the masterworks of Chinese drama, has not always been regarded as respectable. The language of the play is passionate and erotic, and the details of the seduction are explicit. The heroine, a well-bred young woman, is a willing conspirator in her own seduction; moreover, neither she nor her seducer is punished. It is no wonder that the play was regarded as scandalous in some circles. Indeed, Tang Lai-he (who received his *jin shi*, the highest civil service degree in 1640) said: "I have heard that in the 1590's the performance of *Xi xiang ji* . . . was still forbidden among (good) families." Gui Zhuang (1613–73) called the play "a book teaching debauchery."¹¹

The play, and the virtue of Ying-ying, found a champion of sorts in the critic Jin Sheng-tan (1610?–1661). Jin defended the play, saying that those who called the book indecent "would fall into the hell where tongues were uprooted." Jin argued that those who regarded the drama as licentious were narrow-minded prudes who had never even seen the play of which they so heartily disapproved. Yet Jin himself made a number of changes in the text of the play, changes that stress Ying-ying's essential virtue and downplay her passionate nature. Jin's concern with Ying-ying's virtue reflects a growing concern with female chastity during the Qing dynasty. Ying-ying is shocking to Jin in part because they are products of a different culture: his transformations are an attempt to make Ying-

¹⁰ On *Xi xiang ji*, see Tanaka Kenji, "Seishôki banpon no kenkyu" (Research on editions of the *Romance of the Western Chamber*), *Biburia*, no. 1 (1949), 107–48, and "Zatsugeki Seishôki ni okeru jinbutsu seikaku no kyôchô" (Characterizations in the *Romance of the Western Chamber*—a phase in the development of Yuan drama), *Tôhôgaku*, no. 22 (1961), 66–73; Wang Ji-si, "Xi xiang ji xu shuo" (The narrative of *Romance of the Western Chamber*), in *Yuan Ming Qing xi ju yan jiu lun wen ji* (Peking: Zuo jia chu ban she, 1957), 152–70. On the tale by Yuan Zhen, see James R. Hightower, "Yuan Chen and 'The Story of Ying-ying,'" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, no. 33 (1973), 90–123.

¹¹ Cited in John Ching-yu Wang, *Chin Sheng-t'an* (New York: Twayne, 1972), 84. Dai Bu-fan, *Lun Cui Ying-ying—Xi xiang ji ren wu lun* (A discussion of Cui Ying-ying: Discussion of a character in *Romance of the Western Chamber*) (Shanghai: Wen yi chu ban she, 1963), 140. *Gui Zhuang ji* (Peking: Zhong hua shu ju, 1962), *juan* 10, 2:449.

ying, always appealing, respectable in the eyes of his contemporaries.¹² Jin blames Ying-ying's mother for the young couple's illicit lovemaking. Had she not reneged on her promise, they could have married and consummated their love within the bounds of propriety. Jin further suggests that Ying-ying made love with Zhang out of a sense of compassion and duty. Because Zhang had saved her family from bandits, she owed him a debt of gratitude. He desired her so intensely that he fell ill: therefore her duty to fulfill his desires and restore him to health was clear. Furthermore, Jin eliminated the last act of the play, which made clear the actual reunion of the lovers. (Jin argued that the fifth and final act was not by Wang Shi-fu at all but had rather been added by Guan Han-qing.)¹³ Jin's version ends in a dream reunion. Thus, by making minor plot adjustments, Jin is able to show that Ying-ying's behavior does in fact serve an expanded sense of what female duty is. Jin Sheng-tan has rescued the reputation of Cui Ying-ying.¹⁴

By the time *Dream of the Red Chamber* was written, the story of Ying-ying existed in a number of versions, and the *Romance of the Western Chamber* found two rather different forms, Wang Shi-fu's original and Jin Sheng-tan's emendation. The question of which of these two versions of *Western Chamber* Cao Xue-qin used has attracted the attention of several recent Chinese scholars. It is not a matter of mere antiquarian interest, as the two versions do differ substantially. The most exhaustive study of the subject, that by Li Meng-sheng, demonstrates that *Red Chamber* refers to both Wang's original and Jin's emendation.¹⁵ Even Jin's bowdlerized *Western Chamber* would have been disturbing to Dai-yu since Jin's efforts to make Ying-ying a virtuous heroine do not eliminate certain crucial elements in the play. The seduction, though more re-

¹² Wang, 84. On the increasing valuation on female chastity during the course of the Qing, see the articles by Elvin and Mann cited in n. 4 above. On Qing attempts to ban *Western Chamber*, see Itô Sôhei, "Formation of the *Chiao-hung chi*: Its Change and Dissemination," *Acta Asiatica*, no. 32 (1977), 87-88.

¹³ Jin's claim is echoed by Tanaka Kenji. See Tanaka, "Seishôki banpon no kenkyu," 107. Wang Ji-si, however, argues that Wang Shi-fu wrote the entire play. For a convenient discussion of the authorship of the play, see the discussion by James Hargett in the *Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*, ed. William H. Nienhauser (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 408.

¹⁴ For a brief discussion of Jin's changes, see Lorraine Dong, "The Many Faces of Cui Ying-ying," in *Women in China*, ed. Stanley Johannsen and Richard Guisso (New York: Philo, 1981), 90. For a more extensive discussion, see Lorraine Dong, "The Creation and Life of Cui Ying-ying c. 803-1969" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1978), 82-104; for a thorough study in Chinese, see Dai Bu-fan, *Lun Cui Ying-ying*, 154-86.

¹⁵ Li Meng-sheng (n. 2 above); see also Jiang Xing-yu, "Guan yu Bao Dai suo du de shi liu chu ben *Xi xiang ji*" (n. 2 above).

strained, remains unambiguous: the ending (though perhaps less unambiguous) remains happy.

The play was, as we shall soon see, both performed and read in the Jia household. The first mention of the play occurs in chapter 23, when the thirteen-year-old Bao-yu is overcome by a vague and undefined ennui. Tealeaf, his servant, is at a loss as to how to rouse his master from his uncharacteristic spiritless state. He goes out and buys books “of a kind Bao-yu never heard about,” including biographies of famous beauties and *Romance of the Western Chamber*. The titillating books provide initiation for Bao-yu into the world of romance, though not his first exposure to sex. The romances, in their portrayal of sexual love, represent the world of illusion that the immortal Disenchantment was at such futile pains to warn Bao-yu against in the dream in chapter 5, and he is completely enraptured by them.

Bao-yu is cautioned to keep the books hidden, but he leaves a copy of *Western Chamber* lying about. Dai-yu finds it and reads it: “The more she read, the more she liked it, and before very long she had read several acts. She felt the power of the words and their lingering fragrance. Long after she had finished reading, when she had laid down the book and was sitting there rapt and silent, the lines continued to ring on in her head” (chap. 23; Hawkes, 1:464). Dai-yu is entranced by the power of the play. From this point on, lines from *Western Chamber* form an important motif in dialogue between Dai-yu and Bao-yu, as when Bao-yu teasingly refers to himself and his cousin as analogues to the main characters of the play:

“I am the one who is ‘full of sickness and woe’
And yours is that ‘face which topples kingdoms.’”¹⁶

A face that could topple kingdoms is a standard reference to beauty; but it is a dangerous beauty with erotic aspects—a concubine who distracts her master so that he neglects affairs of state, a Xi-shi or a Yang Gui-fei.¹⁷ It is a compliment about which a well-bred young lady might well feel ambivalent. Dai-yu becomes extremely angry, describing his speech as “nonsense for which he deserves to drop

¹⁶ Here my translation varies from that of Hawkes. He simply has Bao-yu cite the lines from *Western Chamber*. In the original, Bao-yu makes the equation between himself and Zhang on the one hand, and Ying-ying and Dai-yu on the other, specific, as shown in my modified translation. The exact quotation which Bao-yu has appropriated is: “How could I, full of sickness and woe, / Withstand the face that could kingdoms overthrow?” (I:iv).

¹⁷ Xi-shi is a famous beauty of the Warring States period, Yang Gui-fei, of the Tang dynasty.

dead" (*gai si de hu shuo*), characterizing the citations as lewd (*yin*), and threatening to tell on him. Only his charmingly abject apology returns her to her good humor. Restored to playful good spirits, she in turn insults him with lines drawn from near the end of the play, likening him to a sprout that bears no fruit and a wax counterfeit of a silver sword. Dai-yu's insult is derived from a passage in which Hong-niang is berating Zhang for his cowardice in confronting Madame Cui about her change of heart about the marriage (IV:ii). The danger of the beautiful woman is paired with the ineffectuality of her suitor.

Later in the same chapter, after Dai-yu and Bao-yu have completed burying fallen blossoms (the sensitive Dai-yu is depressed by the thought of the petals being stepped on or muddied: their burial preserves their purity), fragments of melancholy poetry flit through Dai-yu's mind. The final couplet she recalls is from *Western Chamber*:

As flowers fall and the flowing stream turns red,
A thousand sickly fancies crowd the mind.

[Chap. 23; Hawkes, 1:467]

The lines are spoken by Ying-ying in the opening "wedge" scene of the play, and their final line, not quoted by Dai-yu, is "Wordlessly I resent the east wind" (I, wedge). Fallen flowers symbolize unattended beauty: Ying-ying's resentment of the wind that blows the flowers could be read as distress that she has no man to love. The falling flowers in the romance and in the garden serve to reinforce what Dai-yu fears to be the analogy between Ying-ying and herself. Later in the romance, red flowers are strewn along Ying-ying's bridal path, thus reinforcing the erotic imagery of the flowers in *Red Chamber*. The sickly fancies crowding Dai-yu's mind take on an added dimension once we know from whence the image comes. The image comes full circle when, in the course of a drinking game, Dai-yu draws a card that reads:

Do not resent the east wind: the error is your own.

[Chap. 63]¹⁸

The quotation is the last line of a poem by the Song poet Ou-yang Xiu about Wang Zhao-jun, who was sent as a bride to a Xiong-nu

¹⁸ The line is drawn from Ou-yang Xiu's "Cai ho ming fei qu," in *Ou-yang Xiu quan ji* (Hong Kong: Guang zhi shu ju, 1965), *juan* 1:59. The quotation occurs in chap. 63 of the novel. Hawkes (3:228) translates the line: "Your own self, not the east wind, is your undoing."

prince. She had been an imperial concubine, one of a company so numerous that the emperor had never even seen her. He relied on portraits of his women to select one to send to the prince. The painter portrayed Zhao-jun as ugly: the emperor decided to send her. As she left on her northward journey, the emperor saw for the first time that she was a woman of beauty and grace, and he bitterly regretted his decision. The quoted line is his lament at his loss. That Dai-yu knows the source of the quotation becomes clear in chapter 64. Dai-yu has composed a series of five poems on five unhappy historical beauties. Bao-chai praises the poems for their originality and cites the Ou-yang Xiu poem as another example of a creative rendering of an old theme. The quotation on the playing card recalls to the reader the line from *Western Chamber* and simultaneously suggests Ying-ying's loss and Wang Zhao-jun's unhappy fate.¹⁹

Later, when Dai-yu is resting, she languorously recites a line from the romance:

Each day in a drowsy waking dream of love.
[Chap. 26; Hawkes, 1:516]²⁰

The line is spoken by Ying-ying after her mother has withdrawn permission for her to marry Scholar Zhang, when Ying-ying has made herself quite ill with longing for her lover. Bao-yu hears Dai-yu and teasingly asks her: "Why is 'each day . . . a drowsy waking dream of love'?" She responds by "covering her burning face with her sleeve, and turning her face toward the wall, pretending to be asleep." Shortly thereafter, Dai-yu pretends that she has just awakened and entertains Bao-yu. In praising Nightingale, Dai-yu's maid, for the way in which she pours the tea, Bao-yu resumes the game of allusion:

"Good girl" said Bao-yu.
"If I should share your passionate mistress' bridal couch
How could I ask you to make the bed?"²¹
In an instant the smile vanished from Dai-yu's face.

¹⁹ There are other resonances between this poem, *Western Chamber*, and *Red Chamber*. Zhao-jun (Lady Bright) is one of the five historical beauties Dai-yu has written on in chap. 64 (Hawkes, 3:255–58), and in the same chapter Bao-chai quotes this poem to Dai-yu (Hawkes, 3:258). The tears of the emperor in the poem are likened to flowers that cling to a branch, a contrast to the falling flowers in *Red Chamber* and *Western Chamber*.

²⁰ The passage occurs in *Western Chamber* (III:i).

²¹ Hawkes (1:517) renders the lines Bao-yu spoke to the maid as: "If with your amorous mistress I should wed / 'Tis you sweet maid, must make our bridal bed."

“What was that you said?”

He laughed:

“I didn’t say anything.”

Dai-yu began to cry.

“This is your latest amusement I suppose. Every time you hear some coarse expression or read some crude disgusting book, you have to come back here and give me the benefit of it. I am to become a source of entertainment for the menfolk now, it seems.”²²

Bao-yu, alarmed at her reaction to his jest, apologizes and attempts to comfort his cousin (chap. 26).

Later in the novel, the identification between Dai-yu and Ying-ying, implicit in earlier citations, is made explicit:

The chequered shadows of the bamboos and the dew-pearled moss reminded her of two lines she had read in *Western Chamber*:

A place remote, where footsteps seldom pass,
And dew still glistens on the untrodden grass.

“It’s all very well” she thought as she reflected on the heroine of that play, “Ying-ying may have been unfortunate, but at least she had a widowed mother and a little brother. I have no one. The ancients said ‘A beautiful woman has an unfortunate fate,’ but I’m not even beautiful, so why am I still more unfortunate than Ying-ying?” [Chap. 35]²³

The poem she cites is the opening of the poem that Ying-ying sends to Zhang to invite him to the rendezvous where they will make love. Dai-yu’s words that a beautiful woman has an unfortunate fate echo a phrase in the very next scene of the play, when Ying-ying is lamenting her mother’s change of heart about her marriage. The unhappy fate of the beautiful woman (*jia ren*) is linked in the next line with the weakness of the talented man (*cai zi*; II:iv). The overt meaning of the lines stresses Dai-yu’s loneliness and links her solitary situation to that of Ying-ying. But the function of the lines in *Western Chamber* as a summons to a lover gives another dimension to Dai-yu’s lament: she is not only without kin, she is without a lover.

²² My translation modified from Hawkes, 1:517–18.

²³ My translation modified from Hawkes, 2:174. The citation from *Western Chamber* is II:iii. Hawkes omits the line beginning “The ancients said.” The reference to the “unfortunate fate” also occurs in the poem by Ou-yang Xiu cited in n. 18 above.

Their own complex relationship is not the only subject of Bao-yu and Dai-yu's allusions to *Western Chamber*. In chapter 49, Bao-yu uses a quotation from *Western Chamber* to ask Dai-yu about her change in attitude toward Bao-chai. Bao-yu tells his cousin that there is a line in the romance that he does not understand:

Since when did Meng Guang accept Liang Hong's tray?

He clarifies the relevance of the citation by telling her that the two words he does not understand are "since when." Dai-yu understands his meaning and tells him of the nascent sisterly feeling developing between the two girls, a sisterly feeling that takes as its beginning Bao-chai's warning Dai-yu about the dangers of romances like *Western Chamber*. Bao-yu responds to her confidences by quoting another line from the same play:

It seems that the question

Since when did Meng Guang accept Liang Hong's tray?
could have been answered with another line from the same
act of the same play. It was since you spoke
Like a child whose unbridled tongue knows no concealment!²⁴

Bao-yu comments that in the past Dai-yu would have been deeply offended by his reference to the play; she responds that in the past she regarded Bao-chai as two-faced but now knows better. This exchange implies that it is not the references to the play itself that have offended Dai-yu, but rather the resonances between Ying-ying's fate and her own that cause offense.

It is not only eroticism that Dai-yu learns of from novels. Earlier in the novel we are shown how fiction reinforces her ideas about fate and causality:

Now Dai-yu had observed that in the romances which Bao-yu smuggled in to her and of which she was nowadays an avid consumer, it was always some trinket or small object of clothing or jewellery—a pair of lovebirds, a male and a female phoenix, a jade ring, a gold buckle, a silken handkerchief, an embroidered belt or what not—that brought the heroes and heroines (*cai zi jia ren*) together. And since the fate and future happiness of those fortunate beings seemed to

²⁴ Chapter 49 (Hawkes, 2:478), citing *Western Chamber* III:ii. This passage is translated by Hsiung ([n.2 above], 137) in a way that obscures the reference to Meng Guang.

depend wholly on the instrumentality of such trifling objects, it was natural for her to suppose that Bao-yu's acquisition of the gold kylin would become the occasion of a dramatic rupture with *her* and the beginning of an association with Xiang-yun in which he and Xiang-yun would do together all those delightful things that she had read about in the romances. [Chap. 32; Hawkes, 2:131]

Xiang-yun proves not to be a serious rival for Bao-yu's affection, but Bao-chai is. In the eyes of Dai-yu the signifier that Bao-chai and Bao-yu are meant for one another is Bao-chai's possession of a gold necklace, a match to Bao-yu's jade. The logic of the romance becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Fears that Bao-yu will marry someone else destroy Dai-yu's health; it is her frail health that finally makes his family decide that he must marry someone else.

Dai-yu regards the activities portrayed in the romances as delightful and dangerous. This ambivalence is shared by other members of the Jia household. Grandmother Jia approves of neither romantic drama nor of fiction, though she confesses to a furtive enjoyment of both. In chapter 54 she voices her objections to romance: it is immoral and it is false. Romances are objectionable because in them as soon as a handsome young man appears on the scene, well-bred young ladies carry on in a scandalous manner, forgetting their parents, forgetting propriety. But the scandalous behavior rings false to Grandmother Jia. She says that any well-born young lady with a well-educated mother would be surrounded at all times by nannies and maids: the opportunity for sexual dalliance simply would not occur. Maids (such as Hong-niang in *Western Chamber*) play an active role in bringing the lovers together. Where, Grandmother Jia wonders, were all of the other servants while the affair was taking place? Grandmother Jia concludes by saying that she does not allow such stories in her house, except for when the girls are out of earshot. That the scandalous and unrealistic behavior of the young women in the romances might serve as an inappropriate model for her own young ladies is clearly on Grandmother Jia's mind. Yet shortly after her tirade on fiction, with its oblique condemnation of *Western Chamber*, she orders that the scene "Hui-ming delivers the letter" from *Western Chamber* be performed by Althee, an ingenue in permanent employ of the household. Later, when Parfumee, another of the actresses, is sobbing after she has been beaten by her foster mother, the maid Musk says, "I must say, you don't look much like Cui Ying-ying at the moment. Reddie (Hong-niang) after her beating, though: now that's a part you could play without having to make up for it." Thus

it seems that *Western Chamber* was part of the standard fare of the acting troupe's repertoire in the Jia household (chap. 58; Hawkes, 3:129).

It is not only the senior generation of the Jia household who perceive the dangerous allure of drama. In chapter 42, in their famous reconciliation scene, Bao-chai chastizes Dai-yu for having used quotations from *The Peony Pavilion* and *Western Chamber* in a drinking game.²⁵ In order to criticize the use of quotations, Bao-chai must of course first recognize them. She confesses that as a child of seven or eight she had been "a real terror" and had read plays. But the more mature Bao-chai realizes the dangerous nature of the plays. She cautions Dai-yu, saying, "Let us confine ourselves to good, improving books; let us avoid like the plague those pernicious works of fiction, which so undermine the character that in the end it is past reclaiming" (chap. 41, Hawkes, 2:333–34). This advice convinces Dai-yu that, contrary to her previous impression, Bao-chai does indeed have her (Dai-yu's) best interest at heart. Dai-yu herself is all too aware of the pernicious influence the tantalizing romance presents.

The world of the tantalizing romance is far from the world that Lin Dai-yu occupies, and part of the function of the repeated references to the romance is to serve as a marker of that distance. *Dream of the Red Chamber* is heir to the tradition of scholar-beauty romances, but the inheritance has been utterly transformed. The drama serves to call up a set of expectations in the mind of the reader that the novel then confounds. In the opening scenes in the first chapter of the novel, the narrator of *Red Chamber* makes explicit reference to traditional romances, from which it sets itself apart. The framing allegory of the novel describes the entire text of the novel as having been inscribed on a stone, which Brother Vanitas transcribes onto a more conventional medium. When Vanitas shows skepticism of the value of the novel, the stone replies:

Your so-called "historical romances," consisting, as they do, of scandalous anecdotes about statesmen and emperors of bygone days and scabrous attacks on the reputations of long-dead gentlewomen, contain more wickedness and immorality than I care to mention. Still worse is the "erotic novel," by whose filthy obscenities our young folk are all too easily corrupted. And the "boudoir romances," those dreary stereotypes with their volume after volume all pitched on the

²⁵ Translated by Cyril Birch, *The Peony Pavilion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).

same note and their different characters undistinguishable, except by name (all those ideally beautiful young ladies and ideally eligible young bachelors)—even they seem unable to avoid descending sooner or later into indecency. [Chap. 1; Hawkes, 1:49–50]

Vanitas rereads the novel and finds that “its main theme was love; that it consisted quite simply of a true record of real events; and that it was entirely free from any tendency to deprave and corrupt. He therefore copied it all out from beginning to end and took it back with him to look for a publisher” (chap. 1; Hawkes, 1:51). Vanitas’s assertion that the novel is a true record of real events is a part of the complex play between reality and illusion so fundamental to the novel. Thus the reader is from the outset made aware of ways in which *Red Chamber* aspires to move beyond the genre of romantic fiction.²⁶

Katherine Carlitz has described the ways in which drama and traditional romances serve as framing devices for the sixteenth-century novel *Jin ping mei*. Drama sets up expectations that the novel then confounds. Tales of conventional morality precede and echo scenes of depravity, creating a complex web of authorial comment. The novelist is setting up a system of resonances within the mind of the reader. That the reader of *Jin ping mei* was intended to take an active role in reading the novel is indicated by the critic Zhang Zhu-po, who wrote that the act of reading the novel should recapitulate the act of writing it.²⁷ Cao Xue-qin, like the author of *Jin ping mei*, manipulates the conventions of the genre of the traditional romance in order to break its boundaries. As Ying-ying serves to demonstrate to Dai-yu what she might be and what she is not, so *Romance of the Western Chamber* serves to show what *Red Chamber* is and is not.

Xu Fu-ming suggests that the function of *Western Chamber* in *Red Chamber* is to underscore what he calls the “anti-feudal” elements of the novel. He sees Cui Ying-ying as a rebel, a woman making a statement about freedom of choice in marriage in the most direct way possible, by making love to the man of her choice. And *Romance of the Western Chamber* endorses that choice by punish-

²⁶ For a general discussion of the function of the assertion of originality at the outset of the novel, see Iser’s discussion in *The Implied Reader* (29–56) of similar assertions made by Fielding.

²⁷ Katherine Carlitz, *The Rhetoric of Chin P’ing Mei* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 71. A fairly recent summary of Western literary discussions on intertextuality can be found in Jonathan Culler’s *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981).

ing neither her nor her lover, indeed by allowing them a happy ending. Xu suggests that Bao-yu and Dai-yu, in their admiration for the play, demonstrate an oblique longing for the same kind of freedom.²⁸ Nonetheless, for all the centrality of the marriage issue, *Dream of the Red Chamber* is not a marriage romance: the novel is not about the choice of a mate. Dai-yu and Bao-yu are not free agents. They are bound not only by the constraints of a feudal family system but also by the allegorical structure of the novel in which they appear. The problems raised by human passion in the novel are not merely social. In a world where passion is the product of illusion, there can be no happy love stories, as the immortal Disenchantment tries to show Bao-yu in chapter 5.

That Ying-ying and scholar Zhang successfully defy convention serves to underscore the limitations of Dai-yu's situation. Ying-ying, a figure of considerable allure to Dai-yu, presents a compelling image of happiness and danger. Dai-yu refers to *Western Chamber* as a "crude disgusting book" but at the same time envies Xiang-yun for her imagined future with Bao-yu, where the two of them would "do all of those delightful things that she had read about in the romances" (chap. 32; Hawkes, 2:131). Like Rachel Brownstein's reader of Jane Austen, Dai-yu's expectations are formed by the romance. Yet Dai-yu does not confuse romance with the reality of her life. The happy ending that awaits the heroine of the romance does not, she fears, await her. The rather facile happy ending of *Western Chamber* serves to stress the complexity and subtlety of *Red Chamber*. Dai-yu identifies with Ying-ying, but it is an identification that, in the world of action and consequences, might have fearsome results. Ying-ying enables Dai-yu to put a name on fears that might otherwise remain formless: she is afraid of becoming the heroine in a scandalous romance.

*Department of History
University of Minnesota*

²⁸ Xu Fu-ming (n. 2 above), 184.