

Pao-yu and the Other: Recognition of the Other as Difference

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ABSTRACT

This feminist essay on *Hung lou meng* (*A Dream of Red Mansions*), focuses on the character of Bao Yu as embodying a subversive gender ideology; his own rather bisexual nature and sympathetic attitude toward women in the novel represents a utopian sexual ethics – a recognition of the Other (the female) as different and not merely derivative. Further, like the woman characters who are “fluid” and ambiguous as water, Bao Yu’s gender orientation is “fluid.” The author employs the theories and terminology of modern French psychoanalytic theorists like Lacan and Luce Irigaray to critique the Confucian gender ideology of *Hung lou meng*. The author remarks at the end of the essay that in this novel, “Marriage as an institution is powerful enough to strangle femininity.”

KEY WORDS

Hung lou meng

Luce Irigaray

French

Freud

water imagery

Utopian sexual ethics

subversive gender ideology

fluidity

phallus

Bao Yu

“Girls are made of water” 女兒是水做的骨肉 is probably the most famous enunciation in *Hung lou meng* 紅樓夢 (*A Dream of Red Mansions*, usu. known as *The Dream of the Red Chamber*)¹. This new “definition” of women given by Pao-yu 寶玉, though now worn out through repeated quotation to be a cliché, deserves a double reading. For the water imagery, traditionally and historically associated with women, is not a homologue, but rich with all sorts of connotations. As is well known, the Confucian view of woman as a deluge and source of disaster 女人是禍水² employs the same metaphor, but with an added misogynist moral judgement 禍. (This is why Leng Tzu-hsing 冷子興 infers that Pao-yu will grow up a libertine because he is attracted by the water-woman.) However, on the other hand, although the Confucian gender ideology of male=*yang* over female=*yin* is the dominant discourse of woman in China, the heterogeneity of the water metaphor calls into doubt the authority of the Confucian hierarchical gender discourse. For there exists another Taoist (here I refer to the philosophical school) interpretation of water, which reverses the Confucian order of the water-woman and elevates her status to the highest degree: “In the world there is nothing more submissive and weak than water. Yet for attacking that which is hard and strong nothing can surpass it. This is because nothing can take its place.” 天下莫柔弱行水，而攻堅強者莫之能先，以其无以易之也³). Given that water imagery in Taoist philosophy is also associated with woman, it can be seen as a counter-discourse,⁴ which challenges the dominant Confucian gender hierarchy from time to time (notably in the Wei-Chin Northern and Southern dynasties 220-581 A.D., which parallels the situation that women at that period are relatively free).

If we turn our eyes to our contemporary scene, the French feminist-linguist-psychoanalyst-philosopher Luce Irigaray also employs “fluidity” as her chief “metaphor” to “compete with the phallosensical homologue,”⁵ “since historically the properties of fluids have been abandoned to the feminine.”⁶ In other words, fluidity is her double-edged knife. Rejected as beneath or beyond the system (of solids, alluding to the Lacanian symbolic order) currently in force, ignored by the complicity of a “mechanics” of solids alone and rationality (*This Sex*, 107), fluidity, as the “other of language, is appropriated by Irigaray to intervene (by subverting through quoting) the Lacanian dominant discourse of woman as “not-all,” “lack,” “not (the male) one” (*This Sex*, 106-118).⁷ Yet woman (female sexuality)-fluid, by nature unstable, is indeed *not one*, not the same, is *more than one*, more than the man (male sexuality)-solid-one. Thus the phallic economy of

sexual difference based on sameness and oneness is disrupted by plurality, multiplicity, or difference of fluidity-femininity, and the other (woman) emerges to be unapproachable.

Therefore, with the *rapprochement* of woman as water (fluidity) established, Pao-yu and Irigaray can start supporting each other. Seen in the Irigarayan light, Pao-yu's statement is subversive in that water becomes a metaphor not only of purity, but also of *difference*. Indeed as numerous distinguished woman characters are presented in *Hung lou meng*, woman eludes "Thou art that," that is, any definite identification. Thus Pao-yu's famous enunciation is rather a counter-discourse recognizing the difference of the other.⁸ Moreover, through his enunciated inversion of gender hierarchy — "Girls are made of water and men of mud, [. . .] I feel clean and refreshed when I'm with girls but find men dirty and stinking" (ch. 2; *The Yangs*, Vol. 1, 26), Pao-yu rather expresses his wish to be a woman rather than a man; he aspires to be "feminized," or, using his own "water" metaphor, to be "fluidified."

In fact, by using this water-fluidity metaphor, Irigaray/Pao-yu already "transcend" the Freudian model of "original" bisexuality, a presupposed coexistence and dichotomy of masculinity and femininity to account for the subsequent development of a passive "femininity."⁹ For bisexuality, though seemingly a good method to bypass sexual distinction, is in fact used by Freud to justify the phallic economy of representation, which is based on sameness, oneness, or identity with the masculine subject — an "*a priori* of the same." Therefore, in her famous critique of the psychoanalytic theory of sexual difference, "The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry" (in *Speculum*), Irigaray exposes, by her playful mimicry, how the exclusive privileging of the penis-phallus as the master signifier establishes the primacy of the masculine parameter, and relegates woman to man-minus, absence. Whereas for man there is no prohibition upon substitutes that permit the realization of bisexual tendencies, "provided that these have been *historically valorized*" (*Speculum* 23, emphasis mine), female bisexuality is called "enigmatic," and should be "converted" to the single passive femininity. Therefore, female bisexuality turns out to be rather an "*inverted recapitulation of the 'program' masculine sexuality writes for itself*" (*Speculum*, 111, emphasis Irigaray's). Bisexuality, still binary, and within a *phallogocentric* context, cannot solve the "enigma of women." Thus Freud can only admit that

. . . the development of femininity remains exposed to distur-

bance by the residual phenomena of the early masculine period. Regressions to the fixations of the pre-Oedipus phases very frequently occur; in the course of some women's lives there is a repeated alternation between periods in which masculinity or femininity gains the upper hand ("Femininity," 131).

Such statement in fact turns upon itself, betraying the inadequacy and the inconsistency of sexual *indifference* which is vigorously subverted by Irigaray's close reading. Therefore "femininity" as well as "masculinity" should never, and can never be defined. This is why Irigaray use "fluidity" as counter-"metaphor" with connotations of plurality, multiplicity, incompleteness, and non-unity, to liberate women and femininity from a negative and distorted representation.

Thus Pao-yu's statement of "woman made of water" is an excellent example to elucidate Irigaray's strategy of *disruption* of patriarchal definition of women from *within* (the discursive mechanism) as is most explicitly expounded in "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine" (collected in *This Sex*). For her, the only path available at the initial phase to subvert the monopoly of the phallogentric discourse is *mimicry* (*This Sex*, 76, see also translator's notes, 220). It is a "play with mimesis," to create a *double syntax*, for the purpose of recovering the place of woman's exploitation by discourse, not allowing herself to be simply reduced to the "negative." By the effect of playful repetition, woman can resubmit herself to the masculine logic, but make visible what was supposed to remain invisible. Therefore Pao-yu's statement, appropriating the Confucian misogynist discourse with a twist, is indeed a *mimicry*, a "disruptive excess" (*This Sex*, 78), namely a stance of dissociation and resistance, which is achieved through repeating/interpreting the way in which, within discourse, the feminine is defined as the source of disaster.

Through *mimicry*, Irigaray tries to invoke the repressed "*elsewhere*" (of "matter," "female pleasure," or *jouissance*¹⁰) which is testified by the fact of women's resistance to reabsorption by the present organization of gender (*This Sex*, 76). Yet the access to this "*elsewhere*," an imaginable alternative, can only be "unveiled" (an implied critique of Lacan's privileging the "veiled" phallus) by "crossing back through the mirror that subtends all speculation" (*This Sex*, 77). Such a "place," though with strong sexual connotations, is in fact *realized* by Pao-yu's new "sexual ethics" based on his recognition of the other in Ta-kuan yuan. (I shall come back to this issue

later.)

Thus when we say Pao-yu is “feminized,” it is rather used provisionally (for want of a better description) to emphasize the *ideological difference* between him and most other male characters in *Hung lou meng*. For, aspiring after water-fluidity, his sexuality cannot be defined as male or female. Though no doubt his biological sex is male, his “disposition” is seen as “feminine” from the traditional Confucian perspective. That is why the resistance against his unconventional and “unmasculine” behavior occurs as early as on his first birthday. In this famous “drawing the lot” episode, the reader is told that Pao-yu’s father tests his disposition on his first year birthday by laying out before him lots of objects, but disappointedly finds him prefer “women’s things” — “the rouge, powder-boxes, hair ornaments and bangles” (ch. 2). From his father’s orthodox Confucian view, such behavior designates that Pao-yu is already “contaminated” by “deluge” women, therefore should be “squared.” Nevertheless, the dotage of his grandma (a matriarchal power gained from the death of the patriarch) facilitates his escape from normal “engendering.” Yet the dotage is in turn based on Chinese jade-fetishism, for Pao-yu is born with a magic jade in his mouth. However, the reader should remember the “true” identity of the jade as the *redundant* stone discarded by the great matriarchal goddess Nu-kua 女媧. From redundancy to preciousness, certain ironies and gaps will form in the reader’s reception of Pao-yu as a character. Thus the function of Pao-yu’s mythical identity as a matriarchal residue proves to be a necessary pre(-) text to “excuse” his anti-social gender ideology and behavior.

Pao-yu utters still more “mimicries” with the aims of discursive disruption. For instance, he calls men “career worms” 祿蠹 (ch. 19), which challenges the Confucian value judgement of privileging the male bureaucratic career, and in turn praises girls pure and clean, uncontaminated by such ideology. He believes that “the finest essence of Nature were embodied in girls, men being nothing but the dregs and scum” (ch. 20; *The Yangs*, Vol. 1, 291). He also contends to the assumed Gold-Jade match (between him and Pao-ch’ai 寶釵), in favor of the Wood-Stone match (between him and Tai-yu 黛玉), uttered during his dream, yet in the actual presence of Hsueh Pao-chai (ch. 36; *The Yangs*, Vol. 1, 525). This is also a micro linguistic intervention, a mimicry of the worldly expectation of a “perfect” marriage match. (We should notice that the Wood-Stone bond is always mentioned in *dreams*, the first time in Chen Shih-yen’s 甄士隱 dream in ch. 1, then in the significant and most elaborated dream-vision in ch. 5. Dream as an important

literary mechanism has a long tradition in Chinese literature. Therefore it can serve as a good device for the purpose of "crossing back through the mirror that subtends all speculation," in the Irigarayan sense.) Taken into consideration the power of the Chinese patriarchal ideology which demands a total submission to the family-arranged marriage, the significance of this resistance, of this mimicry should not be under-estimated.

There are still more instances of the discursive mimicries which cannot be enumerated here (for lack of space and time). However, Pao-yu's recognition of women (the other) as *difference* leads to a *different* new sexual ethics, which is embodied in the relationships between him and his girl companions. In order to elucidate this utopian but also revolutionary sexual ethics, we can here borrow again from Irigaray's new proposal in her *Ethique de la difference sexuelle*,¹¹ in which she launches a rethinking on the relations between the self and the other. (In fact, Irigaray constantly frames her discussion of "femininity" in terms of the self-other dialectic, which is reflected in her book-titles: *Speculum of the Other Woman*, *This Sex Which is not One*, or *Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre*.) For if the existing reduction of sexual difference to the male ontological Sameness is undesirable, a revolution in thought and ethics is needed. Instead of conceptualizing man and woman relation as a Hegelian master-slave dialectic, Irigaray, following another contemporary French philosopher-theologian Emmanuel Lévinas, stresses the importance of the ethical response to the call of the other, of putting the other before the self.¹² In other words, an *I-thou* relationship will replace the *I-he* relationship. A mutual respect for each other's significance based on their differences will ensure the expression of the otherness. It will then not lead to a male-centered ("homosexual") economy of sexual exchange. As "equal" but different subjects, Irigaray proposes, man and woman should be able to experience "wonder" (*admiration* in the French original) in their (sexual) encounter. She puts it in the following way:

To arrive at the constitution of an ethics of sexual difference, we must at least return to what is for Descartes the first passion: *wonder*. This passion is not opposed to, or in conflict with anything else, and exists always as though for the first time. Man and woman, woman and man are therefore always meeting as though for the first time since they cannot stand in for one another. I shall never take the place of a man, never will a man take mine. Whatever identifications are possible, one will never exactly fill the place of the other — the one is irreducible to the other.¹³

Under such circumstances, "a sexual encounter would be a celebration, and not a disguised or polemic form of the master-slave relationship" (*Ethique* 23, English trans. 127).

Undoubtedly highly utopian, Irigaray's sexual ethics nevertheless serves as an appropriate guide line to decipher Pao-yu's gender relations, also utopian in nature. To expound this hypothesis, I would like to cite another famous comment, again a "mimicry," yet this time not uttered by Pao-yu, but *on* Pao-yu. Proclaimed by Goddess of Disenchantment 警幻仙姑 as "the most lustful person ever to have lived in this world since time immemorial" 天下古今第一淫人也 (ch. 5; *The Yangs*, Vol. 1, 84), Pao-yu is himself frightened by such a "scandalous" labelling and denies being lustful. Yet Disenchantment has in fact already subverted the traditional Confucian (patriarchal) dichotomy of spiritual love and carnal desire. To quote her explanation in full:

In your [Pao-yu's] dusty world, countless green-windowed chambers and embroidered boudoirs of rich and noble families are desecrated by amorous men and loose women. Worse still, all dissolute wretches since ancient times have drawn a distinction between love of beauty and carnal desire, between love and lust, so as to gloss over their immortality. *Love of beauty leads to lust, and desire even more so.* Thus every sexual transport of cloud and rain [sexual intercourse] is the *inevitable* climax of love of beauty and desire (ch. 5; *The Yangs*, Vol. 1, 84; emphasis mine).

Having denounced the inadequate binary opposition of love and lust, Disenchantment goes on to describe Pao-yu's lustfulness:

In principle all lust is the same, but it has different connotations. . . . In your [Pao-yu's] case, you were born with a passionate nature which we call "lust of the mind [意淫]." This can be grasped by the mind but not expressed, apprehended intuitively but not described in words. [意淫二字可心會而不可口傳，可神通而不可與達 in the Chinese original.] Whereas this makes you a welcome companion to women, in the eyes of the world it is bound to make you appear strange and unnatural, an object of mockery and scorn (ch. 5; *The Yangs*, Vol. 1, 85).

Pao-yu's renowned "lust of the mind" is never, and cannot be clearly *defined*, but is close to the sentiment of "wonder" Irigaray proclaims that we must return to. Not *merely* fleshly lust, the physical and sexual appetite, it is however demonstrated repetitively through concrete instances of contacts with girls, based on his new sexual ethics of putting the other before himself. Whereas this "lust of the mind" is interpreted in numerous preceding criticisms as a phase of Pao-yu's "degeneration," or entrapment by womanly snares along his "spiritual journey towards ascension," the subversiveness of this saying as counter-discourse is constantly overlooked.¹⁴

As if to confront dominant Confucian ethical ideology still further, Pao-yu experiences his first "real" sexual experience with Chien-mei 兼美 ("Combining the best") in the same dream-vision following Disenchantment's declaration of his "lust of the mind." As the "inevitable climax of love of beauty and desire," this sexual initiation illustrates fully the "lust of the mind." Yet it is not a Hegelian master-slave relationship, in which the two parties vie for mastery. He and Chien-mei (Ke-ch'ing) rather establish an I-thou relationship in which they depend on each other, and respond to each other. That is why when he crosses back from his dream (a kind of Irigarayan "elsewhere") to the "real" world, he is still calling her name.

When Pao-yu returns to the "real" world, he can still reenact the "art of love" with another girl, his most intimate chambermaid Hsi-jen 襲人. It is "wonder" that holds their new relationship. For practically "master" and "slave," he never treats her as his slave. The consequence: "From that hour Pao-yu treated Hsi-jen with special consideration and she served him even more faithfully than before" (ch. 6; *The Yangs*, Vol. 1, 88). In other words, "the lovers bestow on each other — life."¹⁵ Hsi-jen, in some sense, becomes the irreducible other to Pao-yu. Besides taking daily care of him, she is the only maid who offers counsel to Pao-yu. Though uttered from a different Confucian point of view, her opinions are still esteemed. She is not requested to bend to the same logic of Pao-yu's.

All along, Pao-yu's gender relations aim to prove the possibility of establishing real (inter)sexual relationships other than the established one that tries to annex the other (usu. woman). Yet it is not identical with the Lacanian differentiation of *La femme* (the idealized woman who only "exists" in courtly love) and *une femme* who is the real object (of male desire). Such a new sexual ethics is practicable only within Ta-kuan yuan, the "elsewhere," which escapes Confucian gender ideology under the ostensible auspice of the Imperial Concubine. Displaced to this garden, Pao-yu and his

girl companions are away from their parents, relatively out of the control of the symbolic order. Within this enclosure, the other can summon the ethical response from the one (Pao-yu).

We may examine the ethical relationship between Pao-yu and Ch'ing-wen 晴雯, one of his other maids. Sharp-tongued and "rebellious," Ch'ing-wen is always defiant against the unequal master-slave relation. In one incident, when Pao-yu scolds her for her carelessness in dropping and breaking his fan, she retorts that it is nothing serious, and questions his authority of assuming such a high master posture. Nevertheless, when they make up, Ch'ing-wen is able to "demand" a favor of him. She is allowed to tear fans to enjoy the tearing sound with impunity. Pao-yu justifies his pampering by commenting that the fan does not matter much as long as it can serve to please a beauty, and he is even willing to spend a thousand taels to please her (Chp. 31). Thus Ch'ing-wen as another irreducible other summons the ethical response from Pao-yu as the one. And Pao-yu, recognizes the other's priority over himself. Later, in return, Ch'ing-wen reciprocates Pao-yu's "favor" by answering his call for the other. When his exotic peacock-feathered cloak is damaged by fire, she, being the only one capable of repairing it, risks her health to darn it for him (ch. 52).

However, the "reality" intervenes. When Pao-yu's mother Lady Wang attempts a raid on Ta-kuan yuan, Ch'ing-wen is expelled simply because she is more beautiful than the other maids. For from Lady Wang's Confucian point of view, to be more beautiful than the others is already a sin, and deserves to be identified as "duluge" and expelled. The last encounter between Pao-yu and her, after her expulsion, though pathetic, can further illustrate Pao-yu's ethical concern. When Ch'ing-wen gulps the smelly tea down as if it were nectar, he is deeply touched and forgets *who he is* (ch. 77). He is rather concerned with the other, and would like to put the other before himself. Yet only after death can Ch'ing-wen be metaphorically transformed by Pao-yu's elegy into an idealized Other, a goddess-like figure, a superior being.

Even with the girls whom he is supposed not to have direct contacts with, Pao-yu does not spare his "sympathy." Ping-erh 平兒, the considerate, virtuous, and beautiful concubine of Pao-yu's cousin Chia Lien 賈璉, as well as the most trusted confidante of Hsi-feng 熙鳳, becomes the innocent victim of their fury after Hsi-feng's discovery of Lien's adultery on her birthday, and is wrongly beaten up as a scapegoat by both (ch. 44). This incident discloses to Ping-erh her real status as a slave, never to be treated as an equal being by her master-husband and mistress. Ironically, it is Pao-yu who apo-

logizes for Lien, thus taking over Lien's husband position. Furthermore, he, by attending to Ping-erh's toilet, which pleasure is traditionally reserved for the husband, experiences another instance of the "lust of the mind." To Pao-yu, Ping-erh, as another irreducible other, is not merely an object of sexual exchange, hence deserves and demands a special treatment. He laments her misfortune, and puts himself in her place, but does not impose his view on her.

Later Pao-yu also gets a chance to be of service to Hsiang-ling 香菱, the concubine of another cousin, Hsueh Pan 薛蟠, who is a pleasure-seeker, even a bully. Hsiang-ling therefore appreciates Pao-yu's consideration when he troubles to find an identical skirt for her when her new one is soiled while playing "match my flower" game with other mischievous girls (ch. 62). Hence in some sense her finding a husband-wife flower is a symbolic act revealing her longing for a true match. This aspiration is met by Pao-yu's bringing a similar flower to match with hers. The irony lies in that it also happens when her husband is away, thus providing Pao-yu a rare chance to replace as "surrogate" husband again by showing a "husbandly" consideration to her. Clearly also an instance of his "lust of the mind," it provides an unexpected delight to Pao-yu. Again his sense of spontaneous responsibility to come to the aid of girls shows his concern for the other as the other. Thus he finds both girls pitiable for their miserable fates, for their marrying wrong husbands. Hence these seemingly insignificant episodes rather reassert the unreserved "wonder" Pao-yu holds in his encounters with girls.

Nevertheless, we should inquire why the latter two episodes provide Pao-yu such great pleasure. Not involving any sexual pleasure, they are good examples to illustrate the fundamental difference between his and other male counterparts' sexual ethics. The principle he holds is alterity, not possession, or *consommation* (in French referring to both consumption and consummation). He seeks only to satisfy his "lust of the mind." Based on such "lust of the mind," Pao-yu's new sexual ethics is openness or susceptibility to the other's call.

Marriage as Threshold

Pao-yu's recognition of women as difference will in the long run confront the most formidable enemy — the marriage institution. His dissemination of his subversive gender ideology first confronts the deep-rooted internalization of patriarchal norms by most girls. Under the pressure of marriage, disguised

as a reward to conformity, the specificity of the other sex — the fresh, unplouted fluidity or “spirituality” — most of the time is even not treasured by themselves. Their responses can be roughly classified in two groups: being innocent, naive, sometimes sentimental and narrow-minded, such as Tai-yu and Hsiang-yun, 湘雲 or adopting “masquerade” (“defined” by Irigaray as “an alienated or false version of femininity arising from the woman’s awareness of the man’s desire for her to be his other,” *This Sex*, 84, also translator’s note, 220), like Pao-chai and Hsi-jen. The instance of Pao-chai shows to what a great extent the internalization of patriarchal norms can reinforce its hegemony. If exceptionally, some girls dare to find for themselves husbands, they are always severely punished. For instance, You San-chieh’s 尤三姐 attempt to violate this rule results in a doubt about her chastity, and consequently an inevitable suicide. When people discover Chess’s 司棋 (the chief maid of Ying-ch’un 迎春) secret sexual transgression with her cousin, she is banished from the garden, Ta-kuan yuan. Needless to mention Ch’ing-wen, who, owing to groundless suspicion of her seduction of Pao-yu, is expelled and dies of it. These chilling consequences of female vulnerability warn of the inevitability of marital tragedy.

From Chapter 71 onwards, there is a rapid downfall in terms of plot. Beginning with the forced suicide of the You sisters, girls gradually all fall victims of their inevitable fate. When femininity, the only hope is crumbling, there is at the same time more exposure of the abuse, evil, and inner conflict inside the big household, gradually getting the better hand.

Under the shadow of marriage institution, some among those girls still manage to retain their innocence; it is more treasurable to see them show little restraint over their emotion, and with no calculated plan to please the senior family members. Though owing to a practical consideration, they are fully aware of the impracticality of following the “fictitious” models of Ying-ying 鶯鶯 and Li-niang 麗娘.

Throughout the whole novel, there is always a hidden expectation of the Gold and Jade marriage from the senior family members. This poses a threat to Pao-yu and Tai-yu’s emotional bond, yet only in his dream does Pao-yu dare to oppose it openly. As far as Tai-yu is concerned, she only indulges herself in self-pity, regarding herself as totally helpless. From a practical point of view, since the decision for a marriage match is always made by senior family members, the best strategy is to win the heart of the Grandmother Chia the Matriarch. Conforming to the dominant norms of conduct and gender ideology, therefore, is rather a more effective strategy, which is em-

ployed by the more sophisticated Pao-chai.

The sexual difference Pao-yu acknowledges is the purity and superiority of the female sex, their intrinsic difference from man. On the other hand, all men except Pao-yu and his "feminized" male companions are classified by him in the same lustful, degenerated class, which might result from the implied author's despair of the male sex. Yet to his regret, through wedlock the female sex will also be corrupted by the male sex.

Contrary to the Feudian theory, Pao-yu finds that the identification of woman to man only occurs after marriage. There seems to him a division of "good" and "bad" women according to their marriage status, and his opposite attitudes toward these two different groups are distinct. Marriage as an institution is powerful enough to strangle femininity. Some girls are forced to conform to the dominant Confucian gender identity, and become victimized. To this group, Pao-yu's sympathy, revealed in his lamentation to Ying-ch'un's and Hsiang-ling's victimization, is even ampler than other girls' (chs. 79 & 80). To another group of women (notably Hsi-feng and Chin-kuei 金桂), corrupted and degenerated, he also shows deep regret.

Yet does the Confucian gender ideology affect Pao-yu? Though in the latter part of the novel, an awkward mechanism (the mysterious loss of his Jade) turns Pao-yu into an "idiot" to be manipulated by the patriarchal authority, it is never as Wang Jing justifies the inevitable solution for him to disentangle himself from the mundane female traps (Wang, 270-286). For by assigning a "merit" to him for the whole Chia clan, it contradicts his former subversiveness in fighting against traditional values. Therefore the plot of his passing of the Exam is rather self-contradictory in terms of textual ideology. A rejection of his new sexual ethics in the impasse of his disillusion is never a good solution, let alone an unjustified one. Though the reestablishment of patriarchal hierarchy, and the denunciation of femininity in the long run reassure the formidable power of patriarchy, our text (inscription) reasserts and reenacts the symbolic resistance. If *Hung lou meng* still has a grip on contemporary readers, it should be largely attributed to the fluidity and the utopian new sexual ethics it evokes.

Notes

1. *Hung lou meng* 紅樓夢 (*A Dream of Red Mansions*), Ts'ao Hsueh-chin 曹雪芹 and Kao E (Ngo) 高鶚, trans. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, 3 vols, (Peiking: Foreign Languages Press, 1978-80), Vol. 1 (1978), 26. In the following text citations will be followed by the chapter no. first, then reference to this translation, hereafter

- abbr. as The Yangs.
2. The earliest (written) association of women with deluge can be found in "Fei-yen wai chuan" (飛燕外傳 "The Unofficial History of Fei-yen"), in which one court academician Chuo Fang-ch'en 淖方成, upon his first sight of the Fei-yen sisters, comments: "This is deluge, which will extinguish fire." ("此禍水也,滅火必矣") For according to the prevalent five-elements cosmology, the Han Dynasty is believed to thrive under the auspice of the fire element; therefore the metaphor of water is appropriated to signify the opposite force which will overthrow the Han Dynasty.
 3. *Lao Tzu*, trans. (with introd.) D. C. Lau, (Middlesex: Penguin, 1963), 140. Chinese Original 老子道德經七十八張.
 4. The concept "counter-discourse" is borrowed from Richard Terdiman. I am indebted to his book *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: the Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-century France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1985), esp. his "Introduction: on Symbolic Resistance," 25-84.
 5. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the OtherWoman*, trans. Gillian Gill (Ithaca and New York: Cornell UP, 1985, French original publ. 1974), 240. Henceforth cited as *Speculum*.
 6. Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (with Carolyn Burke), (Ithaca and New York: Cornell UP, 1985; French original publ. 1977), 116; henceforth abbr. *This Sex*.
 7. Subversion from within is Irigaray's favorite strategy to interrogate the dominant discourse. Here, her immediate target text is "The mirror stage as formation of the function of the I," by the French psychoanalyst Jaques Lacan, in his *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (London: Routledge, 1977), 1-7.
 8. Other/same refers to the tendency in discourse which privileges masculine "sameness-unto-itself" as the basis of signification and identity, and as a consequence, posits the feminine as "other" only in relation to masculine same, that is not as a different mode of signification. However, it must be clarified here that though Irigaray was trained as a psychoanalyst under Lacan, she does not adopt Lacan's differentiation between *Autre* (the capitalized "Other") and *objet petit a* (the small "other"). In fact, she constantly challenges this distinction between the "idealized," hypothetical Other woman (*La Femme*) and the "experiential" other woman (*une femme*), esp. in "Cosi Fan Tutti" and "The 'Mechanics' of Fluids," both collected in *This Sex*, resp. 86-105, 106-118. Hence following Irigaray, I will refer to woman as the other, not the Other.
 9. See Irigaray, "The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry," in *Speculum*, 9-112, esp. 20-1, 110-2. Her main target text is Freud's "Femininity," in his *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, collected in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Uusu. abbr. as *SE*), gen. ed. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74), Vol. 22, 112-35. Henceforth page numbers will be given in the text.
 10. *Jouissance* in French signifies pleasure "totality" (even excess) of enjoyment which is *simultaneously* sexual, spiritual, physical and conceptual. The expression "female pleasure" (*jouissance feminine*) stresses the difference between the male and female libidinal economies, which is one of the central concerns of contemporary French feminists, recurring in a lot of texts discussing femininity, female libido, and female desire.
 11. Irigaray, *Ethique de la difference sexuelle*, (Paris: de Minuit, 1984), henceforth abbr. as *Ethique*.

12. For an account available in English of Irigaray's indebtedness to Levinas, see Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*, (Sidney: Allen & Unwin, 1989), ch. 5 "Luce Irigaray and the Ethics of Alterity," 140-83, esp. 155-58.
13. Irigaray, *Ethique*, 19-20; English translation Sean Hand's, in Toril Moi (ed.), *French Feminist Thought*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 124.
14. For instance, Wang Kuo-wei 王國維 interprets the Jade (玉) as desire (欲), and reads *Hung lou meng* as a story of self-delusion and the tragedy of human will. Such a reading is clearly influenced by the philosophy of Schopenhauer. See Wang Kuo-wei, influenced by the philosophy of Schopenhauer. See Wang Kuo-wei, *Hung lou meng p'ing-lun 紅樓夢評論* (Commentary on *Hung lou meng*), (Taipei: Tien hua 天華, 1979), 11-12. Lucien Miller, in his *Masks of Fiction in Dream of the Red Chamber – Myth, Mimesis, and Persona* (Tucson: Arizona UP, 1975), esp. 155-80, also holds a similar view. Recently, Wang Jing 王瑾, in her unpublished Ph.D. dissertation "The Mythology of Stone: a Study of Intertextuality of Ancient Chinese Stonelore and Three Chinese Novels" (Univ. of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1985), also elaborates along the same line, esp. in her section 4.2.3.2. "Pao-yu's Liminal Philosophy of Amour," 270-86. This work will be henceforth cited as Wang.
15. Irigaray, "Pecondite de la caresse (Lecture de Levinas. *Totalite et infini*, section IV, B 'Phenomenologie de l'eros,'" in *Ethique*, 177. English translation "The fecundity of the Caress" by Carolyn Burke, collected in *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard. A. Cohen, (Albany. State U of New York P, 1986), 235.