

© 2010 Junjie Luo

DESIRE AND REDEMPTION: THE TWO WORLDS IN *JIN PING MEI*

BY

JUNJIE LUO

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature  
in the Graduate College of the  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2010

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Nancy Blake, Chair and Director of Research  
Associate Professor Rania Huntington, Co-Director of Research, University of Wisconsin,  
Madison  
Associate Professor Waifeng Hassan  
Professor Zong-qi Cai  
Associate Professor Laurence Mall

## Abstract

*Jin Ping Mei* was completed in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, and is considered one of the masterpieces of classical Chinese fiction. Recent scholarship on *Jin Ping Mei* has focused on the novel's representation of desire. Some critics believe that desire is depicted in this novel as originating from one or two key characters such as Ximen Qing and Pan Jinlian. I differ with these critics, and contend that desire, as represented in *Jin Ping Mei*, is not sustained in a simple, linear relationship. Desire instead manifests itself in complex relationships between many of the individual characters.

With the help of the literary theories of desire and of network, I argue that *Jin Ping Mei* represents desire as having a network structure. Almost no one depicted in this novel can escape from this network, and the network reproduces itself repeatedly. Using this literary model of a "network of desires," I attempt to offer new perspectives of some of the topics that are frequently discussed in the *Jin Ping Mei* scholarship. These topics include the relationship between Ximen Qing and his women, the nature of the fates of individual characters, and the messages conveyed by the conclusion of *Jin Ping Mei*.

## Acknowledgements

I very much enjoyed my graduate studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where I am lucky enough to have the best dissertation committee that I could imagine. First and foremost, I would like to thank Professor Nancy Blake, the chair of my dissertation committee and the director of my dissertation, for her generous help and unfailing support. She offered many insightful comments on my dissertation and devoted a great deal of time to helping me understand the psychoanalytical theories and the gender theories that are essential to my dissertation project. I am also grateful to Professor Rania Huntington, the co-director of my dissertation. Her vast knowledge of classical Chinese fiction is always an inspirational source for me. I have benefited in numerous ways from my conversations and correspondence with her and from her constructive comments on my dissertation.

I would like to thank my dissertation committee members for their constant support. I am grateful to Professor Waï Hassan for the generous help that he gave to me during my graduate studies, for his valuable advice on my dissertation, and for making me realize the importance of close reading. My thanks also go to Professor Zong-qi Cai. His seminar on the formalistic features of classical Chinese poetry and his syntactic approach to classical Chinese poetry offered me new perspectives in reading the poems of *Jin Ping Mei*. Furthermore, I am grateful to Professor Laurence Mall who gave many valuable suggestions regarding my dissertation and discussed with me ideas such as the “mimetic desire” and “l’amour de loin” that I used in my dissertation.

Furthermore, I would like to express my gratitude to Professors Jean-Philippe Mathy, Michael Palencia-Roth, Jerome Packard, and Rini Bhattacharya Mehta for their help during my graduate studies. I also would like to thank my friends at the University of Illinois, and in particular, Mei-Hsuan Chiang, Eric Dalle, Yanjie Wang, Eric Dodson-Robinson, Hui Xiao, Sevinc Turrkan, Pei-lin Wu, and Mineo Takamura for their support.

An earlier version of the section on Pan Jinlian's masochism in chapter one appeared in *The International Journal of the Humanities* (2009, Volume 7, Issue 1: 149-156) under the title "Masochism, Desire and Death: A Deleuzian Reading of Pan Jinlian". I am grateful to two anonymous reviewers for their suggestions.

Several summer fellowships from the Program in Comparative and World Literature and a Dissertation Completion Fellowship from the School of Literatures, Cultures, and Linguistics allowed me to concentrate on my dissertation research and writing.

I would also like to thank my parents and my grandmother for their support and care. Thanks may not be enough for my wife who read *Jin Ping Mei* with me and shared my moments of happiness and of frustration during the process of completing my dissertation. Last, but not the least, I am immensely grateful to my late grandfather, Luo Jianxun, who instilled in me a love for literature. This dissertation is dedicated to his memory.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Desires.....	21
Chapter 2: Network.....	72
Chapter 3: Desire and Redemption: The Conclusion of <i>Jin Ping Mei</i> .....	112
Conclusion .....	141
Appendix A: Annotated Translation of Early Criticisms on <i>Jin Ping Mei</i> .....	146
Bibliography .....	175

## Introduction

*Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (also known as *The Plum in the Golden Vase* or *The Golden Lotus*)<sup>1</sup> is not an elegant novel in certain aspects, if we regard “elegant” as being “characterized by refinement and polish of style”, using the definition found in the *Oxford English Dictionary*<sup>2</sup>. The novel is notorious for its extensive and graphic descriptions of sexuality and violence. In addition, the author of *Jin Ping Mei* uses a lot of ink describing the minute details of the characters’ daily lives: the appearances of the characters, the clothes and the jewelry these characters wear, the food and the wine that they drink, their daily conversations, and the social activities in which they engage. Some critics believe that these descriptions are sometimes too fussy and repetitious<sup>3</sup>. However, many people value these exuberant depictions and consider them to be a primary strength of the novel. In one of the earliest criticisms on *Jin Ping Mei*, Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568-1610), a renowned literary scholar, praises these exuberant descriptions and compares them to rosy clouds: “I browsed [*Jin Ping Mei*] while leaning in bed. The novel is filled with gorgeous descriptions that are comparable to rosy clouds. The quality of these depictions far exceeds that in Mei Sheng’s

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Plum in the Golden Vase* is the title David Roy used for his translation of the *cihua* recension of *Jin Ping Mei*. As of 2010, Roy has published his translation of the first sixty chapters of this one-hundred-chapter novel. *The Golden Lotus* is the title Clement Egerton used for his translation of the *xiuxiang* recension of *Jin Ping Mei*.

<sup>2</sup> I use the online version of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the Second Edition. URL: [http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy2.library.uiuc.edu/cgi/entry/50073071?single=1&query\\_type=word&query\\_word=elegant&first=1&max\\_to\\_show=10](http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy2.library.uiuc.edu/cgi/entry/50073071?single=1&query_type=word&query_word=elegant&first=1&max_to_show=10). Accessed on May 21, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> For example, A Ding 阿丁 argues: “if a renowned writer could delete as many trivial stories as possible and keep only those parts which excel in the depiction of human relationships, *Jin Ping Mei* would be counted as an excellent work of Chinese vernacular fiction 如果有名手能將《金瓶梅》瑣屑的故事儘量刪削，單留下善寫人情的部分，也可算是中國近代語的文學作品中的出色著作” (170, my translation)

*Qifa* 伏枕略觀，雲霞滿紙，勝於枚生《七發》多矣”<sup>4</sup> (220, my translation). Lu Xun 魯迅, probably the best-known Chinese literary figure of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, argues that these minute descriptions reflect the author’s deep understanding of society and human nature. Lu says in an oft-quoted passage in his *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* 中國小說史略, “[t]he writer shows the most profound understanding of the life his time, his descriptions are clear yet subtle, penetrating yet highly suggestive, and for the sake of contrast he sometimes portrays two quite different aspects of life. His writing holds such a variety of human interest that no novel of that period could surpass it 作者之于世情，蓋誠極洞達，凡所形容，或條暢，或曲折，或刻露而盡相，或幽伏而含譏，或一時並寫兩面，使之相形，變幻之情，隨在顯見，同時說部，無以上之” (222, translated by Xianyi Yang 楊憲益 and Gladys Yang 戴乃疊). Andrew Plaks, a contemporary critic, sees the acute attention that the author gives to detail as being key to understanding the artistry of *Jin Ping Mei* (87-88). I fully agree with these critics. I chose *Jin Ping Mei* as the topic of my dissertation primarily because I love its “textual density”(80)—to use Andrew Plak’s words. This dissertation will explore how desire, a primary theme of *Jin Ping Mei*, is represented in the novel’s detailed portrayals of the daily lives of the characters.

### **The novel *Jin Ping Mei***

What is *Jin Ping Mei* about? Before I summarize the storyline of *Jin Ping Mei*, I will say a few words about the completion date and the author of the novel. It is generally agreed that

---

<sup>4</sup> All of the classical commentaries on *Jin Ping Mei* are taken from *A Collection of Jin Ping Mei Materials* 金瓶梅材料彙編, unless otherwise noted. *Qifa* (translated as *Seven Stimuli* by Naifei Ding) is a prosaic *fu* 賦 written by Mei Sheng 枚乘 who lived during the second century B.C. For an extended discussion of the relationship between *Jin Ping Mei* and *Qifa*, see Ding 81-115. For a discussion of the literary genre *fu*, see Knechtges 59-83.



the novel was completed during the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, although the exact year of completion has not been conclusively established. Many scholars have attempted to establish the identity of the author who used the pseudonym *Lanling xiaoxiaosheng* 蘭陵笑笑生 (Scoffing Scholar of Lanling) for *Jin Ping Mei*. There are over sixty candidates for *Lanling xiaoxiaosheng* (Wu 16). However, there is no consensus concerning the identity of the author of *Jin Ping Mei*<sup>5</sup>.

The historical background of the novel sets it at the end of the Northern Song Dynasty 北宋 (1110-1126 B.C.E.). The story of *Jin Ping Mei*, particularly the first eighty chapters, takes place in the household of Ximen Qing 西門慶, a wealthy merchant. At the beginning of the novel Ximen Qing owns a pharmaceutical store and expands his business as the novel progresses. He also finds success in politics through the use of cunning maneuvers and bribery. He becomes deputy judicial commissioner of the Provincial Surveillance Commission of Shandong 山東 province<sup>6</sup>. Ximen amuses himself in his spare time with sexual excesses. In addition to his legitimate wife Wu Yueniang 吳月娘, and his previously-acquired concubines, Li Jiao'er 李嬌兒 and Sun Xue'e 孫雪娥, Ximen marries Meng Yulou 孟玉樓, Pan Jinlian 潘金蓮 and Li Ping'er 李瓶兒 as the story develops. The title of the novel, *Jin Ping Mei*, is derived from the names of three heroines: Pan Jinlian, Li Ping'er, and Pang Chunmei 龐春梅 who is Jinlian's maid. Ximen also maintains sexual relationships with a dozen other women including his maids, the wives of his employees and servants, and several singing girls. In the first half of the book, Ximen's life and career are on

---

<sup>5</sup> For a review of the scholarship on the dating and the authorship of *Jin Ping Mei*, see Plaks 55-65, and Wu 5-6 and 10-16.

<sup>6</sup> Throughout this dissertation, when I refer to the government offices that characters assume, I use David Roy's translation of these titles unless otherwise noted.

the rise. He accumulates a large amount of wealth and establishes connections with some of the most powerful officials in the central government. Li Ping'er, his concubine, gives birth to a son.

The second half of the novel portrays the downfall of the Ximen family. Ping'er's son dies, and Ping'er falls ill and dies soon afterwards. Ximen achieves some political and business success: he is promoted from the position of deputy commissioner to commissioner and he makes large profit from his growing business. At the pinnacle of his life, however, Ximen dies due to indulgence in debauchery. Wu Yueniang, Ximen's legitimate wife, gives birth to a son on Ximen's deathbed. In the final twenty chapters, Ximen's family collapses. All of Ximen's concubines leave Ximen's house, either voluntarily or involuntarily. Li Jiao'er, the second lady, and Meng Yulou, the third lady, remarry. Pan Jinlian, the fifth lady, and Sun Xue'e, the fourth lady, are thrown out of Ximen's house due to their relationships with other men, and eventually die young. In addition to these concubines, the final twenty chapters also focus on the life experiences of two other characters: Pang Chunmei, Jinlian's maid, and Chen Jingji 陳經濟, Ximen's son-in-law. After several sharp and quick changes, Chunmei becomes the legitimate wife of a powerful general, and Jingji becomes her secret lover. At the end of the novel, Jingji is killed by a servant of the general, and Chunmei dies in a sexual bout. Wu Yueniang remains in Ximen's house. However, her son is converted to Buddhism by a Buddhist master and leaves her forever.

It is generally agreed that there are three extant recensions of *Jin Ping Mei*: the A recension, also known as the *cihua* 詞話 recension, the B recension, also known as the *xiuxiang* 繡像 recension or "Chongzhen 崇禎 period" text, and the C recension, also

known as the *diyi qishu* 第一奇書 recension (Hanan 1-11). There are significant textual differences between the A recension and the B recension<sup>7</sup>. The B recension is spotted with anonymous marginal and interlinear commentaries. The C recension appeared decades after the A and B recensions, and contains Zhang Zhupo's 張竹坡 (1670-1698) extensive commentaries on the novel. The text of the C recension is apparently based on the B recension and is almost identical to the B recension<sup>8</sup> (Roy xx, Tian 347). Some scholars argue that the A recension has a higher artistic value than the B recension and appeared before the B recension<sup>9</sup>. Other scholars hold different opinions regarding the artistic values of the two recensions and their chronological order<sup>10</sup>.

This dissertation uses the *cihua* recension (the A recension) as the primary the text for analysis. I made this choice not because I agree that the *cihua* recension is superior to the *xiuxiang* recension (B recension). In fact, I agree with Tian Xiaofei, who appears to prefer the *xiuxiang* recension, that judgment of a literary text is often subjective and “is largely the function of a particular historical period” (351). However, even Tian admits that “many fine depictions of the details can only be found in the *cihua* recension, but not in the *xiuxiang* recension 但是也確實有很多華美的物質細節為詞話本所有而繡像本所無” (preface 11, my translation). As noted above, this dissertation intends to demonstrate how desire is

---

<sup>7</sup> For an extended discussion of the differences between the A and B recensions, see Hanan 11-35, and Tian 347-388.

<sup>8</sup> Wang Rumei's preface to the C recension, or the *diyi qishu* recension, lists some differences between the B and C recensions. See Wang 3-4.

<sup>9</sup> For example, David Roy holds this opinion. See Roy's introduction to his translation of *Jin Ping Mei*, xx-xxi.

<sup>10</sup> For example, Tian Xiaofei believes that the *xiuxiang* recension is much less didactic than the *cihua* recension and that the *xiuxiang* recension also does a better job in portraying the complexities of individual characters' dispositions. See Tian's introduction to her *Qiusuitang on Jin Ping Mei* 4-12. Tian also summarizes the different evaluations of *Jin Ping Mei*'s recensions in “A Preliminary Comparison” 347-352.

represented in the depictions of the details. My analysis in this dissertation is therefore primarily based on the text of the *cihua* recension, which offers a richer depiction of the details than the other two recensions. However, I will refer to the *xiuxiang* recension and Zhang Zhupo's commentaries in the *diyi qishu* recension (the C recension) in my dissertation as necessity dictates.



Figure 1. The above image shows the front cover (on the right) and the first page (on the left) of the C recension, or the *diyi qishu* recension. The URL of this image is:

[http://pmgs.kongfz.com/data/pre\\_show\\_pic/1/124/428.jpg](http://pmgs.kongfz.com/data/pre_show_pic/1/124/428.jpg)

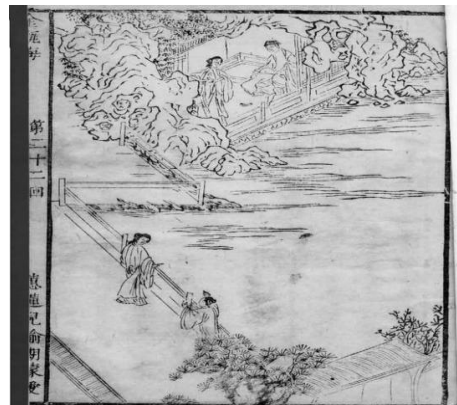


Figure 2. The above image shows an illustration at beginning of Chapter 22 of the B recension, or the *xiuxiang* recension. The B recension contains 200 illustrations that do not exist in the other two recensions. The URL of this image is:

<http://img612.ph.126.net/jy1t9KELqrHDIYQ63fUYaw==/1978206136324255636.jpg>

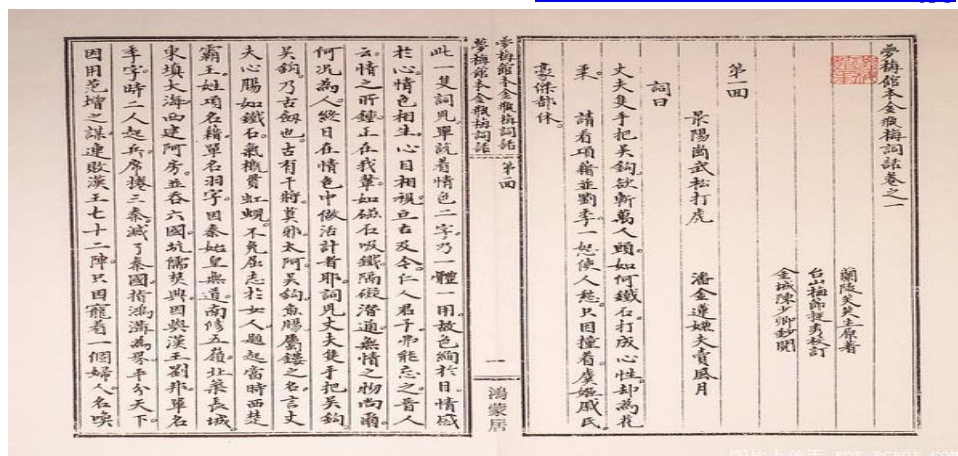


Figure 3. The above image shows the first two pages of the A recension, or the *cihua* recension. My dissertation relies primarily on the text of this recension. The URL of this image is:

<http://image.wangchao.net.cn/bt/1243532350076.jpg>

## Desire and *Jin Ping Mei*

This dissertation focuses on the representation of desire in *Jin Ping Mei*. However, what does the word “desire” mean in this dissertation? Desire is a heavily loaded term in literary theories, as Martin Huang points out (1). Students of the humanities and the social science probably know that the concept of desire plays a key role in the theories of many major thinkers during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Some of these theories about desire, such as those of Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Gille Deleuze and Ren éGirard, will be important critical tools that I will use to elucidate my reading of *Jin Ping Mei*. However, it should be noted that the word “desire” in this dissertation usually refers to its everyday, dictionary definition. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first two definitions of “desire” as a noun are: “**1.** The fact or condition of desiring; that feeling or emotion which is directed to the attainment or possession of some object from which pleasure or satisfaction is expected; longing, craving; a particular instance of this feeling, a wish. **2.** *spec*”. Physical or sensual appetite; lust. When desire is used as a verb, the first definition that the *Oxford English Dictionary* provides is “**1.** *trans.* To have a strong wish for; to long for, covet, crave”<sup>11</sup>. These three definitions constitute the basis of the meaning of desire in this dissertation.

*Jin Ping Mei* is a novel about desire in many respects. The beginning of *Jin Ping Mei*

---

<sup>11</sup> I use the online version of the Oxford English Dictionary, the Second Edition. URLs:

[http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy2.library.uiuc.edu/cgi/entry/50061889?query\\_type=word&queryword=desire&first=1&max\\_to\\_show=10&sort\\_type=alpha&result\\_place=2&search\\_id=B6zh-ry8D6X-7436&hilite=50061889](http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy2.library.uiuc.edu/cgi/entry/50061889?query_type=word&queryword=desire&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&result_place=2&search_id=B6zh-ry8D6X-7436&hilite=50061889) (desire as a noun), and

[http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy2.library.uiuc.edu/cgi/entry/50061890?query\\_type=word&queryword=desire&first=1&max\\_to\\_show=10&sort\\_type=alpha&result\\_place=3&search\\_id=B6zh-ry8D6X-7436&hilite=50061890](http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy2.library.uiuc.edu/cgi/entry/50061890?query_type=word&queryword=desire&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&result_place=3&search_id=B6zh-ry8D6X-7436&hilite=50061890) (desire as a verb). Accessed on May 29, 2010.

exemplifies the above three definitions of desire offered by the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The novel begins with four lyrics entitled “Lyrics on the Four Vices”. Each lyric has subtitle. They are, respectively, “Wine 酒,” “Beauty 色,” “Wealth 財,” and “Wrath 氣”. Except for wrath<sup>12</sup>, wine, beauty and wealth are objects often sought by people. These lyrics describe the pursuit of “the object[s] from which pleasure or satisfaction is expected”—in other words, human desire—and the dire consequences of desire (Huang 104). Placed at the beginning of the novel, these lyrics set the tone for the entire novel. Many readers would agree that, of all the types of human desire, the “physical or sensual appetite,” or the second definition of desire as a noun, is one of the focal points of *Jin Ping Mei*. One of the four lyrics, which is subtitled “Beauty (*se*),” depicts this lust (David Roy translates the subtitle *se* as “lust”) and warns us against the danger of lust:

Do not become enamored of glossy black hair  
and beautiful complexions;  
Cease to hanker after crimson powder  
and halcyon-feathered ornaments.  
What ravages man’s body and shortens his life  
are those bewitching figures;  
Beauties capable of toppling kingdoms and cities  
are more alluring still. (Roy 10)

休愛綠鬢美朱顏，  
少貪紅粉翠花鈿。  
損身害命多嬌態，  
傾國傾城色更鮮。

The novel’s emphasis on the physical and sensual aspects of desire is also revealed in the

---

<sup>12</sup> Martin Huang offers an excellent discussion of wrath (*qi*). See Huang 103-110.

prefatory lyric of the first chapter of the novel:

The hero grips his “Hook of Wu,”  
Eager to cut off ten thousand heads.  
How is it that a heart forged out of iron and stone,  
Can yet be melted by a flower?

Just take a look at Xiang Yu and Liu Bang,  
Whose anger can frighten many people.  
They had only to meet with Lady Yu and Lady Qi,  
For all their valor to come to naught. (Roy 12, with modifications)  
丈夫隻手把吳鉤，  
欲斬萬人頭。  
如何鐵石，打成心性，  
卻為花柔？

請看項籍並劉季，  
一怒使人愁。  
只因撞著，虞姬戚氏，  
豪傑都休。

Following this lyric, the narrator points out, as if the message conveyed by this lyric were not straightforward enough, that “the subject of this lyric is the words *passion* and *beauty* 此一雙詞兒，單說著‘情’‘色’二字” (Roy 12, italics by the translator). The narrator then tells the stories of Xiang Yu 項羽 and Liu Bang 劉邦 to which the lyric refers. In Chinese history, both Xiang and Liu are great heroes who fought for the throne. According to the narrator, after losing several battles against Liu, Xiang commits suicide together with his favorite concubine, Lady Yu 虞姬, instead of seeking help from his friends in his hometown, due to his strong passion for Yu. Liu later becomes the emperor of China. Liu’s passion for his

favorite concubine, Lady Qi 戚姬, inspires him to name Qi's son as the crowned prince. However, Emperor Liu Bang fails to install Qi's son as the heir to his throne, which leads to miserable ends for both Qi and her son, who are purged after Liu's death. These two stories illustrate the messages conveyed by the lyric "Beauty" and the prefatory lyric: sensual desire and its dire consequences. However, it appears that desire has been externalized in these two stories in the form of actions instead of being merely a psychological or emotional state, in part because both Xiang and Liu are heroes who take actions to fulfill their desires. In other words, desire functions primarily as a verb instead of as a noun in those two stories. In this sense, combining the three definitions of desire offer us a good sense of some of the most important aspects of *Jin Ping Mei*, as revealed at the beginning of the novel. I venture to claim that despite "all the baggage associated with [the word desire]," (Huang 1) desire is an appropriate, if not perfect, word for describing some of the major themes of *Jin Ping Mei*. The following chapters will further analyze and elaborate on these themes.

### **The Source of Desire in *Jin Ping Mei*: A Review**

Let us first examine the scholarship on the representation of desire in *Jin Ping Mei* before proceeding to my analysis. In analyzing a large amount of scholarship concerning the representation of desire in *Jin Ping Mei*, I pay special attention to one question: the origin of desire. Since the publication of *Jin Ping Mei*, many critics have considered Ximen Qing, the protagonist of the novel, to be the primary source of desire. Some early critics believe that the primary purpose of the author in writing *Jin Ping Mei* was to use Ximen Qing to satirize or criticize a certain political figure. For example, Wang Zhongqu 王仲瞿 (1760-1817) is of this



opinion. He believes that Wang Shizheng 王世貞 (1526-1590), a renowned scholar, is the author of the novel. According to Wang Zhongqu, Wang Shizheng's father was framed by both Yan Song 嚴嵩, a high-ranking official, and Yan's son, Yan Shifan 嚴世蕃, who was also a high-ranking official. Wang was politically unable to seek revenge for the actions taken against his father, so he wrote *Jin Ping Mei* in order to express his anger over the Yan family, particularly Yan Shifan, and made use of Yan Shifan as a model for the villain Ximen Qing:

Yuanmei [Wang Shifan] wrote this novel to launch a war of words. The character Ximen is an allusion to Donglou [Yan Shifan]. Ximen's inveterate spongers like Ying Bojue allude to people such as Hu Zhi, Bai Qichang, Wang Cai and Hou Ruyi . Ximen's servants like Dai'an refer to Yan Nian. Pan Jinlian, Li Ping'er and Chunmei allude to Donglou's concubines. Ximen's reliance on Cai Jing's power is an allusion to Donglou's reliance on the power of his father, Song. Ximen's theft of the estates of others and his conspiracy to take possession of the wealth of others is an allusion to Donglou, who scrambled for power and accepted bribes. The streets were full of people seeking to give gifts to Donglou when Donglou was in power. Ximen's death being caused by his wound refers to Donglou's death due to his impeachment. The scattering of Ximen's family members and Wu Yueniang's stay at Yongfu Temple after the death of Xiaoge refer to the historical reality that Donglou was executed, the government confiscated his possessions, the senile and sick Treacherous Song had to stay in a hut next to a tomb, and Song died with a heart heavy with grief<sup>13</sup>. (472, my translation)

因作此書，以示口誅筆伐。西門者，影射東樓也。門下客應伯爵等，影射胡植、白啓常、王材、侯汝揖諸人也。玳安等仆，影射嚴年也。金、瓶、梅，影射東樓姬妾也。西門倚蔡京之勢，影射東樓倚父嵩之勢也。西門之盜人遺產，謀人錢財，影射東樓之招權納賄，筐崖相望於道也。西門之傷發而死，影射東樓之遭幼而死也。一家星散，孝哥死後，吳月娘寄居永福寺，影射東樓服罪，家產籍沒，奸蒿老病，寄居墓舍，抑鬱以終也。(472)

---

<sup>13</sup> For a complete translation of this commentary, see the appendix to this dissertation.

The frequent appearances of the name Ximen (who represents Donglou 東樓, which is the pseudonym Yan Shifan uses) in this commentary indicate that the critic Wang Zhongqu considers Ximen to be the single most important character in *Jin Ping Mei*, and that his greed for power and money is central to the development of the plot. Wang also points out the emptiness of Ximen's desire: in the end, Ximen (Donglou) loses everything, including his power, wealth, family and his life. In a word, in regarding *Jin Ping Mei* as primarily a political satire of Yan Shifan, an official who was notorious for his wicked desire, Wang Zhongqu sees the desire of Ximen, a fictional personification of Yan Shifan, as being at the center of the novel.

Modern critics of *Jin Ping Mei* tend not to find a one-to-one correspondence between fictional characters and historical figures. However, they share their predecessors' belief that Ximen Qing is the focal point of desire. For example, Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 (1898-1958) states: "Although it appears that *Jin Ping Mei* depicts the lives of women such as Pan Jinlian, Li Ping'er and Chunmei, the whole novel actually centers on the life of Ximen Qing 《金瓶梅》似在描寫潘金蓮、李瓶兒和春梅那些個婦人們的一生，其實卻是以西門慶的一生的歷史為全書的骨幹與脈絡的" (15 my translation). Zheng goes on to judge Ximen in emotional terms: "When Ximen Qing holds feasts and has a lot of fun, and spends every night as if it were the night of the Lantern Festival, many repressed people and humiliated people are weeping and cursing! He uses people as his ladder to climb into the garden of 'fame' and 'wealth'. He takes advantage of numerous ordinary people by intimidating, cheating, extorting and manipulating them! 在西門慶的宴飲作樂，'夜夜元宵'的當兒，有多少的被壓迫、被侮辱者在飲泣著，在詛咒著！他用'活人'作階梯，一步步踏上了

“名”與“利”的園地裏。他以欺凌、奸詐、硬敲、軟騙的手段，榨取了不知數的老百姓們的利益!” (17, my translation). Zheng actually makes a moral judgment regarding Ximen: Ximen’s desire is the primary representation of desire depicted in the novel, and it is his vicious desire for fame, power and wealth that makes the lives of other people miserable. Zhao Jingshen 趙景深 (1902-1985) shares Zheng’s opinion in large part. Zhao claims that “[Ximen Qing] is the most important character in *Jin Ping Mei*. The entire novel depicts how Ximen Qing uses living people as ladders and climbs up on their flesh and blood. He represents the type of a local tyrant who cruelly exploits [other people] through business transactions and the practice of usury 西門慶是《金瓶梅》中最主要的人物，整部書所寫的就是西門慶怎樣以活人爲階梯，踏著他們的血肉爬上去，即西門慶的‘發迹’史。他是從商業和高利貸進行剝削的典型” (73, my translation). Zhao further argues that Ximen’s desire for women is also central to the representation of sexual desire depicted the novel. According to Zhao, “Ximen is a womanizer who abuses women, which makes him a typical example of the ruling class of the feudal, patriarchal society [at that time]. Centering on Ximen Qing, the novel depicts a series of women he persecutes. Ximen has one legitimate wife and five concubines...He also disgraces over twenty other women. Maids, wives of his servants, and even wives of his friends: every good-looking woman has become his victim 西門慶是封建男權社會統治階級摧殘婦女的淫棍典型。小說即以西門慶爲中心，刻畫一連串受迫害的婦女形象。西門慶有一妻五妾...被他凌辱過的有二十來個，丫頭、家人媳婦，甚至朋友的妻子稍有姿色的無不受他的蹂躪” (74-75, my translation). Zhao appears to say that all of the sexual desire in the novel emanates from Ximen, a wicked man, and the women are merely the objects of Ximen’s sexual desire.

Many contemporary scholars have abandoned this type of moral judgement. However, their discussions still regard Ximen's desire as being at the core of the desires represented in *Jin Ping Mei*. For example, in *Desire and Fictional Narrative in Late Imperial China*, a book-length study of the representation of desire in Chinese vernacular fiction published in 2001, Martin Huang analyzes Ximen's desire at great length. He points out that "What Ximen Qing is doing is not pursuing any specific object of desire, but attempting to perpetuate the act of desiring itself" (108). Based on this argument, Huang concludes, "One important achievement of *Jin Ping Mei* in its exploration of the ramifications of desire is its persistent focus on the deadly consequences that arise when desire tries to perpetuate itself by constantly reinventing its objects" (109). In basing his assessment of the novel's achievement solely on his analysis of Ximen, Huang actually equates Ximen's desire with the totality of the desires represented in *Jin Ping Mei*. Huang appears to say that other characters either do not desire or instead desire in exactly the same way as Ximen.

However, some critics do not agree that Ximen Qing is the sole source of desire in *Jin Ping Mei*. In 1614 B.C.E., not long after *Jin Ping Mei* was completed, Yuan Zhongdao 袁中道 (1570-1623), a renowned scholar and writer, discusses the motivation for the author to create *Jin Ping Mei*:

There once lived a Battalion Commander Ximen who resided in the capital. He hired a Confucian scholar from Shaoxing to live in his house. The scholar lived a relaxed life, and kept a daily record of the licentious and dissipated life he observed in Ximen's household. He used the character Ximen Qing to allude to his master, and the depiction of Ximen Qing's women to allude to his master's concubines. (220-221, my translation)<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> For a complete translation of this commentary, see the appendix to this dissertation.

舊時京師，有一西門千戶，延一紹興老儒於家。老儒無事，逐日記其家淫蕩風月之事，以西門慶影其主人，以余影其諸姬。瑣碎中有無限煙波，亦非慧人不能。(220-221)

Yuan's account about the origin of the novel is just one of the many competing stories concerning the author's identity and his motivation to write *Jin Ping Mei*. However, Yuan's juxtaposition of Ximen and his concubines suggest that both parties were active players in this "licentious and dissipated life". This brief commentary provided inspiration. In chapter three of this dissertation, I will propose that Ximen is not the sole center of desire in *Jin Ping Mei*, and that "the wives' group" depicted in the novel is another important source of desire.

Zhang Zhupo (1670-1698), the most renowned critic of *Jin Ping Mei*, goes one step further than Yuan Hongdao. Zhang shows that in addition to Ximen Qing, and his wife and concubines, who are the principal characters of the novel, the other characters of the novel also desire. For example, Zhang goes to great lengths in his analysis of the desire of Wang Liu'er, Ximen's mistress and wife of Han Daoguo, manager of Ximen's silk store:

The depiction of Wang Liu'er is solely intended to illustrate the theme that money commands 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, 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, so that in the end he 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. 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. *The portrayal of Wang Liu'er appears to focus on her lust for money.* Thus the author does not conclude the story of Wang Liu'er until his last chapter. (Roy 213, with modifications, my emphasis)

寫王六兒者，專爲財能致色一著做出來。你看西門在日，王六兒何等趨承，乃一旦拐財遠遁。故知西門于六兒，借財圖色，而王六兒亦借色求財。故西門死，必自王六兒家來，究竟財色兩空。王六兒遇何官人，究竟借色求財。甚矣！色可以動人，尤未如財之通行無阻，人人皆愛也。然則寫六兒，又似單講財，故竟結入一百回內<sup>15</sup>。

Zhang Zhupo makes two important points in the above analysis. First, Wang Liu'er, who cannot be called a principal character in *Jin Ping Mei*, also desires, and her desire is depicted primarily as being a consuming lust for money. Second, in her relationship with Ximen Qing, Ximen is not the only person who desires. While Ximen seeks sex in this relationship, Wang desires Ximen's money. The same scenario repeats, according to Zhang Zhupo, in Wang's relationship with He Guanren. Zhang Zhupo does not stop here. He further reveals that the desires of some minor characters play important roles in the development of the plot. He uses Shutong, one of Ximen's page boys, and Yuxiao, one of Wu Yueniang's maids, to demonstrate this point:

There are instances in the *Jin Ping Mei* in which the author seems to have deliberately created episodes or characters that appear from nowhere and disappear for no apparent reason. Shutong is an example. But we should know that so much planning went into the author's creation of this single character. It goes without saying that being depicted as Ximen's catamite, Shutong strengthens the image of Ximen as a dissipated person. But it is not apparent that the author has created Shutong in order to prepare for 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 Zhao and the banishment of Lai

---

<sup>15</sup> In this dissertation, the original Chinese of Zhang Zhupo's commentaries are taken from *Jin Ping Mei with Zhang Zhupo's commentaries* 張竹坡批評金瓶梅 edited by Wang Rumei 王汝梅, Li Shaoxun 李昭恂 and Yu Fengshu 於鳳樹 and published by Qilu shushe 齊魯書社, unless otherwise noted.

Wang, it need never have been as serious as it becomes when Pan Jinlian throws her tantrum. This tantrum is precipitated by Yuxiao's willingness to repeat every word of Wu Yueniang's private conversation to Pan Jinlian. Why should Yuxiang tell her everything? Because she has accepted her three conditions. Why does she accept these three conditions? Because Pan Jinlian discovers her affair with Shutong. (Roy 207-208, with modifications)

《金瓶》有特特起一事、生一人，而來既無端，去亦無調，如書童是也。不知作者，蓋幾許經營，而始有書童之一人也。其描寫西門淫蕩，並及外寵，不必說矣。不知作者蓋因一人之出門，而方寫此書童也。何以言之？瓶兒與月娘始疏而終親，金蓮與月娘始親而終疏。雖固因逐來昭、解來旺 起釁，而未必至撒潑一番之甚也。夫竟至撒潑一番者，有玉簫不惜將月娘底裏之言罄盡告之也。玉簫何以告之？曰有“三章約”在也。“三章”何以肯受？有書童一節故也。(26)

On one hand, Zhang Zhupo claims that Shutong's existence strengthens the image of Ximen as being the subject of desire: Shutong is a catamite of Ximen who satisfies Ximen's desire. However, the emphasis in Zhang's analysis is to show that the sexual desires of Shutong and Yuxiao are the primary cause of two key incidents in *Jin Ping Mei*: the quarrel between Pan Jinlian and Wu Yueniang, and Jinlian's subsequent expulsion from Ximen's household. In this sense, Zhang reveals the bridges between the marginal desires and the central events in *Jin Ping Mei*. This type of interconnectedness is exactly what Zhang Zhupo attempts to demonstrate in his commentary. Zhang writes: "The details of this book [*Jin Ping Mei*] are as fine as the hairs of an ox, which are numbered by the thousands and tens of thousands, yet all belong to a single body and are sustained by the same circulatory system. Although the needle-work and the thread are concealed, even widely separated elements are interconnected 蓋其書之細如牛毛，乃千萬根共具一體，血脈貫通，藏針伏線，千里相牽..." (Roy 118). Zhang Zhupo may over-read some of the details of the novel from time to time, as many

critics have pointed out<sup>16</sup>. However, I completely agree with him that this interconnectedness is an important characteristic of the novel<sup>17</sup>. My dissertation is in many ways a continuation of Zhang Zhupo's efforts to examine the interconnectedness in the novel. This dissertation will focus on one particular aspect of this interconnectedness: the network brought into being by the desires of the characters<sup>18</sup>.

## Desire and Redemption

My dissertation, *Desire and Redemption: The Two Worlds in Jin Ping Mei*<sup>19</sup>, is intended to contribute to the ongoing discussions of the representation of desire in *Jin Ping Mei*. I contend that desire, as represented in *Jin Ping Mei*, is not sustained in a unilateral relationship. Rather, desire manifests itself in bilateral and, more frequently, multilateral relationships. All of the novel's main characters simultaneously desire and are being desired. *Jin Ping Mei* depicts a world in which everyone is trapped in a network of desire. I argue that the world that the main characters constitute offers no possibility of redemption, even when, towards the end of the novel, the author creates a world of redemption by depicting two characters

---

<sup>16</sup> For example, see Wang Rumei's preface to the C recension, or the *diyi qishu* recension, 11, and Gu 151.

<sup>17</sup> Several scholars have pointed out the significance of this interconnectedness that Zhang Zhupo identifies in his commentary. For example, David Roy claims that "the whole thrust of Zhang Zhupo's criticism is informed by the desire to demonstrate the thesis that the work as a whole is an organic entity that has been constructed with great care and to which every detail, however insignificant in itself, makes a necessary contribution" (121). Shawn Kelly Jahshan argues that "[f]or Zhang, the novel is a vast web of interconnected details that signify more on the 'structural' or rhetorical level than on the mimetic" (10).

<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that I am not the first person to use the terms "network" and "network of desire" to discuss *Jin Ping Mei*. For example, Ming Dong Gu argues that "the novel [*Jin Ping Mei*] is a brocade of human desires, and its principle of composition is a poetics of weaving" (129). Gu focuses his analysis on Zhang Zhupo's metaphor "weaving," which he regards as the poetics of the novel. He also relates "weaving" to Roland Barthes's view that a piece of literature is a woven text (127). However, the emphasis in my examination differs from Gu's. I deal primarily with the representation of desire which I consider to be a motif of the novel.

<sup>19</sup> The title of my dissertation is inspired by "hongloumeng de liangge shijie" (The Two Worlds in *A Dream of Red Mansions*), an article authored by Yu Yingshi's 余英时.



who are not dominated by desire. The two characters in the world of redemption are depicted as being powerless to redeem those trapped in the network of desire. This dissertation concludes that the depiction of powerlessness indicates nostalgic feelings on the part of the author for the world of desire.

This dissertation is divided into three chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. In the first chapter, “Desires,” I claim that all of *Jin Ping Mei*’s main characters desire, but in different ways. Many different factors influence how they desire, such as their social status and wealth. I take these factors into account, and analyze in detail the desires of many of the characters including Ximen Qing, Pan Jinlian, Li Ping’er, Wu Yueniang, Meng Yulou, Pang Chunmei, and Chen Jingji. My examination of their desires aims to demonstrate that desire in *Jin Ping Mei* almost always exists exclusively in complicated, multilateral relationships.

Based on my arguments in Chapter 1, I argue in the second chapter “Network” that in *Jin Ping Mei*, desire does not originate from a single source. The primary purpose of this chapter is to deconstruct the centrality of the type of desire portrayed in the novel. I introduce the term “wives’ group” to show that desire is depicted in *Jin Ping Mei* as emanating from multiple sources. This chapter also examines how the desires of some of the minor characters influence this network of desire through ripple effects. Desire forms a decentralized network from which no one can escape, and thus is structural. At the end of this chapter, I also discuss the relationship between the network of desire and the fates of individual characters.

In the third chapter of my dissertation, “Desire and Redemption: The Conclusion of *Jin Ping Mei*,” I continue to discuss the nature of this network. I argue that this network of desire perpetuates itself because it keeps replacing any node that becomes lost or disappears. This

network thus does not allow for the possibility of redemption. Although the author concludes the novel by creating two characters—Han Aijie 韓愛姐 and the Buddhist monk, Pujing 普靜—who seem to live outside that network, their existence does not redeem any of those who are consumed by desire. At the conclusion of the novel, however, we come to see, probably for the first time in the novel, that there are two opposing worlds: the world where desire dominates versus the world where people can control and even nullify desire. The powerlessness of latter world over the former world reflects the author's affirmation of desire.

In the conclusion of my dissertation, I reiterate my central arguments and discuss several key characteristics of the network of desire. I demonstrate how my discussion of the network may shed some new light on two key questions that have been frequently discussed in *Jin Ping Mei* scholarship. The first question concerns the relationship between the perceived world and the emptiness, and the second question concerns the fate of characters.

## Chapter 1: Desires

There is a general agreement that *Jin Ping Mei*<sup>20</sup> represents a world of desires. Every major character in *Jin Ping Mei* expresses desires. However, although there is a great deal of scholarship that focuses on analyzing the desires of the primary main characters Ximen Qing and Pan Jinlian,<sup>21</sup> the desires of other major characters such as Wu Yueniang, Meng Yulou and Pang Chunmei have not been fully analyzed. This chapter will systematically examine the desires of the major characters depicted in *Jin Ping Mei*. These major characters include Ximen Qing, Pan Jinlian, Li Ping'er, Wu Yueniang, Meng Yulou, Pang Chunmei, and Chen Jingji. My examination of the desires expressed by these characters serves two primary purposes. First, I will attempt to show that all of these characters express desire, but do so in different ways due to differences in social status, wealth and other characteristics. My analysis of their desires aims to deepen our understanding of how these main characters are represented in *Jin Ping Mei*. Second, I will demonstrate that the desires of these characters are interrelated. Each individual character's desire is influenced by the desires of the other characters. This conclusion will be the premise of my second chapter "Network" in which I will argue that in *Jin Ping Mei*, desire forms a network from which none can escape.

### Seeking Substitutes: the Depiction of the Desire of Ximen Qing

One of the most conspicuous characteristics of Ximem Qing's desire is his lack of

---

<sup>20</sup> I use the *Jin Ping Mei cihua* edited by Mei Jie 梅節 and published by Liren shuju 裏仁書局 as the original text throughout this dissertation, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>21</sup> For example, see Martin Huang 86-110 for an analysis of Ximen Qing's desires, and Naifei Ding 152-164 for an analysis of Pan Jinlian's desires.

long-term goals or plans. For example, it appears that Ximen does not have a plan to become a government official. He has no idea that he will be appointed as a government official when he sends gifts to Cai Jing 蔡京, a top-ranking government official, on the occasion of Cai's birthday. He sends Cai gifts because, Zhai Qian 翟謙, the majordomo of Cai's household, suggests that he do so. This is why Ximen is surprised to hear Immortal Wu's 吳神仙 prediction that he will soon get a position in the government. He laughs after the Immortal Wu leaves, and tells Wu Yueniang, his legitimate wife: "He (Immortal Wu) predicted that I would have the joy of ascending to the clouds from the level ground, and the glory of appointment to office and augmented emolument. Now where would I get an official appointment from? 他相我目下有平地登雲之喜,加官進祿之榮;我那得官來?"(Roy 185, chapter 29).<sup>22</sup> The same is also true with Ximen's relationships with women. He does not have a clear idea of what type of woman he really wants. He simply has affairs with women in a random manner.

Because Ximen lacks a clear long-term goal, his desire is thus imitative<sup>23</sup>. He often imitates other people's desires. For example, one of the primary reasons why Ximen wants to have sex with Pang Chunmei, Pan Jinlian's maid, is that he wants to imitate Hua Zixu 花子虛, his neighbor and a member of the brotherhood to which Ximen and nine other men

---

<sup>22</sup> Scholars generally consider David Roy's *The Plum in the Golden Vase* to be the most reliable translation of *Jin Ping Mei*. However, Roy has not yet published the translation of the last forty chapters of *Jin Ping Mei*. I use Roy's translation for the direct quotations from the first sixty chapters unless otherwise noted. I either use my own translation or the translation of Clement Egerton for the direct quotations from the last forty chapters.

<sup>23</sup> Katherine Carlitz also discusses imitation in *Jin Ping Mei*. Carlitz argues that "[j]ust as officials at court provide models for Ximen Qing, so Ximen Qing sets the tone for his household" (39). Carlitz's idea of imitation is based on a particular sociological model: people of low social status imitate those who possess higher social status. Carlitz's model can be called the "ladder" model, in that this model indicates a clear hierarchy. I believe that Ximen's desire is disseminated and that he does not merely imitate people "above" him. I therefore use the "network" model instead of the "ladder" model to discuss his imitative form of desire. The next chapter of this dissertation will focus on and discuss this "network" model.

belong, who maintains a sexual relationship with his wife's maid. He tells Pan Jinlian, his Fifth Lady:

Brother Hua the Second next door...actually has two attractive young girls as maidservants in his rooms. The one who delivered the flowers today was the youngest. There is another one, as old as Chunmei, whom Brother Hua the Second has already had his way with. I caught sight of her once, when she had followed her mistress to the front door, and could see that she has a good figure. Who would have thought that Brother Hua the Second, young as he is, would carry on that way in his own house? (Roy 202-3, chapter 10).

隔壁花二哥房裡，到有兩個好丫頭，今日送花來的是小丫頭；還有一個，也有春梅年紀，也是花二哥收過用了。但見他娘在門首站立，他跟出來，見是生的好模樣兒。誰知這花二哥年紀小小的，房裡恁般用人！

Pan Jinlian immediately understands Ximen's intention of imitating Hua and having sex with Chunmei. She replies: "If that's the way things stand, tomorrow I'll pay a visit to the rear compound and leave the way open for you. Just call her into the room and have your way with her. That's all there is to it 既然如此，明日我往後邊坐，一面騰個空兒，你自在房中叫他來，收他便了" (Roy 163, chapter 10).

Another example of Ximen's imitative desire can be found in the description of the sexual interplay between Ximen and Ruyi'er 如意兒 in chapter 78 of *Jin Ping Mei*. Ruyi'er is a female servant of Guange, son of Li Ping'er. After both Guange and Li Ping'er die, Ximen and Ruyi'er enter into an affair. During intercourse, Ximen asks Ruyi'er: "Zhang the Fourth, you strumpet, whose woman are you? 章四兒淫婦，你是誰的老婆?" (Egerton 59, chapter 78, with changes). The woman answers: "I am yours 我是爹的老婆" (Egerton 59, chapter 78,). "Say that you once belonged to Xiong Wang, but now you belong to me 你說是熊旺的老婆，今日屬了我的親達達了" (59). "This strumpet once was Xiong Wang's wife,

but now she belongs to this darling 淫婦原是熊旺的老婆，今日屬了我的親達達了” (59). Zhang is the last name of Ruyi'er before her marriage, and Xiong Wang is her husband. The critic Martin Huang has done an excellent analysis of this passage. He argues: “Their affair (the affair of Ximen Qing and Ruyi'er) becomes all the more ‘pleasurable’ to him (Ximen Qing) precisely because Ruyi is another man’s wife. The fact that he can fornicate with the wife of another man whenever he likes has to be verbally confirmed by the very woman over whom he is exercising total dominance. This verbal confirmation enhances his sense of dominance” (106). I agree with Huang. However, I also want to stress that Xiong Wang, Ruyi'er's husband, plays a double role in Ximen's mind, a point which Huang does not bring up in his analysis. On one hand, Xiong Wang is the person whom Ximen imitates. He was Ruyi'er's husband. Ximen is now modeling him and has possessed Ruyi'er. On the other hand, Ximen also sees Xiong Wang as his competitor. The contrast between “you once belonged to Xiong Wang” and “now you belong to me” (59) shows the tension that Ximen perceives between himself and Xiong Wang. Part of Ximen's pleasure comes from Ruyi'er's acknowledgement that Ximen defeats his competitor Xiong Wang when she says what Ximen asks her to repeat. In fact, regardless of whether Xiong Wang is dead or not, he obviously cannot be a true competitor of Ximen, because Ximen is much more powerful than the husband of one of his household servants. However, the conversation between Ximen and Ruyi'er demonstrates that defeating Xiong Wang appears to be crucial to the satisfaction of Ximen's desire. We can even go so far as to say that Ximen satisfies his desire not so much by getting the object of his desire, who is Ruyi'er in this case, as by defeating a competitor who is also seeking to control the same object. If he does not have a real competitor, Ximen

will create an imaginary competitor in order to satisfy his desire.

This competitiveness is an intrinsic part of Ximen's desire. Ximen imitates other people's desires, and other characters likewise imitate his desire. Therefore, Ximen must compete with others in order to satisfy his desire. Consider the example of the relationship between Ximen Qing and Li Ping'er. He first must compete with Hua Zixu in order to have an affair with Li Ping'er, because Hua is the official husband of Li. After Hua dies, Ximen has another competitor: Jiang Zhushan 蔣竹山, a doctor who treats Li Ping'er. When Ximen gets into trouble because his political patrons are impeached, Jiang proposes to Li and Li accepts his proposal (138). However, Ximen survives his troubles. Upon learning that Jiang has married Li, Ximen becomes angry and hires two thugs who visit Jiang's place and beat him. As a result, Li dumps Jiang, feeling ashamed of him. She returns to Ximen, and asks him to accept her as his concubine. At first, Ximen does not want to forgive her. He even whips Li right after she is saved from an attempted suicide. However, Li Ping'er's reply changes Ximen's demeanor from anger to happiness when Ximen asks her to compare himself with Jiang Zhushan. Li says: "How can he be compared with you? You're the sky; he (Jiang Zushan) is a shard of brick. You are higher than the Thirty-third Heaven; he is lower than the Ninety-ninth Hell...even the delicacies that constitute your daily fare are such things as he would never see, were he to live for hundreds of years. How can he be compared to you? 他拿甚麼來比你，你是個天，他是塊磚，你在三十三天之上，他在九十九地之下...自你每日吃 用稀奇之物，他在世幾百年，還沒曾看見哩！他拿甚麼來比你？” (Roy 399, chapter 19). Ximen immediately agrees with Li: "My child, what you say is true. What does the scoundrel (Jiang Zhushan) know about anything? To him, a saucer may look as big as the sky

我的兒，你說的是。果然這廝他見甚麼碟兒天來大！”(Roy 399, chapter 19). He becomes so delighted that he orders Chunmei to set the table for a dinner for himself and Li. Ximen’s pleasure apparently derives from Li’s rapid acknowledgement that he is superior to his competitor Jiang Zhushan. In this sense, competitors such as Doctor Jiang play a two-fold role in the satisfaction of Ximen’s desire. First, Ximen’s competitors challenge him, because they strive to control what he wants. These competitors are obstacles for Ximen to the satisfaction of his desire. This is why Ximen becomes so angry upon learning that Jiang has married Ping’er and decides to punish Jiang. Second, as seen above, the satisfaction of Ximen’s desire is often contingent on his victory in competitions. In this sense, competitors are indispensable to the satisfaction of Ximen’s desire. Ximen continuously asks his women to confirm his victories, and becomes happy almost every time his women do so.

Previous discussions have shown that Ximen’s desire consists of more than simply a subject and an object. There is a third element in Ximen’s desire. This third party sometimes manifests itself not as Ximen’s competitor, but rather as the replacement for what Ximen desires. Andrew Plaks has argued that women are depicted in terms of “pairs” in *Jin Ping Mei*—namely, a woman is sometimes depicted as “the surrogate figure” for another woman (116). He is correct. For example, Lanshi 藍氏, a beautiful lady who is the wife of He Yongshou 何永壽, a colleague of Ximen, can be regarded as a “surrogate” for the deceased Li Ping’er. Both Lanshi and Li Ping’er are depicted as being extraordinarily beautiful. Zhang Zhupo calls Lanshi “the reincarnation of Ping’er” due to their similar manner of dress and demeanor (1266, chapter 78). Both are also of similar social status. Ping’er is the wife of Hua Zixu, a wealthy neighbor of Ximen and one of Ximen’s sworn brothers. Lanshi’s husband is



He Yongshou, Ximen's deputy. Moreover, both Ping'er's husband and Lanshi's husband are nephews of powerful eunuchs. However, I would like to add that more often than not, *Jin Ping Mei* does not primarily depict similarities between characters, but rather the desire of people to find replacements. In other words, *Jin Ping Mei* does not depict similar objects of desire as much as similar desires. Take the pair of Lanshi and Ping'er as an example again. Ximen's reaction during his first encounter with Lanshi is depicted as being almost identical to his reaction during his first face-to-face encounter with Ping'er. When Ximen first "[Ping'er] face to face," "before he knew it, *[h]is eternal souls flew beyond the sky, and [h]is material souls dispersed among the nine heavens* 不覺魂飛天外，魄散九霄" (Roy 254, chapter 13, emphasis added). As soon as Ximen saw Lanshi at a party held at his house: "*his eternal souls flew beyond the sky, and his materials souls dispersed among the nine heavens* 一見魂飛天外，魄喪九霄" (1366, chapter 78, emphasis added)<sup>24</sup>. Tian Xiaofei also notes that Ximen talked about Lanshi in a manner similar to the manner in which he spoke about Li Ping'er before Ximen entered into an affair with Ping'er (232). We may argue that Ximen has a similar type of desire for Ping'er and Lanshi due to the similarities between the two women. Ximen's sexual encounter with Huiyuan 惠元 immediately after Lanshi leaves Ximen's party proves that Ximen does not seek a similar replacement, but rather the satisfaction of his desire. Huiyuan is the wife of Laijue 來爵, one of Ximen's servants. Huiyuan and Lanshi bear little resemblance to each other. However, Ximen still regards Huiyuan as a substitute for Lanshi, and engages in sexual activities with her because he cannot immediately have her for himself (1367-1368, chapter 78). The narrator of the novel comments: "He (Ximen) has

---

<sup>24</sup> Roy has not published his translation of chapter 78. I use Roy's translation of an identical phrase in chapter 13 for this quote.

not yet had a chance to meet Yingniang. So he used Hongniang to quench his thirst 未曾得遇鶯娘面，且把紅娘去解饞<sup>25</sup>” (1368, chapter 78, my translation). Interestingly enough, Ximen also treats Huiyuan as a substitute for Song Huilian 宋蕙蓮. Huilian is the wife of Laiwang 來旺, another one of Ximen’s servants, and is also none of Ximen’s favorite mistresses, but dies early in the novel (377, chapter 26). Ximen has not forgotten Huilian. As the narrator describes it: “she (Huiyuan) was a pretty young woman and Ximen had long desired to possess her. She was not as spritely as Lai Wang’s wife (Song Huilian) had been, but she was not far behind her. Ximen was stirred by the wine he had drunk. He took the woman in his arms, carried her into her room, and kissed her 原來西門慶見媳婦子生的喬樣，安心已久。雖然不及來旺妻宋氏風流，也頗克得過 第二。於是乘著酒興兒，雙關接進他房中親嘴” (Egerton 76, chapter 78, with modifications). It is true that Huilian and Huiyuan share some similarities. For example, their first names share a word “hui,” and both are wives of Ximen’s servants. However, the descriptions here also emphasize the interchangeability of Ximen’s women. Zhang Zhupo makes the following observation: “Lanshi is today’s Ping’er, and Huiyuan is today’s Song [Huilian]. Huiyuan is also a substitute for Lanshi, do Song [Huilian]’s life experiences not foreshadow those of Ping’er? 然則藍氏乃今日之瓶兒，惠元又今日之宋氏。惠元爲藍氏之替身，宋氏豈非藍氏之前身乎？” (1268, chapter 78, my translation). Lanshi is a substitute for Ping’er, Huiyuan is a substitute for Lanshi, Huiyuan and Huilian are “doubles,” and therefore Huilian mirrors Ping’er. Let us extend this chain of

---

<sup>25</sup> Yingniang is Yingying 鶯鶯. Both Yingying and Hongniang are primary characters in *Xixiang Ji* 西廂記, or *The Story of the Western Wing*, and Hongniang is Yingying’s maid. This play depicts the love relationship between Yingying and Zhang Sheng 張生. Yingying and Zhang fall in love, but Yingying’s mother does not allow Yingying to marry Zhang. Hongniang arranges meetings for the two lovers, and helps them communicate with each other. Yingying and Zhang Sheng eventually marry after overcoming numerous difficulties. The play was completed between the late 13<sup>th</sup> century and the early 14<sup>th</sup> century. The author of this play is Wang Shifu 王實甫.

substitutes. Huilian and Pan Jinlian are depicted in terms of being a “pair,” as Andrew Plaks argues (114). Jinlian and Wang Liu’er are also characters who mirror each other, as Tian Xiaofei claims (258). Wang Liu’er and Lanshi then should be interchangeable. This may sound far-fetched because the two characters do not bear any significant similarities. However, Ximen Qing does treat Wang Liu’er as Lanshi’s replacement. One day after his encounter with Lanshi, Ximen goes to Wang Liu’er’s house and has sex with her. When the two engaged in sex, “Ximen is still thinking of Lanshi, and his passion blazes like fire. His penis is very hard 原來西門慶心中，只想著何千戶娘子藍氏，慾情如火，那話十分堅硬” (Egerton 82, chapter 79, with slight modifications). Ximen does not really care whether or not the substitute resembles the original, as long as this substitute can fulfill the position left by the original. This is probably why he treats Ruyi’er, a wet nurse of Ping’er’s son, as one of Ping’er’s replacements<sup>26</sup>. He wants Ruyi’er to “take the dead lady’s [Ping’er’s] place 就頂你娘的窩兒” (Egerton 359, chapter 75), but the only resemblance that Ximen can find between Ruyi’er and Ping’er is their similarly white skin (1081, chapter 67). This may also explain why Ximen sees Meng Yulou as a good candidate for the position left by Zhuo Diu’er 卓丟兒, a recently deceased concubine<sup>27</sup> (85-87, chapter 7), despite the fact that Yulou and Zhuo Diu’er have nothing in common. Zhuo Diu’er was a prostitute before Ximen married her (50-51, chapter 3), whereas Yulou was the widow of a wealthy merchant (86, chapter 7). Ximen’s viewpoint is that all of his women are replaceable and even interchangeable,

<sup>26</sup> Critics have proposed that Ruyi’er is a substitute for Ping’er because the two characters share many similarities. For example, see Plaks 116. I differ with these critics. Ruyi’er being a substitute for Ping’er is not due to their similarities (actually they bear few similarities, as noted above), but is instead due to Ximen’s desire to seek replacements for the deceased Ping’er.

<sup>27</sup> Tian Xiaofei argues that Auntie Xue, a matchmaker, also seeks to replace Zhuo Diu’er (359). Therefore, more than one person is seeking a substitute for a character who has died or disappeared. I will discuss this point in chapter three of this dissertation.

regardless of how different some of them appear to be. Martin Huang considers Lanshi to be the ultimate signifier of Ximen's desire (107). On the contrary, *Jin Ping Mei* does not designate any particular woman as being the ultimate signifier of Ximen's desire, as noted above. The novel instead presents a string of interchangeable signifiers who link together to form an interconnected network. In this sense, the third party in Ximen's desire is still important, because it keeps Ximen's desire active. However, this third party is not so much an individual with distinct characteristics as a generic placeholder. Ximen Qing himself is a placeholder, too. I will elaborate on this point in Chapter three of this dissertation.

### **Masochism: the Depiction of the Desire of Pan Jinlian**

Pan Jinlian's desire is also largely based on her imitation of the desires of other characters. In a manner similar to Ximen Qing, Pan does not appear to have any long-term goals. After she marries Ximen, she is confined to Ximen's house, and has a small group of acquaintances. Given these social restrictions, the only people that she can imitate are Ximen's wife and concubines. Pan frequently imitates the desire of Li Ping'er, Pan's primary competitor in Ximen's household. For example, upon learning that Ximen Qing and Li Ping'er are modeling their sexuality on descriptions of some pornographic paintings, Pan takes these paintings from Ximen, and does the same thing as Ximen and Li: "together with Ximen Qing, Pan opens up the album inside the bed curtains to enjoy the pleasures of connubial bliss 與西門慶展開手卷，在錦帳之中，效於飛之樂" (Roy 272, chapter 13, with slight modifications). Moreover, when Pan learns that Li Ping'er wants to use her own gold to make a pin "in the shape of nine golden phoenixes holding strands of pearls in their beaks 金

丸鳳塾根兒，每個鳳嘴啣一掛珠兒” (Roy 407, chapter 20), she immediately asks Ximen to make a gold pin of the same design for her (275-276, chapter 20). It is easy to label Pan as an individual greedy for money. However, if Jinlian were only after money, she would ask Ximen for gold or gold jewelry. Jinlian's request for a pin of the same design as Li's suggests that Pan's desire is aroused not so much by a lust for money as by her imitation of Li Ping'er who Pan regards as her primary competitor for Ximen's favor. In this sense, Pan's desire is more complex than a simple linear interaction between the subject and the object. Rather, Pan's desire is triangular and involves a mediator, in the sense of Rene Girard's theory of desire (Girard 1-52). Li Ping'er is not the only person Pan imitates. Her desire to become pregnant also derives from the presence of a third party. She is jealous of Wu Yueniang, the legitimate wife of Ximen, who is pregnant, and learns the secret of Wu's pregnancy by threatening Yuxiao, one of Wu's servants. Moreover, shortly after Li Ping'er dies, Ximen enters into an affair with Ruyi'er, a servant of Ping'er, whom Ximen treats as a replacement for the deceased Li, as noted above. Pan believes that Ruyi'er will threaten her position in the Ximen family if she conceives Ximen's child. She thus makes up her mind to imitate Wu: “Pan Jinlian had not forgotten what Yuxiao had told her. She had said that Yueniang had had conceived after taking some medicine which the nuns had brought her. Ximen Qing had taken a fancy to the nurse, Ruyi'er, and Pan feared that the nurse might have a child, and win Ximen's favor for herself. So, secretly, she invited Nun Xue to go to her room, and gave her a tael of silver to get some medicine for her 潘金蓮因想著玉蕭告他說，月娘吃了他的符水藥，纔坐了胎氣。自從李瓶兒死了，又見西門慶在他屋裡，把奶子也要了。恐怕一時奶子養出孩子來，攬奪了他寵愛。於是把薛姑子讓到前邊他房裡無人處，悄悄央薛姑子，

與他一兩銀子，替他配坐胎氣符藥吃” (Egerton 231, chapter 68). There is another reason why Jinlian’s desire to conceive a child can be regarded as being imitative of the desires of others: she does not appear to like children. After Ximen dies, Pan has an affair with Chen Jingji, Ximen’s son-in-law. She soon becomes pregnant, and upon confirming this, she immediately asks Chen to find a way to have the child aborted: “The Great Lady has not come back yet. Go and get some medicine to get rid of the child 趁你大娘還未來家，那裡討貼墜胎的藥，趁早打落了這胎氣離了身” (Egerton 155, chapter 85, with slight changes). The depiction of her abortion is chilling, and Pan is represented as being extremely cold-hearted:

Pan boiled the medicine with water and ate it. Immediately she began to feel pain. She lay down on the bed and asked Chunmei to press her belly forcefully. In a very short time, she called for the pail, and expelled the child. She told Qiuju (another of her servants) that she had a period, and bade her to put toilet paper into the pail and throw everything into the privy. The next day, when the privy cleaners came, they found a white, well-nourished infant” (Egerton 156, chapter 85, with changes).

[潘金蓮]煎紅花湯吃下去，登時滿肚裡生疼。睡在炕上，教春梅按在身，只情揉揣。可霎作怪，須臾，坐淨桶，把孩子打下來了！只說身上來，令秋菊攪草紙，倒將東淨毛司裡。次日掏坑的漢子，挑出去一個白胖的小廝兒。

Pan appears indifferent to her loss because there is no indication that Pan ever felt grief or remorse during the abortion. However, Pan is callous partly because she is aware of the existence of a third party that will pass judgement on her. She tells Chen Jingji: “If I give birth to that monster, I will kill myself because I shall never be able to lift my head and look *people* in the face again 不然弄出個怪物來，我就尋了無常罷了！再休想擡頭見人！” (Egerton 155, chapter 85, with modifications, my emphasis). The people, the third party, or

the mediator—whatever name we choose to use—keep shaping Pan’s desires, decisions and choices.

Pan Jinlian’s desire includes a streak of masochism, a point I will discuss at length in chapter 2 of this dissertation. For example, Pan takes on the role of masochist in the Grape Arbor episode of chapter 27 of *Jin Ping Mei*. First, during the course of perverted sex that occurs during the Grape Arbor episode, there is a conspicuous delay. After Pan’s maid, Pang Chunmei, interrupts a bout of sexual intercourse involving Ximen and Pan, Ximen drinks, plays a sensual game, and then goes to sleep for about two hours. However, during this time, Pan makes no movements while hanging by her feet from the trellis. Prior to Ximen’s resumption of sex, Pan was always depicted as being in a state of waiting. This waiting state, according to Gilles Deleuze’s theory of masochism, is the essential characteristic of the masochistic experience: “formally speaking, masochism is a state of waiting” (63). In this sense, Pan’s state of waiting suggests that her role in this perverted act might be essentially masochistic. It should also be noted that during this interval, both Pan and Ximen remain immobile most of the time, during which Pan hangs by her feet while Ximen sleeps. According to Deleuze’s theory, this sort of immobility is another formalistic characteristic of masochism. Deleuze argues, “the scenes in Masoch have of necessity a frozen quality, like statues or portraits” (61). During this interval, both Ximen the torturer and Pan, the subject of his torture, remain immobile. All motions cease. What remains is the key characteristic of masochism, in the sense of an anticipatory state of waiting on Pan’s part. In addition to waiting in a state of immobility, Pan’s choice of language indicates that she willingly assumes the role of masochist. After Ximen wakes up and playfully tantalizes her, Pan cries: “Daddy,

hurry up and get inside! You are driving this whore of yours crazy! I know you're upset with me on account of Li Ping'er and are deliberately pulling up the stops to teach me a lesson. After what you have put me through today I won't dare defy you anymore 達達，快些進去罷！急壞了淫婦了，我曉的你惱我為李瓶兒，故意使這促，卻來奈何我！今日經著你手段，再不敢惹你了！” (Roy 146, chapter 27). In calling herself a “whore”, Pan justifies the validity of Ximen's torments—being a licentious woman, she deserves the torments that Ximen inflicted on her. She then confesses her jealousy of Li Ping'er, Ximen's sixth concubine, and asks for Ximen's forgiveness. She makes this confession not because she is afraid that Ximen will punish her even more, but because she wants to actively participate in the masochistic infliction of torment on herself. Her confession convinces Ximen that his torments are effective on her because they force her to tell the truth. This can be read as a disguised invitation to continue the torments—because she is jealous of Li Ping'er, Ximen's favourite concubine, she therefore deserves more punishment. In other words, she “conclude[s] an alliance with the torturer to realize the strangest of schemes” (Deleuze 19) and thereby explicitly takes on the role of the masochist.

Pan's masochistic desire is also repetitive to the point of endangering her life. This repetitive masochistic desire eventually leads to her death. After Ximen's death, she believes that Wu Song 武松 is an ideal replacement for Ximen to satisfy her masochistic desires, because he can torment her and ultimately give her great pleasure. On one hand, Wu Song will punish and torment her for murdering his brother Wu Da 武大. On the other hand, because he is the novel's most masculine character and able to kill a tiger single-handedly, he can give her great pleasure. She thus takes enormous risks by accepting Wu Song's marriage



proposal in hopes of repeating the masochistic experiences that she had with Ximen. Waiting on the part of Jinlian again becomes conspicuous on their wedding night. When both she and Wang Po 王婆 become aware of the onset of danger during their first night of marriage, she shows that she has no intention of leaving, while Wang Po tries to run away several times:

Then they (Pan Jinlian and Wang Po) saw Wu Da's tablet on the table. This made them wonder. They felt as though someone were pulling out their hair and sticking knives in their flesh. When they had gone into the inner room, Wu Song told Jasmine to fasten all the doors.

"I must be going now," the old woman said. "There is nobody to look after my house."

"Stay and have something to drink, old Mother," Wu Song said...

"I have had quite enough to eat, Brother Wu," the old woman said, "I must go now and leave you two to enjoy yourselves." (Egerton 191-192, chapter 87)

見明間內明亮亮點著燈燭，武大靈牌供養在上面，先自有些疑忌。由不的髮似人揪，肉如鈎搭。進入門來，到房中。武松分付迎兒把前門上了拴，後門也頂了。王婆見了，說道：「武二哥，我去罷，家裡沒人。」

Even after Wu Song begins to take revenge, Pan passes up the chance to cry out for help or attempt to run away, despite having sufficient time to do so while Wu Song ties up Wang Po. This scene is reminiscent of the Grape Arbor episode during which Pan neither attempts to awaken Ximen nor leave the arbor when her ankles are tied together. Both in this episode and in the Grape Arbor episode, Pan expects the same—torment.

Her confession to Wu Song that she killed Wu Da is also a repetition of her confession to Ximen that she is jealous of Li Ping'er in the Grape Arbor episode. Her confession might at first appear strange because, being an intelligent woman, she is likely to have figured out that Wu Song is unsure who killed his brother. At the beginning of the novel, Wu Song does not accuse Pan of murdering his brother before the county magistrate, but rather Ximen and

Wang Po (122, chapter 9). Even after being freed from prison, Wu Song still continues to remain unaware that Pan is the actual murderer. At this critical moment, Pan could have made a better choice than to have confessed. However, if we regard her confession as an invitation for Wu Song to punish her, we may find that it is similar in nature to her confession during the Grape Arbor episode. Pan asked Ximen for his forgiveness, and in chapter 87 Pan cried to Wu Song, “Uncle, *forgive* me, and let me get up. I promise I will tell you 叔叔且饒，放我起來，等我說便了” (Egerton 193, chapter 87, my emphasis). Pleading for Wu Song’s forgiveness constitutes Pan’s admission that she has done something wrong. Wu Song’s additional punishments are thus justified. Knowing that Pan will tell him the truth, Wu Song picks her up, strips off her clothing and makes her kneel down before the tablet. Wu Song’s violent and sensual reaction is exactly what Pan, a masochist, expects of him. Then just as Pan confesses her jealousy of Li Ping’er, Pan confesses her murder of Wu Song’s brother in the likely expectation of further, even more violent torments, which she fully deserves because she has, in fact, killed her ex-husband who is the only brother of Wu Song. However, Wu Song is not Ximen. He brutally kills Pan after she confesses that she is the murderer of his brother instead of playing a violent sexual game with her. Or is Wu Song just another Ximen, given all his brutal and violent reaction to Pan’s confession? Nonetheless, the narrator of the novel best captures the repetitive essence of Pan’s masochistic desire in a poem which links the Grape Arbor episode to Pan’s death:

Poor Jinlian is worth lamenting,  
Stripped of clothing and kneeling before the tablet.  
Jinlian did not expect that Wu the Second would kill her,  
She was thinking that it would only be a repetition of Ximen’s game to hang her by her legs.

All that passed is now no more than a dream,  
The body is now worthless.  
The taking of a life pays for the taking of another life,  
Retribution comes immediately! (1499, chapter 87, my translation)  
堪悼金蓮誠可憐，衣服脫去跪靈前，  
誰知武二持刀殺，只道西門綁腿頑；  
往事堪嗟一場夢，今身不值半文錢，  
世間一命還一命，報應分明在眼前。

In this sense, although Ximen is dead, he is always present in the heart of Pan's masochistic desire. Pan attempts to model the relationship between herself and Wu Song on what has happened between her and Ximen. In this sense, the third party—the deceased Ximen—plays such a significant role in Pan's relationship with Wu Song that it can even determine whether an individual lives or dies.

### **Keeping My Money Safe: the Depiction of the Desire of Li Ping'er**

It appears that Li Ping'er's desire differs significantly from Pan Jinlian's desire: the third party, or mediator, does not play any significant role in Li's desire. Unlike Pan Jinlian, Li Ping'er rarely imitates the desire of others out of jealousy after she marries Ximen. However, it should be noted that Li is the strongest woman in Ximen's household in terms of wealth, beauty, and social status. Therefore, she has no reason to be jealous and imitate other people's desires. First, she is the richest of all of Ximen's women. Before she marries Ximen, she has already given him three thousand taels of silver and "four lacquer chests decorated with gold tracery that contain python robes, jade-ornamented girdles, jewelled cap buttons, chatelaines, pendants, and bracelets, as well as valuable jewels and objets d'art 四口描金箱櫃，蟒衣玉

帶，帽頂繅環，提繫條脫，值錢珍寶，玩好之物” (Roy 278, chapter 14). After Li dies, Dai'an 玳安, Ximen's page boy, depicts vividly the wealth of Li to Fu the Second, Manager of Ximen's pharmaceutical shop: “Do you know how much wealth that the Sixth Lady (Ping'er) brought to our family when she married the Master? Other people may not know, but I know this. There was a huge amount of gold pearls, objets d'art, jade-ornamented girdles, chatelaines, pendants, bracelets, frets and valuable jewels, even if we do not take into consideration the silver that she brought in 別人不知道，我知道。把銀子休說，只光金珠玩好玉帶繅環狄髻值錢寶石，還不知有多少” (1021, chapter 64, my translation). Given her personal wealth, there is no reason for Ping'er to envy others. By contrast, Pan Jinlian was born to a poor family. Her father was a tailor, and died when Pan was a child (10, chapter 1). Pan Jinlian's mother is also poor. She once came to attend Pan's birthday party by sedan. However, she cannot afford to pay the fare and must ask Pan to pay the fare for her (1355-1356, chapter 78). Ping'er is also described as a woman with outstanding beauty. When Ying Bojue 應伯爵 and Xie Xida 謝希大, Ximen's best friends, see Li for the first time, they sing high praises of her beauty: “She (Ping'er) cuts such a striking figure that in all the world you could hardly hope to find the like 自這一表人物，普天之下，也尋不出來” (Roy 418, chapter 20). Of course, they flatter Ximen because they are sycophants seeking favors from Ximen. However, just as Tian Xiaofei points out, we can tell how impressively beautiful Li is by the fact that the Painter Han who makes portraits of Ping'er after her death still clearly remembers Li's appearances after seeing Li only once among thousands of women four months before (188). Ximen also praises Li for her white skin, something which is traditionally associated with beauty (385, chapter 27). However, Pan Jinlian's skin is not as

white as Ping'er's. When Ximen says that her skin is as white as Li's, Li's maid Ruyi'er responds: "No, Father, her skin is whiter than mine. The fifth lady is beautiful but the color of her skin is mediocre 爹沒的說，還是娘的身上白，我見五娘雖好模樣兒，也中中兒的" (Egerton 357, chapter 75, with changes). Pan Jinlian is also aware that her skin color is not as white as Li's, and tries to make her skin whiter in order to compete for Ximen's favor: "...the woman (Jinlian), because she had overheard Ximen Qing praising the whiteness of Li Ping'er's body in the Kingfisher Pavilion the other day, had...rubbed the mixture over her entire body, until it was white and glossy, shiny and smooth, exuding a palpable exotic fragrance, in the hope of gaining Ximen Qing's affection and replacing her rival in his favor 原來婦人因前日西門慶在翡翠軒誇獎李瓶兒身上白淨，就暗暗將茉莉花蕊兒，攪酥油定粉，把身上都搽遍了。搽的白膩光滑，異香可掬。使西門慶見了愛他，以奪其寵" (Roy 189, chapter 29). Moreover, Guange 官哥, the son of Li and Ximen, is the only male child that Ximen had at that time. In a patriarchal society where a male descendant is regarded as being more important than a female descendant, Li's son allows Li to enjoy a social position almost as elevated as Ximen's legitimate wife enjoys in Ximen's household. Li's son fans the fires of the barren Pan Jinlian's jealousy, and drives her to scheme to kill Guange (921-923, chapter 59). There are many reasons for Pan to imitate Li, but Li does not feel a need to imitate others because she has almost everything it is possible for her to have.

However, this does not mean that Li Ping'er does not have desires. When Li Ping'er is Huazi Xu's wife, she wants to marry Ximen. However, after learning that Ximen is facing a criminal charge which could lead to the confiscation of his properties, Li decides to marry the doctor Jiang Zhushan instead (236-237, chapter 17). Then another twist emerges: Ximen soon

solves his problems and hires two rogues to give Jiang a beating. Li then divorces Jiang, and makes up her mind to marry Ximen. What does Li really want? What is the object of her desire?

Within the world of Li Ping'er's desire, wealth plays a key role. The primary reason why she marries twice after the death of her husband, Hua Zixu, is that she wants to retain her wealth. For example, Hua is sued by his three brothers who claim that he takes all the estates of their late uncle Eunuch Hua. Consequently, Hua Zixu is jailed, and awaits trial. Realizing that the wealth left by the old eunuch is in jeopardy, Li decides to move most of the eunuch's wealth to Ximen's family where the wealth can be better protected. When Ximen tells Li that half of the 3,000 taels of silver that Li intends to give him would be sufficient to release Hua from prison, Li Ping'er immediately says that her main purpose is not to save Hua, but to preserve this wealth: "If there is anything left over, you can keep it for me, sir...If I don't take precautions ahead of time, but leave everything to him, we are going to end up having trouble making ends meet. It's obvious that three fists are no match for four hands. If we let ourselves be outnumbered, sooner or later they'll get the better of us and make off with the property, and I'll be left in the lurch with nowhere to turn 多的大官人收去...趁早奴不思個防身之計，信著他，往後過不出好日子來。眼見得拳疊不得四手，到明日沒的把這些東西兒，吃人暗算奪了去，坑閃得奴三不歸。"(Roy 278, chapter 14). For Li Ping'er, wealth is the centerpiece of her universe, including her marriage. As soon as she learns that the judge's order that the house that she and Hua currently live in must be sold and that Hua's three brothers will "divide up the proceeds" (Roy 281, chapter 14), Li asks Ximen to purchase that house, saying: "Why don't you get together a few taels of silver and buy the house we are

living in? After all, it won't be long now before I'm completely yours 拿幾兩銀子，買了所住的宅子罷。到明日奴不久也是你的人了" (Roy 281, chapter 14). Li Ping'er suggests that taking possession of her house is the first step toward possessing her. We also see an important transition here: it is the first time that Li makes clear her intention to leave Hua and marry Ximen. As noted above, she dumps Hua Zixu primarily because he can no longer safeguard the eunuch's wealth, and she intends to marry Ximen primarily because she wants to keep her wealth safe in a home under Ximen's roof.

Li Ping'er marries Jiang Zhushan instead of Ximen Qing in part due to her desire to retain her wealth. She makes this decision after learning that Ximen is in serious trouble as a result of the ongoing imperial investigation of his relatives. Doctor Jiang tells Li Ping'er: "he (Ximen) has recently been implicated in an affair involving his kinsman by marriage and is holed up in his home, unable to come out. The construction work he has undertaken is only half-finished and has all been abandoned. Documents have been dispatched from the Eastern Capital ordering the prefectural and district authorities to arrest the implicated parties. *It looks as though the building he was working on is likely to end up being confiscated by the government.* Why on earth, for no good reason, would you want to marry someone like that? 況近日他親家那邊為事，幹連在家，躲避不山。房子蓋的半落不合的，多丟下了。東京門下文書，坐落府縣拿人。到明日他蓋這房子，多是入官抄沒的數兒。娘子沒來由嫁他則甚?" (Roy 353, chapter 17, my emphasis). Zhang Zhupo commented on the underlined quote: "This is what truly disturbs Ping'er 動瓶兒處在此" (265, chapter 17, my translation). As seen above, one of the primary reasons why Li is getting married is to preserve her wealth. Once Ximen becomes implicated in an affair and his own property might be confiscated as

well, Li regrets her decision to marry Ximen and casts her eyes upon Doctor Jiang, who is interested in her: “Since Ximen Qing’s household is implicated in such an affair, the outcome is unpredictable. Moreover, I’m so alone here that when I felt I was lucky to escape with my life. Under the present circumstances, I might just as well take this doctor as my husband and try to make a go of it; why not? 西門慶家如此這般為事，吉凶難保。況且奴家這邊沒人，不好了一場，險不喪了性命。為今之計，不如把這位先生招他進來，過其日月，有何不可？” (Roy 355, chapter 17).

Li Ping'er divorces Jiang in part because he can no longer safeguard Li's financial security. Li gradually loses interest in Jiang who is unable to satisfy her sexually (258-259, chapter 19). However, the most compelling reason for their divorce is Jiang's inability to protect Li's money. After the two get married, Li invests three hundred taels of silver in order to help Jiang's dispensary business get started in her house (237, chapter 17). However, Ximen soon emerges from his troubles. Ximen is angry over Li's marriage to Doctor Jiang, and hires two thugs who proceed to give Jiang a good beating and destroy his dispensary (259-262, chapter 19). The thugs also claim that Jiang owes them thirty taels of silver. When the case is presented to the local juridical official, the official, who has been informed about the case beforehand by the powerful Ximen, orders Jiang to return the money. Jiang has to ask Li Ping'er for the money in order to avoid being sentenced to jail. Not only does Li lose her investment in Jiang's dispensary, she also must shoulder the burden of the thirty taels of silver that Jiang has been asked to return. She immediately decides to divorce Jiang. She curses when Jiang asks her for thirty taels of silver: “You shameless cuckold! Whose money do you think you're giving away? You've got a nerve demanding money of me. If I'd known



that even if you lost your head, you'd leave a stump of debts behind, I'd never have been blind enough to marry you. You turtle! You're good enough to look at, but not fit to eat 沒羞的王八！你遞什麼銀子在我手裡？問我要銀子。我早知你這王八砍了頭是個債樁，就瞎了眼，也不嫁你這中看不中吃的王八！” (Roy 390, chapter 19). Li Ping'er's logic is clear: the success of her marriage depends on her seeing it as being founded on financial security. Li finds that her husband Jiang cannot protect her wealth and even poses a threat to her wealth. To prevent further damage to her property, she asks Jiang to leave her house immediately: “The sooner you move out of here the better. If I let you stay any longer, I'm likely to discover that even the value of this house will not suffice to pay off your debts 你趁早與我搬出去罷；再遲些時，連我這兩間房子，尚且不勾你還人！” (Roy 391).

In this sense, Ping'er is depicted throughout the novel as being the character who attempts to retain the social order, because social order enables her to maintain what she already has. For example, after she spends the first night with Ximen after their marriage, Li arises. The first question that she asks Ximen concerns a fret of gold filigree that she owns: “Do the First Lady and the others have frets like this one or not? 上房他大娘眾人，有這髻沒有？” (Roy 407, chapter 20). Upon knowing that Wu Yueniang, the First Lady, does not own such a fret, she decides to have her gold fret melted down, and uses the gold to make a piece of jewel of the same design as the First Lady's (274, chapter 20). This allows for a comparison of Li's manner of imitating others with Pan Jinlian's manner of imitation. As discussed above, Pan's imitation is a type of competitive imitation. She imitates Li Ping'er because she wants to compete with her and eventually defeat her. In a sense, Pan's imitation is an imitation “from below to above”. This type of imitation challenges the existing social

order. That is why Pan dares to start a fight with Wu Yueniang, Ximen's First Lady, who has a higher social status than Pan. By contrast, Li's imitation can be called "from above to below". She is not willing to wear any sort of jewelry if it is more beautiful and luxurious than Wu Yueniang's jewelry. Doing this means that she actually acknowledges the importance of the existing social order to her and plays a part in maintaining it. She never challenges Wu Yueniang, the First Lady. Nor does she dare to start a fight with Pan Jinlian, who marries Ximen earlier than herself, no matter how much Pan slanders and bullies her. Tian Xiaofei deems the relationship between Li Ping'er and Pan Jinlian as "being on a symbolic level, a civil war between human civilization and the primitive passion of human being 瓶兒與金蓮的內戰，從象徵層次上說，竟是人類的文明和人類原始激情之間的內戰也" (44, my translation). More precisely, I would say that the tension between Li and Pan represents the tension of two forces that co-exist in human society: the stabilizing drive to maintain current social order and the subversive drive to overthrow current social order.

### **Blocking Others from Actualizing Their Desires: The Depiction of the Desire of Wu Yueniang**

Critics have often seen the desire of Wu Yueniang primarily in terms of her desire for money. One frequently cited example is that Wu teaches Ximen Qing how to secretly move Li Ping'er's wealth to Ximen's house. Once Li's wealth arrives, she orders that it be sent directly to her bedroom (188, chapter 14). After Hua Zixu, Li Ping'er's husband, dies, Ping'er asks Ximen to marry her as soon as possible. However, Wu objects to this marriage. One concern that she raises is: "you (Ximen) really can't very well marry her...you've already

been engaged in hanky-panky with her, first buying their house and then stashing away all the valuables she entrusted to you for safekeeping 你不好取他的休…你又和他老婆有連手，買了他房子，收著他寄放的許多東西" (Roy 327, chapter 16). It is obvious that a primary reason why Wu's objects is that Wu wants to take possession of Li's valuables. Zhang Zhupo has commented: "if Ximen did not marry Li Ping'er, would her valuables stay in Wu's bedroom and never be mentioned again? 然則不娶她，此東西將安然不題乎?" (247, chapter 16, my translation). In this sense, the critics are right: Wu desires wealth.

However, what these critics have failed to notice is the reason why Wu is so interested in possessing the wealth. She wants to control the wealth not because she needs the money to maintain a luxurious lifestyle or to compete with Ximen's other women on the basis of jewelries and ornaments. Throughout the novel, Wu is not depicted as being the sort of woman who aspires to a life of luxury. She does not own the sort of luxurious and expensive "alcove bedstead of inlaid mother-of-pearl 螺鈿廠廳床" (Roy 187, chapter 29) that both Li Ping'er and Pan Jinlian have in their bedrooms. She does not dress herself up fashionably. Tian Xiaofei argues that in Ximen's family, Meng Yulou, the Third Lady, and Pan Jinlian are the fashionable women. Song Huilian, a maidservant who is also Ximen's mistress, does not imitate the manner in which Wu dresses, but "the way in which Meng and Pan are tricked out 看了玉樓、金蓮眾人打扮"<sup>28</sup> (Roy 32, chapter 22, with slight changes). Moreover, Wu is not a miser similar to Felix Grandet who gets happiness simply by accumulating wealth<sup>29</sup>. In *Jin Ping Mei*, Wu does not check the inventory of her wealth with wild and greedy eyes. She appears to be no longer interested in the wealth provided that she keeps it in her bedroom.

---

<sup>28</sup> Tian 73.

<sup>29</sup> Felix Grandet is a character in *Eugénie Grandet*, a novel by Honoré de Balzac which was published in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Felix Grandet is a miser who enjoys counting his wealth at night.

She is even occasionally portrayed as being a fairly generous person. When Meng Yulou leaves Ximen's house to marry Li Gongbi 李拱璧, Wu gives Jinlian's "balustraded bedstead with inlaid mother-of-pearl 螺鈿床<sup>30</sup>" (Roy 187, chapter 96) to Meng as her dowry, because Meng's "gilt lacquer Nanjing bed with retractable steps 南京描金彩漆拔步床" (Roy 147, chapter 8) has been given to Ximen Dajie 西門大姐 as her trousseau when she marries Chen Jingji. However, the "gilt lacquer Nanjing bed with retractable steps" sells for eight taels of silver, whereas a similar "alcove bedstead with inlaid mother-of-pearl" is worth at least sixty taels of silver (1627, chapter 96). If Wu were interested in money *per se*, she would be calculating enough to find a less expensive bed for Meng. Moreover, when Dai'an, a page boy of Ximen's, and Manager Fu 傅夥計 who runs Ximen's pharmacy, discuss the women of Ximen's household, Dai'an thinks that Wu is one of the more generous women in Ximen's house: "The First Lady (Yueniang) and the Third Lady (Meng Yulou) are generous, too 俺大娘和俺三娘使錢也好" (Egerton 166, chapter 64). Manager Fu agrees with Dai'an's assessment that Wu is generous (1021, chapter 64). If Wu is neither a miser nor is interested in maintaining a luxurious lifestyle, why does she attempt to take possession of other people's wealth?

I argue that Wu Yueniang's motivating desire is to block other people from actualizing their desire for wealth rather than controlling the wealth by herself. She wants to control Li Ping'er's wealth because her wealth poses a threat to her position in Ximen family. Like many of the characters in *Jin Ping Mei*, she knows that Ximen likes Li in part because she is rich. For example, Dai'an, Ximen's page boy comments on the relationship between Ximen

---

<sup>30</sup> Roy has not published his translation of chapter 96. I use Roy's translation of an identical phrase in chapter 29 for this quote.

and Li after Li dies: "what the Master cares is not the person (Li), but her money 不是疼人，是疼錢" (1021-1022, chapter 64, my translation). Pan Jinlian also points out that Ximen's sudden mood change from anger to happiness on the first night that he and Li spend together after their marriage is due to a fret of gold filigree that Li gave to Ximen: "how come, last night, the thunder may have been loud, but the raindrops didn't amount to anything? You were threatening to give her a real thrashing and make her hang herself. But this morning all she had to do was pull out a fret in order to make a ghost out of you to turn the millstone. You dog of oily mouth! There is nothing you won't do for her 昨日那等雷聲大雨點小，要打著教他上吊。今日拿出一頂髻來，使的你狗油嘴鬼推磨，不怕你不走！" (Roy 409, chapter 20, with slight changes). Tian Xiaofei points out that the ghost turning a millstone derives from the Chinese idiomatic expression "with money you can make the devil turn the millstone 有錢能使鬼推磨" (63). Just like Dai'an and Jinlian, Yueniang is aware of the power that Li Ping'er's money exerts over Ximen. Not long after Ximen marries Li, Wu complains to her brother: "Now that he's got the this rich baby of his (Ping'er), a poor officer's daughter like myself might just as well be dead for all he cares...You lousy ruffian. Since when have you changed your attitude towards me? 他有了富貴的姐姐，把俺這窮官兒家丫頭，只當亡故了的算帳...賊強人，從幾時這等變心來？" (Roy 419, chapter 20, with slight changes). Wu Yueniang makes a stark contrast between her—"a poor officer's daughter"—and Li—"rich baby," and believes that Ximen judges his women by their wealth. From her point of view, she loses favor with Ximen because Li is richer than herself. Therefore, her efforts to take control of Li's wealth are not due to her greed for money, but rather can be understood as an integral part of her strategy to counter Li Ping'er's attraction to Ximen and maintain her

position in the Ximen family. Another revealing example of Wu's attitude towards wealth takes place immediately after Ximen's death. When Ximen dies, Wu opens a chest to find some silver with which to buy Ximen a coffin (1391, chapter 79). However, she suddenly loses consciousness because her son Xiaoge is about to be born. After she gives birth to her son and regains consciousness, Wu comes to check the chest in which the silver is stored. Seeing upon that the chest is still open, she scolds her maidservant Yuxiao: "You smelly idiot! When I was unconscious, you were unconscious, too! You have left the chest open with a lot of people walking around. Don't you know that you should've locked the chest up! 賊臭肉，我便昏了，你也昏了？箱子大開著，恁亂哄哄人走，就不說鎖鎖兒！" (Egerton 821, chapter 79, with slight changes). She immediately orders Yuxiao to have the chest locked. However, Wu does not know that Li Jiao'er, the Second Lady, has already taken advantage of this opportunity to steal five taels of silver while the chest was open. Wu is apparently not a miser who bothers to count the number of silver taels. Otherwise she would have found out that the silver is missing sooner or later. After all, five taels of silver is not an inconsequential number. What Wu cares about most is the action of locking rather than what is locked inside. This example of her treatment of Li Ping'er's wealth lead to the conclusion that Wu does not seek to take possession of wealth simply for the sake of possessing it. Instead, she takes control of wealth in order to block the realization of other people's desires for it. Meng Yulou piercingly tells Pan Jinlian when she sees Wu scold her maidservant for leaving the chest open: "Now we know what kind of person the First Lady is. She begins to keep an extra eye on people on the first day when her man is dead 原來大姐姐恁樣的，死了漢子頭一日，就防範起人來了" (Egerton 821, chapter 79, with some changes).

In this sense, Yueniang's attempt to control Li Ping'er's wealth is similar in nature to her efforts to keep Ximen Qing away from Pan Jinlian after Li dies. On several occasions, particularly after Pan challenges her and quarrels with her, Wu prevents Ximen from coming to Pan's bedroom and sleeping with her (1266, chapter 75, and 1292, chapter 76). However, this does not necessarily mean that Yueniang wants Ximen to sleep with her. She instead requests that Ximen sleep with Meng Yulou and Li Jiao'er, who she believes do not pose a serious threat to her position in her family. It does not really matter to her whether Ximen sleeps with her, so long as Ximen is not involved with Pan. Just as she locks Li's wealth in her bedroom, Wu locks up Ximen so that Pan would not have access to him. Therefore, her desire is not a desire for Ximen on her part so much as the desire to block Pan's desire for Ximen.

### **Making Full Use of the Medium: the Depiction of the Desire of Meng Yulou**

Zhang Zhupo's well-known commentary on *Jin Ping Mei* states that he considers Meng Yulou, the Third Lady of Ximen, to be a character who stands out among all of Ximen's women. From Zhang's point of view, Meng differs from other women such as Pan Jinlian and Li Ping'er:

Meng Yulou is the only major character in the book whom the author allows to come to a decent end. 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, although she may be open to criticism for her unseemly haste, this is a common 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 (Roy 219).

內中獨寫玉樓有結果，何也？蓋勸瓶兒、金蓮二婦也。言不幸所天不壽，自己雖不能守，亦且靜處金閨，令媒妁說合事成，雖不免扇墳之謔，然猶是孀婦常情。及嫁，而紈扇多悲，亦須寬心忍耐，安於數命。此玉樓俏心，高諸婦一著。

I differ from Zhang Zhupo, however. I argue that Meng does not fundamentally differ from Pan Jinlian or Li Ping'er: Meng also desires. She desires what many other female characters desire: a man, control of wealth, and high social status. Her desire for these things leads her to marry Ximen. Many critics have pointed out that Yulou accepts Ximen's proposal because Ximen promised her before marriage that she would be his legitimate wife and take charge of the entire family: "My wife (Ximen Qing's) has been dead for some time and I would like to make you my legitimate wife and put you in charge of the household. What do you think of this proposal?" (Roy 134, chapter 7). In order to confirm that Ximen really wants to make her his legitimate wife, she asks Auntie Xue 薛嫂, the go-between, again about Ximen's marital status. Auntie Xue gives her a vague answer to stall her (92, chapter 7). However, Yulou soon realizes that she has been deceived when Ximen marries her as his third lady. She became unhappy. When Li Gongbi proposes to her after Ximen dies, she checks Li's background and marital status carefully with the go-between and agrees to accept his proposal only after she resolves her doubts and is certain that Li comes from a decent family and that she will be his legitimate wife (Tian 270-1). Yulou explains to the go-between who represents Li why she persistently asks so many questions about Li: "Many go-betweens are liars...I am frightened to be deceived again 你這媒人們說謊的極多...奴也吃人哄怕了" (Egerton 913, chapter 91). His complaints about the go-betweens suggest that Meng's desire



for a prosperous, respectable life was not fully satisfied during her marriage to Ximen. She wants to have her desire satisfied in her marriage with Li.

When Meng is in Ximen's house, she behaves in a way not inherently different from other women: she vilifies the other women in Ximen's household, and is sometimes dangerously manipulative. For example, she attempts to smear the image of the First Lady Wu Yueniang. After a period of cold war between Ximen and Wu Yueniang, the two become reconciled one night. Yulou learns about this reconciliation the next morning. She immediately informs Pan of this reconciliation and paints a very negative image of Wu:

According to the maid, the two of them (Ximen and Yueniang) talked away the night together. She said Father got down on his knees to the First Lady, calling her 'Mother,' and that the first Lady herself put on such a show it was enough to give you the creeps. I guess if she chooses to carry on that way there's nothing more to be said about it. But if it had been anyone else, you can be sure she would be ticked off for her wantonness (Roy 9, chapter 21).

丫頭學說兩個說了一夜話：他爹怎的跪著上房的，叫媽媽，上房的又怎的聲  
喚擺話的，硃死了！相他這等，就沒的話說，若是別人，又不知怎的說浪！

She also plays a key role in the death of Song Huilian, a maid in Ximen's household who was one of Ximen's favorite lovers. She dislikes Huilian, who was fond of the limelight, and becomes angry with her several times (324, chapter 23 and 337, chapter 24). Upon learning that Song Huilian has persuaded Ximen to release her husband Lai Wang from prison and that Ximen is ready to give Huilian three rooms to live in, Yulou passes this information to Pan Jinlian, the foe of Huilian (368, chapter 26). She provokes Pan by saying: "She'll (Song) be on an equal status with you and me. What sort of behavior is that? And our elder sister (Wu) won't do anything to prevent it 就和你我等輩一般，甚麼張致？大姐姐也就不管管兒？"

(Roy 110, chapter 26). Pan Jinlian immediately becomes exasperated because she does not want Huilian, who once slandered her in front of Ximen, to be Ximen's concubine: "Anger swelled her breast but there was no place to put it; The red of her two cheeks was further augmented with red 忿氣滿懷無處著，雙腮紅上更添紅" (Roy 110, chapter 26). She comes to Ximen and persuades him to not release Song's husband Lai Wang, which eventually leads to Song's suicide. These activities show Meng's manipulative side and how she manipulates Pan, herself one of the most manipulative characters in *Jin Ping Mei*, to achieve her own goal. She even becomes jealous over Pan Jinlian, with whom she maintains a good relationship. Chapter 78 of *Jin Ping Mei* shows how Ximen comes to Meng's bedroom to comfort her because she does not feel well. Yulou complains to Ximen that he likes Pan more than he likes her: "Of course you (Ximen) did not know that I am sick. We are not your wives. Go and care about the one that you really love! 可知你曉的，俺每不是你老婆，你疼心愛的去了" (1267, chapter 75, my translation). When Ximen explains that he has been busy recently, Meng continues to contrast how Ximen treats her and how he treats Pan: "Of course you've been quite busy—you are preoccupied with your sweetheart. You just kick the unlucky people like us away. It may take you ten years to think of us again 可知你心不得閒，可不了一了心愛的扯落著你哩！把俺每這僻時的貨兒，都打到揣了號聽題去了。後十年挂在你那心裡" (1267, chapter 75, my translation). The anonymous commentator in the *xiuxiang* edition of *Jin Ping Mei* aptly puts it:

Although Yulou did not mention anything about competing with Pan Jinlian for Ximen's favor, what she said is cold and sad, and is more profound than just talking about competition...Yulou and Jinlian have always been close friends. However, when the occasion demands, Yulou can complain about Jinlian in an acrimonious and critical

way. We can see that for Yulou, her personal interests always take precedence over friendship. (1051, chapter 75, my translation)

口說不爭，卻語冷情淒，猶深於爭...玉樓、金蓮素稱莫逆，一到此際，含酸帶刺有無限低徊。可見利害一切於己，交情知愛又落第二義矣。

In this sense, Meng Yulou is no different in her essential nature from other women such as Pan Jinlian. She is not depicted as being a character who is bound by moral principles. When it comes to her personal interests, she could do almost anything that leads to having her desire satisfied. For example, soon after Meng gets happily married to Li Gongbi, the only son of a government official, Chen Jingji, son-in-law of Ximen, comes to Meng's place. He threatens Meng with a hairpin of hers that he accidentally picked up, and asks her to leave Li and live with him. Meng pretends to accept Chen's request, fearing that Chen may claim that they had an affair and make a scene. She even kisses Chen and sucks Chen's tongue in order to make Chen believe that she will elope with him that night (1565, chapter 92). However, right after Chen leaves, she tells her husband everything and suggests a plan to get rid of Chen: "Chen came here to seduce me, and he wanted to take me away from you. I asked him to wait for me at midnight tonight at the back wall of our house. Why don't we just turn his trick against himself, catch him as a thief on the spot, and get rid of him for good? [陳經濟] 如此這般，來拘搭，要拐我出去。奴已約下他，今晚夜至三更，在後牆相等。咱不好將計就計，把他當賊拏下，除其後患如何?" (1566, chapter 92, my translation). Meng is cold-hearted and merciless when dealing with Chen. She is even willing to sacrifice her body in order to keep Chen quiet and trick him into believing her. Furthermore, the narrator of the novel points out that Meng does so not because she is loyal to her husband Li, but rather because Chen is inferior to Li: "If Meng married a dull and stupid person who was inferior to

Chen Jingji, Jingji's plan would work out well. However, her current husband has a promising future, and is lovable and young. The two also have strong feelings for each other. For what good did Meng subscribe to Jingji's seduction? 當時孟玉樓若嫁得箇癡蠢之人，不如經濟，經濟便下得這箇鋤鋤著。如今嫁箇李衙內，有前程，又是人物風流，青春年少，恩情美滿，他又拘你做甚？” (1565-1566, chapter 92, my translation). Apparently, she is not the kind of woman who is praised in traditional Chinese morality, meaning a woman who remains faithful to her husband forever. In brief, *Jin Ping Mei* does not depict Meng as being a morally redeeming character.

The resemblance between Meng's desire and Pan's desire is best revealed by their similar reactions to the men with whom they fall in love at first sight. When she first sees Li Gongbi, her future husband, on the way back from Ximen's tomb,

Meng Yulou had noticed how gay and handsome he (Li Gongbi) seemed. He was about the same age as herself, a good horseman, and skilled with bow. When they looked at each other, they seemed to establish an understanding. But she had not known whether he was married or not. She had said to herself: 'My husband is dead and I have no child of my own...It will be well for me to take a step forward and make sure of a home in which to spend my old age (Egerton 238, chapter 91, with slight changes).

那日郊外孟玉樓看見衙內生的一表人物，風流博浪，兩家年甲多相彷彿，又會走馬拈弓弄箭，彼此兩情四目都有意，已在不言之表，但未知有妻子無妻子，口中不言，心內暗度：“況男子漢已死，奴身邊又無所出…我不如往前進一步，尋上個葉落歸根之處…”

When Pan Jinlian encounters Wu Song, brother of her husband and a hero who can kill a tiger single-handedly, her reaction is described as follows:

Jinlian looked at Wu Song and saw that his physique is awe-inspiring, and his appearance

was imposing. His body seemed to be possessed of boundless strength. Were this not so, how could he have overcome the tiger? “They are brothers, born of the same mother,” she thought to herself, “and yet one of them is so big and strong... But look at that Three-inch Mulberry-bark Manikin of mine! He’s only three parts human, and seven parts ghoulish... Wu Song certainly looks manly enough to me. Why don’t I see if I can get him to move in with us here? Who knows? This may turn out to be the very love-match I’ve been waiting for (Roy 32, chapter 1).

[潘金蓮]看了武松身材凜凜，相貌堂堂，身上恰似有千百斤氣力。不然，如何打得那大蟲？心裡尋思道：“一母所生的兄弟，又這般長大，人物壯健，奴若嫁得這個，胡亂也罷了！你看我家那身不滿尺的丁樹，三分似人，七分似鬼...據看武松，又好氣力，何不交他搬來我家住？誰想這段姻緣，卻在這裡！”

Meng’s reaction to Li and Pan’s reaction to Wu Song have much in common. First, both women are initially attracted to their striking appearances and physiques. Meng sees Li as being “gay and handsome,” “a good horseman,” and “skilled with bow”. Pan finds Wu Song’s appearance imposing and “his body seems to be possessed of boundless strength”. Once they see these men, they immediately compare the men they have met to their own husbands, and immediately conclude that these men are better matches for them than their husbands. Meng’s husband Ximen is already dead, compared with the handsome and lively Li. Pan’s husband is “a three-inch Mulberry-bark Manikin who is three parts human, and seven parts ghoulish,” compared with the manly Wu Song. Their goals are also similar: they want to initiate new relationships with the men they have just seen. Meng wants to “take a step forward and make sure of a home in which to spend my old age,” and Pan believes she has an opportunity to get into the sort of marriage she has been seeking. In a word, what Meng desires and what Pan desires are almost identical. However, there is one significant difference between their desires. Meng has a better grasp of reality. She will not act until she

is sure that Li is interested in marrying her, whereas Pan immediately lets Wu Song know about her feelings, without considering or caring about whether or not Wu Song shares her feelings.

Meng Yulou has a more acute awareness of the role that society plays in the satisfaction of an individual's desires, in comparison with many of the other female characters of *Jin Ping Mei*. Pan Jinlian challenges the existing social order, Li Ping'er attempts to maintain the existing social order, and Meng is a character who knows how to use the social order to her advantage for the purpose of satisfying her desire. There is always a medium—society, or more precisely, the individuals that compose a given society—between Meng and the objects of her desire. Meng establishes a relationship with what she desires through a medium. She is eager to marry Ximen. The narrator of *Jin Ping Mei* writes in a poem: "The woman of beauty (Yulou) felt herself predisposed in favor of Ximen Qing 佳人心愛西門慶" (Roy 140, chapter 7). However, unlike Pan Jinlian, who expresses her feelings in front of Wu Song, or Li Ping'er, who approaches Ximen directly, she entrusts Auntie Xue, a go-between, to arrange her marriage. There is another medium which is the key to her marriage with Ximen: Aunt Yang 楊姑娘, the paternal aunt of Meng's ex-husband. Before marriage, she works to earn Aunt Yang's support for her marriage (chapter 7). Before Ximen comes to Meng's house to make a formal proposal, Auntie Xue, the go-between, informs Ximen of the necessity of bribing Aunt Yang first to gain her support for their marriage. How would Auntie Xue know that Yang's support is essential? Apparently, Meng passes this information along to her. Moreover, Meng wants to consult with Aunt Yang before accepting Ximen's marriage proposal. When Ximen wants to finalize the date of their wedding ceremony, Meng responds:

"If that's the way it's to be...I will send someone tomorrow to inform my late husband's paternal aunt (Aunt Yang), who lives in the northern quarter of the city 既然如此，奴明日就使人來對北邊姑娘那裡說去" (Roy 136, chapter 7). After the go-between tells Meng that Ximen have already visited Aunt Yang and Yang fully supports this marriage, Meng replies: "if that's really what Aunt said, everything will be fine 既是姑娘恁的說，又好了" (Roy 136, chapter 7). Meng's effort to gain Aunt Yang's support for her marriage pays off. On Meng and Ximen's wedding day, Zhang Long 張龍, maternal uncle of Meng's late husband, interferes with the marriage. Zhang wants Meng to marry another person that he has in mind because that arrangement would allow him to get a share of the estates of Meng's late husband (93, chapter 7). However, Aunt Yang comes forward to support Meng's intended marriage, and Zhang winds up giving up on his attempt to block this marriage following a quarrel with Yang (96-97, chapter 7). Similarly, when dealing with an extortion attempt on the part of Chen Jingji, Meng also uses social forces to her advantage. She asks her husband to set a trap for Chen (1566, chapter 92). She also uses the social power of her father-in-law, an assistant prefect. When Chen is put on trial on charges of theft, Meng's father-in-law suggests to the prefect that Chen should be beaten in order to obtain his confession (1567, chapter 92). Although the prefect is discerning enough to uncover that Chen is innocent, Chen's extortion plan fails miserably and results in several days in prison.

It should be noted, however, that society is composed of many different types of individuals who have their own different types of desires. The desires of all of these individuals, including Meng, are thus intertwined, and sometimes conflict with each other. Due to the existence of other people's conflicting desires, Meng's desire often winds up being

only partially satisfied. For example, it was discussed above that Meng uses other people, such as her husband and her father-in-law, to get rid of Chen Jingji, who attempted to extort her, and almost succeeded. However, the prefect was conscientious enough to conduct a thorough investigation into Chen's theft. Once he realizes that Chen is innocent, the prefect immediately releases Chen and rebukes Meng's father-in-law, the assistant prefect, in front of other officials. Meng's father-in-law becomes angry, beats his son, and asks him to divorce Meng immediately. However, Meng's husband is so much in love with her that he refuses his father's request, and it turns out that Meng's mother-in-law also sympathizes with her son. Meng narrowly escapes becoming divorced (1568-1569, chapter 92). In this sense, although Meng uses society to defeat Chen's extortion attempt, her desire to be rid of Chen for good is not satisfied. Meng is socially adept, but there are individuals in society who remain beyond her control.

Meng uses the individuals in society to satisfy her desire, and those individuals similarly use her to satisfy their own desires. Although Meng sometimes appears to have her desire satisfied, the outcome is not quite what she really expected. For example, Meng depends on the go-between's help to marry Ximen. However, she wants to be Ximen's legitimate wife, which is why she seeks to confirm Ximen's marital status with Auntie Xue, the go-between, after Ximen leaves: "Does Ximen Qing have any women in his household or not? 西門慶房裡有人沒有人?" (Roy 136, chapter 7). Of course, Auntie Xue does not tell Meng the truth, which is that Ximen already has a legitimate wife, because she is positioned to earn a sizeable amount of money by acting a go-between should Meng and Ximen get married. She beats around the bush in her reply: "My dear lady...even if he does have a few women about the



place, none of them amount to anything. If what I say isn't true, when you get there you'll find out for yourself 好奶奶，就有房裡人，那箇是成頭腦的！我說是謊，你過去就看出來" (Roy 137, chapter 7). On one hand, Meng wants to marry the wealthy Ximen. Auntie Xue is the person that helps Meng satisfy her desire. The narrator of the novel comments in a poem:

The matchmaker did her utmost to promote the union,  
Meng Yulou had already decided to marry a rich man.  
Those with affinities will meet though separated by a thousand *li*,  
Those without affinities will miss each other though face to face. (Roy 128, chapter 7)

媒妁慇懃說始終，孟姬愛嫁富家翁。  
有緣千里能相會，無緣對面不相逢。

On the other hand, Auntie Xue misguides and misinforms Meng because she desires to make money by arranging the marriage of Meng and Ximen. Meng's desire to become Ximen's legitimate wife is not satisfied, and Meng winds up seldom being happy in Ximen's house as a result. The prefatory poem of Chapter 7 of *Jin Ping Mei* best summarizes the ambivalent role Auntie Xue plays in the (dis)satisfaction of Meng's desire:

I play the role of matchmaker and am really rather good at it;  
Entirely owing to the assiduity with which I ply my two legs.  
My lethal lips are practiced at persuading widowers to remarry;  
My trenchant tongue is capable of stirring the chaste widow's heart.  
Lucky ribbons of festive red constantly adorn my head;  
Party favors from wedding feasts are always present in my sleeves.  
There is only one thing that I cannot speak of;  
I both help and ruin my clients (Roy 125, with changes).

我做媒人實可能，全憑兩腿走慇懃，

唇鎗慣把鰥易配，舌劍能調烈女心；

利市花紅頭上帶，喜筵餅錠袖中撐，

只有一件不堪處，半是成人半敗人。

### **Instinctual Drive vs. Society: the Depiction of the Desire of Pang Chunmei**

Pang Chunmei's desire is in many aspects similar to the desire of her mistress, Pan Jinlian. Like Pan, Pang is often depicted as an emotional woman of unrestrained wrath and insatiable sexual desire. She enjoys scolding others using foul language. She calls Li Ming 李銘, a musician, a "cuckold" on numerous occasions because he touches her hand while teaching her how to play *pipa*, a traditional Chinese musical instrument (314, chapter 22). Pang also rails against another maid, Yuxiao, who enjoys the same social status in Ximen's family as Pang, when she sees Yuxiao flirting with one of Ximen's page boys: "What a wondrously wanton whore you are! No sooner do you catch sight of a man than you start carrying on with him in an unheard of way 好個怪浪的淫婦！見了漢子，就邪的不知怎麼樣兒的了！" (Roy 104, chapter 46). She calls a professional singer called Shen Erjie 申二姐 "blind whore" because Shen chooses not to sing for her (1260, chapter 75). In a manner similar to Pan Jinlian, Pang has sex with numerous men. After she marries Commandant Zhou 周統制, she goes on to commit adultery with Chen Jingji. After her husband dies on the battlefield, she fornicates with Zhou Yi 周義, son of an old servant of Commandant Zhou. She finally ends up with dying of exhaustion during the sexual intercourse (1685, chapter 100).

However, despite her uncontrollable wrath and consuming desire for sex, there is a side of Pang that often goes unnoticed: Pang has a good knowledge of how society functions and

has the necessary skills to climb the social ladder. She has sworn at many subordinates in Ximen's house such as maids, musicians, and singers. However, she never challenges the most powerful people in Ximen's family—Ximen Qing, Wu Yueniang, Pan Jinlian, Li Ping'er, Meng Yulou, and Li Jiao'er, the Second Lady of Ximen. The best she can hope for is to quarrel with the least favorite concubine of Ximen, Sun Xue'e, who was herself a maid before marrying Ximen and who still does housework after her marriage. For example, Wu Yueniang is unhappy with Pang's rude attitude towards Shen Erjie, a blind singer. Wu initiates a quarrel with Pang's mistress, Pan Jinlian, partly because Pan shields Pang from Wu's censure (Tian 223). After the quarrel, Ximen visits Pan's place to comfort Pang. Interestingly enough, Pang blames only Wang Liu'er, the wife of one of Ximen's managers, for her troubles: "if Han Daoguo's wife does not come, it is fine. But if she comes, I will point my finger to her and teach her a good lesson. All these troubles come from the blind whore that she sends here 等到明日韓道國老婆不來便罷，若來，你看我指與他，一頓好的不罵！原來送了這瞎淫婦來，就是個禍根！" (1297, chapter 76, my translation). The person with whom she wants to quarrel is not Wu Yueniang, who scolds both her mistress and herself, but rather Han Daoguo's wife who does nothing but introduce Shen Erjie to Ximen's household. The commentator in the *xiuxiang* edition of *Jin Ping Mei* writes: "Pang transfers her anger to another person. What a surprise! 遷怒，大奇" (1077, chapter 76, my translation). However, the real issue is not Pang's transference of anger so much as her acute awareness that she cannot challenge Wu Yueniang, Ximen's legitimate wife, who is pregnant with Ximen's child. Pang apparently knows this better than her mistress, who challenges Wu and fails. Moreover, Pang is later purchased by Commandant Zhou to be his concubine. However,

she rapidly moves up from being the lowest-ranked concubine to become the legitimate wife of Zhou. There is almost no description of how she accomplishes this. However, we can imagine this would not be easy, given the example of Ximen's family, where the domestic politics of his women is no less complicated than governmental politics. If Chunmei had not known society well, or had requisite political skills, she would not have been able to surpass Sun Erniang, another concubine of Zhou who married Zhou earlier than herself, to fill the position being the legitimate wife of Zhou.

If Pang Chunmei were Li Ping'er or Meng Yulou, she would probably be content with life as the legitimate wife of Commandant Zhou. However, Pang has an unusually strong vitality not found in Li, Meng, or even Pan Jinlian, her mistress. When she quarrels with others, she scolds them ferociously and without fail for minutes on end, seemingly not needing to breathe. She does not give the people she swears at any opportunity to respond. It is difficult to imagine Li Ping'er or Meng Yulou doing that—they seldom quarrel. Even Pan Jinlian, who is notorious for her ability to scold others on end, does not possess this sort of overwhelming power. Even Ruyi'er, the maid of Li Ping'er, once replied defiantly to Pan's accusations (1176-1177, chapter 72). Another revealing example of Pang's extraordinary vitality occurred when Ximen Qing put his arms around Chunmei in order to comfort her after Yueniang scolded her. Ximen often comforted her women by embracing them. Most of Ximen's women, no matter how bitter or angry they might be at that moment, became subdued<sup>31</sup>. However, Chunmei is different. After a heated quarrel between Pan Jinlian, Pang's mistress, and Wu Yueniang, Ximen came to Pan's room to comfort both Pan and Pang. Each

---

<sup>31</sup> For example, Ximen embraces Yueniang when he attempts to comfort Yueniang in chapter 21. Yueniang soon becomes subdued.

reacts differently to Ximen's attempts to comfort them. Pan is "lifted by Ximen in his arms...She made quite a scene before Ximen, and turned her face away from him. She cannot hold her tears, and they rolled down her beautiful cheeks without a stop 被西門慶用手拉起他來...那婦人便做出許多喬張致來，把臉扭著，止不住紛紛的香腮上滾下淚來。” (Egerton 162, chapter 76, with some changes). Pang reacts in a completely different manner. When Ximen puts his arms around her and attempts to lift her up, she struggles so fiercely that the violence of her sudden movements almost knocks Ximen down (1297, chapter 76). Readers can easily develop a picture of a strong and energetic Pang Chunmei from such a depiction.

Pang Chunmei is an energetic woman full of vitality who is not content with life as a dutiful wife and caring mother of the upper class. She wants more. She wants sex, and her husband the Commandant is always busy with his government activities. She fornicates with Chen Jingji. After Chen's death, Pang seduces her servants. She plays with fire even when she appears to have everything—family, wealth, and a high social position. Although Pang has a great deal of practical knowledge of how to succeed in society, and does succeed in society, her vitality and energy are destructive forces with the potential to undermine her success. Pang is caught between her practical knowledge and her uncontrollable passion. For example, after Chen Jingji comes to Commandant Zhou's house, the novel twice depicts scenes of sexual intercourse between Pang and Chen. Their sexual interplay is twice interrupted by announcements by Pang's maids that Pang's son, Jinge, needs to be cared for by his mother. During the first scene, while the two engage in sexual activities, a maid comes in to say that Jinge has woken up, and cries for his mother. Pang must leave to take care of

her son (1644, chapter 97). The next time they enjoy themselves together, another maid comes in to inform Pang that there is an emergency involving her son: “The little Master Jinge was shaken down by wind. Please go to see him immediately 小衙內金哥兒，忽然風搖倒了，快請奶奶看去。” (1672, chapter 99, my translation). Pang becomes so frightened that she immediately runs to see her son. These two scenes are revealing: on one hand, Pang appears as an energetic woman full of vitality who wants to satisfy her instinctual desire—sex with her lover. On the other hand, as a woman of society, Pang must fulfill a social role—taking care of Jinge, her son. It should be kept in mind that Pang becomes the legitimate wife of the Commandant in large part because she is the Commandant’s only concubine who has given birth to a male child (1596, chapter 94). Whatever power she has in the Commandant’s family derives from her having given him his sole male descendant. Even the Commandant must bow to Pang’s request when she threatens him using the welfare of the child as a weapon (945). In this sense, his son is her key to success in society. To make matters more complicated and ironic, this son may not even be the biological son of the Commandant, but rather the son of Chen Jingji, Pang’s lover. Pang and Chen enjoy sex in November immediately after Pang is driven out of Ximen’s house (1472, chapter 86), and Pang gives birth to the child next August (1596, chapter 94). Moreover, the manner in which Jinge reacts upon first seeing Chen suggests that a blood relationship between the two exists. Chen was a Taoist monk at that time, and was given strokes as punishments for patronizing prostitutes. Pang’s son happens to see him waiting for the strokes: “they are just about to beat Chen Jingji. Strangely enough...when the Little Master (Jinge) sees Chen Jingji being beaten, he stretches his arms and wants Chen to hold him, and it is difficult for Zhang Sheng (a

servant of the Commandant) to hold him in his arms. Zhang Sheng was afraid that the Commandant might see the child and hurriedly took him away. The Little Master cried, and kept crying in front of his mother in the rear of the house 兩邊招呼打時，可要作怪…那小衙內看見走過來打經濟，在懷裡攔不住，撲著要經濟抱。張勝恐怕守備看見，忙走過來，那小衙內亦發大哭起來，直哭到後邊春梅根前” (Egerton 283, chapter 94, with changes). Pang’s instinctual desire to seek pleasure and her desire to succeed in society are thus intertwined. The complexity of Pang’s desires makes it difficult for others to deal with her demise. The members of the Commandant’s family understand that Pang died of exhaustion while fornicating with a servant. However, given that Pang’s son will someday inherit the deceased Commandant’s office, they decide to not disclose this affair. Instead, they ceremoniously bury Pang next to the Commandant in the family cemetery as if Chunmei died a natural death (1685, chapter 100). Her death is therefore both a confirmation of her life philosophy—“Seize the day to enjoy life”<sup>32</sup> 人生在世，且風流了一日是一日！”(1465, chapter 85, my translation)—and a culmination of her success in society, although both the confirmation and the success are laced with irony.

### **The Fluidity of Gender: the Depiction of the Desire of Chen Jingji**

It may be appropriate to conclude this chapter by analyzing Chen Jingji’s desire. More than one critic believes that Jingji and Ximen Qing who mirror each other. However, there appears to be one significant difference between Ximen and Jingji in terms of their gender roles. Martin Huang argues that Ximen Qing is often depicted as a male who desires, whereas

---

<sup>32</sup> See Tian 249 for a discussion for Chunmei’s life philosophy—enjoying the present life without thinking about the future.

Jingji often depends on the favors of other women to make a living (109-110). In his homosexual relationship with other men, Jingji is the one who is sodomized (Huang, 110). Following Huang's logic shows that although Jingji is biologically male, the position he occupies in this network of desire is similar to the one occupied by Ximen's women. Both Jingji and the women are depicted as being objects of desire.

However, Chen Jingji is not depicted as being merely the object of desire. Pang Chunmei takes Jingji as her lover when he is penniless. With the help of Chunmei, Jingji becomes rich and marries a lady named Ge Cuiping 葛翠屏. Soon after their marriage, Jingji meets Han Aijie 韓愛姐, the daughter of Han Daoguo 韓道國 and Wang Liu'er, and Aijie becomes Jingji's mistress. Jingji takes on a traditional female role in his homosexual relationship with Jin Zongming 金宗明, but at the same time, also maintains a relationship with a female prostitute (chapter 93). In this sense, the gender role that Jingji plays is not fixed. He takes on different roles with different people. In one relationship, he is the object of desire, and in another relationship, he becomes the subject of desire.

Jingji even takes on multiple roles in one relationship. After Jingji loses all of his family's fortunes, he is sent by a friend of his late father to a Taoist temple (Chapter 93). One of the monks there, Jin Zongming, seeks to have sex with him:

When Chen Jingji came, Zongming saw how handsome he was, how white his teeth and how red his lips. His face was so white as if he applied powder onto it. He seemed so intelligent and cute that he could make his eyes speak for him in place of his mouth. So he asked the young man to come and sleep in his room. In the evening they drank and, when Jingji was drunk, they went to bed together. At first, one had his head at one end and the other at the other end. But Jin Zongming complained that Jingji's feet smelled, and asked him to come



over the other way. Then he complained that Jingji's breath was bad, and asked him to turn his face around (Egerton 275, chapter 93, with modifications).

因見經濟生的齒白唇紅，面如傅粉；清俊乖覺，眼裡說話，就纏他同房居住。晚夕和他吃半夜酒，把他灌醉了，在一舖歇臥。初時兩頭睡，便嫌經濟腳臭，叫過一箇枕頭上睡。睡不多回，又說他口氣噴著，令他吊轉身子，屁股貼著肚子。

Jingji apparently becomes the object of Jin Zongming's desire. He first becomes the object of Monk Jin's gaze, and then Monk Jin treats Jingji as if he were his sex toy to be used at his disposal. Chen Jingji is not portrayed as simply being a miserable victim of nonconsensual sex, however. He instead takes an active role in this relationship. Jingji knows well what Jin really wants, but he "said nothing, feigning sleep 那經濟推睡著，不理他" (Egerton 275, chapter 93). He does this in order to control Jin Zongming, who is in charge of the wealth of the Taoist temple: "This fellow (Jin Zongming) will fall into my hands...I will let him have a taste and then I will get hold of his money 這廝合敗...與他箇甜頭兒，且教他在我手內納些敗缺" (Egerton 275, chapter 93). In other words, Chen also desires. In this sense, Jingji is similar to some of the female characters in the novel such as Pan Jinlian and Wang Liu'er because both Jingji and these women trade sex for financial gains, as several critics have noted<sup>33</sup>.

However, Jingji displays no pleasure during his bout of sexual intercourse with Monk Jin, while the female characters show at least some degree of earnestness during their bouts of sexual intercourse with men. When Jin makes sexual advances on Jingji, he becomes quite calculating. He first threatens to make this matter known to Monk Ren 任道士, head of the temple (1587, chapter 93). Only after Jin accepts his three conditions, which give Jingji

---

<sup>33</sup> For example, see Huang 110.

access to the wealth of the this temple, does Jingji allow Jin to satisfy his desire (1587, chapter 93): “‘I will do everything you [Jingji] say,’ Jin Zongming said. They spent half the night in their wild pursuits. Jingji had been a dissolute young wastrel and knew all the tricks of the trade. *He used these tricks for the benefit of Jin Zongming, and made him perfectly happy* 金宗明道：‘這個不打緊，我都依 你。’ 當夜兩箇顛來倒去，整狂了半夜。這陳經濟自幼風月中撞，甚麼事不知道！當下被底山盟，枕邊海誓，淫聲艷語，摳吮舔品，把這金宗明哄得歡喜無盡” (Egerton 275, chapter 93, with modifications, emphasis added).

The primary reason why Jingji engaged in homosexuality with Jin and took on the traditional female role was to make Jin happy rather than to make himself happy. In this sense, Jingji is not depicted here as exhibiting biologically feminine tendencies. He simply acts out the female role in exchange for money. Jingji’s “acting out” is also revealed during the course of his relationship with Pang Chunmei. Similarly, Jingji takes on a feminine role in his relationship with Chunmei, although Chunmei is a female. He has to satisfy Chunmei’s sexual desire, just as with Monk Jin, in exchange for protection, power, and wealth. Accordingly, almost all the pleasure during their sexual intercourses was experienced by Chunmei, but not by Jingji. The novel twice describes the sexual activities that take place between Chunmei and Jingji after Chunmei marries General Zhou. On the first occasion, the novel uses a poem to depict their erotic encounter:

The clouds of hair covering the temples are disturbed  
In this agreeable and happy meeting at the pavilion which is surrounded by flowers,  
Sweat, mixing with facial powder,  
Condenses the fragrance sent by the flowers, and oozes out from the red silk clothes.  
Few people visit this remote courtyard  
Whereas the sun stays here for a long time,

Look at the scene:

A yellow warbler is pecking at a precious flower. (1644, chapter 97, my translation)

花亭懽洽鬢雲斜，粉汗凝香沁絳紗。

深院日長人不到，試看黃鳥啄名花。

Chunmei is apparently the protagonist of this poem, which describes how Chunmei's hair is disturbed and how her sweat comes out of her clothing. This lyric, poetic representation of Chunmei's sexuality indicates that she fully enjoys this bout of sexual intercourse. However, there is no mention of pleasure experienced by Jingji. Jingji appears only once in this poem, and is compared to a "yellow warbler". Chunmei is again depicted as the one who experiences the most pleasure during their next round of fornication. The novel portrays this fornication scene from the point of view of the "ears" of Zhang Sheng, a trusted servant of Chunmei's husband, General Zhou. Zhang overhears their sexuality being in play when he is patrolling the premises of the general's house. When he passes by the room where the two are making love, Zhang "hear[s] the sound of a woman's laughter 聽見書房內彷彿有婦人笑語之聲" (Egerton 350, chapter 99, emphasis added). Again, there is no description of Jingji's pleasure. Jingji instead regards his erotic encounter with Chunmei not as a means of satisfying his sexual desire but rather as an opportunity to make personal requests. During sexual intercourse, Jingji asks Chunmei to get rid of Zhang Sheng, because Zhang Sheng's brother-in-law, Liu the Second 劉二, once bullied him (1671-1672, chapter 99). In this sense, the role that Jingji takes on in his heterosexual relationship with Chunmei does not differ from the role that he takes on in his homosexual relationship with Monk Jin. Jingji must still act out a feminine role, even though he is a man and Chunmei is a woman.

Chen Jingji feels compelled to act out certain roles, which reveals the conditionality of

Jingji's desire. Martin Huang believes that Jingji is a prototype of "weak and henpecked protagonists," who "partly because of their own uncontrollable desires, are completely dominated by women" (110). Pushing Huang's argument further allows us to say that Jingji satisfies other people's desire in order to satisfy his own desire. However, I would like to add that there does not exist any clear-cut line of demarcation between Jingji's desire and the desires of other people. As noted above, characters in *Jin Ping Mei* such as Ximen Qing and Pan Jinlian lack long-term goals, and Jingji is one of these characters. He does not usually think things over, make a plan, and then carry out the plan in order to satisfy his desire. His desire instead often originates from the contacts that he makes with other characters, and is typically more or less a spontaneous response to the desires of other people. For example, Jingji does not have any plan to obtain financial gains from the Taoist monk Jin Zongming. It is Jin who wants to have sex with him, and Jingji deems it a good opportunity to trade sex for money. In a similar vein, Jingji has no plan to use Chunmei to seek power and money. His meeting with Chunmei is purely accidental. When he is on trial at the court of Chunmei's husband, Chunmei accidentally sees him without being seen herself (1597-1598, chapter 94). She eventually finds an opportunity to take Jingji to her house, claims that he is her brother, and takes him as her lover (chapter 97). With the help of Chunmei, Jingji marries a woman and becomes the owner of a large tavern. As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, the novel begins with four lyrics on different types of desires such as the desire for money and the desire for woman, and the novel spends a great deal of ink describing these desires. My analysis of Chen Jingji's desire and the desires of many other characters demonstrates that these desires rarely emanate from a single character. This novel instead shows that desire

often originates from the complicated human interactions and is sustained in such relationships. Chen Jingji did once attempt to carry out a plan to satisfy his desire. Jingji wanted Meng Yulou to be his concubine/mistress, and threatened to take her away from her husband (chapter 92). However, his plan failed miserably, primarily because people such as Yulou have her own, different desires, as noted in previous discussions. Ironically enough, Yulou's desire is primarily a response to Jingji's desire, and is thus similar in nature to Jingji's desire as described above. In this sense, the relationships between Jingji and the other characters are not represented as being simple and linear in the picture of desire that this novel paints. Jingji and other characters instead form dynamic relationships in which the desires of characters continually shape, influence and change each other. I choose the metaphor "network" to describe these dynamic relationships.

Almost all of the characters live within this network. As noted in my previous discussions in this chapter, many of the desires of other characters similarly originate from, and are sustained within, these complicated human interactions. Ximen Qing, the male protagonist of the novel, is no exception. For me, Chen Jingji is indeed a mirroring character of Ximen Qing. However, he is no ordinary mirror, but rather a magnifying mirror. The repeated interactions between Jingji's desire and the desires of other characters magnify the interconnectedness and the interdependence of Ximen's desire and the desires that emanate from other sources. The beginning of this chapter has already demonstrated the importance of "the third party" in Ximen's desire. The next chapter will further demonstrate that the other characters in this novel also shape, influence, and change Ximen's desire throughout the course of their interactions with Ximen.

## Chapter 2: Network

As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, *Jin Ping Mei* begins with two stories. Each story concerns a great hero in Chinese history: the first story is about Xiang Xu (232 B.C.-202 B.C.) and the second is about Liu Bang (256 B.C.-195 B.C.). I argued in chapter one that the two stories represent an externalization of desire in the form of action. However, the two short narratives are more than simply representations of desire in action. They also demonstrate the intricate relationships between the desires of different characters, particularly, the dynamic interactions between the heroes' desires and the desires of their women. I will quote these two stories in order to examine these relationships and interactions more closely:

It then goes on to refer to the Hegemon-King of Western Chu, whose name was Xiang Ji, or Xiang Yu. Because the First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty was lacking in virtue...Xiang Yu rose up in rebellion against him and was joined by the King of Han, whose name was Liu Ji, or Liu Bang. The two men rolled up like mat the territory in which the capital of the First Emperor had been located and thus put an end to the Qin dynasty. Later they agreed to make the Hong Canal a boundary line between their territories and divided the empire between them.

Now in the course of their conflict, Xiang Yu was able, with the help of plans provided by Fan Zeng, to defeat the King of Han in seventy-two military engagements. But he was so infatuated with his favorite, Lady Yu, who possessed the kind of beauty that can topple kingdoms, that he took her with him on his campaigns so that they could be together day and night. Eventually he was defeated by Liu Bang's general, Han Xin, and had to flee by night as far as Yinling, where the enemy troops caught up with him. Although Xiang Yu was defeated, he might have sought help from the area east of the Yangtze River, but he could not bear to part with Lady Yu. Hearing the armies that surrounded on all sides singing the songs of his homeland, the region of Chu, he realized that his situation was hopeless and expressed his sorrow in song:

*My strength can uproot mountains,  
My valor knows no peer;  
But the times are against me,  
And my steed will run no more.  
My steed will run no more,  
So what can I do?  
Oh, Lady Yu, Lady Yu,*

*What is to be done?*

When he finished singing his face was streaked with tears.

“Your highness must be sacrificing important military considerations on my account,” Lady Yu said to him.

“Not really,” the Hegemon-King replied. “It’s just that we can’t bear to give each other up. Moreover, you are such a beauty that Liu Bang, who is a ruler addicted to wine and women, is sure to take you for himself if he should see you.”

“I would rather die in an honest cause than compromise myself in order to save my live,” Lady Yu wept.

Then, asking Xiang Yu for his sword, she slit her throat and died. The Hegemon-King was so moved by her act that, when the time came, he followed suit by cutting his own throat.

...

Now the King of Han, Liu Bang, was originally no more than a neighborhood head in Sishui. Yet, with his three-foot sword in hand, he slew the white snake and rose in righteous revolt in the mountainous area between the districts of Mang and Tang. Two years later he destroyed the Qin dynasty, and in the fifth year of his reign destroyed the Chu, thereby winning the empire for himself and establishing the Han dynasty. But he became infatuated with a woman whose maiden name was Qi.

Lady Qi gave birth to a son whose title was Prince Ruyi of Zhao. Because Empress Lv was jealous of her and wished her no good, Lady Qi was extremely uneasy. One day when Emperor Gaozu (Liu Bang) was ill and lay with his head in her lap, Lady Qi began to weep, saying, “after you have fulfilled you ten thousand years, on whom shall my son and I be able to reply?”

“That shouldn’t be a problem,” the emperor said. “When I hold court tomorrow I’ll depose the heir apparent and set up your son in his stead. How would that be?”

Lady Qi dried her tears and thanks him for his favor.

When Empress Lv heard about this she summoned her husband’s chief adviser, Zhang Liang, for a secret consultation. Zhang Liang recommended that the Four Greybeards of Mount Shang be induced to come out of retirement and lend their support to the heir apparent.

One day the Four Greybeards appeared in court with the heir apparent. When Emperor Gaozu saw these four men with their snow-white hair and beards and imposing caps and gowns, he asked them who they were. They identified themselves as Master Dongyuan, Qili Ji, Master Xiahuang, and Master Luji. Greatly astonished, the emperor asked, “Why did you choose not to come when I offered you employment in the past, only to appear today in the company of my son?”

“The heir apparent is destined to be the preserver of what Your Majesty has established,” the Four Greybeards replied.

Upon hearing this Emperor Gaozu felt dejected and upset. As the Four Greybeards were on their way out of the palace he summoned Lady Qi into his presence, pointed them out to her, and said, “I would have liked to replace the heir apparent, but these four men have lent him their support. Now that his wings are full-grown his position will prove difficult to shake.”

Lady Qi wept without cessation and the emperor extemporized a song to console

her:

*The great swan soars aloft,  
A thousand li in one flight.  
Once his pinions are complete,  
He can range the Four Seas.  
He can range the Four Seas,  
So what can we do?  
Of what avail are stringed arrows,  
Against a target that lies beyond their reach?*

The emperor finished his song and, in the end, did not make the Prince of Zhao his heir apparent.

After the death of the Emperor Gaozu, to rid herself of her apprehensions, Empress Lv had Prince Ruyi of Zhao put to death with poisoned wine and so mutilated Lady Qi as to turn her into a “human pig.” (Roy 13-15, chapter 1, with modifications, emphasis added)

題起當時西楚霸王，姓項名籍，單名羽字。因秦始皇無道…因與漢王劉邦，單名季字，時二人起兵，席捲三秦，滅了秦國，指鴻溝為界，平分天下。因用範增之謀，連敗漢王七十二陣。只因寵著一個婦人，名叫虞姬，有傾城之色，載於軍中，朝夕不離。一旦被韓信所敗，夜走陰陵。為追兵所逼，霸王敗向江東取救，因捨虞姬不得，又聞四面皆楚歌。事發，嘆曰：“力拔山兮氣蓋世，時不利兮騅不逝。騅不逝兮可奈何？虞兮虞兮奈若何！”歌畢，淚下數行，虞姬曰：“大王莫非以賤妾之故，有費軍中大事？”霸王曰：“不然。吾與汝不忍相捨故耳！況汝這般容色，劉邦乃酒色之君，必見汝而納之。”虞姬泣曰：“妾寧以義死，不以苟生！”遂請王之寶劍，自刎而死。霸王因大慟，尋以自刎。

…

那漢王劉邦原是泗上亭長，提三尺劍，碭山斬白蛇起手。二年亡秦，五年滅楚，掙成天下。只因也是寵著個婦人，名喚戚氏。夫人所生一子，名趙王如意，因被呂後妒害，心甚不安。一日，高祖有疾，乃枕戚夫人腿而臥。夫人哭曰：“陛下萬歲後，妾母子何所托？”帝曰：“不難。吾明日出朝，廢太子而立爾子，意下如何？”戚夫人乃收淚謝恩。呂後聞之，密召張良謀計。良舉薦商山四皓，下來輔佐太子。一日，同太子入朝，高祖見四人鬚鬢交白，衣冠甚偉。各問姓名。一名東園公，一名綺裏季，一名夏黃公，一名角裏先生。因大驚曰：“朕昔求聘諸公，如何不至？今日乃從吾兒所遊？”四皓答曰：“太子乃守成之主也。”高祖聞之，愀然不悅。比及四皓出殿，乃召戚夫人指示之曰：“我欲廢太子，況彼四人輔佐，羽翼已成，卒難搖動矣！”戚夫人遂哭泣不止。帝乃作歌以解之：“鴻鵠高飛兮羽翼，抱龍兮橫蹤四海。橫蹤四海兮，又可奈何？雖有綈繳兮，尚安所施！”歌訖，後遂不果立趙王矣。高祖崩世，呂後酒酖殺趙王如意，人斃了戚夫人，以除其心中之患。

These two stories demonstrate that even the power of great heroes such as Xiang Yu, the Hegemon-king, and Liu Bang, who defeated Xiang and founded the Han dynasty, sometimes has limits. The two songs that the heroes compose and sing (the italicized part in the above quote) express a profound sense of their powerlessness, with sentences such as “so what can I



do?” and “what can we do?” repeating themselves in these two songs. The two stories also show that the limited power of the heroes primarily results from the restraints put on their desires by their women. Lady Yu’s suicide changes Xiang Yu’s mind. As noted in the introduction of this dissertation, following Yu’s suicide, Xiang becomes too sad to continue to fight against Liu Bang. He follows in Yu’s footsteps and kills himself. As regards Liu Bang, the desires of his women—the Empress Lv and Lady Qi—strongly influence his decision to name the crowned prince. The narrator points out: “Liu Bang and Xiang Yu were certainly heroes of their day and yet did not escape the fate of suffering their ambitions to be blunted by these two women 說劉、項者，固當世之英雄，不免為二婦人，以屈其志氣” (Roy 15, chapter 1). While the role that Lady Yu plays in her relationship with Xiang Yu is depicted as being relatively passive, Lady Qi and Empress Lv play active roles to determine who will succeed Liu Bang. Both women actively compete to influence Liu Bang in order to have their sons succeed the throne. In contrast, Liu Bang acts quite passively. He changes his mind regarding the choice of his successor twice, and these changes are essentially passive responses to the desires of Qi and Lv. In this sense, Liu Bang does not differ fundamentally from Chen Jingji whose desire I examined at the end of the previous chapter. The desires of both Liu Bang and Jingji are subject to influence by other people, particularly, their women, despite Liu being a strong hero who united China, while Jingji is depicted as a weak libertine who never experienced any significant success.

The main story *Jin Ping Mei* tells is a repetition and extension of the stories about Liu Bang and Xiang Yu. After the narrator tells the stories of Liu and Xiang, he comments: “[t]his has always been so, in ancient as in modern times, [and] it is as true for the exalted as for the

humble 今古皆然，貴賤一般” (Roy 16, chapter 1). In other words, “there is nothing new under the sun,” (872, Ecclesiastes 1:9). The narrator goes on to say: “now this book is an instance of a beautiful woman who is embodied in a tiger and engenders a tale of the passions 如今這一本書，乃虎中美女，後引出一個風情故事來” (Roy 16, chapter 1). This is a key sentence of the novel, as critics have pointed out<sup>34</sup>. The image of “a beautiful woman who is embodied in a tiger 虎中美女” has struck many critics. This image is generally read as the danger of “woman-sex,” (Ding 144) or more broadly, the danger of sensuality (Tian 7). These readings of this image are, of course, valid. The tiger is a fierce animal, and the juxtaposition of a tiger and a beautiful woman suggests that women are also dangerous. The tiger is dangerous because it is active and aggressive. This image thus also suggests that women’s desires are active rather than passive. In traditional Chinese paintings and poems, Chinese women are typically represented as being quiet and passive. This is not the case in *Jin Ping Mei*. The tiger attacks Wu Song, brother of Wu Da who is Pan Jinlian’s husband, in the first chapter of the novel<sup>35</sup>. The women in *Jin Ping Mei* also maintain dynamic relationships with Ximen Qing, the protagonist of the novel. The narrator continues to write:

In it a licentious woman commits adultery with a decadent man-about-town:  
 Every evening devoted to the pursuit of pleasure;  
 Every morning an occasion for deluded dalliance.  
 But in the end she does not escape the fate of:  
 A corpse prostrate beneath the blade,  
 A bloodstained carcass in the Yellow Springs;  
 Never again to don silk or satin,  
 No longer able to apply rouge or powder. (Roy 16, chapter 1, emphasis added)

<sup>34</sup> For example, see Tian 7.

<sup>35</sup> For an insightful discussion of the relationship between Jinlian and the tiger, see Ding 143-164.

一個好色的婦女，因與了破落戶相通，日日追歡，朝朝迷戀。後不免屍橫  
刀下命染黃泉，永不得著綺穿羅，再不能施朱付粉。

Note that this passage represents the externalization of a woman's desire, but not of a man's desire. What is emphasized here is that women's desires can be aggressive and active. This chapter will discuss how Ximen's wife and concubines project their desires into their relationships with Ximen and how they actively participate in establishing and sustaining the network of desires.

Below, I will first introduce the concept of "wives group" in order to show that there exists another center of desire that is often in competition with Ximen's desire. Second, I will point out that Ximen's desires are often heavily influenced by the desires of other characters. Third, I will further deconstruct the desires of the "wives group" to argue that they cannot really be called a center of desire. Rather, it is a network formed by the various desires of individual characters. In a word, desire as represented in *Jin Ping Mei* does not originate from a single source. At the end of this chapter, I will discuss the relationship between individual characters' desires and their fates.

### **The "Wives Group"**

Before introducing the term "wives group," I will say a few words about the "network" concept. In contemporary theories, "network" can be defined as "a space constituted in and through the interconnections of points, nodes, and curves" (Eriksson 596). As noted in chapter one of this dissertation, the desires represented in *Jin Ping Mei* are almost always interconnected, and this network model fits comfortably with my analysis of the entanglement of these desires. Philosophers and theorists have identified many characteristics

of a “network,” and three are particularly pertinent to my current study. The first characteristic is the decentralizing tendency of a network. Michel Foucault has discussed the network structure of power, and argues that “power’s condition of possibility...must not be sought in the primary existence of a central point, in a unique source of sovereignty from which secondary and descendant forms would emanate...Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (93). Power in Foucault’s network model is disseminated, instead of being centered on any particular locus, as many critics have noted. Gilles Deleuze, another renowned philosopher, also regards multiplicity as a prominent characteristic of a network (505). According to Deleuze, this multiplicity undergoes constant changes (21). Change is another important characteristic of a network. Deleuze claims that “the rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, change in nature” (21). Deleuze’s rhizome offers a huge number of connective possibilities among different points or nodes (21), which means that the rhizome is in a state of constant transformations. “[The rhizome] constitutes a whole that constantly reorganizes itself according to creeping runners, yielding a multiplicity that does not allow a unity,” (604) as Kai Eriksson proposes. A third characteristic of a network which is particularly relevant to my current discussion of *Jin Ping Mei* is the relativity that is prevalent within the network. The significance, value, and identity of any object within the network are relative, and depend on the relationships it forms with other objects found within the same network. Eriksson concisely summarizes this relativity:

What is important is that the identity of places and areas is formed through their position and function as parts of the whole...rather than their intrinsic significance as

such. The intersections of a network, therefore, do not have a special meaning-content as distinct places and localities but only as nodes and reference points that have a certain function in the topology of the network. (596)

In other words, the positions that objects occupy within a network, as opposed to their “intrinsic values,” differentiate objects from each other within the network. This characteristic of the network serves as a theoretical basis for my use of the term “wives group”.

I use the term “wives group” to refer to all of Ximen’s wife and concubines. It is true that Ximen’s wife and concubines differ from each other. For example, Wu Yueniang is the only legitimate wife of Ximen, whereas the others are Ximen’s concubines. Yueniang is thus superior to the other women in terms of her social status within Ximen’s family. They also differ greatly in terms of the wealth they possess. Some concubines, such as Li Ping’er and Meng Yulou, are much wealthier than others, such as Pan Jinlian and Sun Xue’e. I do not intend to ignore those differences in grouping Ximen’s wife and concubines together. I put these women in the same group primarily because they sometimes cluster around the same position within the network of desires. When they cluster, they do so because they share similar desires, and express their desires using similar voices. In this sense, this “wives group” bears many similarities to the concept “assemblage” that Gilles Deleuze depicted in his book *A Thousand Plateaus* (22). According to Deleuze, “the only assemblages are machinic assemblages of desire and collective assemblages of enunciation” (22). I will demonstrate below that the “wives group” is an assemblage based on both desire and enunciation. I will also show that this “wives group” is another important center of desire depicted in the novel. The desire that emanates from this “wives group” sometimes competes

with Ximen Qing's desire, which challenges the idea that Ximen's desire occupies the central position within the network of desires.

Let us first examine the death of Li Ping'er, Ximen Qing's favorite concubine, to understand the important roles that his wives play in *Jin Ping Mei*. Although Li Ping'er is Ximen's favorite woman, there is little, if anything, that Ximen can do to prevent her death. When Guange, Li Ping'er and Ximen's son, is scared by Pan Jinlian's cat "Snow Lion 雪獅子", Ximen can show his exasperation only by dashing that cat to death (924-925, chapter 59). When Ping'er is dead, Ximen only has himself to blame for her death: "it's all my fault 都是我坑陷了你了" (Egerton 142, chapter 62). In fact, Ping'er's death is caused not by Ximen but primarily by Pan Jinlian. Jinlian uses her cat to scare Ping'er's son to death. Ping'er's agony over her son's death is the primary reason why she becomes sick and eventually dies. Even after Guange's death, Jinlian still takes every opportunity to attack Ping'er:

When Pan Jinlian saw that the child was no more, and that Li Ping'er had lost her son to death, every day she plucked up her spirits and expressed her gratification in a hundred different ways. Pointing at one of the maidservants, she railed at Li Ping'er by indirection, saying, "You lousy whore! As I have said all along: the sun may be at high noon, but the time will come when it will pass its zenith. When the turtledove has dropped its egg: it has no recourse but to pout...How do you like it, now that you're no better off than I am...Li Ping'er, in her adjacent quarters, overheard all this invective but did not dare to say anything in response. (Roy 489-90, chapter 60)

那潘金蓮見孩子沒了，李瓶兒死了生兒，每日抖擻精神，百般的稱快。指著丫頭罵道：“賊淫婦，我只說你日頭常晌午，都怎的今日也有錯了的時節？你班鳩跌了，彈也嘴答穀了…都怎的也和我一般。”李瓶兒這邊屋裡分明聽見，不敢聲言…

Jinlian's constant railing at her creates psychological pressure which makes her physical symptoms worse. As the author of the novel puts it:

All she [Ping'er] could do was to shed tears behind Jinlian's back. Suffering from suppressed anger and suppressed resentment on top of her accumulated vexation and sorrow, gradually her heart and spirit were disoriented, and her dreaming soul turned topsy-turvy. With every day, her intake of tea and food diminished...[I]n the first place, because she was longing for her child, and in the second place, because she was afflicted with suppressed rage, her [Ping'er's] former ailment reappeared, and as before, her menses flowed unceasingly from her lower body. (Roy 490, chapter 60)

[瓶兒]背地裡只是弔淚。著了這暗氣暗惱，又加之煩惱憂戚，漸漸心神恍惚，夢魂顛倒兒。每日茶飯，都減少了...這李瓶兒一者思念孩兒，二者著了重氣，把舊時病症，又發起來，照舊下邊經水淋漓不止。

This ailment soon leads to Ping'er's death. However, both Pan Jinlian and the other concubines of Ximen contribute to the death of Ping'er. None of Ximen's wives displays much sympathy for Ping'er when she suffers from abuse and psychological torture at the hands of Jinlian, let alone help and support her. Consider the death of Guange, Ping'er's son, for example. Wu Yueniang appears to be the one who is most concerned about Guange among all of Ximen's wives. When Guange is scared by Jinlian's cat and becomes very sick, she calls for Dame Liu 劉婆子, a medical practitioner and shamaness, to see Guange. However, when Dame Liu asks Yueniang's permission to cauterize Guange, she does not want to accept the responsibility for making a decision: "who would be willing to take responsibility for that?...We'll have to wait until his father [Ximen] gets home, and consult with him about it. Otherwise, if we go ahead with the moxabustion on our own, he is likely to raise a hue and cry when he gets home 誰敢耽？必須還等他爹來，問了他爹。不然灸了，惹他來家吆喝" (Roy 470, chapter 59). Yueniang appears to care more about her own welfare than about the health of the child who needs immediate medical attention. When Ping'er begs Yueniang to give green light to the moxabustion, Yueniang replies: "It's your child, after

all...Proceed with the moxabustion if you like. I do not have the authority to make any decision 孩兒是你的孩兒，隨你灸。我不敢張主” (Roy 470, chapter 59, with modifications). What Yueniang says here may sound valid and reasonable. However, we should keep in mind that when Guange is healthy, Yueniang even makes marriage arrangements for Guange and does not ask permission of anyone beforehand (chapter 41). But when it comes to the decision regarding whether or not to cauterize Guange, Yueniang claims that she does not have the authority to make such a decision. Zhang Zhupo probably sees the contradiction in Yueniang’s argument and calls her reply “absurd 奇談” (879, chapter 59). As regards Yulou, the Third Lady, she seems to disappear after Guange gets sick. Only after Guange is dead does she make a comment: “Just as I suggested before, he was sure to wait for that time before slipping away. He was born at 4:00 PM, and he died at 4:00 PM; and even the dates are the same. Both events occurred on the twenty-third. Only the months were different. He lived exactly a round one year and two months” (Roy 477, chapter 59). Yulou’s tone is marked by a strangely technical precision with time and date. We cannot find any trace of emotion in Yulou’s remark. She sounds as if she were not talking about a child who lived with her and has just died, but rather about a machine that has just broken down. In a word, Yulou exhibits no sympathy regarding Guange’s death. Sun Xue’e, the Fourth Lady, appears to be on Ping’er’s side after Guange’s death. However, she does not really attempt to comfort Ping’er for the loss of her child. Xue’e instead uses the Guange’s death as an opportunity to vent her suppressed resentment towards Jinlian, her mortal foe. Just as she tells Ping’er:

After all, you are still in the springtime of your youth. Surely there is no reason to fear that you won’t be able to have another child in the future. But hereabouts walls have cracks and fences have ears, so we’ve got to be careful what we say. As far as she’s



concerned, those who devote their every thought to scheming only end up bringing calamity on their own heads. Who does not know that she resented the fact that you gave birth to this child?...Who knows how many times she has done her best to bury the rest of us alive? She is never content unless she is able to monopolize the attentions of our husband. But if he chooses to spend the night in anyone else's room, she gets so angry she scarcely cares whether she is dead or alive. Fortunately you are all aware that in the past our husband seldom ventured into my place in the rear compound. But when he happened to do so on one occasion recently, you all saw the way in which she was all of a heap engaging in chitter-chatter at my expense with her maids behind my back...I may not say anything about it, but every day, I'm going to keep my eyes peeled where she's concerned. Who knows what sort of a bad end that whore will come to in the future? (Roy 485, chapter 59, with slight modifications)

你又年少青春，愁到明日養不出來也怎的？這裡牆有縫，壁有眼，俺每不好說的。他使心用心，反累己身。誰不知他氣不忿你養這孩子？…不知你我也被他話理了幾遭哩！只要漢子常守著他，便好。到人屋裡睡一夜兒，他就氣生氣死。早時前者你每都知道，漢子等閒不到我後邊。到了一遭兒，你看背地亂都唧喳成一塊。對著他姐兒每，說我長，道我短。…俺每也不言語，每日洗著眼兒看著他。這個淫婦，到明日還不知怎麼死哩！

The first few sentences of Xue'e's remark relate to Ping'er loss of child, but the emphasis soon shifts to Xue'e anger towards Jinlian. "It takes Xue'e no more than three sentences to get preoccupied with her own matters 三句話就說到自己心事," (789, chapter 59, my translation) to use the words of the commentator of the *xiuxiang* edition. In the second part of her remark, Xue'e makes no effort to comfort Ping'er. She just keeps complaining about how Jinlian mistreats her and curses Jinlian. Zhang Zhupo calls Xue'e "a person with a load on her mind 有心事人" (887, chapter 59, my translation) in his interlinear commentaries on this passage. Zhang is correct. What matters to Xue'e is not the death of Guange or Ping'er's grievance *per se*, but the "load on her mind 心事". She just wants to use this tragedy to

speak out about what is already in her mind. With no one around to support and comfort her, Ping'er is doomed to death. She becomes sick after her son's death, and soon dies.

Even after Ping'er's death, Ximen's women remain jealous of her due to Ximen's excessive sorrow over her death, which indicates his enduring love for her. We can easily see their jealousy given the cold responses these women exhibit in response to Ping'er's demise. For example, after Ping'er's death, Wu Yueniang is quite unsatisfied with Ximen's reaction to Ping'er's death. She is uncomfortable with Ximen's sorrow over Ping'er death and believes that his expressions of sorrow are excessive and unreasonable: "Look at him [Ximen]! She [Ping'er] is dead, and you will not bring her back to life by crying 你看恁勞叨！死也死了，你沒的哭的他活！" (Egerton 146, chapter 62, with modifications). Yueniang also thinks that Ximen is too fuzzy about the ritualistic procedures that follow Ping'er death. When Wu Yueniang sees the portrait of Ping'er done by the Painter Han that Ximen hires, Yueniang makes the following complaint: "He [Ximen] made such a trouble! We do not know where the dead woman has gone. What need was there to have a portrait painted...成精鼓搗，人也不知死到那裡去了，又描起影來了！" (Egerton 153, chapter 63, with modifications). The Third Lady Meng Yulou is also jealous of the great esteem in which Ximen holds Ping'er within his heart. However, as seen in the discussion in the first chapter, Yulou seldom expresses her feelings directly. She instead prefers to manipulate other people in order to satisfy her desires. For example, when Wu Yueniang complains that Ximen neither washes his face nor combs his hair after Ping'er death, Yulou says: "so he has not dressed his hair or washed his face?! 他原來還沒梳頭洗臉哩" (Egerton 146, chapter 62, with modifications). Many critics believe that this sentence shows that Yulou is a cold person. For example, the

commentator of the *xiuxiang* edition of *Jin Ping Mei* concludes from this sentence that “Yulou has always been indifferent towards Ximen 玉樓於西門慶原不關心” (846, chapter 62, my translation). Zhang Zhupo also reads the coldness within Yulou from this sentence (946, chapter 62). I agree with these critics that this sentence may reflect Yulou’s indifference towards Ximen, but I also see this sentence as being indicative of Yulou’s deliberate repetition of Yueniang’s complaint. The primary purpose for this repetition is to draw the attention of the other concubines to Ximen’s deep sorrow over Ping’er death and deepen Yueniang’s resentment against Ximen. Yulou’s manipulation indicates that like Yueniang, she is also jealous of Ping’er and dislikes Ximen’s reaction to Ping’er death. However, she wants the other women to speak for her and succeeds in getting them to do so. Jinlan hears what Yulou says, joins the conversation, and she and Yueniang take turns complaining that Ximen cares more about Ping’er’s death than his own health and hygiene (chapter 62). There is another example of Yulou’s manipulation. A few days after Ping’er’s death, Ximen cries when he sees a scene from *Yuhuan Ji*, a play about the romance that lasts two lifetimes between Wei Gao 韋臯 and Yuxiao 玉簫 (chapter 63). Jinlian notices the tears coming from Ximen’s eyes, but does not know why he cries. Yulou immediately explains that this scene in which Yuxiao sends her portrait to her lover Wei Gao immediately before her death reminds Ximen of Ping’er (Tian 187): “the plays are intended to express sorrow, joy, separations and meetings. A certain scene in this play must have touched his [Ximen’s] heart. This scene reminds him of someone, just as a saddle may remind us of a dead horse. That is why he cries 樂有悲歡離合，想必看見那一段兒觸著他心，他覷物思人，見鞍思馬，纔落淚來。” (Egerton 164, chapter 63, with changes). Apparently, Yulou aims to provoke Ximen’s

concubines by showing that Ximen remains unable to forget the deceased Ping'er. However, Yulou's attempt at manipulation is not as effective as the previous attempt. Although Jinlian wants to further discuss Yulou's explanation, Yueniang asks Jinlian to remain quiet and focus on the play. Yulou realizes Yueniang's lack of interest, immediately takes the side of Yueniang, and half-seriously criticizes Jinlian: "I do not know what makes my Sixth Sister [Jinlian] talk so much 俺六姐不知怎的，只好快說嘴" (Egerton 164, chapter 63, with modifications). In a word, although Ping'er is already dead, Yueniang, Yulou and Jinlian remain jealous of her and find different ways to express their jealousy.

Ximen Qing is aware of Ping'er helplessness in his household. When Ping'er dies, Ximen cries over her body: "Heaven wills my death. You have been in this house three years and not a single day's real pleasure have you had. It is all my fault 天殺了我西門慶了！姐姐，你在我家三年光景，一日好日子沒過，都是我坑陷了你了！" (Egerton 142, chapter 62). The pleasure that Ximen refers to here is apparently not materialistic enjoyment. As seen in the first chapter, Ping'er is the wealthiest among Ximen's wives, and many of Ximen's women, especially Pan Jinlian, are jealous of her wealth and lifestyle. This pleasure must have a psychological or emotional connotation. But who deprives Ping'er of this psychological or emotional pleasure? Although Ximen blames himself, Wu Yueniang, the First Lady, immediately senses that Ximen is actually accusing the group of his wives for the death of Ping'er. She tells Ximen's other wives: "Look at the fuss that he [Ximen] has made. Cry if you will, but put her down. You must not cry face to face with her like that. If the foul air from her mouth comes to you it will make you ill. *And what do you mean by saying that she never had a single happy day? If she did not, who did? We ourselves cannot decide how*

*long we shall live. We shall all have to go the same way* 你看韶刀，哭兩聲兒去開手罷了！一個死人身上，也沒個忌諱，就臉擰著臉兒哭。倘忽口裡惡氣，撲著你是的！他沒過好日子，誰過好日子來？半晌時不借，留的住他倒好。各人壽數到了，誰人不打這條路兒來” (Egerton 142, chapter 62, with modifications, my emphasis). Yueniang apparently attempts to defend the group composed of Ximen’s wives against Ximen’s accusations: Ping’er is also a member of that group, everyone in that group has similar experiences in Ximen’s house, other group members are no happier than Ping’er, and Ping’er dies because it is time for her to die. While Ximen’s complaint is subtle, the next move Ximen takes after Ping’er death is obviously aimed at the group of wives. He asks Licentiate Wen 溫秀才 to use *jingfu* 荆婦 [my humbled wife] as the title of Li Ping’er in the obituary notice (chapter 63). However, *jingfu* is the title that is reserved exclusively for the legitimate wife. On one hand, Ximen calls Ping’er *jingfu* because he loves Ping’er so much. On the other hand, by calling Ping’er *jingfu*, he also deprecates all of his other wives: he moves Ping’er, who ranks last among Ximen’s wives, up to the highest rank. He is apparently discontented not with a single wife such as Pan Jinlian but rather with the entire group of wives. In a similar vein, Ximen attacks his group of wives again by asking Privy Councilor Du 杜中書 to write “The Coffin of Ximen’s *gongren*, Captain of the Royal Guard 詔封錦衣西門慶恭人李氏柩” (Egerton 157, chapter 63, with modifications) on the Ping’er’s funeral banderole. Ying Bojue, one of Ximen’s closest friends, points out that the title *gongren* 恭人 can be applied only to the legitimate wife.

Although Ximen appears to be the most powerful person in his house, his group of wives is collectively as powerful, if not more powerful than, him. The sycophant Ying Bojue,

probably the most cunning character in this novel, knows the power of this group. Consciously or unconsciously, he assumes the role of the speaker for this group. He even goes against Ximen's desire in order to satisfy the desires of this group of wives. Every time when Ximen wants to call Ping'er *jingfu* or *gongren*, titles reserved exclusively for the legitimate wife, Bojue is the first to step forward to stop him from doing so, saying that Yueniang is Ximen's legitimate wife. Bojue does so not to maintain the social hierarchy in Ximen's family, but to protect himself. He fully understands that he cannot afford to offend this powerful group of wives if he wants to maintain his close relationship with Ximen. For example, when Ximen listens to a song sung by boy actors, he begins to miss Ping'er again and tears stream from his eyes. When Bojue asks him if this song reminds him of the deceased Ping'er, Ximen replies: "Brother Ying. You think my mind is always upon her. Look at those dishes. When she was alive, she used to arrange them with her own hands. Now she is dead, we have to have the maid do it. You can see for yourself whether the dishes are properly set out. There is not even a dish that fits my taste! 應二哥，你只嗔我說。有他在，就是他經手整定；從他沒了，隨著丫鬟掇弄，你看都相甚模樣？好應口菜也沒一根我吃" (Egerton 192, chapter 65, with modifications). Bojue replies: "Brother, don't talk like that. The death of the Fifth Lady has hurt you badly, so you talk in this way. But I am afraid that you may hurt the feelings of *the other ladies* 哥休說此話，你心間疼不過，便是這等說。恐一時冷淡了別的嫂子們心" (1049, chapter 65, my translation and emphasis). A cunning sycophant who knows well the power structure in Ximen's house, he knows that it would be dangerous to stand on the other side of the "wives group". Zhang Zhupo calls this remark of Bojue "crafty 賊" (993, chapter 65). Bojue is right to be crafty. Pan Jinlian overhears this

conversation, and reports it to Yueniang. The two become jealous again and begin to complain about Ximen. However, the two are obviously satisfied with Bojue's stance on this matter because none of them mentions him in their complaints. Although their complaint may have little impact on Ximen, their dissatisfaction with Bojue may have a devastating impact on him. Bojue depends on Ximen's favors to make a living, and cannot afford to have these women saying something against him to Ximen. Similarly revealing are the different attitudes that Bojue and Privy Councilor Du have regarding using the title *gongren* on Ping'er's funeral banderole. Privy Councilor Du is the person that Ximen invites to write an inscription on the banderole. He does not object to applying the title *gongren* to Ping'er, his reason being that: "This lady bore a son, so it does not go against the etiquette 曾生過子，於禮也無礙" (Egerton 157, chapter 63, with modifications). Bojue, on the other hand, completely objects to the use of this title: "Now that the legitimate wife is still alive, we can't do that 見有正室夫人在，如何使得" (Egerton 157, chapter 63, with modifications). The author does not tell us why Privy Councilor Du supports Ximen's proposal. There is one possible reason: Du is a one-time employee of Ximen. The best strategy for him to maximize his profit is to fully satisfy the desire of Ximen at that time because Ximen is the one who pays him. He does not need to care about the feelings of Ximen's wives. On the other hand, Bojue is a long-time "employee" of Ximen. In order to maximize his long-term profit, he must take into consideration the interests of Ximen's wives who have a huge influence on Ximen's desires. Bojue makes this point clear when he tells Licentiate Wen that Ximen should not call Ping'er *jingfu* [my humbled wife] in the obituary notice: "It is contrary to polite usage. Now that Madame Wu is his legitimate wife, we cannot do that. If it is sent out the way he wishes,

people will talk. Uncle Wu, especially, will be offended 這個理上說不通，見有如今吳家嫂子在正室，如何使得？這一個字出去，不被人議論，就是吳大哥心內也不自在” (Egerton 155, chapter 63). Critics have pointed out that politeness is not really Bojue’s concern. He takes this title seriously due to Wu Yueniang, the representative of the “wives group”, and Uncle Wu, an official and brother of Yueniang, who is Yueniang’s closest relative (Tian 187).

This “wives group” is so powerful that even Ximen Qing sometimes finds it difficult to satisfy his desire due to their existence. Ironically enough, Ximen Qing creates this “wives group” in order to satisfy his own desire. However, as soon as this “wives group” comes into being, this group develops its own desires. In other words, these wives are no longer simply objects of Ximen’s desire, but have desires of their own as well. Their desires compete with Ximen’s desire and often counteract his desire. Ximen wants to protect Ping’er but fails. Ping’er is dead, and Ximen is sad and angry. But whom can he really blame? None of his wives is innocent, but Ximen is not ruthless enough to punish everyone and destroy the “wives group” that he himself created. What he can do after Ping’er’s death is to blame and punish irrelevant people such as servants: “what with his grief and what with the strain he had had, he became very irritable about the fifth night-watch. He cursed the maids and kicked the boys 西門慶熬了一夜沒睡的人，前後又亂了一五更，心中已著了悲慟，神思恍惚，只是沒好氣，罵丫頭、踢小廝” (Egerton 146, chapter 62). Even Chen Jingji, his son-in-law, has become a victim of his wrath. Not concerned with the fact that Jingji’s mother is still alive, he forces Jingji to “take the part of her [Ping’er’s] son 強著陳經濟做孝子” (Egerton 154, chapter 63) and perform a series of rituals that a son is supposed to perform throughout



Ping'er's funeral and memorials<sup>36</sup>. His desire to express his dissatisfaction with the "wives group"—his attempts to call Ping'er *gongren* or *jingfu*—is also held in check. As seen above, his wives do not even need to step forward to stop Ximen from doing so. Ying Bojue has already spoken for them, and he succeeds in changing Ximen's mind.

After Ping'er's death, Ximen appears to be so helpless for a time. He even loses interest in the real world from which he once obtained so much pleasure. Let us examine how Ximen behaves during a drama performance after Ping'er's death. About a week after Ping'er's death, many of Ximen's relatives and friends come to spend a night in Ximen's house, and Ximen hired a group of actors to stage the plays that evening. The author lists the names of almost everyone present:

Ximen Qing had fifteen tables arranged for his guests in the temporary building. Master Qiao, the two Uncles Wu, Hua the Elder, Uncle Shen, Licentiate Ni, Licentiate Wen, Dr. Ren, Li Zhi, Huang Si, Ying Bojue, Xie Xida, Zhu Nianshi, Sun Guazui, Bai Laiguang, Chang Shijie, Fu Zixin, Han Daoguo, Gan Chusheng, Pen Dichuan, Wu Shunchen, two nephews of Ximen, and six or seven neighbors...In the great hall, on one side of the large screen, sat the two aunts Wu, Aunt Yang, old woman Pan, another Aunt Wu, Aunt Meng, Third Sister Zheng and Big Sister Duan, with the ladies of Ximen's household. On the other side were Chunmei, Yuxiao, Lanxiang, Yingchun and Xiaoyu. They stood in a group and watched the play. (Egerton 161-162, chapter 63)

晚夕西門慶在大棚內放十五張卓席，為首的 就是喬大戶、吳大舅、吳二舅、花大舅、沈姨夫、韓姨夫、倪秀才、溫秀才、任醫官、李智、黃四、應伯爵、謝希太、祝日念、孫寡嘴、白來創、常時節、傅日新、韓道國、甘出身、賁地傳、吳舜臣兩個外甥，還有街坊六七位人…這裡廳內左邊弔簾子看戲的，大妗子、二妗子、楊姑娘、潘媽媽、吳大姨、孟大姨、吳舜臣媳婦、鄭三姐、段大姐並本家月娘眾姊妹，右邊弔簾子戲的，

---

<sup>36</sup> See Zhang Zhupo's commentary on this incident in chapter 63 (955). Zhang's commentary states that Jingji is "having really bad luck 活晦氣".

是春梅、玉簫、蘭香、迎春、小玉都擠著觀看…

In addition to them, the three prostitutes—Li Guijie, Zheng Aiyue, and Wu Yin'er—are also present (1017, chapter 63). In total, more than fifty people watch this play, excluding minor servants and maids. This is a really noisy crowd: as usual, Ying Bojue and Li Guijie banter and flirt with each other. Xiaoyu teases Yuxiao because her name is the same as the protagonist in the play, and playfully pushes her. Yuxiao hits Chunmei and spills the tea in Chunmei's hand. Chunmei then scolds Yuxiao. Strangely enough, although he is surrounded by this large, noisy crowd, Ximen still does not feel very lively. He asks the actors to “perform the most lively part of their play” (Egerton 164, chapter 63). Maybe during this rare moment in *Jin Ping Mei*, Ximen is disappointed with this lively, noisy world constituted by his women, relatives and friends who have satisfied his desires and given him so much pleasure, because none of them truly shares his grief over Ping'er's death. As Tian Xiaofei puts it, “the sorrow of a libertine looks more pitiful when no one shares the sorrow with him 則浪子的悲哀，因為無人能夠分擔而顯得越發可憐” (188). Tian is correct. However, I would like to add that this passage is not so much a description of Ximen's sorrow as a description of how difficult it is for Ximen to experience this sorrow. He has to fight his way through the large crowd surrounding him to focus his mind on the deceased Ping'er. He stops Bojue and Guijie from bantering and flirting, and he sends a servant to keep Xiaoyu, Yuxiao and Chunmei quiet. In this sense, Ximen does not really want to be a part of this lively, noisy authentic world. Ximen instead prefers to immerse himself in the lively virtual world of the play in order to insulate himself from the lively outside world and focus on experiencing his private feelings:

Ximen Qing bade Shu Tong: “tell the actors to perform the most lively part of their play”.

The music began, and one of the actors came to ask whether they should play the scene in which the portrait is sent. "I don't care what it is," Ximen Qing said, "as long as it is something lively." The actress plays the role of Yuxiao, and sings for a while. While she was singing, 'Never more shall I see you in this world, so I send you this portrait of me,' Ximen Qing suddenly thought of the demeanors of Li Ping'er during her illness. He was so touched that he could not help but shed tears. He took a handkerchief from his sleeve and dried his eyes. (Egerton 164, chapter 63, with modifications)

西門慶令書童催促子弟，快弔關目上來，分付揀省熱鬧處唱罷。須臾打動鼓板，扮末的上來。請問西門慶：「小的寄真容的那一摺，唱罷？」西門慶道：「我不管你，只要熱鬧。」貼旦扮玉簫唱了一回。西門慶看唱到「今生難會，固此上寄丹青」一句，忽想起李瓶兒病時模樣，不覺心中感觸起來，止不住眼中淚落，袖中不住取汗巾兒擦拭。

After a series of difficulties, Ximen finally succeeds in keeping himself away from the public and gives himself time to experience sorrow over Ping'er's death.

### **“Wives Group”: A Network of Desires**

I use the term “wives group” to describe Ximen's wives not because they constitute a homogeneous group in which each wife of Ximen is similar in terms of ideas, interests and desires. On the contrary, Ximen's wives have divergent desires. “Network” may be a better word to describe these women because their desires intertwine with each other and form a network. They may exhibit similar desires at given moment, but they fight against each other for their individual desires the next moment. Therefore, although Wu Yueniang and Pan Jinlian appear to be the leaders of this group, they do not actually constitute the nexus of these wives' desires. For example, immediately after Ping'er death, Pan Jinlian and Wu Yueniang exhibit the same desires. They are discontented with Ximen's sorrow over Ping'er death because both of them are jealous of Ping'er. However, within a few days Jinlian makes

an attempt to control Yuexiao, a maid of Yueniang, in order to get inside information about Yueniang (chapter 64). Jinlian happens to view the episode of sexual intercourse between Yuxiao and Huatong, a page boy of Ximen. When Yuxiao begs Jinlian not to disclose this affair to Ximen out of fear that Ximen may punish them, Jinlian forces Yuxiao to promise her three things in exchange for keeping what she knows a secret:

First: whatever happens in your mistress's room, whether important or unimportant, you must tell me all about it. If I hear it from anybody else, and you have not told me, I will never forgive you. Secondly: if I ask you for anything from your mistress's room, you must get it for me. Thirdly: tell me how it is your mistress, who was never with child before, is suddenly going to have a baby. (Egeton 168, chapter 64, with modifications)

一件，你娘房裡但凡大小事兒，就來告我說。你不說，我打聽出，定不饒你。第二件，我但問你要甚麼，你就稍出來與我。第三件，你娘向來沒有身孕，如今他怎生便有了？

Jinlian is apparently treating Yueniang as a competitor, or possibly even as an enemy. After Ping'er's death, Yueniang becomes Jinlian's next target. Jinlian wants to know how Yueniang becomes pregnant because she also wants to conceive a baby. In Ximen's family, the birth of a child, especially a boy, means that the mother will garner more attention from Ximen and achieve more power, as we have seen in Li Ping'er's case. Yueniang's pregnancy thus puts Jinlian in a potentially disadvantageous competitive position. Once Jinlian learns from Yuxiao which medication that Yueniang took to help her become pregnant, she asks for Nun Xue for the same medication in the hope of becoming pregnant (chapter 68). As can be seen from her three requests, Jinlian is actually preparing to wage war against Yueniang. She wants to both take possession of Yueniang's belongings and also obtain the inside information about what is happening in Yueniang's room.

Yueniang is no different than Jinlian. While she and Jinlian share discomfort over

Ximen's deep love for Ping'er, Yueniang's desire soon shifts away from the jealousy over Ping'er to the jealousy over Jinlian. Yueniang does not allow Jinlian to take possession of the fur coat of the deceased Ping'er. When Ximen tries to obtain that coat for Jinlian, Yueniang shows her dissatisfaction with both Jinlian and Ximen:

You [Ximen] don't keep your word...When she [Ping'er] died, you got very angry when anyone suggested sending her maids to serve other ladies, but now it seems all right to give her clothes away. Why does she [Jinlian] stick to this coat rather than wear her own fur coat? It is a good thing that the owner of the coat is dead. If she were alive, you could do nothing more than take a look at this coat (Egerton 346, chapter 74)

你自家把不住自家嘴頭了。他死了，嗔人分散房裡丫頭；相你這等，就沒的話兒說了。他見放皮襖不穿，巴巴兒只要這皮襖穿，早時他死了，你只望這皮襖。他不死，你只要好看一眼兒罷了！

Although Yueniang fails to stop Jinlian from wearing Ping'er's fur coat on this occasion, Yueniang never forgets about this fur coat. She raises this issue again in a major quarrel between herself and Jinlian, and scolds Jinlian for not informing her first about her intention to wear Ping'er's coat. Another reason for that major quarrel is that Yueniang is envious of Jinlian's success in keeping Ximen in her room at night. She complains about this several times and tries to draw Yulou to her side. One night, Yueniang finds that Ximen plans to sleep in Jinlian's room. She becomes angry and says to Yulou: "The fellow [Ximen] doesn't know what he's doing. I think that he would come here and go with you. I can't imagine why he has gone to her again. But, now I come to think of it, she has been looking lovesick these last few days. She doesn't seem able to leave him for a moment 你向恁沒來頭的行貨子！我說他今日進來往你房裡去，如何三不知又摸到他那屋裡去了？這兩日又浪風發起來，只在他

前邊纏！” (Egerton 351, chapter 74). Although on this occasion Yueniang verbally complains about Jinlian, the next time Jinlian asks Ximen to sleep in her room, Yueniang forces Ximen to stay away from Jinlian and spend the night in Yulou’s room. As discussed in the first chapter, Yueniang’s desire is primarily the desire to thwart her competitors’ desires. She does not really care whether Ximen spends the night with her, provided that he does not spend the night with Jinlian, her primary competitor. This one-time success does not satisfy Yueniang. She brings up this issue again during her quarrel with Jinlian:

If you [Jinlian] are not whorish, why did you pull the lattice aside, dash in and ask him to go to your room when he was here in my room yesterday? What do you mean by it? Our husband is a man. He does a man’s work. What crime has he committed that you should tie him with a cord of pig’s hair? You are a worthless creature who knows no sense of propriety. (Egerton 376, chapter 75, with modifications)

不浪的慌？你昨日怎的他在屋裡坐好好兒的，你恰似強汗世界一般，掀著簾子，硬著來人叫他前邊去，是怎麼說？漢子頂天立地，吃辛受苦，犯 了甚麼罪來，你拿豬毛繩子套他？賤不識高低的貨！

The extremely negative words such as “whorish” and “worthless creature” that Yueniang uses to name Jinlian reflect the deep resentment that Yueniang feels towards her. In a word, it is unusual for Yueniang and Jinlian, the two primary figures of the “wives group,” to share the same desire. It is most often the case that their desires are in competition with each other.

Meng Yulou, another key figure in the “wives group”, also has her own desires. Chapter one of this dissertation noted that although she maintains a good relationship with Jinlian, Yulou continues to criticize Jinlian because she is jealous of her. As regards her relationship with Yueniang, Yulou is depicted as being a person who defers to the First Lady. However,

this does not mean that she will sacrifice her own desire for Yueniang. For example, during the sexual bout between Ximen and Jinlian in the Grape Arbor episode, Jinlian left one of her sleeping shoes in the Arbor. Little Iron Rod 小鐵棍, son of Ximen's servant Laizhao 來昭, happens to be nearby. He sees the bout and picks up this red shoe. When Jinlian learns that Little Iron Rod has kept her shoe, she reports it to Ximen and asks him to punish the child. Ximen gives Little Iron Rod a beating, and almost beats him to death. During a course of a casual conversation, Jinlian asks Yulou how Yueniang responded to the "lost shoe incident".

Yulou replies:

She [Yueniang] said, "Right now in this household, chaos is king. The nine-tailed fox fairy has appeared in the world, and has got that benighted ruler so befuddled he'll be banishing his son and divorcing his wife before you know it. Just remember what she did to that servant, Laiwang, who's no longer with us...She [Jinlian] managed to frame him so effectively he was driven out of the household, whereupon she turned her attention to his wife and made her life so unbearable she committed suicide. And now, all on account of a single shoe, she's stirred up enough for a rumpus to startle Heaven and shake the earth...How did it get anywhere where the youngster could pick it up, in the first place?...And now, unable to cover her own embarrassment, she's made a scapegoat of that youngster and he's ended up getting a drubbing. And it's not even over anything important! (Roy 169, chapter 29)

你還說哩！大姐姐好不說你哩！說：“如今這一家子亂世為王，九條尾狐狸精出世了。把昏君禍亂的貶子休妻，想著去了的來旺兒小廝…生兒禍弄的，打發他出去了。把個媳婦又逼臨的吊死了！如今為一隻鞋子，又這等驚天動地反亂。你的鞋好好穿在腳上，怎的教小廝拾了？…如今沒的撋羞，拿小廝頂缸，打他這一頓，又不曾為甚麼大事！”

We can only confirm that the first two sentences appear similar to what Yueniang said before,

but Yulou altered the wording of Yueniang so that the tone acquired a harsher tint than was actually the case. We cannot verify whether the remaining sentences Yulou “quoted” actually came from Yueniang’s mouth. It is possible that Yulou simply makes things up. Moreover, even the first two sentences are quoted without any context being given. Yueniang uses “The nine-tailed fox fairy” to refer to Jinlian when Ximen decides to send Laiwang, Huilian’s husband, to prison, and this has nothing to do with “the lost shoe incident” that occurs at least months later. Yulou herself also appears to agree with Yueniang when she makes that remark (chapter 26). The purpose behind Yulou’s misquotes is obvious: she intends to stir up Jinlian against Yueniang. As Hou Hui points out, one of Yulou’s primary desires is to arouse ill will between people (193). In order to satisfy this desire of hers, it becomes irrelevant that Jinlian is her best friend and ally and that Yueniang is the First Lady. She simply enjoys manipulating other people. The relationship among Yueniang, Yulou and Jinlian is complicated enough. In addition, Ximen’s household also includes Jiao’er, the Second Lady, and Xue’e, the Fourth Lady, each of whom have their own individual desires. In a word, all these women form a network of desires. Yueniang knows this well. When Li Guijie, a singing girl and prostitute, complains about the mutual jealousy and fierce competition that exist in her profession, Yueniang says: “is there truly a difference between those who are in your profession and those who are not? It is the same. Each one is anxious to get the better of the others. Whenever one seems to be securing a little favor, the others conspire to cast her down<sup>37</sup> 你每裡邊與外邊，怎的打偏 別？也是一般，一個不憤一個。那一個有些時道兒，就要躡下去” (Egerton 348, chapter 74, with modifications). Yuexiang’s comment best

---

<sup>37</sup> Egerton’s translation here appears to be corrupted.



summarizes how this “wives group” operates. On one hand, these wives have their own individual desires and compete with each other—“each one is anxious to get the better of the others,” to use Yueniang’s words. On the other hand, they share the same jealousy, the same desire to “cast her down” when one of their members receives special attention from Ximen. That is one reason why Jinlian becomes the next target of this “wives group” after Ping’er’s death. After the quarrel between Yueniang and Jinlian, these wives—Xue’e and Jiao’er in particular—again surround Yueniang to complain about Jinlian (chapter 75). Soon after Ximen’s death, Xue’e suggests selling Jinlian, Yueniang agrees and drives Jinlian out of Ximen’s house (chapter 86). This sale eventually leads to the death of Jinlian. Wu Song pretends to buy her and marry her, and brutally kills Jinlian to avenge for the death of his brother, Wu Da (chapter 87). As regards Yulou, Jinlian’s best friend, she neither attempts to persuade Yueniang not to sell Jinlian nor does she warn Jinlian against the potential danger in her marriage with Wu Song (chapter 87). When most of the wives share the same desire, this “wives group” becomes so powerful that it can destroy almost anyone, be it the strong and cunning Jinlian or the meek and gentle Ping’er.

### **Deconstructing Ximen Qing’s Desires**

As seen from the analysis of Ximen Qing’s desire, there is no single locus of desire in *Jin Ping Mei*. Ximen’s wives are “created” by Ximen’s desires. However, once they become part of Ximen’s life, each becomes yet another source of desire. Their desires compete with his. Moreover, the desires of the “wives group” can also be deconstructed. As seen above, the desires of the “wives group” do not emanate from a central source, but are intertwined with

each other and form a network. In addition, even Ximen's desire can be further deconstructed. While the desires of Ximen and the desires of his wives sometimes conflict with each other, for the most part, the desires of Ximen and the desires of the wives are depicted not as being in opposition to each other, but rather as influencing each other. In this sense, Ximen's desire can no longer be considered as simply his own unadulterated desire. For example, chapters 11 and 12 of *Jin Ping Mei* present Ximen as a man who can punish his women at will. He beats Sun Xue'e, whips Pan Jinlian, and then cuts off some of Pan's hair. However, the truth is that Ximen winds up being covertly manipulated again and again by his women in order to satisfy their desires. They manipulate Ximen in order to get him to punish those they hate by telling him things calculated to make him exasperated about their enemies. For example, Jinlian tells Ximen: "I certainly never loved you just for your money, and now that I have joined my fate to yours, how can you let anyone abuse me so? She (Sun Xue'e) said I had done in my husband (Wu Da), a thousand times, if not ten thousand times...我當初又不曾圖你錢財，自恁跟了你來；如何今日交人這等欺負！千也說我擺殺漢子，萬也說我擺殺漢子...(Roy 214, chapter 11)". Ximen immediately becomes enraged at Sun Xue'e. He does not want the death of Wu Da mentioned, because he was involved in the murder of Wu Da. Upon hearing what Pan said, "[l]ike a whirlwind he (Ximen) descended upon the kitchen, seized Xue'e by the hair, and proceeded to beat her with a short stick as hard as he could 一陣風走到後邊，採過雪娥頭髮來，儘力拏短棍打了幾下"(Roy 214). Sun Xue'e, together with Li Jiao'er, Ximen's second wife, uses the same strategy to retaliate. Aware that Ximen is a jealous and domineering husband, they inform Ximen about Pan's affair with a servant. Ximen's response is predictable. "(a)nger flared up in his heart, and malice accrued in his gall 聽了怒從心上

起，惡向膽邊生” (Roy 234, chapter 12). Ximen first has the servant beaten and then whips Pan. Ximen’s power over his women therefore does not necessarily mean that he is the subject of desire. Just as is the case with all of his women, his subjectivity is also limited. Although Ximen is the master of his family, his subjectivity is constantly being influenced, shaped and changed by his women. Pang Chunmei is Pan’s maid and is herself a manipulator. When Ximen asks Chunmei if he should continue to whip Pan: “how could she (Jinlian) have had anything to do with the slave? This is all something fabricated by someone who is jealous of Mother (Jinlian) and me. Father, you should make your own judgment...娘肯與那奴才？這箇都是人氣不憤俺娘兒們，作做出這樣事來。爹你也要個主張…”(Roy 237, chapter 12, with some changes). We cannot conclude that Ximen does not possess any desire here: he knows what he desires; it is he who wants to beat these women. What he may not know is that his desire to beat these women is heavily influenced by the desires of others. We can even say that in this situation Ximen’s desire is the outgrowth of the desires of others. Just as is the case with the desires of the “wives group,” Ximen’s desires do not emanate from a single source because his desires originate not only from Ximen himself and but also from those surrounding him.

In addition to the deconstruction of Ximen Qing’s desires and his women’s desires, the novel *Jin Ping Mei* undermines the notion that desire comes primarily from a single source. In *Jin Ping Mei*, when a character has certain desires, another character immediately also becomes involved, leading to three, four, and more characters becoming involved. Each of these characters has their own desires, and all of these desires constitute a web without a center. Hou Hui 侯會 offers a good example in his book *Food and Money in Jin Ping Mei*:

*Exploring Human Nature in Late Ming Dynasty from Eating and Dressing* 食貨金瓶梅：從穿衣吃飯看晚明人性: Miao Qing 苗青, Chen San 陳三 and Wen Ba 翁八 murder Miao Tianxiu, a wealthy merchant, on the boat in order to steal his wealth (chapter 47). Although Miao, Chen and Wen are the ones who originally desired the money, several other people become involved soon after the original three steal the money. Eventually, the money that they steal is divided among many people (Hou 293-5). Let us look at another example. Wang Liu'er, wife of Han Daoguo, has an affair with Daoguo's brother, Han the Second 韓二. This kind of illicit desire is supposed to be kept private. However, in *Jin Ping Mei*, there are few well-kept secrets. Several young scamps in Wang Liu'er's neighborhood learn about this affair and catch Wang and Han while they are engaging in fornication. The scamps want to send the two to the government. Upon learning about this, Han Daoguo, Wang's husband, asks for Ying Bojue's help. Bojue speaks with Ximen, who immediately releases Wang. The next day when this case is presented to Ximen, he orders that a beating be given to those who spied on Liu'er and Han and then has them imprisoned. The relatives of the scamps become scared. They come to Ying Bojue, give him 40 taels of silver, and "beg him to intervene with Ximen Qing" (Roy 293, chapter 34). Bojue offers to give Shu Tong 書童, one of Ximen's favorite page boys, 15 taels of silver, in his exchange for his help in obtaining the release of the scamps. Shu Tong agrees, but asks for 20 taels instead of 15 taels. Shu Tong then uses 1 tael and 5 maces of silver to buy some delicacies for Li Ping'er, and asks her to intercede on behalf of the scamps. Ping'er agrees to help, and then asks Shu Tong to share the delicacies and the wine with her. Shu Tong's face turns red after drinking the wine. When Ximen comes home, he is attracted by the pleasing contrast formed by the red and the white on Shu Tong's

face<sup>38</sup>, after which he and Shu Tong engage in sexual activities. Shu Tong shares the remaining delicacies and wine with his fellow servants. However, he forgets to invite Ping An 平安, a servant, to eat with them. Ping An becomes irritated, and informs Pan Jinlian about Shu Tong's drinking and eating in Ping'er's room and his homosexual relationship with Ximen (chapter 34). Jinlian satirizes Ping'er on several occasions, suggesting that she and Shu Tong are having an affair. Lai An 來安, another servant of Ximen, overhears Lai Wang's conversation with Jinlian and reports it to Shu Tong. Shu Tong becomes angry with Lai Wang, and tells Ximen that Lai Wang was eavesdropping on them the day when he and Ximen were engaged in sexual intercourse (chapter 35). Ximen is exasperated, and finds an opportunity to give Lai Wang a beating, "with the result that the skin was broken, the flesh was split, and his [Lai Wang's] haunches were completely covered with weals" (Roy 320, chapter 35). The author of *Jin Ping Mei* designed the novel in such a manner that a secret is never meant to be kept for long. Someone either overhears it or eavesdrops on it, and what was once a secret soon spreads to many others.

Many critics such as Katherine Carlitz, Andrew Plaks and Martin Huang have read this voyeurism on the level of the relationship between the text and its readers, and considered the voyeurism to be the author's strategy of "luring the reader into a vicarious affirmation of the reality of his illusory fictional world" (Plaks 151). I would like to add that this sort of voyeurism could also be read on the purely textual level. The numerous instances of voyeurism indicate that desire does not exist simply between character A and character B. Once desire arises, characters C, D, E, F, G also become involved, and their own desires with

---

<sup>38</sup> I use Roy's translation with modifications (298, chapter 34). The following is the original Chinese: "西門慶見他吃了酒，臉上透出紅白來，紅馥馥唇兒，露著一口糯更牙兒，如何不愛？"

them, thus creating a web of desires. As the story progresses, it becomes apparent that other people's desires soon come to have little or nothing to do with the affair between Wang Liu'er and Han the Second. I am not saying that the desires of Liu'er and Han are unimportant. If the two did not have an affair, a series of incidents would not occur. What I am saying is that neither Wang Liu'er nor Han the Second can be called the source of desire. Without the desires of Wang and Han, Ying Bojue will still use his tie to Ximen to make a profit, Pan Jinlian will still find opportunities to attack Li Ping'er, her primary competitor, and the servants of Ximen will still tell on each other as the occasion demands. In a word, desire as represented in *Jin Ping Mei* never originates from a single, primary source.

In *Jin Ping Mei*, the desires form a network within which everyone is trapped, both as the subject of desire and as the object. In other words, desire as represented in this novel is more structural than personal. Therefore, neither Ximen's death nor the death of Pan can put desire to a halt. The novel gives a strong sense of repetitiveness that stretches into infinity. Ximen and Pan are dead, but their lives are replicated by Chen Jingji and Pan Chunmei respectively, although in different ways. The novel ends with Dai An, who was once Ximen's servant, taking over all of Ximen's properties and becoming the new Ximen. This ending creates the impression that Ximen Qing will continue to be replicated despite the death of the original Ximen. Nowhere is this repetitiveness and sense of infinitude better demonstrated than in the incarnation scene in the final chapter of the book. Deceased characters are reborn, with little change in their backgrounds in the Northern Capital of China. There is the prospect, if not the promise, that the network of desires will be reformed, and that the story of *Jin Ping Mei* will be repeated over and over forever (Carlitz 141). Showing the structural nature of

desire allows *Jin Ping Mei* to achieve a transcendence which critics have noted. Xiaofei Tian states in the preface to her *Qiushuitang on Jin Ping Mei* 秋水堂論金瓶梅: "... I think that the men and the women in *Jin Ping Mei* can exist in any age. They do not need to wear the clothes of the Ming Dynasty or of the Song Dynasty... In our lives, we have people like Ximen Qing, Grand Preceptor Cai, Ying Bojue, Li Ping'er, Pan Chumei and Pan Jinlian. They are not only active in the land of China, but also frequent the luxurious hotels in Hong Kong and in New York...因我以爲《金瓶梅》裏面的男男女女是存在於任何時代的，不必一定穿著明朝或者宋朝的衣服...我們的生活中，原不缺少西門慶、蔡太師、應伯爵、李瓶兒、龐春梅、潘金蓮。他們鮮衣亮衫地活躍在中國的土地上，出沒於香港與紐約的豪華酒店..." (13, my translation).

### **Desires, Chances and Fates**

*Jin Ping Mei* presents a world of desires. As noted above, almost every character both desires and is desired. However, this does not explain why different characters in this novel follow different courses of life and achieve different endings. For example, Pan Jinlian has an extremely miserable destiny. She is thrown out of Ximen's house and dies a bloody death—she is disemboweled by Wu Song, brother of her ex-husband Wu Da (chapter 87). We can argue that Pan's desire causes her death. However, how can we use this argument to explain the life of Li Jiao'er, the second wife of Ximen, or that of Wang Liu'er, wife of Han Daoguo, who is the manager of Ximen's silk shop? Given how greedy and licentious Jiao'er and Liu'er are, they deserved destinies similar to Pan's. However, at the end of the novel, Li becomes the second wife of a rich man, Zhang Er'guan 張二官, who takes over Ximen's

office after his death. Wang marries her husband's brother, Han the Second, after her husband's death (Tian 259). It is suggested that both Li and Wang live fairly peaceful lives after their marriages (Tian 259). Why such a huge difference between their destinies and Jinlian's? In addition, it may be true that Ximen is doomed to die due to his insatiable sexual desire, but the death of his mirror character, Chen Jingji, his son-in-law, appears to have very little to do with his sexual desires, although he is also a notorious womanizer. The conclusion of the novel show that Jingji becomes the lover of Pang Chunmei, a former maid of Pan, and lives in the house of General Zhou, the husband of Pang, all the while pretending that he is Pang's brother. General Zhou is a chief military officer in Shandong Province. He has a trusted servant, Zhang Sheng. Zhang's brother-in-law Zhang the Second takes advantage of Zhang's power and acts as a bully in the local brothels. Zhang the Second not only bullies Jingji but also beats the mother of Chen's mistress. Chen complains to Pang, who agrees to find a way to kill Zhang Sheng, on whose power Zhang the Second relies. However, Zhang overhears their conversation when he is patrolling around the house. He becomes angry, breaks into Chen's room and kills Jingji (chapter 99). If Zhang had not overheard this conversation, Jingji would not have been killed. In this sense, Jingji's death is accidental.

Therefore, *Jin Ping Mei* touches on an important question: what is the relationship between desire and chance? This is a complicated question. On one hand, a character's desire shapes the course of his/her life in the novel. For example, Pan Jinlian's death is closely related to the nature of her desires. I have argued before that Pan's desire is more or less masochistic. Her masochistic desire blinds her, which is why she accepts Wu Song's proposal. Even Wu Yueniang, who is less intelligent than Pan, realizes that this proposal is just a trap



set by Wu Song: “when Wu Yueniang heard this (the news that Jinlian is going to marry Wu Song), she was sorry...Afterwards, she said to Meng Yulou: ‘Pan Jinlian will die at this man’s (Wu Song’s) hands. He is a man ready to kill for no reason whatever, and he will not spare her’月娘聽了，暗中跌腳...與孟玉樓說：‘往後死在他小叔子手裡罷了！那漢子殺人，不斬眼，豈肯幹休？’” (Egerton 191, chapter 87). When Wu Song punishes and tortures Pan, she makes no attempt to cry for help, which is contrary to the image portrayed throughout the novel of being a smart vixen who knows how to protect herself and is not easily intimidated. Only when Pan finds that Wu Song is going to kill her does she begin to shriek for help (Egerton 193, chapter 87). As noted in chapter one of this dissertation, it is likely that Jinlian, due to her masochistic desire, regards Wu Song’s torture as being similar to what happened to her in the Grape Arbor, where Ximen’s violent actions are prerequisites for her sexual pleasure. Therefore, Jinlian’s desire leads to her death.

On the other hand, we can find that the role of desire is also problematized in *Jin Ping Mei*. Desire is not always the sole deterministic force in an individual’s life. Random incidents also play a key role in shaping the course of a character’s life. For example, Pan Jinlian’s death is more or less accidental. After Pan is forced to leave Ximen’s house, many men—his lover Chen Jingji, Magnate He 何官人, Zhang Erguan and General Zhou—try to buy her from Wang Po, a go-between and procuress. However, for one reason or another, Pan does not get sold to them before Wu Song comes along. In this case, we can clearly see the power of fate or chance: if Pan were to have fallen into the hands of some other go-betweens such as Auntie Xue 薛嫂 or Auntie Wen 文嫂, who were less greedy than Wang Po, if Chen Jingji had a hundred taels of silver, or if Magnate He, Zhang Erguan or General Zhou had not

tried to bargain with Wang Po over Jinlian's price, Jinlian would have escaped Wu Song's revenge. In this sense, Pan's death is also the result of fortune.

It should always be noted that human desires and random incidents as represented in *Jin Ping Mei* are not necessarily in conflict or incompatible. Rather, desire and chance are intertwined in this novel. *Jin Ping Mei* often depicts the random incidents that shape the course of the lives of the characters as being the results of the interactive desires of many people. Pan Jinlian's death is illustrative. In addition to Pan's masochistic desire, Wang Po's greed for money is also a cause of Jinlian's death. If Wang Po had not insisted on selling Pan for a hundred taels of silver plus 5 taels of silver as the brokerage fee, Jinlian would have been married before Wu Song returned, and therefore would not have been killed. Li Jiao'er's jealousy also contributes Pan's death. She is a long-time foe of Pan. After Ximen's death, she remarries Zhang Erguan, Ximen's successor. Apparently, she does not want Jinlian to compete with her in Zhang's household. Upon realizing that Zhang is now bidding for Pan, Jiao'er informs Zhang about all of the evil acts that Pan has committed: "[Pan Jinlian] had poisoned her first husband before she went to Ximen Qing... she had misconducted with the boys, and murdered the Sixty lady [Li Ping'er] and her child 金蓮當初用毒藥擺佈死了漢子，被西門慶占將來家，又偷小廝，把第六個娘子生了兒子，娘兒兩人，生生吃他害殺了" (Egerton 186, chapter 87, with slight modifications). Zhang "gave up the idea of marrying Jinlian 這張二官就不要[金蓮]了" (186). Even Wu Yueniang is not innocent in Jinlian's death. Yueniang and Jinlian are not on good terms, and they often compete for the favor of Ximen. This competition culminates in chapter 75: the two confront each other for the first time, and a bitter quarrel erupts. Soon after Ximen's death, Wu Yueniang asks Wang

Po to sell Pan when she learns about Pan's affair with Chen Jingji. When Wang Po says that Wu Song has proposed to Pan, Wu Yueniang immediately becomes aware of Wu Song's intention to kill Pan. However, she does not even bother to warn Wang Po of the possible danger that this marriage may pose for Pan. Yueniang's indifference also contributes to Pan's death. Even Sun Xue'er, the fourth wife of Ximen, plays a role in Pan's death. Pan and Sun often quarreled. When the affair between Pan and Chen Jingji becomes known to the Ximen household, Xue'e suggests to Wu Yueniang: "send for old woman Wang (Wang Po) to take the strumpet (Jinlian) away and sell her to anyone who will marry her. When we have got rid of this crap, we may have peace. I see no reason why we should deliberately keep her there. If we do, we will all suffer in the future 然後叫將王媽媽子...把那淫婦教他領了去,變賣嫁人。如同狗屎臭尿,掠將出去,一天事都沒了!平空留著他在屋裏做甚麼?到明日沒的把咱們也扯下水去了" (Egerton 174, chapter 86, with changes). Sun's suggestion helps Wu make up her mind to sell Jinlian. Xue'e thus also contributes to Jinlian's death. In this sense, Jinlian's death is caused by the desires of multiple others, herself included, rather than simply being an unintentional result of random incidents.

The above analysis shows that random incidents of the types depicted in *Jin Ping Mei* also have a predeterministic aspect. These incidents can be regarded, to a certain extent, as manifestations of a predeterministic force, meaning fate. We can predict these incidents, provided that we understand the desires of every individual involved in these incidents. In fact, *Jin Ping Mei* shows that the courses of the lives of many of the characters in the novel are predetermined. In chapter 29 of *Jin Ping Mei*, a physiognomist called Immortal Wu comes to Ximen's house and predicts the fortunes of Ximen and his household. At the end of

the novel, a Buddhist Monk with the surname Ye 葉頭陀 also tells the fortune of Chen Jingji, who was left out of the earlier fortune-telling (chapter 96). The fortunes of the main characters are even predicted on more than one occasion. In chapter 46, an old country woman tells the fortunes of several of Ximen's wives by using the tortoise oracle. All of these predictions prove true as the novel progresses, and the invincible power of fate is always present in *Jin Ping Mei*.

However, fate as depicted in *Jin Ping Mei* also includes an unpredictable aspect. That is probably why the two Liu'er—Pan Liu'er (Jinlian) and Wang Liu'er—who are depicted as being “doubles” in *Jin Ping Mei*, meet different ends at the conclusion of the novel, as Tian Xiaofei points out (258). The unpredictability of fate results from the impossibility of locating the desire of the individual characters. As seen above, an individual's desire is not represented in *Jin Ping Mei* as something that s/he can fully control. Desire is propagated and sustained in complicated relationships formed by all of the characters in *Jin Ping Mei*. Almost every character's desires are constantly being influenced, shaped, and changed by the desires of others. Take Pan Jinlian's death as an example again. Many people hate her because she is aggressive and manipulative. Therefore, their desires are, to a large extent, responses to Jinlian's desire. Jinlian's desire is also influenced by the desires of other people. Her feud with Sun Xue'er is initiated by Pang Chunmei, her maid. Chunmei hates Sun and verbally abuses Sun in front of Pan. In addition, we cannot only blame Pan for her quarrel with Wu Yueniang; as noted above, Yueniang is jealous of Jinlian and does not treat her well, primarily because Ximen like Jinlian much more than her. Jinlian's fate, and probably the fates of all of the characters in the novel, are beyond the control of any individual character, and are full of

uncertainties. However, we readers cannot live with these uncertainties forever. We need some sort of assurance of order and rationality, even if such assurances are no more than illusions. We need a world of redemption where everything can be put in order. *Jin Ping Mei* presents us with such a world at its conclusion, although it is a conclusion laced with ambiguities.

### **Chapter 3: Desire and Redemption: The Conclusion of *Jin Ping Mei***

The final part of the previous chapter reflects the uncertainties that are prevalent in the network of desires. Desires originate from within the characters of *Jin Ping Mei*, and these characters constitute the network of desires. However, this network is outside of their control once it comes into being. The conclusion of *Jin Ping Mei* indicates an attempt to eliminate uncertainties and restore order. Below, I will first examine the ends to which several key characters come at the conclusion of *Jin Ping Mei*. I will argue that two opposing worlds exist at the conclusion of *Jin Ping Mei*: the world of desires and the world of redemption. I will further argue that the undeveloped world of redemption and its limited influence over the characters in the world of desire indicates a sense of nostalgia and longing for the world of desires.

#### **Possibilities of Redemption?: The Ending of Several Characters**

Meng Yulou differs from many of the other characters in *Jin Ping Mei* who die miserably. She appears to come to a happy end at the conclusion of *Jin Ping Mei*. After Ximen dies, she marries Li Gongbi, son of a government official who loves her deeply, as his legitimate wife, and ends up living with him in his hometown. Zhang Zhupo, the well-known commentator on *Jin Ping Mei*, refers to Yulou as “the only major character whom the author allows to come to a decent end” (Roy 218). Does this decent end mean that Yulou has eliminated the uncertainties and acquired control of her own fate, and is no longer entangled in the network of desires? My point of view is that the relatively happy end to which Meng

Yulou comes does not mean that she eventually escapes from the network of desires described in the second chapter. I have gone to great lengths to analyze Meng Yulou's desires in the first two chapters and concluded that she plays an important role in the network of desires when she resides in Ximen's household. After Ximen dies, she remains entangled in this network. Let us take a closer look at the series of events that led to Meng Yulou's end—living "happily" with her husband in his hometown—in order to understand her involvement in this network. It should be noted that before they return to Gongbi's hometown, they live in another city with Gongbi's father, a government official. They are forced to return to his hometown because Gongbi's father hates them and asks them to return to that hometown. As noted in chapter one of this dissertation, the father's anger arises from the humiliation that he suffers at the hands of Prefect Xu, his superior. Xu rebukes Gongbi's father after discovering Yulou and Gongbi's scheme to frame Chen Jingji. Yulou and his husband develop this scheme because Jingji attempts to exhort Yulou in order to get her to elope with him. Jingji threatens Yulou in two ways. One involves Yulou's hairpin that Jingji accidentally picks up.<sup>39</sup> The other involves the boxes of gold and silver that Yulou takes as a dowry to Gongbi's house when the two get married. This hairpin is inscribed with two lines of verse that include Yulou's name, and has a long story. In chapter 82 of *Jin Ping Mei*, Jinlian happens to find this hairpin in the sleeves of Jingji, who has an affair with Jinlian after Ximen's death. Jinlian thus gathers that Jingji and Yulou are also having an affair. She becomes angry and quarrels with Jingji, despite Jingji's claim that he accidentally picked up the hairpin. This hairpin also plays a role at the time when Jinlian and Ximen Qing have just

---

<sup>39</sup> A hairpin is considered to be an intimate object belonging a woman. When a man possesses a woman's hairpin, that may suggest that the two are having an affair.

begun their relationship (chapter 8). Before Ximen marries Jinlian, he stops seeing Jinlian for some time because he has just married Yulou. When Ximen eventually shows up in Jinlian's house, Jinlian observes Ximen wearing this hairpin and becomes jealous.

As regards the boxes of gold and silver that Yulou brings to Gongbi's house, these boxes belong to Jingji's family. At the beginning of the novel, the government orders that Jingji's father be investigated. Jingji's father becomes worried, and he asks Jingji to move these boxes to Ximen's house as a precaution (chapter 17). Ximen and Wu Yueniang keep the boxes and never return them to Jingji.<sup>40</sup> It appears that Yulou never ceases to desire after Ximen's demise: she takes the belongings of other people as her dowry, and also puts in motion a scheme to get rid of Jingji. Yulou continues desiring, which makes her no different than the other characters in this network. Most important of all, the conclusion of *Jin Ping Mei* does not represent Yulou as being able to eliminate the uncertainties that exist in this network of desires and to control her own fate. No matter how happy Yulou's end might appear to be, this end is inevitably determined by the composite forces of multiple desires. It is obvious that the desires of Yulou, Chen Jingji, Li Gongbi, Gongbi's parents, and Prefect Xu play important roles in determining Yulou's fate. In addition, the hairpin brings to mind the desires of Ximen Qing and Pan Jinlian, and the boxes of gold and silver are directly linked to the desires of Wu Yueniang and even Chen Jingji's father. In this sense, although Yulou's end appears to be much better than the end of Jinlian, who winds up being brutally disemboweled

---

<sup>40</sup> The conclusion of the novel reveals that these boxes actually might not belong to Jingji's family (chapter 82). According to Jingji, they might belong to Yang Jian, a high-ranking official related to Jingji's father by marriage. At the beginning of the novel, Yang Jian is impeached and imprisoned, and he dies in prison in chapter 66. Jingji's father faces investigation and exile due to his close relationship to Yang. This possibility further complicates the network of desires.



by Wu Song, they share one fundamental similarity: both of their ends are determined by the composite forces of multiple desires, and are thus filled with uncertainties beyond the control of any individual character.

Li An 李安, a minor character who first appears towards the end of *Jin Ping Mei*, is represented as being capable of remaining uninfluenced by this network of desires, while Meng Yulou is always trapped in the network of desires. The author of *Jin Ping Mei* praises Li An in the opening poem of the last chapter: “Li An is a truly wise person, which is precious and rare/He flew himself out of the sea of trouble” (1679, chapter 100, my translation). Li is a retainer who works for General Zhou Xiu, husband of Pang Chunmei. In the last chapter of the novel, Chunmei seeks to develop an affair with Li An, who is physically strong and skilled in martial arts. She uses money to seduce Li An, but Li An resists the temptation and decides to leave Zhou Xiu’s house to stay with his uncle. Li An’s decision to resist Chunmei’s attempts at seduction and leave the General’s house offers us the hope of redemption, because eventually this is a character who is able to control his own fate and thus nullify the uncertainties created by the composite forces of multiple desires. However, it should be noted that Li An decides to resist Chunmei’s attempts at seduction in large part due to his mother’s request and that Li might succumb to Chunmei’s allure and even go on to develop an affair with Chunmei had his mother not advised him (Ding 128-129). In this sense, Li An’s ability to remain outside of this network of desires and control his own fate is conditional, because this ability is dependent on other factors—in this case, his mother’s advice. When Li An obeys his mother and goes to stay with his uncle, Li Gui 李貴, is it possible that he will come under the influence of the network again when his

mother is not around? The novel fails to provide an answer. We know only that Li An's uncle is a master of martial arts who works for Li Gongbi, Meng Yulou's husband. So Li An is going to live with Yulou and her husband. As noted above, Yulou and her husband have always been part of the network of desires, regardless how kind they are and how happy their life might be. This means that Li An simply leaves one part of this network and goes on to immediately plunge into another part of this network, circumstances in which his mother may not be available to offer him advice. Uncertainties still exist, and redemption is not absolute.

However, in the conclusion of *Jin Ping Mei*, Han Aijie shows us the possibility of remaining outside of the network of desires without help from others. Han Aijie is the daughter of Han Daoguo, who manages one of Ximen Qing's stores, and Wang Liu'er, one of Ximen's mistresses. In the middle of the novel, Ximen marries Aijie to Zhai Qian, butler of Cai Jing, a powerful central government official, as Zhai's concubine. After the family of Cai Jing collapses, Aijie returns to her hometown together with his parents. She even sells her body on the way back. When she returns, she meets Chen Jingji and enters into an affair with him (chapter 98). After Jingji's sudden death, Aijie decides to live as a widow for the remainder of her life, even though Jingji never officially married her. Later, when rich young men propose to her and her family presses her to accept one of their proposals, Aijie makes an extraordinary decision: She vows never to get married, deforms herself by blinding her eyes, and ultimately becomes a Buddhist nun (chapter 100). Aijie's extraordinary decision enables her to shield herself from the composite forces generated by the desires of others and thus to remain shielded from the network of desires. Finally, we see a character who fully controls her life.

It is necessary to delve into Aijie's feelings for Jingji in order to understand the significance of Aijie's final decision more fully. It should be noted that when Aijie and Jingji stay together, she acts in a manner no different than many other women in *Jin Ping Mei*, such as her mother, Wang Liu'er, who exchanges sex for money. The primary reason why Aijie begins her affair with Jingji is that her family is short of money. She wants Jingji to give her some money after she sleeps with him. Aijie takes a gold pin from Jingji's hair, and seduces him into bed. Once the two conclude their sexual activities, Aijie immediately asks Jingji for money. She does not return the gold pin to Jingji until Jingji promises to give her the five taels of silver she requested (1658, chapter 98). The narrator of *Jin Ping Mei* comments on Aijie's intent to seduce Jingji for the purpose of trading sex for money: "No matter how crooked you [Jingji] are/I [Aijie] still can trick you into drinking the water that I use to wash my feet 饒你奸似鬼，也吃洗腳水" (1658, chapter 98, my translation). Making love is usually the first thing they do upon meeting. Before Jingji leaves, he usually gives Aijie some money, which she gladly accepts (1658, 1670, chapters 98 and 99). It appears that Aijie deals with Jingji in a manner no different than the manner in which her mother, Wang Liu'er, treats Ximen Qing, Jingji's father-in-law.

However, Jingji's absence, rather than his presence, makes Han Aijie special. Aijie shows that she can remain faithful to Jingji and continue to miss him when they are not together, whereas her mother is incapable of doing the same thing with Ximen. Aijie becomes utterly lovesick during Jingji's absence when he must stay with his legitimate wife, Ge Cuiping, for a few days: "She (Aijie) thought of him so much that one day seemed like three autumns and one night as long as half a summer [韓愛姐]心中思想，挨一日似三秋，盼一

夜如半夏” (Egerton 342, chapter 98). She writes poems to express her lovesickness and even sends Jingji an emotional love letter along with several gifts (1661-1662, chapter 98). After Jingji’s death, Aijie chooses to remain loyal to Jingji until she herself dies. The three poems Aijie writes after Jingji’s death reveal her feelings. On one hand, Aijie regrets the absence of Chen Jingji, because no other man can properly appreciate her beauty. Two of the three poems written by Aijie after Jingji’s death end with a lamentation that her beauty will no longer be appreciated by the right sort of man. She asks in the first poem:

[I] leant against the dressing table in the evening, in a low spirit,  
For whom did I take such effort to decorate my delicate eyebrows? (1684, chapter 100,  
my translation)

晚來悶倚粧臺立，巧畫蛾眉為阿誰！

She raises a similar question in the second poem, “For whom did I dress up anew? 新粧好好為何人” (1684, chapter 100, my translation). On the other hand, she comes to terms with this absence and is content with herself: “*I pitied myself and cherished myself* when I looked at my shadow 顧影自憐還自惜” (1684, chapter 100, my translation and emphasis). Aijie does not seek to fill this absence. Rather, she turns down all marriage proposals and isolates herself from the world. In doing so, Aijie perpetuates this loss.

Below I will examine the differences between Aijie and the other characters in *Jin Ping Mei*, based on what has been discussed so far. I contend that Aijie’s decision not to seek any substitute for what she has lost, and her effort to eternalize the loss differentiate her from many of the other characters in *Jin Ping Mei*. One point of difference is that the other characters in *Jin Ping Mei* are always depicted as seeking to replace whatever they have lost. For example, as noted in chapter one of this dissertation, Ximen always seeks substitutes for

the deceased Li Ping'er. He first chooses Ruyi'er, the wet nurse for Ping'er son, to replace Ping'er. When he sees Lanshi, wife of He Yongshou, who is one of his colleagues, Ximen sees her as another potential substitute for Ping'er. After Ximen's death, the characters who surround Ximen also seek a substitute for Ximen. Li Jiao'er, one of Ximen's concubines, remarries Zhang Erguan (1490, chapter 87). Zhang is in many respects a near-duplicate of Ximen: he not only is rich but also assumes Ximen's position as judicial commissioner after the death of Ximen (1490, chapter 87). Moreover, she becomes the second lady of Zhang, just as she was the second lady of Ximen while Ximen was alive (1490, chapter 87). In a sense, Li Jiao'er regards Zhang as being simply a substitute for the deceased Ximen. Ying Bojue, a sycophant who depends on Ximen's favors to live, also sees Zhang as a substitute for Ximen. After Ximen dies, "Ying Bojue was in Zhang Erguan's house nearly every day, and he told Zhang everything he knew about Ximen Qing's household 應伯爵無日不在他那邊趨奉，把西門慶家中大小之事，盡告訴與他" (Egerton 114, chapter 80, with modifications). Bojue plays the role of matchmaker in arranging the marriage of Zhang and Jiao'er. He also persuades Chun Hong 春鴻, the page boy of Ximen, to leave Ximen's house and work for Zhang (chapter 87). He even encourages Zhang to marry Jinlian (chapter 87). In a word, Bojue works hard to make Zhang the next Ximen. Bojue's efforts show that he wants to fill the void left by Ximen's death and relive his previous relationship with Ximen. Pan Jinlian also seeks a substitute for Ximen after his death. She becomes close to Chen Jingji, who behaves in a manner similar to Ximen, and comes close to marrying him. Sometimes Jinlian does not even care enough to choose a substitute for Ximen who is appropriate for her because what she really seeks is simply a substitute who can fill the void left by the absence

of Ximen. At the beginning of the novel, Ximen becomes attached to Li Guijie, a prostitute, and stays in Guijie's residence for several weeks (chapter 12). Jinlian becomes lovesick (chapter 12), as does Aijie when Jingji is not with her. However, Jinlian chooses to remedy the absence of Ximen by having sex with a page boy in the Ximen household while Aijie decides not to seek a substitute for Jingji. Pang Chunmei behaves in a manner similar to Jinlian. Soon after Chen Jingji, her lover, dies, Chunmei attempts to seduce Li An to remedy the absence. After Li An flees from her, she enters into an affair with the son of a servant in her house (chapter 100).

Even Li Ping'er, who is often regarded as being the most devoted wife of Ximen, seeks a substitute when Ximen is unable to marry her as he has promised due to an ongoing imperial investigation that implicates Ximen. After waiting for several weeks without any word from Ximen, Ping'er begins to have sex with a fox disguised as Ximen (chapter 17). Later, when Ximen gets out of trouble, Ping'er tells him that the fox haunted her during the time when Ximen was not around: "they [the fox spirits] assumed names and appropriated identities, appearing to me in your guise in order to sap my vitality...[狐狸]假名托姓變做你，來攝奴精髓..." (Roy 398, chapter 19). In fact, Ping'er creates this fox in her mind as a substitute for Ximen, rather than a fox that truly comes to haunt her. Jiang Zhushan, the doctor who treats Ping'er for the problem of the fox, points out:

In attempting to ascertain the cause of your indisposition just now, I find that your hepatic pulse is thready, becoming full after passing the *ostium pollicare* on the wrist...*This indicates a condition, engendered by the six desires and seven passions...*By the day you feel enervated and sleepy, lacking all vitality; and by night, your spirit will not keep to its abode, but dallies with demons in your dreams (Roy 349-350, chapter 17, underlining mine).

小人適診病源，娘子肝脈絃出寸口而洪大…主六慾七情所致…白日則倦怠嗜臥，精神短少。夜晚神不守舍，夢與鬼交。

More revealingly, Ping'er chooses Jiang Zhushan as her substitute for Ximen immediately after Jiang cures her of the fox problem: she decides to marry Jiang at the banquet she holds to thank him for his efficacious medications (chapter 17).

The second chapter of this dissertation argued that the death of the primary characters such as Ximen Qing and Pan Jinlian fails to bring the network of desire to a halt because desire does not emanate from a single point of origin. We can add that this network will seek to replace whichever node that ceases to exist. Li Ping'er dies, and Ximen brings in Ruyi'er as her replacement. Ximen Qing dies, and the void left by his absence is soon taken up by people such as Zhang Erguan and Chen Jingji. In this manner, the network sustains itself regardless of who dies. Han Aijie's loyalty to the deceased Chen Jingji is particularly important because she chooses to not seek a substitute for Jingji. Her choice extends the hope of bringing this network to an end: this network of desires would soon collapse if the people in the network regarded the nodes of the network as being uniquely irreplaceable.

But what about Wu Yueniang? In a manner similar to Han Aijie, Wu Yueniang eschews remarriage after her husband's death. Is Wu Yueniang's loyalty of the same nature as Aijie's? I contend that Yueniang's loyalty differs in a fundamental manner from Aijie's because Yueniang continues to seek a substitute for the deceased Ximen. After Ximen's death, what Yueniang cares most about is her son, Xiaoge, which Tian Xiaofei has pointed out (305). Wu is concerned about her son because she sees Xiaoge as a substitute for Ximen. When Master Pujing converts Xiaoge into a Buddhist monk and takes him away, the narrator describes Yueniang's expectation that Xiaoge will assume his father's position when he grows up: "He

[Xiaoge] was fifteen years old and *she [Yueniang] hoped that he would inherit the property and continue the family dynasty* [孝哥]到十五歲，[月娘]指望[孝哥]承家嗣” (Egerton 374, chapter 100, with modifications, emphasis added).

Let me add a few words about Master Pujing and the conversion of Xiaoge. Master Pujing, a seemingly all-powerful Buddhist monk, reincarnates deceased characters such as Ximen Qing, Pan Jinlian, Li Ping'er and Chen Jingji, and requests that they not repeat their misguided relationships in their subsequent lives. He also takes on Ximen's only son, Xiaoge, who is also the reincarnation of Ximen, as his disciple and leaves with him. In doing this, Pujing attempts to prevent the formation of another network of desires and redeem people such as Wu Yueniang. Pujing says when he shows Yueniang that Xiaoge is a reincarnation of Ximen, “You know the proverb which says when a son becomes a monk there is salvation for nine generations 一子出家，九祖升天” (Egerton 373, chapter 100). At the conclusion of the novel, Yueniang agrees to give her son to Master Pujing. She appears to be enlightened, as she tells Pujing: “I was fully enlightened in that dream 適間一夢中，都已省悟了”(1694, chapter 100, my translation). Does this mean that Yueniang eventually achieves redemption with the help of Pujing and thereafter remains isolated from the network of desires?

My answer is no. Let us take a look at a series of events which lead to Yueniang claiming that she was fully enlightened. At the conclusion of the novel, Yueniang dreams that she and her son visit Yun Lishou 雲理守, one of Ximen's sworn brothers (chapter 100). She wants to complete the marriage between her son and Yun Lishou's daughter who was previously engaged to her son. However, Yun is also interested in Yueniang and offers to marry her. Yueniang refuses his proposal, and Yun becomes angry and kills Yueniang's son.



After Yueniang awakens, she tells her maid: “I just had a dream, which forebodes something terrible 適間做得一夢，不祥” (1694, chapter 100, my translation). The morning when Master Pujing asks whether Yueniang has become enlightened, Yueniang answers: “Holy Master, with my eyes of flesh and human body, I did not know that you were a bodhisattva. I was fully enlightened in that dream 上告尊師，弟子吳氏肉眼凡胎，不知師父是一尊古佛。適間一夢中，都已省悟了” (Egerton 373, chapter 100, with modifications). Yueniang knows that Master Pujing is a powerful bodhisattva because he knows what she dreams about. She is convinced that the terrible things in her dream will come true if she goes ahead with her plan to marry her son to Yun Lishou’s daughter. She gives her son to Master Pujing *not* because she realizes that by avoiding creating a substitute for Ximen, she puts an end to repetitious cycle of the network of desires. Rather, she believes what Pujing tells her: “Your late Ximen Qing did many bad deeds. Now he has been reincarnated in your family as your son. He would spend all your money, ruin your estate, and die by having his head cut off [if I did not take him away from you] 當初你去世夫主西門慶，造惡非善。此子轉身，托化你家，本要蕩散其財本，傾覆其產業，臨死還當身首異處” (Egerton 373, chapter 100, with modifications). Yueniang has no choice but to allow Master Pujing to take her son when Pujing uses his magic power to prove to her that her son is the reincarnation of Ximen. She does not want to lose all of her property or have her only son die a miserable death. In this sense, Yueniang’s so-called enlightenment is simply her understanding of what is in the best interests of herself and her family.

Wu Yueniang fails to experience true enlightenment throughout the novel. Her understanding of the world always remains on the same level. The nature of her desire does

not change after Master Pujing converts her son to Buddhism. In a manner similar to many other characters, Yueniang continues to seek substitutes for the deceased Ximen. She hoped that her son could assume Ximen's position, but her hope was not realized. However, she continues her pursuit of an alternate of Ximen after her son leaves her, and soon finds this substitute. Yueniang changes the name of Dai'an, one of Ximen's servants, to Ximen An 西門安, and gives him Ximen's entire estate (1695, chapter 100). Dai'an runs Ximen's estate in such an intelligent and efficient manner that others begin to call him "Master Ximen Junior" (1695, chapter 100). Dai'an's title "Master Ximen Junior" indicates that he is repeating the late Ximen's actions (Carlitz 141). The network of desires is thus sustained and reconstituted, and Yueniang plays a crucial role in making this happen. In this sense, not only does Yueniang fail to achieve any enlightenment, she is also a key figure in ensuring the continuation of the network.

Wu Yueniang is not the only character who remains unenlightened and unredeemed. As noted above, the promise of salvation is present in the world of Han Aijie and in the world of Pujing, but such salvation does not extend to include most of the characters in *Jin Ping Mei*. Han Aijie and Pang Chunmei live under the same roof, but Aijie's loyalty to the deceased Jingji fails to influence Chunmei's behavior. Chunmei is not loyal to her husband, a military officer who loses his life on the battlefield fighting Jin invaders. She remains as licentious as before, makes love with a male servant after her husband's death, and ultimately dies as a result of sexual excesses (chapter 100). Even the power of the seemingly all-powerful Buddhist monk faces limitations in the world of condemned ghosts. Master Pujing attempts to

reincarnate ghosts by reading the Buddhist sutra known as “Free from hatred” a hundred times:

I exhort you/Hate not one another/For hate deep rooted in the heart/Can never be done away/Hatred may arise in a single day/But in ten thousand days it will still exist/If you use hate to combat hate/It is as though you cast water upon snow/If you return hatred for hatred/It is as though a wolf meets a scorpion/Of men that hate each other, none, I know/Escapes the bitterness of hate/I am repenting for you/so you can be enlightened/Find your own true nature/Then hatred and ill-will will melt away to nothing/I depend on the power of the sacred texts/To find salvation for all evil-doers/Go now to be born again/And forgo hate for ever more/Change yourself and get incarnated/Don't get trapped again in your next life! (Egerton 368, chapter 100, with changes)

勸爾莫結冤，冤深難解結。一日結成冤，千日解一徹！

若將冤報冤，如湯去潑雪。若將冤報冤，如狼重見蠍！

我見結冤人，盡被冤磨折。我見此懺悔，各把性悟徹。

照見本來心，冤愆自然雪。仗此經力深，薦拔諸惡業。

汝當各托生，再勿將冤結！

However, the deceased characters that populate the conclusion of *Jin Ping Mei* are not receptive to the message of the verse. They remain unenlightened. No matter how many times the sutra is recited, it does not free them from hatred. Before they commence their new lives, they still vividly remember those who caused their deaths. What Pan Jinlian says prior to her incarnation is representative: “I am Pan, the wife of Wu Da and Ximen Qing’s concubine. *Wu Song, my sworn enemy, killed me*. Thanks to my master’s blessing, I’ll go to the Eastern Capital to be born as the daughter of a certain Li 奴是武大妻，西門慶之妾，潘氏是也。不幸被仇人武松所殺。蒙師薦拔，今往東京城內黎家為女，托生去也” (Egerton 369, chapter 100, with modifications, emphasis added). We can anticipate that, in the absence of any

repentance and enlightenment, the characters, most of whom are reborn in the same city with little change in their backgrounds, will go on to reconstitute the network of desires.

The conclusion of *Jin Ping Mei* shows, probably for the first time in the novel, that there is another world outside the network of desires. This world, formed by Han Aijie and Master Pujing, offers the possibility of bringing to an end this network of desires. We can call this world “the world of redemption.” However, as noted in my previous discussions, this world of redemption has little power over those who are immersed in their desires. No matter how loyal Aijie remains towards her lover, and no matter how hard Master Pujing works to enlighten those trapped in the network, the network perpetuates itself. If so, what message does *Jin Ping Mei* intend to convey by depicting a world of redemption which has little power over the world of desires? Answering this question will help identify some of the central themes presented in *Jin Ping Mei*.

### **Desire and Redemption**

Before answering this question, it is best to reexamine the characters in the world of redemption. The characters in the world of redemption are generally less fully developed and convincing than their counterparts in the world of desires. For example, Li An, who resists Pang Chunmei’s attempts at seduction and leaves Chunmei’s house, appears in the novel for a short period of time, as Tian Xiaofei points out (303). The author praises Han Aijie’s loyalty at the time of Aijie’s death: “before her loyal spirit reached the nether world, her melancholy soul had already penetrated the nine layers of heaven 貞骨未歸三尺土，怨魂先徹九重天” (1688, chapter 100, my translation). However, except for these two verses, the death of Han

Aijie is mentioned briefly: “she died at the age of thirty-two, from illness 後年至三十二歲，以疾而終” (1689, chapter 100, my translation), whereas the deaths of those trapped within the network of desires such as Ximen, Jinlian and Ping’er are depicted in great detail. Even the depictions of Pang Chunmei’s and Chen Jingji’s deaths, which also occur at the conclusion of the novel, are more vivid and forceful than the depiction of Aijie’s death. Moreover, Aijie’s transformation from a dissolute woman into a loyal lover is abrupt. The author of *Jin Ping Mei* uses only one chapter to depict the relationship between Aijie and Jingji, whereas he spends many chapters describing the relationships between Ximen and his women such as Jinlian and Ping’er. This lack of description makes it almost impossible to pinpoint the reasons for Aijie’s loyalty to Jingji. That is to say, the conclusion of *Jin Ping Mei* does not give the impression that Aijie’s devotion to Jingji is well-founded.

In fact, it appears that Aijie is loyal to Jingji primarily for the sake of being loyal. Aijie writes four poems when she and Jingji are temporarily separated. The four poems show that she simply chooses to miss Jingji, and this choice has little to do with his personal characteristics. First, the syntactic construction of the four poems indicates that the poems emphasize Aijie’s lovesickness. The dominant syntactic structure of the four poems is subject + predicate construction. This construction is usually used to stress the agent (subject) and the action of the agent (predicate) (Cai 381). The subject is always the “I”—Han Aijie, and all of the predicates are verbs that demonstrate or suggest Aijie’s lovesickness. In these four poems, we can find such lines as “[I] wearily leant on the embroidered bed, being reluctant to move with a heart heavy with grief, ... [I] suffered from lovesickness twenty-four hours a day 倦倚繡床愁懶動...一日相思十二時” (1666, chapter 99, my translation), “[I] looked at the

sunshine from the top of a high tower ... [I] have already leant against all the twelve railings on the top of the tower 危樓高處眺晴光…十二欄杆閑憑遍” (1666, chapter 99, my translation), “I could not have any dreams in a cold bed surrounded by curtains embroidered with lotus flowers 帳冷芙蓉夢不成” (1666, chapter 99, my translation). “I lost weight and my face dimmed because of you darling 為郎瘦損減容光” (1666, chapter 99, my translation). Aijie repeatedly expresses how much she misses Jingji in her poems. Moreover, these poems represent her lovesickness as being perennial in nature, given that the four poems have the titles “Spring 春,” “Summer 夏,” “Fall 秋,” and “Winter 冬” which include all of the seasons of the year. However, if we look only at the four poems without knowledge of their context, we do not really know whom it is that Han Aijie misses so much. In the subject + predicate construction, the object of the predicate does not matter so much as the subject and predicate (Cai 380-1). Jingji never even appears as an object in the subject + predicate constructions of the four poems, which means that Aijie’s lovesickness does not have a specific object. Although Aijie mentions her lover three times in her poems, Jingji is referred to by general terms such as “darling 郎” and “soul mate 知心人” (1666, chapter 100). These general terms can be used to refer to Chen Jingji, but are so vague that they could refer to anyone that Aijie might love. In this sense, Aijie does not care so much about the person that she misses as her psychological state of missing someone.

A comparison of Aijie’s poems and the poems composed by Jingji’s legitimate wife, Ge Cuiping, can help us to better understand Aijie’s attitude towards Chen. After Jingji’s death, Aijie and Ge Cuiping stay together. One day they compose poems together, and each writes three poems (1683-1684, chapter 100). Aijie’s three poems show that she is quite depressed

following Jingji's death. However, again she does not even mention Jingji in these three poems. Judging from her poems, Cuiping is much less emotionally stirred than Aijie. However, Cuiping not only mentions Jingji but also shows that she regards Jingji as an individual by delineating specific details about his characteristics in her poems. Cuiping writes in one of her poems:

A libertine always lives a dissolute life.

He is drunk all day and sleeps below flowers (1684, chapter 100, my translation).

誰知蕩子多輕薄，沈醉終朝花下眠

Of course, the libertine in this poem refers to Jingji. Although Cuiping portrays Jingji using a sarcastic tone, her sarcasm suggests that the dead Jingji persists in her memory as having been a real person.

Even Ximen Qing, who is probably the most promiscuous character in the novel, treats the deceased Li Ping'er as a true individual, regardless of how many substitutes he seeks for Ping'er. He misses Ping'er because Ping'er has a mild disposition. He tells Wu Yueniang when he realizes that Ping'er is going to die soon: "she [Ping'er] has been in this house only several years, and she has never harmed anyone, whether of high or low degree. And so sweet is her nature that she has never spoken an unkind word about anyone. I cannot bear to lose her 他來了咱家這幾年，大大小小，沒曾惹了一個人。且是又好個性格兒，又不出語，你教我捨得他那些兒" (Egerton 141, chapter 62). Ximen misses Ping'er also because she is a beautiful lady. He asks a painter to paint two portraits of Ping'er after her death so that he could see the portraits (chapter 63). He misses Ping'er partly because he misses their sexual interaction. When Ximen dreams about Ping'er after her death, the two have sex and Ximen has a nocturnal emission (chapter 71). Another reason why Ximen misses Ping'er is that she

is good at arranging dishes. He complains to Ying Bojue, his close friend: “Look at those dishes. When she was alive, she used to arrange them with her own hands. Now she is dead, we have to have the maid do it. You can see for yourself whether the dishes are properly set out. There is not even a dish that fits my taste! 有他在，就是他經手整定；從他沒了，隨著丫鬟掇弄，你看都相甚模樣？好應口菜也沒一根我吃” (Egerton 192, chapter 65, with modifications). Ximen presents a vivid picture of what type of person Ping’er was when she was alive. Ximen misses Ping’er for superficial reasons: beauty, good temperaments, sensuality, and food. However, it is easier to understand these reasons than the reasons for Aijie’s loyalty. As a result, we sympathize more with Ximen’s sorrow over the loss of Ping’er, although Aijie’s loyalty may be nobler in nature.

The other key character in the world of redemption is Master Pujing, an omniscient and powerful Buddhist monk who attempts to redeem characters who have drowned in their desires. Pujing is depicted as being, at best, awkward, when he seeks to convert Yueniang’s son to Buddhism. It may be true that Yueniang’s son is a reincarnation of Ximen Qing and he would cause a great deal of trouble if he stayed with Yueniang. However, Pujing’s aggressiveness is still not amenable to reason. He and Yueniang meet when Yueniang runs away from her hometown with her family in order to avoid an upcoming war. Once he sees Wu Yueniang, Pujing shouts in a loud voice: “Mrs. Wu, where are you going? Return my disciple to me! 吳氏娘子，你看往那裏去？還與我徒弟來！” (1688, chapter 100, my translation) with no consideration for the stresses Yueniang may have experienced during her travels. Naturally, Yueniang is frightened and refuses to hand her son over to him, despite the vague promise that she made to Pujing years ago that he could take her son as his disciple



once he grows up. Pujing's reaction to Yueniang's refusal is close to rudeness: "Lady, *do not pretend that you are asleep or in a dream*... You promised that I should have your son for my disciple. Why have you not given him to me? 娘子，你休推睡裏夢裏...你許下我徒弟，如何不與我？” (Egerton 366, chapter 100, with modifications, my emphasis). Pujing's phrasing is similar to that of Wu Song when Wu Song wants to kill Wang Po to avenge the death of his brother: "Old woman...*do not pretend that you are asleep or in a dream*. It is your hand that ended my brother's life 婆子休得吃驚...休推睡裡夢裡，我哥哥性命都在你身上” (Egerton 192, chapter 87, with modifications, my emphasis). It is no surprise that Wu Song uses these rude words, given that he is depicted as being a brutal and ruthless man in *Jin Ping Mei*. However, it is difficult to imagine such rude words coming from the mouth of Master Pujing, who represents the Buddhist ideals and comes for the purpose of redeeming the people trapped in the network of desires. Furthermore, Pujing uses a childish trick in order to take Yueniang's son away. When Yueniang holds her son in her arms and would not let her son go away, Pujing distracts Yueniang's attention by lying to her: "“Lady, don't cry. Look, there is another master coming'. They all turned their heads to look, but when they turned around again, the old monk and Yueniang's son had vanished in a wind “娘子休哭兒的，那邊又有一位老師來了！” 哄的眾人扭頸回頭，當下化陣清風不見了(Egerton 374, chapter 100, with modifications). In comparison with the sometimes rude, sometimes callous and sometimes childish Master Pujing, Yueniang's reactions to Pujing's request that he take her son from her are depicted in a more sympathetic light. When Pujing is ready to leave with her son, Yueniang wishfully asks Pujing: "“Master, you have converted my child to a Buddhist monk. When will the mother and the son see each other again?” she cannot help but

grab her son, crying out aloud ‘師父，你度托了孩兒去了，甚年何日，我母子再得見面？’不覺扯住，放聲大哭起來” (1695, chapter 100, my translation). It is true that Yueniang is always filled with desire and attempts to seek a substitute for the deceased Ximen. It is also true that she remains unenlightened and still clings to earthly relationships even at the conclusion of the novel. However, this remains one of the most touching moments of her life.<sup>41</sup>

The undeveloped, unconvincing and sometimes awkward world of redemption indicates that the world of redemption is not the author’s point of emphasis in *Jin Ping Mei*. Critics such as Zhang Zhupo and Catherine Carlitz have argued that the central message conveyed by the conclusion is predominantly Confucian. It concerns the importance of loyalty and filial piety (1562, chapter 100) or the punishments that people receive due to their deviations from Confucian teachings (Carlitz 26-27). Other scholars, such as Tian Xiaofei, champion a Buddhist reading of the ending of *Jin Ping Mei*. The conclusion of *Jin Ping Mei* speaks of mercy and the transformation from a world filled with sound and fury to an empty world (Tian 302-307). They are all correct. These messages appear at the conclusion and throughout the entire novel. The conclusion depicts Han Aijie, an ideal representative of Confucian loyalty, and Master Pujing, who shows Buddhist mercy by attempting to redeem people such as Ximen and Jinlian. Throughout the novel, there appear poems which either talk about the importance of following Confucian morality or discuss the transient nature of the life and the world from a Buddhist perspective. However, another important message that the conclusion

---

<sup>41</sup> Tian Xiaofei expresses similar opinions. However, Tian sees this touching scene as an expression of the novel’s, or the author’s, Buddhist extension of mercy to Yueniang: “this mercy...can be seen in the sad cries of Wu Yueniang, who does not want her son to leave her 這種慈悲...表現在月娘不捨得孝哥出家的哀哀大哭中” (306, my translation).

and the novel as a whole convey is often ignored: the author is enthralled by the world of desires, and more so with this world than with the world of redemption. That is probably why the characters in the world of redemption are undeveloped and awkward, and lack the artistic and emotional power found in the depictions of the characters in the world of desires. That is probably also why the world of redemption has little power over the world of desires. At the conclusion, there is nostalgia for the world of desires. On one hand, those trapped in the network of desires create trouble for both themselves and others. They need to be punished and redeemed. On the other hand, without them, the world lacks excitement and interest, and the author does not really want them to leave the stage. The characters' reincarnations can be read as forms of punishment. It is likely that these unenlightened people will meet again, and re-experience the uncertainties, separations and deaths caused by their desires. However, this reincarnation also indicates regret. It is as if we do not want the actors to leave after we have seen their wonderful drama, and we want them to continue their performance.

This regret also occurs when the author depicts the deaths of many of the characters trapped in the network of desires. I am not saying that the author does not see these deaths from Confucian or Buddhist perspectives. The poem that the author writes after Jinlian's death includes these two lines: "All that passed is no more than a dream/now, the body is worthless 往事堪嗟一場夢，今身不值半文錢" (1499, chapter 87, my translation). The two lines reflect a typical Buddhist view that life is in nature similar to a dream. The author also summarizes the lives of the primary characters in a poem at the conclusion of the novel:

When I take the leisure to read the record of this house I cannot help but be sad,  
Who can deny that Heaven's principle works in a cycle.  
Ximen was a mighty and lawless man, but he could not maintain the continuance of

his house,

Jingji was wild and dissolute, and met a violent death in consequence.

Yulou and Yueniang were nice people, so they ended up having a long life,

Ping'er and Chunmei were wanton, and soon made their way to Hell.

It is not strange, therefore, that Jinlian reaped the reward of evil,

Leaving a foul reputation to be spoken of for a thousand years. (Egerton 375, chapter 100, with modifications)

閑閱遺書思惘然，誰知天道有循環，

西門豪橫難存嗣，經濟顛狂定被殲。

樓月善良終有壽，瓶梅淫佚早歸泉，

可怪金蓮遭惡報，遺臭千年作話傳！

It is easy to identify both the Buddhist idea of karmic retribution and the Confucian idea of the opposition between good and evil. It is true that these characters have done many evil deeds and they deserve their miserable ends. It is also true that their deaths are to some extent brought out by their own desires, as noted in chapter two of this dissertation. However, the author still depicts their deaths with sympathy and sorrow. These characters, who were once filled with desires and vitality, are suddenly killed in a bloody manner, become inanimate corpses, and can no longer join the hustle and bustle of the world of *Jin Ping Mei*. The author feels very sorry for them. When Jinlian is killed by Wu Song, the narrator writes: “Worth lamenting is poor Jinlian/Stripped of clothes and kneeling before the tablet/Unexpectedly, she is killed by Wu Song/Still thinking that it would only be Ximen’s game to hang her legs 堪悼金蓮誠可憐，衣服脫去跪靈前。誰知武二持刀殺，只道西門綁腿頑” (1499, chapter 87, my translation). While Jinlian’s naked body and her kneeling position is a recurring symbol of lust and desire in many of the erotic scenes, at this point they signal Jinlian’s imminent death. “Ximen’s game to hang her legs” in the last line apparently refers to the Grape Arbor episode

in which Ximen and Jinlian perform many sexual acrobatics, as noted in the chapter one of this dissertation. However, this section does not concern Grape Arbor but rather Wu Song's brutal killing. Even Jinlian, a woman full of desire, lust, passion and life, must face her destiny. Isn't this worthy of lamentation? The author expresses his feelings: "when a person has breath, she can do thousands of things. She loses control of everything the day when she dies. Jinlian dies at the age of thirty-two 三寸氣在千般用，一日無常萬事休。[金蓮]亡年三十二歲" (1498, chapter 87, my translation). Using almost identical wording, the author expresses the same regret and lamentation over the death of Chen Jingji. After Jingji is brutally killed by Zhang Sheng, the author comments: "when a person has breath, he can do thousands of things. He loses control of everything the day when he dies. It is lamentable that Jingji, who has not passed his twenty-seventh birthday, dies an unnatural death at such a young age 三寸氣在千般用，一日無常萬事休。可憐經濟青春不上三十九，死於非命" (1673, chapter 99, my translation).

Let us examine Friedrich Nietzsche's perception of Satyrs in order to better understand the regrets and sorrow the author expresses concerning the deaths of Jinlian and Jingji. There are numerous similarities between Satyrs and the characters in *Jin Ping Mei*. According to *Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome*:

Satyrs were imaginary characters, usually depicted with a mixture of human and equine characteristics. They had a reputation for sexual mischief, excessive inebriation, collective play, and an unbecoming lack of modesty...Satyrs and nymphs belong to the group that are depicted attending Dionysus in Greek vase paintings. The habits of satyrs, however, are the reverse of the self-control, temperance, and sobriety characteristic of the god. (Cole)

Almost all characteristics that Satyrs exhibit, such as sexual indulgence, drinking, collective

play and lack of restraint, can be found in the characters of *Jin Ping Mei*.



Figure 4. This painting was completed around the sixth century B.C., according to J.D.Beazley (262). Without any change, we can use this painting to illustrate the erection of Ximen Qing after he swallows the aphrodisiac given to him by an Indian monk together with the hard liquor: “it so happens that Ximen Qing had swallowed a dose of the Indian monk’s medicine, and washed it down with distilled spirits...His organ became engorged with rage, its protuberances swelled and its head sprang up, its sunken eye grew round, and its distended blood vessel were all exposed” (Roy 209, chapter 50). This picture is taken from Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/satyr>)

Nietzsche writes about the Satyrs, which represent the spirit of some of the ancient Dionysiac festivals, in his renowned *The Birth of Tragedy*:

From all corners of the ancient world (leaving aside the modern one in this instance), from Rome to Babylon, we can demonstrate the existence of Dionysiac festivals of a type which, at best, stands in the same relation to the Greek festivals as the bearded satyr, whose name and attributes were borrowed from the goat, stands to Dionysos himself. *Almost everywhere an excess of sexual indiscipline, which flooded in waves over all family life and its venerable statutes, lay at the heart of such festivals. Here the very wildest of nature’s beasts were unleashed, up to and including that repulsive mixture of sensuality and cruelty which has always struck me as the true ‘witches’ brew’.* (20, my emphasis)

If we use the phrase “*Jin Ping Mei*” to replace “such festivals”, the underlined sentences would serve as an apt comment on the motif of *Jin Ping Mei*. Nietzsche further comments in

*The Birth of Tragedy* on Satyrs: “what he [the Greek] saw in the Satyr was the original image (*Urbild*) of mankind, the expression of man’s highest and strongest stirrings...an emblem of the sexual omnipotence of nature which the Greek habitually regards with reverent astonishment” (41). On one hand, Nietzsche dislikes the Satyrs because they are similar to beasts and lack any restraint in sexuality and temperaments. On the other hand, Nietzsche reveres this unrefined passion of Satyrs, and sees this passion as being fundamental to the original character of the mankind.

The author of *Jin Ping Mei* holds similar view regarding his characters such as Jinlian and Jingji. He dislikes these characters for their lack of self-control, so he allows many of them to die in miserable ways. However, he also respects the unrestrained passion that these characters exhibit, just as Nietzsche observes Satyrs “with reverent astonishment”. When these characters die, the author naturally feels sad. This dissertation has noted the author’s regret and sorrow over the deaths of Jinlian and Jingji. The author also shows respect for Song Huilian when she dies. Huilian is the wife of Lai Wang, a servant of Ximen. She is a promiscuous woman, who maintains an extramarital relationship with Ximen. However, after Huilian hangs herself, the author writes: “the good things of this world are none too enduring/Colored clouds are prone to scatter and colored glaze is brittle 世間好物不堅牢，彩雲易散琉璃脆” (Roy 123, chapter 26, with modifications). The poem compares Huilian with colored clouds and colored glaze, both of which are beautiful objects. The author esteems this licentious woman primarily for her unrestrained energy and passion, as Sun Shuyu has argued convincingly (46). Ximen Daijie, daughter of Ximen Qing and the first wife of Chen Jingji, also hangs herself after Jingji gives her a severe beating. However, the author does not

express sorrow over Dajie's death, and comments on Daijie's death in a perfunctory manner: "We do not know where her true spirit returns/We suspect that the spirit may dwell in the moving clouds or autumn waters 不知真性歸何處，疑在行雲秋水中" (1571, chapter 92, my translation).

The author does not sympathize with Wu Da's death, either. Wu Da was then the husband of Jinlian. Jinlian and Ximen plan to murder Wu Da with the assistance of the go-between Wang Po in order to get married. Jinlian first forces him to drink lethal poison, and then sits on him and suffocates him with the quilt in order to put an end to his struggles (chapter 5). In a word, Wu Da dies in an extremely miserable manner. The author comments on Wu Da's death in a surprisingly sarcastic tone: "*The legions of Hell* are further augmented by *one poison-eating ghost*/The world of the living is diminished by *one adulterer-seizing man* 地獄新添食毒鬼，陽間沒了捉姦人" (Roy 107, chapter 5, my emphasis). The phrase "one adulterer-seizing man 捉姦人" the author uses to refer to Wu Da appears to say that the exclusive, or at least primary, function of Wu Da in this living world is to catch adulterers. Wu Da's other title, "poison-eating ghost 食毒鬼," is puzzling. The active voice suggests that Wu Da eats the poison on his own initiative. However, the fact is that he was forced to drink poison. Furthermore, it is surprising to see Wu Da go to Hell following his death, given that Wu Da is an innocent victim of a treacherous murder. Both Wu Da and Ximen Dajie are victims of evil deeds perpetrated by Jinlian and Jingji against them. However, the author likes those victims much less than the characters who have engaged in a variety of evil deeds, because Wu Da and Dajie lack the vitality and strong desires that can be readily found in Jinlian, Jingji and Huilian. Wu Da is even reincarnated in another city, Xuzhou, while the



other reincarnated characters are reborn in Dongjing, the Northern Capital of China. This may be seen as a reward for Wu Da. He does not have to reenter the network of desires maintained by the other characters because he will be a considerable distance away from them. However, this arrangement also suggests some kind of subtle discontentment with Wu Da. He is a clumsy actor with little life in him, who can only play the role of adulterer-seizing man and poison-eating ghost. The next reincarnation of the network will have little or no need for him.

In a word, *Jin Ping Mei* presents a complicated view of the characters who are embedded in the network of desires. These characters deserve mercy because they ruin their own lives without being aware of what they are doing, as Sun Shuyu points out (46-47). The author creates people such as Han Aijie and Master Pujing in order to enlighten and redeem them. They also deserve punishments because their desires drive many of them to do evil deeds. The author allows them to die miserably as punishment, and Pan Jinlian will even leave a bad reputation behind her that will endure for thousands of years, as the author claims in the concluding poem of the novel. Moreover, the author also likes and respects his characters for their intense passions, and considers lives that are filled with desires to be exciting. When the characters die, the author sounds sad. He depicts the world of redemption as having little power over them, which allows them to relive their exciting life stories. The author likes them, and does not want them to change even after they experience different forms of punishment and the redemption process. Dong Wu Nongzhuke 東吳弄珠客 [The Pearl-juggler of Eastern Wu] comments in an oft-quoted preface to *Jin Ping Mei* written during the early 17<sup>th</sup> century: “He who reads the *Jin Ping Mei* and responds with a feeling of compassion is a Bodhisattva; he who responds with a feeling of apprehension is a superior

man; he who responds with a feeling of enjoyment is a petty person; and he who responds with a feeling of emulation is no better than a beast 讀《金瓶梅》而生憐憫心者，菩薩也；生畏懼心者，君子也；生歡喜心者，小人也；生效法心者，乃禽獸耳” (Roy 6). I do not think that we should designate certain categories of readers as being “petty people” or “beasts”. Nevertheless, this quote demonstrates the multiple messages that *Jin Ping Mei* presents.

## Conclusion

The focus of this dissertation is the complexity of the network of desire. I have demonstrated how desire originates, and develops, in multilateral relationships between a number of characters. An individual character's desire is frequently depicted as being influenced by the desires of other characters. Jacques Lacan says in his famous statement: "man's desire is the desire of the Other" (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 235). The desires of many of the characters are intertwined, and constitute a network. A major artistic achievement of *Jin Ping Mei* is its vivid depictions of these entanglements.

This dissertation argues that one of the primary characteristics of this network is its decentralizing tendency. I have pointed out that this network of desire is polycentric. These multiple centers indicate that desire, as depicted in *Jin Ping Mei*, does not emanate from any single source. I have further deconstructed the centrality of these centers. For example, the structure of the "wives' group", one of the network centers that I have identified, is a fundamentally a network, and therefore cannot be truly regarded as a "center". During the process of deconstructing the centrality of desire, I demonstrated that the desires of some minor characters are important to the progress of the storyline. This further challenges the distinction between center and margin in the contour of the network of desire. We can analyze the phenomenon I have described at the beginning of this dissertation on a more theoretical level: why are the depictions of details one of novel's major attractions to many readers, including myself? Due to the blurring of the distinction between the center and the margin, the novel's artistic power lies not so much in its depiction of major events, if there are any

such events in this novel, as in its careful, meticulous depiction of the daily lives of the characters—to use Zhang Zhupo’s words “the hairs of an ox 牛毛” (18, translated by Roy).

There is no center in this network of desire. However, the structure of this network remains and persists. This dissertation has demonstrated how the structure keeps seeking and replacing the nodes that disappear. As noted in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, the reincarnation of the characters, which is facilitated by Master Pujing, does not bring an end to this network. This reincarnation instead suggests a repetition of the entire structure of this network. The supernatural Buddhist monk is able to redeem individual characters such as Xiaoge, Ximen’s son as well as his reincarnation, but powerful as he is, Pujing is still unable to change the underlying structure.

Understanding of this network can give us a new perspective for analyzing two questions frequently discussed in the mainstream of *Jin Ping Mei* criticism. The first question concerns the contrast between *se* 色 (the perceived reality)<sup>42</sup> and *kong* 空 (emptiness) in *Jin Ping Mei*. Desire apparently belongs to the world of *se*, and contemporary critics appear to understand the emptiness as the futility of the pursuit of individual characters, due to the ephemeral nature of the objects that characters pursue<sup>43</sup>. My concept of a decentralized network may help us understand this emptiness in relation to the perceived world from another perspective. In absence of an identifiable origin, this network of desire is devoid of any ultimate meaning or foundation. Therefore, this emptiness can also be understood as the lack of meaning that is present from the beginning of the pursuit or desire. Desire has no

---

<sup>42</sup> Here I use Andrew Plaks’ translation of *se*.

<sup>43</sup> For example, Tian Xiaofei appears to hold this opinion. She argues in “A Preliminary Comparison” that “Xiaoge not only shaves his head and becomes a Buddhist disciple, but is also transformed into ‘a whiff of breeze’ by and along with Pujing, the old monk with magical powers. At the end of the book, both simply fade into thin air, which is indeed the ultimate form of ‘emptiness’” (388).

meaning precisely because no such beginning/origin exists—"Man's desire is the desire of the Other" (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 235). The network of desire described in the novel simply repeats itself again and again, with no beginning or ending. This is true emptiness, and this type of emptiness can be sensed in the novel's meticulous depictions of desire that appear throughout the novel. In this sense, the author's affirmation of desire that I have discussed at the end of chapter 3 should not be regarded as constituting a negation of this emptiness. In fact, almost every time he affirms desire, the author conveys a profound sense of emptiness, an emptiness that has no meaning, purpose, direction and foundation<sup>44</sup>.

The second question touches on the microcosmic level of *Jin Ping Mei*: the relationship between individual character's fate and the network of desire. Scholars have pointed out that the fate of the characters in *Jin Ping Mei* is often depicted as being determined by a set of rules which reward "good" characters and punish "bad" characters<sup>45</sup>, as seen, for example, in the concluding poem of the novel, which I quoted in full in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. However, as noted in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, Pan Jinlian's life experiences are sometimes unpredictable, and her death, in many aspects, is not predestined, but is rather the result of a number of random forces. In addition to Jinlian, random forces also shape the life trajectories of characters such as Meng Yulou, Pang Chunmei, Ximen Qing, Chen Jingji and Wang Liu'er. How do we understand the predictability and the unpredictability of an individual character's fate? My argument that the network of desire is not centralized on any single locus may shed some new light on this question. My examination of the novel has

---

<sup>44</sup> Andrew Plaks also argues for the co-existence of perceived reality and emptiness. See Plaks 511-512. However, he appears to say that this co-existence can primarily be found in *Jin Ping Mei*'s depictions of sexuality or sensuality (511).

<sup>45</sup> For a discussion of this "karmic predestination", see Plaks 507-509.

demonstrated that the world the characters constitute is not represented as bearing similarity to our solar system. In the solar system, all of the planets circle around the sun, and we can predict their positions relative to the sun at any given moment. However, there is no such center in the network of desire. The world of *Jin Ping Mei* instead operates on the “quantum” level. The characters in *Jin Ping Mei* keep “clashing” with each other due to their different, and sometimes conflicting, desires. We cannot precisely determine their positions due to their repeated “collisions”. It is impossible to predict a character’s position at any given moment, but it appears that we can outline the trajectory of a character’s life—in other words, their fate—after we observe that character’s movement within the network. In this sense, the fate of characters are both predictable and unpredictable, and both determined and the result of random forces. That is also probably why the primary characters’ fates are predicted in Chapter 29 of *Jin Ping Mei*. By contrast, in *Hong Lou Meng* 紅樓夢 (also known as *The Story of the Stone* or *The Dream of Red Chamber*)<sup>46</sup>, another famous classical Chinese novel which also deals primarily with familial relationships, the fate of its primary characters are predicted in Chapter 5, at the beginning of this 120-chapter novel. It appears that the author of *Jin Ping Mei* sought to give his readers more reading space to observe these characters and understand the destinies that the fortune-teller reveals. It is no coincidence, therefore, that *Jin Ping Mei* reaches one of its climaxes in Chapter 30, one chapter after the prediction of the characters’ fate: Ximen is awarded a position in the government and Ping’er, one of his concubines, gives birth to a son. The time for observation is over, and the official staging of

---

<sup>46</sup> *Hong Lou Meng* was published during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The novel presents the downfall of a prominent Jia family. The storyline centers on the life experiences of Jia Baoyu 賈寶玉, the most beloved son in Jia family, and his relationships with the girls around him. *Hong Lou Meng* is often regarded as the most important novel in Chinese literary history. It is generally agreed that Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 is the author of this novel.

the drama begins.

## Appendix A: Annotated Translation of Early Criticisms

### on *Jin Ping Mei*

The novel *Jin Ping Mei* has received a great deal of critical attention since it was officially published in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>47</sup>. *Jin Ping Mei* is now one of the most frequently discussed classical Chinese novels. A large number of articles and monographs on this novel have been published in both China and the West. And international conferences on *Jin Ping Mei* are held regularly. The study of *Jin Ping Mei* has become a sub-discipline within Chinese studies, and is known as *jinxue* 金學(Jinology)<sup>48</sup>.

The early criticisms that I translated here were written before 1911 A.D., the year when the Qing dynasty, the last dynasty in the Chinese history, ended. These early criticisms remain useful to contemporary scholars. Many contemporary scholarly publications have quoted the early criticisms on *Jin Ping Mei*, and several scholars have used them as the basis for developing their own arguments regarding the novel<sup>49</sup>. My dissertation also quotes these early criticisms at length.

Among these early criticisms, Zhang Zhupo's renowned "How to Read the *Jin Ping Mei* 《金瓶梅》讀法" has been translated into English, and is included in the anthology *How to Read the Chinese Novel*. In addition, a limited number of translated quotations from this body of criticism have appeared in English-language scholarship<sup>50</sup>. However, many of these classical commentaries await translation or retranslation in full with annotations that can help

---

<sup>47</sup> For a discussion of the date of *Jin Ping Mei*'s original publication, see Wu 19-20.

<sup>48</sup> For an informed review of the past and the present of Jinology, see Wu 1-36, and Ding 3-45.

<sup>49</sup> For example, see Plaks 55-180, Ding 3-140.

<sup>50</sup> For example, the translations of some of these commentaries appear in Ding's *Obscene Things* and Mary Elizabeth Scott's dissertation *Azure from Indigo: Hong Lou Meng's Debt to Jin Ping Mei*.



explain their historical and cultural context.

In addition to the lack of translation of these early criticisms, there remains another reason why I translated these traditional commentaries. I quote some of these commentaries within the body of my dissertation. However, I usually quote only a portion of a commentary. A full, annotated translation of these commentaries can provide the context of these quotations, and can help both myself and my readers better grasp the meaning of these brief commentaries.

All of these early commentaries are taken from *Collected Materials on Jin Ping Mei*. I translated about half of the commentaries that were collected in that anthology due to my time limitations. I hope that my annotated translation of these classical commentaries will help readers better understand *Jin Ping Mei*, one of the masterpieces of Chinese literary history.

## 遊居柿錄

### A Melancholy Journal of a Traveler<sup>51</sup>

袁中道

Yuan Zhongdao<sup>52</sup>

往晤董太史思白，共說小說之佳者。思白曰：‘近有一小說，名《金瓶梅》，極佳。’予私識之。後從中郎真州，見此書之半，大約模寫兒女情態俱備，乃從《水滸傳》潘金蓮演出一支。所雲金者，即金蓮也；瓶者，李瓶兒也；梅者，春梅婢也。

I once visited *Hanlin*<sup>53</sup> Academician Dong Sibai<sup>54</sup>. We discussed excellent novels. Sibai said, “*Jin Ping Mei*, a recent novel, is excellent.” I kept the title in mind. I later went to Zhenzhou<sup>55</sup> with Zhonglang<sup>56</sup>, and I had the opportunity to read half of the novel. *Jin Ping Mei* portrayed the emotions and manners of men and women in detail, and its plot is developed out of the story of Pan Jinlian in *Shuihu Zhuan*<sup>57</sup>. Jin refers to Pan Jinlian, Ping refers to Li Ping’er, and Mei refers to the maid Chunmei.

舊時京師，有一西門千戶，延一紹興老儒於家。老儒無事，逐日記其家淫蕩風月之

---

<sup>51</sup> *A Melancholy Journal of a Traveler* is a collection of literary sketches written in the form of diary. See *The Diary of Yuan Xiaoxiu* [Yuan Xiaoxiu riji]

<sup>52</sup> Yuan Zhongdao (1570-1623) is a major scholar and writer in the late Ming Dynasty. See *History of the Ming Dynasty* [Ming shi], p.7398.

<sup>53</sup> Hanlin was an academy run by the central government to conduct academic research and perform certain secretarial duties for the emperor. See *History of Administrative Systems in Ancient China* [Zhongguo gudai xingzhen zhidu shi], p. 136.

<sup>54</sup> Dong Sibai (1555-1636) is Dong Qichang. Sibai is his hao (pseudonym). He was a high-ranking official and a well-known calligrapher and painter. See *History of the Ming Dynasty* [Ming shi], pp.7395-7396.

<sup>55</sup> Zhenzhou is today’s Yizheng City in Jiangsu Province.

<sup>56</sup> Zhonglang is Yuan Hongdao (1568-1610). Zhonglang is his zi (courtesy name). Yuan was a well-known scholar and writer, and was the brother of Yuan Zhongdao. See *History of the Ming Dynasty* [Ming shi], p.7397-7398. See note 6 for information about Yuan Zhongdao.

<sup>57</sup> *Shuihu Zhuan* (also known as *Water Margin* or *Outlaws of the Marsh*) a well-known classic Chinese novel. This novel depicts the life experiences of a group of outlaws led by Song Jiang.

事，以西門慶影其主人，以余影其諸姬。瑣碎中有無限煙波，亦非慧人不能。

There once lived a Battalion Commander Ximen who resided in the capital. He hired a Confucian scholar from Shaoxing<sup>58</sup> to live in his house. The scholar lived a relaxed life, and kept a daily record of the licentious and dissipated life he observed in Ximen's household. He used the character Ximen Qing to allude to his master, and the depiction of Ximen Qing's women to allude to his master's concubines. We can see family and societal relationships reflected in the novel's detailed descriptions of trivial matters. Only talented writers can achieve this effect.

追憶思白言及此書曰：‘決當焚之。’以今思之，不必焚，不必崇，聽之而已。焚之亦自有存者，非人力所能消除。但《水滸》崇之則誨盜；此書誨淫，有名教之思者，何必務為新奇以驚愚而蠹俗乎？”

I remember what Sibai said about *Jin Ping Mei*, “We definitely should burn it.” However, I think that we should neither burn it nor praise it. Just let the book be. If we burn the novel, some people will keep the copies of it. It is beyond human ability to eliminate all of the copies of this book. But if we praise *Shuihu*, we are actually propagating violence, and if we praise *Jin Ping Mei*, we are actually encouraging lust. Why do those Confucians have to write something extraordinary which shocks the masses and corrupts the hearts of ordinary people?

---

<sup>58</sup> Shaoxing is a city in today's Zhejiang Province.

## 味水軒日記

### Diary of Weishui Study

李日華

Li Rihua<sup>59</sup>

萬曆四十三年乙卯，（正月）五日，伯遠攜其伯景倩所藏《金瓶梅》小說來，大抵市渾之極穢者，而烽焰遠遜《水滸傳》，袁中郎極口贊之，亦好奇之過。

On December 24<sup>th</sup>, 1615, Boyuan<sup>60</sup> brought to my place the novel *Jin Ping Mei* that his uncle Jinqian<sup>61</sup> kept. The novel uses vulgar language derived from the conversations and jokes of the lower social classes. However, the novel lacks the thrust of *Shuihu Zhuan*. Yuan Zhonglang<sup>62</sup> gave this novel high praise because his curiosity was misplaced.

## 脂硯齋重評石頭記評語

### Commentaries in *The Story of the Stone Re-annotated by Zhi Yanzhai*<sup>63</sup>

庚辰本第十三回眉批：“寫個個皆到，全無安逸之筆，深得《金瓶》壺奧！”

The commentary written on the top margin of chapter 13 of the Geng Chen Manuscript<sup>64</sup>:

---

<sup>59</sup> Li Ruihua (1565-1635) was a renowned painter and writer during the late Ming Dynasty.

<sup>60</sup> Li Boyuan is Li Yingzheng, a poet who lived in the late 16th and early 17th century. The exact years of his birth and death remain unknown. Boyuan was his zi (courtesy name).

<sup>61</sup> Jinqian was Shen Defu's zi (courtesy name). Shen Defu (1578-1642) was a famous essayist.

<sup>62</sup> Yuan Zhonglang is Yuan Hongdao (1568-1610). Zhonglang was his zi (courtesy name). Yuan was a well-known scholar and writer.

<sup>63</sup> Zhi Yanzhai was one of the earliest, and probably the most important, commentator on *Hong Lou Meng*, and appeared to know the author of the novel personally. However, his/her identity is still a topic for scholarly debate. For a detailed and in-depth discussion of Zhi Yanzhai, see Ouyan Jian's *Restoring the Identity of Zhi Yanzhai* (Huanyuan zhiyanzhai).

<sup>64</sup> There are several versions of manuscripts that contain Zhi Yanzhai's commentaries on *Hong Lou Meng*. The Geng Chen Manuscript is one such manuscript. The Chinese people used a system called the

“The author of *The Story of the Stone* describes every single character effectively. There is not a single stroke that is not indispensable. He apparently knows the secret that led to *Jin Ping*’s success.”

甲戌本第二十八回眉批：“此段與《金瓶梅》內西門慶，應伯爵在李桂姐家飲酒一回對看，未知孰家生動活潑？”

The commentary written on the top margin of chapter 28 of the Jia Xu Manuscript<sup>65</sup>: “We should read this chapter in juxtaposition with the chapter in which Ximen Qing and Ying Boju drink in Li Guijie’s house<sup>66</sup>. Which chapter of the two has a more vivid and lively description?”

庚辰本第六十六回寫柳湘蓮因尤三姐事對寶玉跌足道：“你們東府裡除了那兩個石頭獅子乾淨，只怕連貓兒狗兒都不幹淨。我不做這剩忘八。”其下有雙行夾批：“奇極之文！趣極之文！”《金瓶梅》中有雲“把忘八的臉打綠了”，已奇之至，此雲“剩忘八”，豈不更奇！

Liu Xianglian stomped impatiently due to his engagement with You Sanjie when he talked with Baoyu<sup>67</sup>: “The only clean things about that Ningguo House are the stone lions that stand outside the Gate. The very cats and dogs there are corrupted. I don’t want to be a

---

sexagenary cycle to number the years. Based on this system, Geng Chen in this context refers to the year 1760. For a discussion of the sexagenary cycle, see *A Summary of Ancient Chinese Culture* (Zhongguo gudai wenhua huiyao), pp. 65-68.

<sup>65</sup> There are several versions of manuscripts that contain Zhi Yanzhai’s commentaries on *Hong Lou Meng*. The Jia Xu Manuscript is one such manuscript. Jia Xu here refers to the year 1756 in the sexagenary cycle calendar.

<sup>66</sup> The commentator is referring to chapter 12 of *Jin Ping Mei*.

<sup>67</sup> Liu Xianglian and You Sanjie were previously engaged. However, after realizing that You might not be as pure as he believed, Liu decided to withdraw his proposal. You committed suicide upon learning that Liu did not intend to marry her.

cuckold of a cuckold<sup>68</sup>!” Below these lines is a two-line interlinear note: “So extraordinary, so interesting!” *Jin Ping Mei* has a sentence in a similar vein: “I will beat your cuckold’s face until it’s black and blue<sup>69</sup>.” This is extraordinary. Here we have “a cuckold of a cuckold”, isn’t this an even more extraordinary turn of phrase?

## 閱紅樓夢隨筆

### Random Writings after Reading *Hong Lou Meng*

周春

Zhou Chun<sup>70</sup>

天下閱〈紅樓夢〉者，俗人與〈金瓶梅〉一例，仍為導淫之書，能論其文筆之若何，已屬難得，然亦究歸於癡人說夢耳…蓋此書每於姓氏上著意，作者又長於隱語晦詞，各處變換，極其巧妙，不可不知。

Among those who read *Hong Lou Meng*, superficial readers place *Hong Lou Meng* and *Jin Ping Mei* in the same category. They regard *Hong Lou Meng* as a book that induces lust. We cannot find many readers who pay some degree of attention to the author’s writing style. However, even those readers are still uninformed readers whose discussion is not to the point...It should be noted that the author of *Hong Lou Meng* plays with the names of the characters. He also excels at using elliptical language, which varies from one place to another

---

<sup>68</sup> The English translation of the first two sentences of this quotation comes from David Hawkes’ translation of *Hong Lou Meng, The Story of the Stone*, Vol. 3 pp.303. The translation of the last sentence of this quotation is my own, because Hawkes does not translate this sentence in his translation.

<sup>69</sup> This quotation comes from chapter 22 of *Jin Ping Mei*. The English translation of this quotation is taken from David Roy’s translation of *Jin Ping Mei, The Plum in the Golden Vase*, vol. 2 pp. 41.

<sup>70</sup> Zhou Chun (1729-1815) was a literary scholar.

and is truly ingenious.

## 銷夏閑記

### Random Writings in an Idle Summer<sup>71</sup>

顧公燮

Gu Gongxie<sup>72</sup>

太倉王忬家藏《清明上河圖》，化工之筆也。嚴世蕃強索之；忬不忍舍，乃覓名手摹贗者以獻。

Wang Yu<sup>73</sup> of Tai Cang<sup>74</sup> kept *Along the River during the Qing Ming Festival*<sup>75</sup>, a masterpiece painting. Yan Shifan<sup>76</sup> demanded it, with overtones of extortion, from Yu. Yu could not bear to give up the painting. He found a renowned painter to create a forgery, and presented that forgery to Shifan.

先是，忬巡撫兩浙，遇裱工湯姓，流落不偶，攜之歸，裝演書畫，旋薦於世蕃。當獻畫時，湯在側，謂世蕃曰：“此圖某所目睹，是卷非真者，試觀麻雀，小腳而踏二瓦

<sup>71</sup> *Random Writings in an Idle Summer* is an 18th-century collection of historical anecdotes. See *Literary Sketches of Danwu* [Danwu biji], pp. 3-5.

<sup>72</sup> Gu Gongxie is the author of *Random Writings in an Idle Summer*. He lived during the 18th century. Little is known about his life. See *Literary Sketches of Danwu* [Danwu biji], p. 3.

<sup>73</sup> Wang Yu (1507-1560) was a high-ranking official during the reign of Jia Jing Emperor (1522-1566). See *History of the Ming Dynasty* [Ming shi], pp.5396-5399.

<sup>74</sup> Tai Cang is a city in today's Jiangsu Province, China. Wang Shu is a native of Tai Cang.

<sup>75</sup> *Along the River during the Qing Ming Festival* is arguably the best-known classical Chinese painting. The authorship of this painting is generally attributed to Zhang Zeduan (1085-1145), a court painter of the Song Dynasty. The painting presents a panoramic view of Bianjing, today's Kaifeng of Henan Province, on a large scroll. For an introduction to this painting, see [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/03/arts/design/03pain.html?\\_r=3](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/03/arts/design/03pain.html?_r=3).

<sup>76</sup> Yan Shifan (ca.1513-1565) was a high-ranking official during the reign of Jia Jing Emperor (1522-1566). He was notorious for his corrupt and licentious life. He was executed in 1565 after he and his father fell out of favor with the emperor. See *History of the Ming Dynasty* [Ming shi], pp. 7920-7921. See note 38 for the information about Yan Song.

角，即此便知其偽矣。”世蕃患甚，而亦鄙湯之爲人，不復重用。

Prior to this, Wang Yu had been governor of Zhejiang<sup>77</sup>, and met a person called Tang who made his living mounting painted and calligraphic scrolls<sup>78</sup>. Tang wandered around alone. Yu brought Tang back to his home to mount paintings and calligraphy, and soon afterwards recommended him to Shifan. Tang was present when Yu presented *Along the River during the Qing Ming Festival* to Shifan. He told Shifan, “I once saw the authentic painting, but this one is not authentic. Look at the sparrow. Its foot is tiny, but it steps on the corners of the two tiles. We can tell from this detail that the painting is a counterfeit.” Shifan became exasperated with Yu. He also began to despise Tang, and no longer trusted him.

會俺答入寇大同，忬方總督薊遼，鄢懋卿嗾御史方輅劾忬禦邊無術，遂見殺。後範長白公（允臨）作《一捧雪傳奇》，改名《莫懷古》，蓋戒人勿懷古董也。

It happened that Altan Khan<sup>79</sup> invaded Da Tong<sup>80</sup>. At that time, Yu was the Governor-General of Jiliao<sup>81</sup>. Yan Maoqing<sup>82</sup> incited the Censor<sup>83</sup>, Fang Lu, to accuse Yu of being incapable of defending the borders. Yu was thus executed. Fan Changbai (Yunlin)<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> Zhejiang covered the area of today's Zhejiang Province.

<sup>78</sup> Mounting is a special technique used to preserve traditional Chinese calligraphy and paintings and to make them vivid. For more information about mounting, see *Chinese Pictorial Art as Viewed by the Connoisseur*, pp. 33-6.

<sup>79</sup> Altan Khan (1507-1582) was the emperor of the Tumet Mogols. He led several wars against the Ming Empire during the 16th century. For an in-depth study of Altan Khan, see *A Critical Biography of Altan Khan* [Anda han pingzhuan].

<sup>80</sup> Da Tong is a Chinese city in today's Shanxi Province.

<sup>81</sup> Jiliao was an area that included portions of today's Shanxi Province, Hebei Province and Liaoning Province. However, the precise boundaries of that has yet to be determined. See map 239 in *Collection of Chinese Ancient Atlas: Ming Dynasty* [Zhongguo gudai ditu ji: mingdai].

<sup>82</sup> Yan Maoqing lived in the 16th century, and was a high-ranking official during the reign of Jia Jing Emperor (1522-1566). He belonged to the Yan Song clique, and was notorious for his corruption. See *History of the Ming Dynasty* [Ming shi], pp.7924-7925. See note 38 for the information about Yan Song.

<sup>83</sup> Generally speaking, censors observed the government officials on behalf of the emperor. They had the ability to charge the officials if corruption and/or the abuse of power was observed. See *History of Administrative Systems in Ancient China* [Zhongguo gudai xingzhen zhidu shi], pp. 165-169.

<sup>84</sup> Fan Yunlin (1558-1641) was a well-known calligrapher and painter. Changbai is his hao (pseudonym).



later wrote *The Legend of a Handful of Snow*<sup>85</sup>, and then changed its title to *Do Not Keep Antiques* in order to warn people against storing antiques.

忬子鳳洲（世貞）痛父冤死，圖報無由，一日偶偈世蕃，世蕃問：“坊間有好看小說否？”答曰：“有。”又問：“何名？”倉卒之間，鳳洲見金瓶中供梅，遂以《金瓶梅》答之。但字迹漫滅，容鈔正送覽。退而構思數日，借《水滸傳》西門慶故事為藍本，緣世蕃居西門，乳名慶，暗譏其閨門淫放。而世蕃不知，觀之大悅，把玩不置。

Fengzhou (Shizheng)<sup>86</sup>, son of Yu, grieved over the unjust death of his father. However, he could not find a way to exact revenge. One day, he paid a visit to Shifan. Shifan asked, “is there a novel worth reading available?” Fengzhou answered, “Yes.” “What is its name?” Seeing the golden vase holding the plum, in a rush of inspiration, Fengzhou came up with the name *Jin Ping Mei* and gave it as his reply. He gave the excuse, however, that the manuscript was not legible and asked for Shifan’s permission to make a legible copy before presenting the novel to him. He went home and worked out the plot, which was borrowed from the story of Ximen Qing in *Shuihu Zhuan*. Shifan was then living at the West Gate<sup>87</sup>, and had once been known as “Qing” when he was an infant, which meant that the novel *Jin Ping Mei* was actually a mockery of the licentious and dissipated life in his household. However, Shifan was not aware that Fengzhou’s novel was actually a mockery of his life. He very much

---

See the preface to *The Collected Writings of the Master of Shuliao Mansion* [Shuliao guan ji].

<sup>85</sup> *The Legend of a Handful of Snow* is a play that tells a story about a precious jade cup “A Handful of Snow”. An official Mo Huaigu (the name literally means “does not keep antiques”) keeps this jade cup. Yan Shifan asks for this cup, and Mo presents a counterfeit cup to Yan. The mounter Tang Qin that Mo recommends to Yan informs Yan that the cup is a fake. Yan becomes angry with Mo, and persecutes him. At the end of the drama, Mo has barely survived and has lost everything except for the cup. However, the true author of this play remains the subject of debate. Li Yu (ca. 1590-ca. 1660), for example, is one of several candidates for author of the play. See *A Handful of Snow* [Yipeng xue].

<sup>86</sup> Wang Shizhen (1526-1590) was a famous scholar who also held several important government positions. Fengzhou is his hao (pseudonym). See *History of the Ming Dynasty* [Ming shi], pp.7379-7381.

<sup>87</sup> In Chinese, Ximen literally means “West Gate”.

enjoyed the book, and kept reading it without putting it down.

相傳世蕃最喜修腳，鳳洲重賂修工，乘世蕃專心閱書，故意微傷腳迹，陰搽爛藥，後漸潰腐，不能入直。獨其父高在閣，年衰遲鈍，票本擬批，不稱上旨。上寢厭之，寵日以衰。禦史鄒應龍等乘機勸奏，以至於敗。噫！怨毒之於人，甚也哉！

It was known that Shifan liked pedicures. Fengzhou gave a large bribe to the pedicurist. The pedicurist slightly injured the edge of Shifan's foot and then secretly applied a medication that rots the flesh on the wound, while Shifan was concentrating on reading the novel. Shifan was thus unable to go to the cabinet to perform his duties. Shifan's father, Song<sup>88</sup>, was also in the cabinet, and was old and mentally and physically decrepit. The instructions that Song drafted for the emperor (without his son's assistance) no longer satisfied the emperor. The emperor gradually became tired with him, and Song soon fell out of the emperor's favor. Censor Zhou Yinglong took this opportunity to impeach Song, which eventually led to the fall of his family. Alas! What resentment!

---

<sup>88</sup> Yan Song (1480-1567), father of Yan Shifan (see note 25), was a top-ranking government official during the reign of the Jiaqing Emperor. He has often been depicted as having been a corrupt official who abused his power. See History of the Ming Dynasty [Ming shi], pp.7914-7919.

## 《新譯紅樓夢》回批

### Chapter Commentaries on *The New Translation of Hong Lou Meng*<sup>89</sup>

哈斯寶

Khasbo

批曰：我讀《金瓶梅》，讀到給眾人相面，鑑定終身的那一回，總是讚賞不已。

The commentary says: When I read the chapter of *Jin Ping Mei* in which the Immortal Wu physiognomizes the main characters of *Jin Ping Mei* and tells their fortunes<sup>90</sup>, I could not help but admire this chapter.

現在一讀本回，才知道那種讚賞委實過分了。《金瓶梅》中預言結局，是一人歷數眾人，而《紅樓夢》中則是各自道出自己的結局。

However, now that I have read chapter 22 of *Hong Lou Meng*, I have realized that my admiration for that chapter in *Jin Ping Mei* went too far. When *Jin Ping Mei* foreshadows the destinies of its characters, there is one person who tells the fortunes of many of the novel's characters. However, in *Hong Lou Meng*, each character speaks about his/her own destiny.

教他人道出，哪如自己說出？《金瓶梅》中的預言，浮淺；《紅樓夢》中的預言，深邃：所以此工彼拙。

How can having another person tell the characters' fortunes compare with having the

---

<sup>89</sup> *The New Translation of Hong Lou Meng* was a 19th-century, abridged Mongolian translation of Hong Lou Meng. Khasbo is the translator. For a biography of Khasbo, see *Dictionary of Chinese Translators* (Zhongguo fanyijia cidian), pp. 265.

<sup>90</sup> The commentator is referring to chapter 29 of *Jin Ping Mei*.

characters tell their own fortunes? The foreshadowing as depicted in *Jin Ping Mei* is superficial, whereas the foreshadowing as depicted in *Hong Lou Meng* is profound. That is why we say one is delicate and the other is coarse.

妙復軒評石頭記。讀法

**Miaofu Xuan on *The Story of the Stone*:**

**How to Read *The Story of the Stone***

張新之

Zhang Xinzhi<sup>91</sup>

《紅樓夢》是暗《金瓶梅》，故曰意淫。金瓶有苦孝說，因明以孝結，此則暗以孝結。至其隱痛，較作《金瓶梅》者尤深。

*Hong Lou Meng* resonates with *Jin Ping Mei* in a hidden way. That is why the term “lust of mind” is used to describe *Hong Lou Meng*. *Jin Ping Mei* can be read as an expression of frustrated filial piety<sup>92</sup>, because the novel ends with an overt depiction of filial piety. *Hong Lou Meng* ends with a covert depiction of filial piety, however. The anguish that is hidden in *Hong Lou Meng* is more profound than what the author of *Jin Ping Mei* expresses in his novel.

---

<sup>91</sup> Zhang Xinzhi (ca. 1828-ca. 1850) was a well-known commentator on *Hong Lou Meng* (*The Story of the Stone*).

<sup>92</sup> Reading of *Jin Ping Mei* as an expression of frustrated filial piety was proposed and championed by Zhang Zhupo (1670-1698), who was famous for his commentaries on *Jin Ping Mei*. For the complete text of Zhang’s commentaries, see *Collection of Jin Ping Mei Materials* (*Jin Ping Mei Ziliao Huibian*), pp. 1-194.

《金瓶》演冷熱，此書亦演冷熱。《金瓶》演財色，此書亦演財色...

*Jin Ping* presents the symbolic motifs of cold and heat<sup>93</sup>; *Hong Lou Meng* also presents the symbolic motifs of cold and heat. *Jin Ping Mei* depicts wealth and lust; *Hong Lou* also depicts wealth and lust...

### 續金瓶梅集續

#### Preface to *The Sequel to Jin Ping Mei*<sup>14</sup>

西湖釣叟

Xihu Diaosou<sup>15</sup>

小說始于唐宋，廣於元，其體不一。田夫野老能與經史並傳者，大抵皆情之所留也。情生則文附焉，不論其藻與俚也。

The genre of the novel began during the Tang and Song Dynasties, and became popular during the Yuan Dynasty. This genre of popular literature has been passed down together with the Confucian canons and histories, because the feelings that the novel awakens persist. Once the feelings become awakened, the texts will not be forgotten, regardless of whether or not the style is elegant.

《金瓶梅》舊本言情之書也。情至則易流於敗檢而蕩性。今人觀其顯不只其隱，見其放不知其止，喜其誇不知其所刺。蛾油自溺，鴆酒自斃，袁石公先敘之矣。作者之難於述者之晦也。

---

<sup>93</sup> The symbolic motifs of cold and heat were an idea proposed by Zhang Zhupo in his commentaries on *Jin Ping Mei*. See *Collection of Jin Ping Mei Materials* (*Jin Ping Mei Ziliao Huibian*), pp. 12.

*Jin Ping Mei* is a novel whose intention is the expression of feelings. These feelings, when they come to extremes, tend to make people lose control of themselves and become loose in character. When they read *Jin Ping Mei*, people today look at the overt instead of the hidden, they see the excesses instead of the inhibitions, and they prefer the lustful exaggeration to the disapproval of excesses. The moth drowns itself in the oil of the lamp, and people kill themselves by drinking poisonous wine<sup>16</sup>—Yuan Shigong<sup>17</sup> has already talked about it. It is difficult for an author to hide his hidden intentions from critics.

今天下小說如林，惟推三大奇書曰《水滸》、《西遊》、《金瓶梅》者，何以稱乎？《西遊》闡心而證道於魔，《水滸》戒俠而崇義於盜，《金瓶梅》懲淫而炫情於色，此皆顯言之，誇言之，放言之，而其旨則在以隱，以刺，以止之間。唯不知者曰怪，曰暴，曰淫，以爲非聖而畔道焉。

We have numerous novels today. Why do we regard *Shuihu*<sup>18</sup>, *Xiyou*<sup>19</sup>, and *Jin Ping Mei* as being three masterpieces? *Xiyou* expounds upon the inner self by putting the Tao to test among demons, *Shuihu* warns against chivalrous behaviors by praising the brotherhood of bandits, and *Jin Ping Mei* reprimands licentiousness by exaggerating feelings of lust. These overt, exaggerated and unconstrained depictions are intended to reveal what is hidden, to make criticisms and to give warnings. Those who are uninformed call these descriptions supernatural, violent and licentious, and regard them as deviations from the golden path prescribed by the Confucian teachings.

烏知夫稗官野史足以翼聖而贊經者，正如雲門韶濩，不遺夫擊壤鼓缶也。夫得道之精

者糟粕已具神理，得道之粗者金石亦等瓦礫，顧人之眼力淺深耳。

Romances and fictitious histories can be used to glorify the Confucian teachings, just as the elegant music can be played using very crude instruments. Those who properly understand the Way will be able to find divine truth in dross, whereas those who barely know the Way will identify gold and precious gems as gravel. This is due to the differing abilities of individuals to make good judgments.

### 紅樓評夢

#### Commentaries on the Dream Written in the Red Mansions

諸聯

Zhu Lian<sup>94</sup>

書本脫胎於《金瓶梅》，而褻嫚之詞，淘汰至盡。中間寫情寫景，無些點牙後慧。非特青出於藍，直是蟬蛻於穢。

*Hong Lou Meng* is a derivative work based on *Jin Ping Mei*. However, *Hong Lou Meng* eliminates all of the obscene and uncensored descriptions. The author of *Hong Lou Meng* does not repeat what was said in *Jin Ping Mei* when he portrays emotions and settings. To say that “the pupil excels the teacher” may be an understatement. *Hong Lou Meng* is comparable to a cicada that frees itself from filth by casting off its slough.

---

<sup>94</sup> Zhu Lian lived in the 18th and 19th century. Little is known about his life.

## 《春雨草堂別集》金瓶梅條

### *Jin Ping Mei Entry in Collected Works of Spring Rain Cottage*

宮偉鏐

Gong Weiliu<sup>95</sup>

《金瓶梅》相傳為薛方山先生筆，蓋為楚學政時，以此維風俗、正人心。又雲趙儕鶴公所為，陸錦衣炳住京師西華門，豪奢素著，故以西門為姓。

It is said that Xue Fangshan<sup>96</sup> is the author of *Jin Ping Mei*. When he presided over the prefectural examination in Chu<sup>97</sup>, he wrote this novel in order to warn the common people and to set human hearts straight. Some also said that Zhao Chaihe<sup>98</sup> wrote this novel. Lu Bing<sup>99</sup>, an Embroidered-uniform Guard<sup>100</sup>, used to live at the Xihua Gate in the capital, and was well-known for his voluptuousness. So Zhao surnamed the hero of the novel “Ximen”.

後有《續金瓶梅》，乃山東丁大令野鶴撰，隨奉嚴禁，故其書不傳。

Later, there came *The Sequel to Jin Ping Mei*<sup>101</sup> written by Ding Yehe<sup>102</sup>, who was a

---

<sup>95</sup> Gong Weiliu lived during the 16th and 17th century. Little is known about his life.

<sup>96</sup> Xue Fangshan is Xue Yingqi, who lived during the 16th century. Fangshan was his hao (pseudonym). He was a well-known writer and historian.

<sup>97</sup> Chu usually refers to the area of today's Hubei Province and Hunan Province. However, to the best of our knowledge, Xue Fangshan (Yingqi) presided over the prefectural examination in Zhejiang, but is not known to have presided over the same examination in Chu.

<sup>98</sup> Zhao Chaihe is Zhao Nanxing. Chaihe was his hao (pseudonym). He held several important government positions during his life time. He was also a renowned writer of melodies.

<sup>99</sup> Lu Bing (1510-1560) was a major politician during the reign of Jia Jing Emperor (1507-1567).

<sup>100</sup> An Embroidered-uniform Guard was a member of the secret service that was directly under the control of the Emperors. The Embroidered-uniform Guard existed only during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). For a discussion of The Embroidered-uniform Guard, see *History of Administrative Systems in Ancient China* [Zhongguo gudai xingzhen zhidu shi], pp. 175-176.

<sup>101</sup> *The Sequel to Jin Ping Mei* is a novel written by Ding Yaokang (1599-1671). The novel emphasizes the role that the Buddhist Dharma plays in the lives of the characters in *Jin Ping Mei*. For more information about the novel, see the preface to *Three Sequels to Jin Ping Mei*, pp. 1-18.

<sup>102</sup> Ding Yehe is Ding Yaokang (1599-1671). Yehe was his hao (pseudonym). For more information about Ding Yaokang, see the preface to *Three Sequels to Jin Ping Mei*, pp. 3-7.



county magistrate from Shandong. However, the government soon ordered that the sequel be banned. That is why the sequel is not in circulation today<sup>103</sup>.

## 金瓶梅考證

### Textual Research on *Jin Ping Mei*

王仲瞿

Wang Zhongqu<sup>104</sup>

《金瓶梅》一書，相傳明王元美所撰。元美父忬以灤河失事，爲奸蒿構死，其子東樓實贊成之。

It is said that Wang Yuanmei<sup>105</sup>, who lived during Ming Dynasty, is the author of *Jin Ping Mei*. After being defeated at the Luan River<sup>106</sup>, Wang Yu, father of Yuanmei, was framed by Yan Song, a treacherous official, and was executed. Donglou, Song's son, also participated in the framing of Yu.

東樓喜觀小說，元美撰此，以毒藥傳紙，冀使傳染人口而斃。東樓燭其計，令家人洗去其藥，而後蟠閱，此書遂以外傳。

Donglou liked to read novels. Yuanmei wrote the novel *Jin Ping Mei*. He mixed a poison

---

<sup>103</sup> Contrary to the author's assertion, Ding's *The Sequel to Jin Ping Mei* is still in circulation today.

<sup>104</sup> Wang Zhongqu is Wang Tan (1760-1817), a poet during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). Zhongqu was his zi (courtesy name).

<sup>105</sup> Wang Yuanmei was Wang Shizhen (1526-1590). Yuanmei was his zi (courtesy name). Wang was a famous scholar who also held several important government positions. For more information about Wang's life, see *History of the Ming Dynasty* [Ming shi], pp.7379-7381.

<sup>106</sup> Luan River is a major river in north China. Wang Yu was defeated by Altan Khan near the Luan River in 1559 during a series of wars that Altan Khan fought against the Ming Empire in the 16th century. For a description of these wars, see *A Critical Biography of Altan Khan* [Anda han pingzhuan], pp. 50-54.

which moved its way into the leaves of the book, hoping that the poison would work its way into Donglou's mouth and kill him. Donglou recognized Yuanmei's plan. Before reading the novel, he asked his servants to wash away the poison on the pages. *Jin Ping Mei* thus began to circulate in the market.

舊說如此，竊有疑焉。元美爲一代才人，文品何等峻潔，不應有此穢襲之作。陰險如東樓，既得其情，安得不爲斬草除根之舉？明知之而故縱之，亦非東樓之爲人。得此原本，而諸疑豁然矣。

This is a long-held story about the origin of *Jin Ping Mei*. But I have my doubts. Yuanmei was among the most talented writers of his generation. His writings are lofty and noble in spirit. He should not have written such an indecent and filthy novel. Donglou is a sinister and ruthless person. He had every reason to root out the source of trouble when he learned about Yuanmei's plot. Learning about Yuanmei's plot against him and letting him go—this does not mesh with Donglou's character. However, all of my doubts disappeared after I saw the original version of the novel.

曾聞前輩趙歐北先生雲：《金瓶》一書，爲王元美所作。余嘗見其原本（隨園老人曾有此本），不似流傳之俗本鋪張床第等穢語。紙上傳藥，以毒東樓，其說支離，不足信也。

Zhao Oubei<sup>107</sup>, who is my elder, once told me, "*Jin Ping* was written by Wang Yuanmei.

---

<sup>107</sup> Zhao Oubei is Zhao Yi (1727-1814). Zhao was a government official during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor. He was a renowned poet and historian. Oubei was his hao (pseudonym).

I have seen the original version of the novel (The Old Man of Sui Garden<sup>108</sup> once owned the original version). The original version is different from the edition in the market which is full of indecent descriptions of sexuality and other matters.” The story of applying poison to the pages for the purpose of poisoning Donglou is inexact and unconvincing.

元美當父難發後，兄弟踵蒿門哭籲貫罪，蒿以謾語慰之，而卒陷其父于死。元美與嚴氏有不共戴天之仇。

As soon as Yuanmei's father got into trouble, Yuanmei and his brothers visited Yan Song and cried to him to pardon their father. Song used deceptive words to comfort them. Later on, however, their father died as a result of Song's frame-up. Yuanmei's animosity towards the Yans was too strong to be alleviated.

當時奸焰薰灼，呼天莫訴，因作此書，以示口誅筆伐。西門者，影射東樓也。門下客應伯爵等，影射胡植、白啓常、王材、侯汝揖諸人也。玳安等仆，影射嚴年也。金、瓶、梅，影射東樓姬妾也。西門倚蔡京之勢，影射東樓倚父蒿之勢也。西門之盜人遺產，謀人錢財，影射東樓之招權納賄，筐崖相望於道也。西門之傷發而死，影射東樓之遭幼而死也。一家星散，孝哥死後，吳月娘寄居永福寺，影射東樓服罪，家產籍沒，奸蒿老病，寄居墓舍，抑鬱以終也。

At that time, Yan Song's sinister influence was so strong that Yuanmei could not find a forum to appeal for justice. Yuanmei wrote this novel to launch a war of words. The character Ximen is an allusion to Donglou. Ximen's inveterate spongers like Ying Bojue allude to

---

<sup>108</sup> The Old Man of Sui Garden was the hao (pseudonym) of Yuan Mei (1716-1797). Yuan was a famous literary scholar and writer.

people such as Hu Zhi, Bai Qichang, Wang Cai and Hou Ruyi<sup>109</sup>. Ximen's servants like Dai'an refer to Yan Nian<sup>110</sup>. Pan Jinlian, Li Ping'er and Chunmei allude to Donglou's concubines. Ximen's reliance on Cai Jing's power is an allusion to Donglou's reliance on the power of his father, Song. Ximen's theft of estates of others and conspiracy to take possession of the wealth of others is an allusion to Donglou, who scrambled for power and took bribes. The streets were full of people seeking to give gifts to Donglou when Donglou was in power. Ximen's death caused by his wound refers to Donglou's death due to his impeachment. The scattering of Ximen's family members and Wu Yueniang's stay at Yongfu Temple after the death of Xiaoge refer to the historical reality that Donglou was executed, the government confiscated his possessions, the senile and sick Treacherous Song had to stay in a hut next to a tomb, and Song died with a heart heavy with grief.

本忠孝而作此書，而顧以淫書目之：此誤於俗本，而不觀原本之故也。原本與俗本有雅鄭之別。原本之發行，投鼠忌器，斷不在東樓生前。書出傳誦一時，陳眉公《狂夫叢談》（此書曾于舒丈處見抄本）極歎賞之，以為才人之作，則非今之俗本可知。

The author wrote this novel out of loyalty and filial piety. However, people read this novel as pornography. They make this mistake because they have read only the edition that circulates in the public market but not the original version. The difference between the original version of *Jin Ping Mei* and the edition available in the public market is the difference between refined music and low-brow music. People involved had to make sure that the publication of the original version of the novel would not get them into trouble. Therefore

---

<sup>109</sup> These people were government officials who belonged to the Yan clique. For more information about these people, see History of the Ming Dynasty [Ming shi], pp.7925.

<sup>110</sup> Yan Nian was the head servant of the Yan household.

the original version could not be published while Donglou was still alive. When the original version began to circulate, it was widely read and inspired admiration. In Chen Meigong's<sup>111</sup> *A Non-conformist's Discussion* (I have seen a copy of Chen's book in Shu the Elder's<sup>112</sup> place), Chen sang praise for the novel and considered it the work of a talented writer. Apparently, Chen was not talking about the public edition now available on the market.

或雲李卓吾所作，卓吾即無行，何至留此穢言？大約明季浮浪文人之作偽。何物聖歎，從而扇其毒焰，揚其惡潮耳？安得舉今本而一一摧燒之！（按今本每回後，有聖歎長批，大半俗不可耐，或亦是後人僞託）

Some people say that Li Zhuowu<sup>113</sup> is the author of the current edition. Li Zhuowu might be a person of loose morals. However, would he go so far as to leave these indecent words in the book? Perhaps the edition that is in circulation today is a counterfeit written by a particular member of the frivolous and dissipated literati of the Ming Dynasty. What kind of person is this Shengtan<sup>114</sup> who used the current edition to fan the poisonous flames and raise evil waves? If only we could eliminate every copy of the current edition! (Note that there is a long commentary by Shengtan at the end of each chapter of the current edition. Most of the commentaries are unbearably vulgar and perhaps were written under Shengtan's name during subsequent generations.)

---

<sup>111</sup> Chen Meigong is Chen Jiru (1558-1639), who was a renowned writer and painter. Meigong was his hao (pseudonym).

<sup>112</sup> Shu the Elder refers to Shu Wei (1765-1815), a poet during the Qing Dynasty.

<sup>113</sup> Li Zhuowu is Li Zhi (1527-1602). A thinker and writer, Li is well-known for his unconventional behavior and ideas. Zhuowu was his hao (pseudonym). For an in-depth discussion of Li Zhi's life and his ideas, see 1587, *A Year of No Significance*, pp. 189-221.

<sup>114</sup> Shengtan is Jin Shengtan (1608-1661). Jin was a literary scholar. He is best-known for his commentaries on classical Chinese literature. For a description of Jin's life and his literary accomplishments, see *Chin Sheng-t'an: His Life and Literary Criticism*.

按此原本，乃小玲瓏山館主人贈舒丈者，不知與雲松觀察所見之本，有無異同。（趙所見爲隨園本否，他日當問之）珍珠密字，楷法秀麗，余妻尤愛玩不置，繡徐妝罷，意爲之注，頗能喚醒惡人不淺。擬與舒丈力謀付梓，爲元美一雪其冤。

The original version was given to Shu the Elder by the Owners of A Small Exquisite Hill House<sup>115</sup>. I do not know whether or not this version is the same as the one that Intendant of Circuit Yunsong<sup>116</sup> (I will ask Zhao<sup>117</sup> whether the novel that he saw belonged to the Old Man of Sui Garden). The characters are arranged densely like strings of pearls, and are beautifully written in regular script. My wife liked this original version and did not want to put it down. She would like to write commentaries on this novel to warn weak-minded readers when she is not doing embroidery or dressing up. She and Shu the Elder will try to get her commentaries published in order to clear Yuanmei's name.

秀水王曇識於鑒湖偕隱廬，時乾隆五十九年十月十日也。

Written by Wang Tan of Xiu Shui in the Cottage of Joint Retirement at Jian Lake<sup>118</sup>, on October 10<sup>th</sup> of the 59<sup>th</sup> year of Qianlong Emperor<sup>119</sup>.

---

<sup>115</sup> "The Owners of A Small Exquisite Hill House" is a group pseudonym that refers to Ma Yueguan (1687-1755) and Ma Yuelu (1711-1799), who were brothers, renowned businessmen and book collectors.

<sup>116</sup> Intendant of Circuit Yunsong refers to Zhao Yi. Yunsong was his zi (courtesy name). Intendant of Circuit was the last position that Zhao took in the government before his retirement.

<sup>117</sup> Zhao refers to Zhao Yi. See the previous note for more information about Zhao Yi.

<sup>118</sup> Jian Lake is a lake in modern-day Zhejiang Province.

<sup>119</sup> The 59th year of Qianlong Emperor is the year 1794.

## 小說叢話

### A Cluster of Discussions on Fiction

平子

Pingzi<sup>120</sup>

《金瓶梅》一書，作者抱無窮冤抑，無限深痛，而又處黑暗之時代，無可與言，無從發泄，不得已藉小說以鳴之。

The author of *Jin Ping Mei* wrote with a heart laden with infinite grievances and pain. He lived in a dark society. He could find neither a channel for talking about his pain and grievances nor a vent for exuding them. He had to write a novel in order to speak out.

其描寫當時之社會情狀，略見一斑。然與《水滸傳》不同：《水滸》多正筆，《金瓶》多側筆，《水滸》多明寫，《金瓶》多暗刺；《水滸》多快語，《金瓶》多痛語；《水滸》明白暢快，《金瓶》隱抑悽惻；《水滸》抱奇憤，《金瓶》抱奇冤。

The descriptions in *Jin Ping Mei* give us a glimpse of the social conditions that existed at that time. The descriptions found in *Jin Ping Mei* differ from the descriptions found in *Shuihu Zhuan*. *Shuihu* approaches its subject matter directly, whereas *Jin Ping* approaches its subject matter indirectly. *Shuihu* has many straightforward criticisms, whereas *Jin Ping* occasionally expresses subtle sarcasm. The language of *Shuihu* is sharp, whereas the language of *Jin Ping* conveys a sense of diffuse pain. *Shuihu* employs a clear and straightforward writing style, whereas the tone of *Jin Ping* is sad and bitter. *Shuihu* expresses extraordinary wrath, whereas

---

<sup>120</sup> Pingzi is Di Baoxian (1872-ca. 1942). Pingzi was his hao (pseudonym). Di was a scholar, writer and painter.

*Jin Ping* expresses extraordinary grievances.

處境不同，故下筆亦不同。且其中短簡小曲，往往雋韻絕倫，有非宋詞、元曲所能及者，又可徵當時小人女子之情狀，人心思想之程度，真正一社會小說，不得以淫書目之。

The authors lived in different eras and life situations, and the ways in which they wrote novels differ. The short letters and popular songs in *Jin Ping Mei* often have such charm that some exceed the standards set by the song lyrics of the Song Dynasty and the melodies of the Yuan Dynasty. The novel also shows how women and vile men lived and is representative of the public felt and thought at that time. *Jin Ping Mei* is truly a novel about the society of that era, and should not be thought of as pornography.

## 小說叢話

### A Cluster of Discussions on Fiction

曼殊

Manshu<sup>121</sup>

吾見小說中，其回目之最佳者，莫如《金瓶梅》。《金瓶梅》之聲價，當不下於《水滸》、《紅樓》，此論小說者所評為淫書之祖宗者也。

Of all the novels I have read, *Jin Ping Mei* has the best chapter titles. *Jin Ping Mei* is as well-known as *Shuihu* or *Honglou*. Critics regard it as the ancestral prototype of erotica.

---

<sup>121</sup> Su Manshu (1884-1918) was a major literary figure in early 20th-century China. He was a writer, painter and translator.



餘昔讀之，盡數卷，猶覺毫無趣味，心竊惑之。後乃改其法，認為一種社會之書以讀之，始知盛名之下，必無虛也。

I had read several chapters of the novel, but did not find it interesting at all. I felt a little confused. I later adopted a new way of reading this novel, and thought of this novel as a book about how society operates. Not until then did I realize that the novel deserved its reputation.

凡讀淫書者，莫不全副精神，貫注於寫淫之處，此外則隨手披閱，不大留意，此殆讀者之普通性矣。至於《金瓶梅》，吾固不能謂為非淫書，然其奧妙，絕非在寫淫之筆。蓋此書的是描寫下等婦人社會之書也。

When people read erotic novels they focus their attention on the pornographic descriptions. They read the other parts of the novel carelessly and pay little attention to them. This is common among readers. We cannot say that *Jing Ping Mei* does not belong to the category of erotica. However, the main thrust of the novel is not its pornographic depictions. *Jin Ping Mei* seeks to represent society with an emphasis on descriptions of the women of the lower social classes.

試觀書中之人物，一啓口，則下等婦人之言論也；一舉足，則下等婦人之行動也。雖裝束模倣上流，其下等如故也；供給擬於貴族，其下等如故也。若作者之宗旨在於寫淫，又何必取此粗賤之材料哉？

Look at the characters in the novel. When they open their mouths, they speak in the manner of women of the lower social classes. When they lift their feet, they behave in the

manner of women of the lower social classes. Although they dress like women of the higher social classes, it does not change the fact that they belong to the lower social classes. Although they are provided with the amenities similar to those given to aristocrats, it does not change the fact that they belong to the lower social classes. If the author aimed to write pornographic descriptions, why did he choose to use these unrefined women as the subject matter for his novel?

論者謂《紅樓夢》全脫胎於《金瓶梅》，乃《金瓶梅》之倒影雲，當是的論。若其回目與題詞，真佳絕矣。

Critics say that *Honglou Meng* was derived from *Jin Ping Mei* and is an inverted reflection of *Honglou Meng*. This is an apt comment. As regards *Jin Ping Mei*'s chapter titles and the poetry at the beginning of each chapter, they are just wonderful!

## 雜說

### Miscellaneous Comments

吳趸人

Wu Jianren<sup>122</sup>

《金瓶梅》、《肉蒲團》，此著名之淫書也，然其實皆懲淫之作，此非著作者之自負如此，卽善讀者亦能知此意，固非餘一人之私言也。

*Jin Ping Mei* and *Rou Putuan*<sup>123</sup>, both are well-known examples of pornography.

---

<sup>122</sup> Wu Jianren (1866-1910) is a Chinese writer best-known for his *Bizarre Happenings Eyewitnessed over Two Decades* [Ershi nian mudu zhi guan xianzhuang], one of the "Four Great Satirical Novels" in the Late Qing period. He also edited several newspapers and journals in Shanghai.

However, in matter of fact, they actually speak out against lust. Not only do their authors demonstrate this intention, careful readers can also see this intention. I am not the only one who holds this opinion.

顧世人每每指爲淫書，官府且從而禁之，亦可見善讀者之難其人矣。推是意也，吾敢謂今之譯本偵探小說，皆誨盜之書。夫偵探小說，明明爲懲盜小說也，顧何以謂之誨盜？夫仁者見之謂之仁，智者見之謂之智，若《金瓶梅》、《肉蒲團》，淫者見之謂之淫，偵探小說則盜者見之謂之盜耳。

Ordinary people regard these works as pornography. The government agrees with them and subsequently has banned them. We can see the difficulty of finding careful readers who truly understand books. If we agree that these books are pornography, it would follow that detective stories that are translated into Chinese are books that promote criminal behavior. However, detective stories actually speak out against crimes. How can we say that they propagate crimes? Benevolent people find benevolence in detective stories, and wise people find wisdom in them. Just as lustful people call *Jin Ping Mei* and *Rou Putuan* pornography, only criminals focus on the crimes depicted in the detective stories.

嗚呼！是豈獨不善讀書而已耶，毋亦道德缺乏之過耶！社會如是，捉筆爲小說者當如何其慎之又慎也。……（載《月月小說》第八號，1907年）

Alas! Is this just a matter of not knowing how to read, or is it due to the readers' lack of

---

<sup>123</sup> *Rou Putuan*, also known as *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, is a Chinese erotic novel published during the mid-17th century. Authorship of this novel is generally attributed to Li Yu, playwright and novelist. *Rou Putuan* tells the story of Weiyang Sheng, or Scholar Vesperus, who indulges in debauchery before becoming a Buddhist monk.

morality? Society is like that. Those who write novels should be very very careful. (Published in the eighth issue of *All-Story Monthly*<sup>124</sup>, 1907)

---

<sup>124</sup> *All-Story Monthly* was a journal that published novels, short stories, and literary criticism from 1906 B.C.E. to 1908 B.C.E. Wu Jianren was the general editor of the journal, and also contributed many stories to it.

## Bibliography

- A, Ding. *Jin Ping Mei zhi yishi ji jiqiao* (The ideas and the narrative techniques of *Jin Ping Mei*). In *Jin Ping Mei ziliao xubian: 1919-1949* (A Sequel to A Collection of *Jin Ping Mei* Materials: 1919-1949). Ed. Zhou Juntao. Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1990.
- Balzac, Honor éde. Eug énie Grandet. Trans. Marion Ayton Crawford. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985.
- Beazley, J.D. *Attic Red-figure Vase-painters*. 3 Vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963.
- Bradsher, Keith. “‘China’s Mona Lisa’ Makes a Rare Appearance in Hong Kong.” *The New York Times*. <[http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/03/arts/design/03pain.html?\\_r=4](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/03/arts/design/03pain.html?_r=4)>. Accessed on July 2, 2009.
- Carlitz, Katherine. *The Rhetoric of Chin P’ing Mei*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1986.
- Cai, Zong-qi. “A Synthesis: Rhythm, Syntax and Vision of Chinese Poetry.” In *How to Read Chinese Poetry: A Guided Anthology*. Ed. Zong-qi Cai. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.
- Cao, Xueqin. *The Story of the Stone*. Trans. David Hawkes. 5 vols. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979-1986.
- Collection of Chinese Ancient Atlas: Ming Dynasty* [Zhongguo gudai ditu ji: mingdai]. (1984). Ed. Cao Wanru, et al. Beijing: Cultural relics Publishing House.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*. Trans. Jean McNeil. New York: Zone Books, 1989.

- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.
- Deutsch, Helene. *The Psychology of Women*. New York: Grune & Stratton, 1944.
- Ding, Naifei. *Obscene Things: Sexual Politics in Jin Ping Mei*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.
- Ding, Yaokang. *Three Sequels to Jin Ping Mei* [Jin Ping Mei sanzong xushu]. Ed. Lu He and Xing Yue. 2 vols. Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1998.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Eriksson, Kai. "Foucault, Deleuze, and the Ontology of Networks." *The European Legacy*. 10:6 (2006): 595-610.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*. Trans. Robert Hurley. 3 Vols. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.
- Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. Trans. Colin Gordon and John Mepham. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.
- Fuery, Patrick. *Theories of Desire*. Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1995.
- Girard, René. *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*. Trans. Yvonne Freccero. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1965.
- Gu, Ming Dong. *Chinese Theories of Fiction: A Non-Western Narrative System*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006.

Gulik, Robert Hans van.. *Chinese Pictorial Art as Viewed by the Connoisseur*. Roma: Istituto Italiano Per Il Medio Ed Estremo Oriente, 1958.

Hanan, Patrick. "The Text of *Chin P'ing Mei*." *Asian Major* 9.1 (1962): 1-57.

Hou, Hui. *Shihuo Jinpingmei: Cong chifan chuanyi kan wanming renxing* (Food and Money in Jin Ping Mei: Exploring Human Nature in Late Ming Dynasty from Eating and Dressing). Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2007.

Huang, Martin. *Desire and Fictional Narrative in Late Imperial China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Huang, Ray. *1587, A Year of No Significance*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981.

Jahshan, Shaun Kelly. "Reader-Oriented Polyphony? Zhang Zhupo's Commentary on the *Jin Ping Mei*." *Modern Language Quarterly*, 56.1 (1996): 1-29.

*Jin Ping Mei ziliao huibian* (A Collection of Jin Ping Mei Materials). Ed. Hou Zhongyi and Wang Rumei. Beijing: Beijing daxue Chubanshe, 1985.

Knetchtges, David R. "Fu Poetry: An Ancient-Style Rhapsody." In *How to Read Chinese Poetry: A Guided Anthology*. Ed. Zong-qi Cai. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits*. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006.

Lacan, Jacques. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981.

- Lanling Xiaoxiaosheng. *The Golden Lotus: A translation, from the Chinese original, of the novel Chin P'ing Mei*. Trans. Clement Egerton. 4 volumes. London: Routledge, 1974.
- Lanling xiaoxiaosheng. *Jin Ping Mei Cihua*. Ed. Liu Bendong. Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1980.
- Lanling xiaoxiaosheng. *Jin Ping Mei Cihua*. Ed. Mei Jie. 3 Vols. Taipei: Liren shuju, 2007.
- Lanling xiaoxiaosheng. *The Plum in the Golden Vase, or Chin P'ing Mei*. Trans. David Roy. Vols. 1-3. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1991-2006.
- Lanling xiaoxiaosheng. *Xinke xiuxiang piping Jin Ping Mei*. Ed. Qi Yan and Ru Mei. 2 Vols. Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1990.
- Lanling xiaoxiaosheng. *Zhang Zhupo piping Jin Ping Mei*. Ed. Wang Rumei et al. Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1991.
- Li, Yu. *A Handful Snow* [Yipeng xue]. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1989.
- Li, Yu. *The Carnal Prayer Mat*. Trans. Patrick Hanan. New York: Ballantine Books, 1990.
- Lu, Xun. *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*. Trans. Xianyi Yang and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1982.
- Luo, Junjie. "Masochism, Desire and Death: A Deleuzian Reading of Pan Jinlian." *The International Journal of the Humanities*. 7:1 (2009): 149-156.
- New World Translation of the Holy Scripts*. New York: Watch Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1984.
- Ouyang, Jian. *Restoring the Identity of Zhiyan Zhai* [Huanyuan zhiyan zhai]. Harbing: Heilongjiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 2003.



*Oxford English Dictionary*. 1989. May 21, 2010 and May 29, 2010.

<<http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy2.library.uiuc.edu/entrance.dtl>>

Plaks, Andrew. *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.

Roy, David. Trans. "Chang Chu-p'o on How to Read the *Chin P'ing Mei* (The Plum in the Golden Vase)." In *How to Read the Chinese Novel*. Ed. David Rolston. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.

Roy, David. Trans. "Chang Chu-p'o's Commentary on the *Chin P'ing Mei*." In *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays*. Ed. Andrew Plaks. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.

*A Summary of Ancient Chinese Culture* [Zhongguo gudai wenhua huiyao]. Ed. Huang Jingui. 2 vols. Hangzhou: Xiling yinshe chubanshe, 2007.

Sun, Shuyu. *Jin Ping Mei de yishu* (The Art of *Jin Ping Mei*). Taipei: Shidai wenhua, 1979.

Tian, Xiaofei. *Qiushuitang lun Jin Ping Mei* (Qiushuitang on *Jin Ping Mei*). Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2003.

Tian, Xiaofei. "A Preliminary Comparison of the Two Recensions of *Jinpingmei*." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 62.2 (2002): 347-89.

Wang, John C. Y. *Chin Sheng-t'an: His Life and Literary Criticism*. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2004.

Wang, Juan. (2007). "Officialdom Unmasked: Shanghai Tabloid Press, 1897–1911." *Late Imperial China* 28.2 (2007): 81-128.

Wu, Gan. “*Jin Ping Mei* yanjiu de xuan’an yu lunzheng (Debates and Unsolved Problems in *Jin Ping Mei* Research).” In *Jin Ping Mei he Linqing: diliujie guoji Jin Ping Mei xueshu taolunhui lunwenji* (*Jin Ping Mei* and Linqing: The Proceedings of the Six International Conference on *Jin Ping Mei*). Ed. Huang Lin and Du Mingde. Jinan: qilu shushe, 2008.

“Wu Jianren.” *Renditions*. Authors and Translators Index.  
<<http://www.renditions.org/renditions/authors/wujr.html>>. Accessed on June 11, 2009.

Yang, Shaoyou. *A Critical Biography of Altan Khan* [Anda han pingzhuan]. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1992.

Yu, Yingshi. *Honglouloumeng de liangge shijie* [The Two Worlds in A Dream of Red Mansions]. Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexue chubanshe, 2002.

Yuan, Zhongdao. *The Diary of Yuan Xiaoxiu* [Yuan Xiaoxiu riji]. Ed. A Ying. Shanghai: Shanghai zazhi gongsi, 1935.

Zhang, Peiheng and Yuming Luo. Eds. *Zhongguo wenxueshi xinzhu* (A New History of Chinese Literature). 2 Vols. Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2007.

Zhang, Tingyu, et al. *History of the Ming Dynasty* [Ming shi]. Vol. 10. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974.

Zhang, Tingyu, et al. (1974). *History of the Ming Dynasty* [Ming shi]. Vol. 13. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974.

Zhang, Tingyu, et al. *History of the Ming Dynasty* [Ming shi]. Vol. 14. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974.

Zhao, Jingshen. “*Jin Ping Mei* de tica, zhuti, renwu. (The Materials, Themes and Characters of *Jin Ping Mei*).” In *Mingjia yanzhong de Jin Ping Mei* (*Jin Ping Mei* in the eyes of renowned scholars). Ed. Li Shiyue. Beijing: wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006.

Zhao, Yi. *Selected Poems of Zhao Yi* [Zhao Yi shixuan]. Ed. Hu Yixiao. Henan: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1985.

Zheng, Zhenduo. “Tan *Jin Ping Mei* (On *Jin Ping Mei*).” In *Mingjia yanzhong de Jin Pin Mei* (*Jin Ping Mei* in the eyes of renowned scholars). Ed. Li Shiyue. Beijing: wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006.