

The *Chih-yen-chai* Commentary: An Analysis in the Perspective of Western Theories of Literature

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Perhaps the most illuminating commentary on a work of Chinese fiction is the *Chih-yen-chai* (脂硯齋, CYC) commentary on *Hung-lou-meng* (紅樓夢, *Dream of the Red Chamber*). As John Wang (王靖宇) has pointed out, most discussions of this commentary have centered upon its usefulness in determining authorship, dates, and the relationships between the various manuscript versions of the novel. In his article, "The *Chih-yen-chai* Commentary on the *Dream of the Red Chamber*: A Literary Study," Wang notes that:

[this] is regrettable, since only a small portion of the comments can be considered circumstantial in nature, while the majority have to do with such questions as the author's "intention," the artistic achievement of the book, etc., questions properly belonging in the realm of literary criticism. An investigation of the Commentary along these lines should be of value to us not only to determine how the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, generally considered China's greatest traditional novel, was received among its earliest critics, but also to furnish us with some understanding of the state of Chinese fiction criticism towards the latter part of the eighteenth century.¹

In the *chia-hsü* (甲戌, 1754) version of the novel, Wang has observed some two hundred comments pertaining to literary technique. Perhaps one of the strong points of the commentary is also the cause of one of its shortcomings. The commentary was written in an occasional fashion, as the commentator(s)

read and reread the various versions and revisions of the text. The observations tend toward the subjective and seem by their application to be heavily dependent on the commentator's immediate impressions.

Whenever I read this book and occasionally hit on a point, I immediately took note of it. I did not read the book from beginning to end first and then comment on it from its first page onwards; hence occasionally my comments are repetitive. Moreover, the comments of you other gentlemen represent your own views; I, Chih-yen-chai, in making my comments have done so for my own pleasure. Later on, every time I read it again I always jotted down a few words and added them beside the columns of the text; hence there are also remarks bearing cross-references to my earlier and later comments.²

余閱此書偶有所得，即筆錄之，非從首至尾閱過，復從首加批者，故偶有複處。且諸公之批，自是諸公眼界；脂齋之批，亦有脂齋取樂處。後每一閱，亦必有一語半言加於側，故又有於前後照應之說等批。

This kind of approach allowed the commentator relative freedom from having to systematically comment upon each phenomenon as it occurred. He might choose to, or choose not to note each instance of a particular literary device. The commentary thus displays a wealth of varied approaches to the novel, occurring at uneven intervals. Yet the unsystematic nature of the commentary also makes certain devices ill-defined and ambiguous, unsubstantiated by either a well defined description or a systematic listing of examples. Wang's article attempts to fill this deficiency. Unfortunately, his own cataloguing of items neglects any consideration of how these isolated items function together in the structure of the text.

The purpose of our study is twofold: the first part will be a brief consideration of two Western approaches to literature: Russian Formalism and French Structuralism. In our consideration of these two approaches, we will be merely suggesting terms which may serve as rough equivalents to the terminology of the *CYC*. This is intended neither to deny the intrinsic originality of the *CYC*, nor to subsume it to these other approaches. Rather, we feel that they may be mutually illuminating – the *CYC* may benefit from the systematic nature of Structuralism, and Structuralism may be made aware of phenomena perhaps unaccounted for within its scope. Hopefully, this exercise will serve to propose possibilities of a thorough comparative study of these modes of criticism. The second, and larger part of our paper

will attempt an application of one recent work on poetics to one chapter of the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Correlating its concern to the concerns of *Chih-yen-chai*.

I

In one of his earlier studies, Shklovsky applied terms from classical rhetoric to narrative devices. Using Fontanier's *Figures du Discours*, he found, as Todorov notes, "there exist certain narrative figures which are projections of rhetorical figures."³ Among the techniques listed by the *CYC*, we find ready examples which correspond to rhetorical figures.

1. "Painting the cloud to bring the moon into relief" (烘雲托月). Wang defines this as using one character or situation as a pretense for describing another. ". . . the author pretends to write about A when he really wants to describe B."⁴ This device is similar to *Metalepsis*: "To substitute an indirect expression for a direct one, to make one thing understood by means of another which proceeds it, follows it, or accompanies it."⁵ Both *CYC*'s item and Fontanier's involve displacement, a transference of focus wherein one character or situation is described indirectly through the treatment of another.

2. "A whirlwind makes the snow dance and a precipitous gorge turns back the waves" (迴風舞雪倒峽逆波). This indicates the juxtaposition of two very different elements. In Chapter 2 *CYC* says:

Before the pomp and prosperity of the Ning and Jung are portrayed, a small scene of desolation is depicted. Before a whole book of mundane and befuddled people is described, an unworldly and enlightened person is presented.⁶

未出寧榮繁華盛處，却先寫一荒涼小境；
未寫通部入世迷人，却先寫一出世醒人。

This is *antithesis*, "The opposition of two objects, one to the other, considering them under a common rapport, or one object to itself, considered under two contrary rapports."⁷ In the example from the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, two elements are combined in syntagmatic contiguity, thus lending them a common rapport. The two themes — the immaterial and

the material – run parallel to each other throughout the novel.

3. “Adornment” (襯貼法) is a technique wherein characters are presented in ascending order of importance, peripheral characters are presented before major characters. This corresponds to *auxesis*, “Words arranged in ascending order of importance.”⁸ To cite an example from Shakespeare: “Since brass, nor stone, nor earth / nor boundless sea / But sad mortality o’er-sways their power” (Sonnet 65).

4. “The painter’s method of dotting the trees, grass, and rocks with thick and light ink after the hills, rivers, tree branches, and ravines are already done” (畫家山水樹頭壑俱備末用濃淡墨點苔法). The author “adds interesting details to a story already well developed.”⁹ *Epiphraise* is an addition made to a phrase that one would have assumed to be complete.

The study undertaken by Shklovsky involved the transposition of the terminology of one discipline to another – from rhetoric to narrative fiction. The *CYC* also uses the terminology of another discipline – art criticism, in order to describe narrative technique. Perhaps we are not being too bold to suggest the comparative study of Western classical rhetoric and classical Chinese rhetoric, and of the possible manifestations of their figures in narrative works.

From under the somewhat unwieldy rubric of “Structuralism” we have borrowed concepts from three theorists – Todorov, Barthes and Genette. Todorov’s notion of *embedding* is similar to what the *CYC* calls “the gold cicada shedding its shell” (金蟬脫壳法). Wang remarks that by this term *CYC* indicates a smooth transition from one topic to another. For his example, he uses an episode in Chapter 56 where the girls switch from a discussion of Chu Hsi (朱熹) to household matters.¹⁰ *Embedding* involves the transition from one topic or character to another. Semantic material from the preceding event may serve as motivation for the change in focus, and become subordinated to the ensuing discourse. “A second story is enclosed within the first.”¹¹ Through the *Dream of the Red Chamber* we witness stories within stories, most notable of course being the story of the Stone itself, within which is embedded to adventures of Pao-yü, the first few chapters present us with numerous characters and their respective stories. As Todorov notes, “The appearance of a new character invariably involves the interruption of the preceding story, so that a new story, the one which explains the ‘Now I am here’ of the new character, may be told to us.”¹² Take this example from the *Dream*:

He [Yu-cun] had scarcely set foot inside the door of the village inn when one of the men drinking at separate tables inside rose up and advanced to meet him with a broad smile.

"Fancy meeting you!"

It was an antique dealer called Leng Zi-xing whom Yu-cun had got to know some years previously when he was staying in the capital. Yu-cun had a great admiration for Zi-xing as a practical man of business, whilst Zi-xing for his part was tickled to claim the acquaintanceship with a man of Yu-cun's great learning and culture. . . . The two men then proceeded, between leisurely sips of wine, to relate what each had been doing in the years that had elapsed since their last meeting.¹³

The visual image *Chih-yen-chai* uses of a cicada shedding its outer shell is strikingly appropriate for the embedding process.

Barthes' *hermeneutic* code involves the laying down of clues which become seeded in the text, opening enigmas for later disclosure. "Under the hermeneutic code, we list the various (formal) terms by which an enigma can be distinguished, suggested, formulated, held in suspense, and finally disclosed."¹⁴ This may be compared to the technique of "Laying down threads" (伏線) in the *Chih-yen-chai*. Wang says that this refers to the "careful planting of unobtrusive clues to events that will be developed later in the story."¹⁵ These clues may be misleading. *CYC* calls this the technique of "Mixing the colors" (間色法).

This is a diversionary measure on the part of the author to make his writing appear elusive. In Chapter 31, for example, we see Tai-yü fret over the fact that Hsiang-yün possesses a gold unicorn, apparently for fear that she may be destined to marry Pao-yü (Precious Jade) (because of) the auspicious match of gold and jade. The author's intention all along is actually to have Pao-ch'ai (Precious Clasp) marry Pao-yü in the end.¹⁶

Barthes' hermeneutic code takes into consideration "false clues" as well. In *S/Z* he treats it as "falsehood" which may take various forms. For example, "equivocation, double understanding" (144), "metonymic falsehood" (162), "false proofs, tricks" (143), etc.

Genette's *Figures III* contains, among other things, a thorough and systematic treatment of Time, Mode and Voice. *Chih-yen-chai's* technique

of "folding back" (轉疊法) is the "retracing or recall in later narratives of an earlier incident not recounted before."¹⁷ Genette's *analepsis* is "any evocation after the event of a happening which precedes the point of its occurrence in the récit."¹⁸ Its counterpart is *prolepsis*, "any narrative maneuver which consists in telling or evoking in advance an ulterior event."¹⁹ Although the *CYC* does not mention this phenomena, it occurs several times within the *Dream*. Most notably, the story of the Stone reveals the ultimate destiny of Pao-yü—he will return to the transcendent world and resume the form of the stone. At other times the author uses *prolepsis* as thinly veiled clues, for example, the poems and pictures revealed to Pao-yü in the Land of Disillusionment in Chapter 5 serve to prophesy the fate of the twelve Jin-ling beauties. He also uses a kind of "partial *prolepsis*" to entice the reader from one chapter to the next, a common story-telling device. For example, at the end of Chapter 21, Hsi-feng stops Chia-lien and says, "No, don't go! There's some thing else I want to talk to you about." The author then tells the reader, "But if you want to know what it is, you will have to wait for the next chapter."²⁰ For our last example, we will mention Genette's distinction between Voice and Mode. For Genette, the "Voice" is whoever actually articulates an event in the discourse. The "Mode" is the orienting frame of mind. *CYC* mentions the technique of "Revealing secretly" (暗透法). This means to "let one character speak what is on the mind of another."²¹ This also distinguishes between the frame of mind which orients the narrative, and the actual enunciation.

We hoped to show that the *Chih-yen-chai* Commentary takes into account many of the narrative devices defined in western literary criticism. The parallels may not be exact however neither are the two narrative traditions. We have merely suggested correspondences that upon further investigation may yield interesting methods of comparison.

II

The majority of the concerns of the *CYC* Commentary have to do with how the narrative is structured. How are episodes opened and closed? How are themes established and threaded through the novel? How does it achieve both unity and variety? Benjamin Hrushovski's article, "Segmentation and Motivation in the Text Continuum of Literary Prose"²² discusses the pheno-

menon of the “unfolding of the text.” I propose to first cover some of the general principles set forth by Hrushovski which have particular significance with regard to the *CYC* Commentary, and then to analyze Chapter 11 of the *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

According to Hrushovski, the narrative text follows a process of gradually unfolding itself. There must be a motivating factor which leads the reader from one segment to another.

A long text cannot possibly be of one piece. It is usually divided into many small segments with a whole network of motivations for introducing such segments and for their closure, shifters from one segment to another, transitions from one semantic focus to another, etc. . . .²³

This shifting of focus, and the process of opening and closing episodes, is manifested in the *CYC* in comments such as “Clouds cutting the mountains in halves” (橫雲斷山) “The grey line of a grass snake” (草蛇灰線), “Crisscrossing (錯綜)” “A solid piece begins with soft strokes” (重作輕抹), “Layers of mountains appear severed, the cloud joining them remains unbroken” (山斷雲連), “To advance one step further into the house” (進一步門庭法則), and “Adornment.”

Another technique appreciated by the Commentary is polysemic condensation, the technique of “two sounds produced by one clapping,” (一擊兩鳴), “one clapping in an empty valley, echoes coming from all eight directions,” “one stroke of the brush serving the purpose of two strokes” (一筆兩用).²⁴ This indicates the description of two or more things through the description of one. This is one manifestation of a more pervasive phenomenon described by Hrushovski as “junction.”

There is no pure event material in language. Each passage of a text presenting an event has to contribute at the same time to a number of other patterns. . . . Such a passage is, clearly, a junction in which several heterogeneous patterns meet, intersect, and interact, though one of them may be dominant.²⁵

Thus, the example given by Wang from the *Dream of the Red Chamber* has one character saying to another, “Miss X is in beauty as Miss Y,” which serves not only to describe Miss X and Miss Y, but also the speaker’s character

in terms of her sense of beauty, current cultural appreciations, an implied comparison between the inner characters of X and Y, etc.

Hrushovski conceives of a "Three-Story Construct of Meaning"—". . . whenever semantic material is organized, a three-story construct is involved."²⁶ These "stories" are sense, Field of Reference (FR), and Regulating Principles. "Sense" may be taken to be lexical denotation. This denotation is applied to a Field of Reference particular to the specific conditions of the enunciation. In this way, denotation becomes specified from a field of lexical possibilities. Hrushovski says that ". . . metaphors exist precisely as an interaction between the sense of a word and the Field of Reference."²⁷ In the *Dream of the Red Chamber* events are at times projected upon two or more Fields of Reference at the same time. The interaction results in the metaphoric layer of significance found throughout the novel. The sense is projected upon both the worldly and the transcendent.

Hrushovski distinguishes between a frame of reference (fr) and a Field of Reference (FR). A frame of reference is a "continuum of any kind, in time and space, or in theme or in ideas, which may accommodate a number of referents."²⁸ A Field of Reference is a theoretical continuum of a large number of frames of reference. He gives this example, ". . . in a novel we have a number of 'frs' (of time and space), in which a character appears when he is two years old, when he is twenty and seventy, but not in-between. Nevertheless, we assume a hypothetical Field of Reference, only parts of which were actually presented in the text, which comprises one continuous lifetime of this character."²⁹ This accounts for the sense of unity we derive in the *Dream of the Red Chamber*. The several intersecting stories of this world and the eternal world cut into each other, revealing key fragments to metonymically refer to a continuum which constantly shifts on and off-stage. The ability of the author to imply a FR from fragmented episodes is what *Chih-yen-chai* refers to as "Although the mountains appear severed, the cloud joining them remains unbroken." Although the *CYC* notes this technique but once, and that confined within one chapter, the term might be applied to the entire framework of the novel.

Regulating Principles present the attitudes of the speaker. Such phenomena as irony, point of view, set, etc., belong to this domain. "The Regulating Principles tell us in what sense to take the sense of the words."³⁰ The three levels, or "stories" are thus interacting and mutually reliant.

In using Fields of Reference, there must be what Hrushovski calls

“referential grounding.”

One of the difficulties of a text of fiction is that it presents words as if they were being used in a real life situation, whereas the writer has had no previous opportunity to present all the details of the frame of reference to which these words should apply. In short, the Internal Field of Reference created in a work needs *referential grounding*. Thus, major characters may be introduced only after minor characters have appeared and a setting presented; major places will be presented only as a continuation of minor places which have been detailed at the beginning, etc. . . . Grounding is a metonymic rather than a chronological-causal dimension given to referents in the Internal Field of Reference.³¹

As we noted above, the corresponding rhetorical figure to this is *auxesis*. The *CYC* has several terms for this technique. For example, “A solid piece of work begins with soft strokes,” “Instead of coming directly to the main topic, it begins first with a series of minor and seemingly unrelated matters.” Again, “The painter’s method of dyeing three times” (畫家三染法). “This means adding details to an outline gradually and repeatedly. Thus, an outline of the Chia’s is given in a conversation by Leng Tzu-hsing at the beginning of the novel before they are presented and gradually made into full-blown characters in the main part of the story.” Finally, there is “Adornment,” “Peripheral characters or matters are shown first so as to make the appearance of central ones more important and dramatic.”³² Through comparison with Hrushovski’s concept of referential grounding, these techniques mentioned by *Chih-yen-chai* are given a functional role in the exposition of the text.

Given the segmentation of the narrative into events, episodes, chapters, etc., the author has recourse to specific methods of offering motivations for segmentation and transition. Hrushovski has taken an episode from *War and Peace* to illustrate his point. This episode involves the party given by Anna Pavlovna in the first large episode of the novel. “Since the bulk of semantic material is on the second plane, i.e., on the level of the characters, the author needs a further device to cut their dialogue into small pieces.”³³ The narrator moves from one circle of guests to the next. Whereas in Hrushovski’s example the topic shifts, an observation of similar fragmentation is made by *Chih-yen-chai* in an episode where the topic is shifted from the particular incident of Yüan-ch’un’s royal visit to the general customs surrounding royal visits. *Chih-yen-chai* notes that in Chapter 16, Governess

Chao's inquiry about Yüan-ch'un's visit prompts Chia-lien to elaborate upon the custom. This he calls "Advancing the step further into the house." This example shifts the focus from the (fr) to an external (FR). The motivation stems from the (fr), and is an example of what Hrushovski calls "global motivation," that is, motivation from a specifically local event to a larger one. It may take the form of "the nature of the party, the political situation referred to, the social basis of the participants, the use of known historical information, etc. . . ." ³⁴

There is what Hrushovski calls a "semantic chain" which helps prepare the narrative for new semantic material.

One should stress that Tolstoy never introduces new semantic themes without preparation. The excitement of Anna Pavlovna has been well established in previous passages in something that could be called a *semantic chain*.

This is the function of what CYC calls the technique of "A grey line of snake in grass." "Through the repetitive use of a key image or symbol the author succeeds in achieving a unity or a certain purpose in his work similar to that achieved in a symphony through the recurrent use of motif." ³⁵

Lastly, there is what Hrushovski calls "principles of dynamization." There are four major forms. First, the disruption of announced themes. For example, in the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Chapter 11, we expect to be told about Chia Ching's birthday celebration. As it turns out, the main part of the chapter deals with Ch'in-shih's illness. This also illustrates the second form of dynamization, the shifting of theme. The theme shifts from celebration to innuendoes of incest. These two forms are noted in the *CYC* Commentary as "Crisscrossing." "The story does not progress in a straight line. There are constant references back and forth, and insertions and intrusions of all kinds to make it into a complicated and intricate pattern." ³⁶ The third form is the introduction of "little threads of plot." "They are used . . . for the sake of creating little anticipations and leading the reader by the nose on rather uninteresting matters of no consequence." ³⁷ These "little threads" are what *CYC* calls "mixing the colors," "a diversionary measure on the part of the author to make his writing appear elusive." ³⁸ Finally there are "discontinuous semantic threads." They are similar to the techniques of "Clouds cutting the mountains in halves," this is the

interruption of one story by another, to be resumed later, and "Layers of mountain-peaks rising above the blue air" (層巒疊翠), which is "the author's ability to write about similar topics either one after another or in different parts of the story effortlessly and without repeating himself."³⁹

By comparing Hrushovski's theory to items from the *Hung-lou-meng*, we hope to display how these items, heretofore considered as separate, unrelated "techniques" may function together in systematically noting specific literary devices achieving and reflecting specific narrative phenomena.

Before beginning our analysis of the eleventh chapter of the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, let us insert a word about commentaries in general. In the *Wen-hsin tiao-lung* (文心雕龍), Liu Hsieh (劉勰) promotes the *hsing* (興) mode above all other tropes in poetry. At once the most valuable, it is the most elusive. "Such parables are like the first rays of light before the break of dawn, still enveloped in ambiguity. This is the reason why commentaries are required to make the meaning clear"⁴⁰ (明而未融, 故發注而後見也). In Chinese narrative, and in the *Dream of the Red Chamber* in particular, much of the meaning is hidden, contained in what some narratologists call "non-events."

An event may be based on non-event material. For example, in an argument between two lovers about the weather or about whether to close or open the window, a reader may detect a crucial point in the story, a crisis in their mutual relationship. This is an event on the reconstructed level, though not based on any event-related material in the language.⁴¹

One immediately recalls the various squabbles between Pao-yü and his playmates. The *CYC* Commentary inserts itself to offer interpretations based on the reconstructed level of synthetic analysis, hoping to explicate the "true" significance hidden below the surface. As Plaks has observed, non-events ascend to a more primary position in Chinese literature, in contradistinction to event-oriented and epically based western narrative.

In short, we may see that the Chinese narrative tradition has consistently played down the foregrounding of events as existential units, preferring instead to place nearly equal emphasis on the overlapping of events, the interstitial spaces between events, in effect on non-events alongside of events in the conceptualization of human experience in time.⁴²

These non-events yield meaning only upon the reader's interpretations informed by the integration of these non-events upon the plane of reconstruction. It is in this reconstruction process, which ties together various semantic threads and notations on a paradigmatic axis, that commentaries dwell.

Given the importance of non-events, especially in Chinese narrative, why does the *Chih-yen-chai* Commentary of the *chia-hsü* version contain no references *at all* to Chapter 11, a fairly crucial chapter? Before analyzing this chapter left untreated by *CYC*, let us furnish an example of his comments on a previous chapter.

Chapter 8 contains detailed observations by *Chih-yen-chai*. We will consider the opening episode. This deals with two events. First, Pao-yü and Hsi-feng describe Ch'in Chong to Grandmother Chia, hoping that he might be admitted to the clan school. Second, You-shih invites a group of them to attend a play she has set up.⁴³

Item A: "She [Hsi-feng] told Grandmother Chia that Ch'in Chong would be calling on her within a day or two to pay his respects. Their infectious enthusiasm put the old lady in a high good humour, . . ." (Hawkes, p. 185).

Chih-yen-chai remarks: "This [episode] is now complete, it's not necessary to write about it again in detail. This is excellent, it secretly passes the needle." (止此便十成了，不必繁文再表，故妙。偷度金針法。)

This item takes place in the beginning of Chapter 8, telling of Hsi-feng's narration of Ch'in Chong's qualities to grandmother Chia. It prepares the reader for the coda at the end of the chapter, when the subject of Ch'in Chong's education is reintroduced. The remarks of Hsi-feng which inform the reader that Ch'in Chong will be coming to pay his respects to Grandmother Chia set the stage for the actualization of that event in the *récit*. What happens instead at the end of Chapter 8 is an episode that parallels that event. Instead of Ch'in Chong coming to pay respects to Grandmother Chia, thus performing the proper ceremony of "K'e" (客) to a potential benefactress, we are told of Ch'in P'ang-yeh (Ch'in Chong's father) coming to pay his respects to Chia Tai-ju, the master in charge of the school and a relative of the Chia clan. Thus, in "secretly passing the golden needle," the same as "painting the cloud to bring the moon into relief" the author calls forth one event (Ch'in Chong's predicted visit to Grandmother Chia) by the direct presentation of another (his father's visit to Chia Tai-ju to secure his son's admission to the school). *Chih-yen-chai's* remarks praise the artistry

of the author in using this device, for he is saved from having to recount the details of Ch'in Chong's visit. Instead, he may tell of Ch'in Pang-yeh's visit to Chia Tai-ju, thus saving him from repetitiousness.

The author has skillfully interwoven several themes. In the previous chapter he treated the friendship between Chia Pao-yü and Ch'in Chong. He continues that theme in the beginning of this chapter. He then digresses to describe the tripartite relationship between Pao-yü, Tai-yü and Pao-chai, and then returns to close the chapter with the episode of Ch'in Pang-yeh's visit to the school master. This structure resembles a musical piece, introducing one motif, then another, and closing with a variation of the first. Another striking similarity between the two parallel events is the manner of presenting them in the discourse. Both events are presented as summary discourse, that is, the author does not present the dialogue between the characters directly, but rather summarizes their speech, paraphrasing the main points. This allows for the economic use of detail, and serves as foreground for the episodes which occupy that space between the parallel episodes, that is, the episode in which Pao-yü and Pao-chai show each other their jade pieces, and the episode where the tripartite relationship between Pao-yü, Tai-yü, and Pao-chai is treated. In these episodes, there is a shift from summary, indirect discourse, to direct discourse, where the characters' speech is presented directly, instead of being summarized by the narrator.

In general, the Commentary fails to note the function of techniques on a larger scale. Too often, it is content to note here and there the occurrence of certain techniques, without seeing their function as a unit. This will be noted again below.

Item B: "Although she was getting on in years, Grandmother Chia still loved excitement."

CYC: "This serves to portray Chia-mu" (爲賈母寫傳).

The structure "Although. . . still" reveals the narrator's point of view. His logic inserts itself into the narrative. The theme is one of mind and matter. Although she is aging, Chia-mu's spirit remains sharp. This spirit of bravado is undercut in the following passage, where we find that, despite her good spirits, she wearily returns to her house early on in the performance of the entertainment she had looked forward to. On a literal level then, this is a portrait of Chia-mu. On an allegorical level, however, it serves to maintain one of the central themes of the novel — impermanence, the passing of things despite all human efforts to forestall their passing.

Item C: ". . . two days later, You-shih came to fetch Hsi-feng, the old lady did in fact accompany them, taking Lady Wang, Tai-yü and Pao-yü as well. By about noon, however, she was ready to go back and rest. . ."

CYC: "Explanatory facts. If the author had merely written about the viewing of the plays, it would only have been a view of an unsophisticated old parvenu woman. Exuberance will depart, the loss of spirit returns. This is a just account of the nobility of that generation. The theme of happiness spawns so many works of literature."

(敘事有法，若只管寫看戲，便是一無見世面之暴發貧婆矣。寫隨便二字，興高則往，興敗則回，方是世代封君正傳。且高興二字，又可生出多少文章來。)

In his comments, *Chih-yen-chai* notes the allegorical implications we noted above. What he does not comment upon fully is what the structuralists would call "identity through differentiation." Chia-mu's portrait is given greater force through the comparison of her character to that of others, as will be noted below.

Item D: "Lady Wang was basically fond of peace and quiet."

CYC: "This portrays Lady Wang's 'clashing' personality. Nevertheless, each one has his or her own character" (偏與 刑夫人相犯，然卻是各有各傳). Lady Wang's character is contrasted to Grandmother Chia's. The two character's embody, respectively, sobriety and high-spirits.

Item E: "This left Hsi-feng as principal guest, and she moved into the place of honour and stayed there for the rest of the day, enjoying herself immensely and not returning until late in the evening"

CYC: "Extremely detailed, everything is delivered and represented" (甚細，交代畢).

This comment needs a certain amount of explanation. It may simply refer to the fact that all the characters have now been put into place – Chia-mu has left to rest, Lady Wang has gone to find peace and quiet, and Hsi-feng spends the rest of the day enjoying the performance. Nevertheless, the allegorical level which *Chih-yen-chai* himself commented upon manifests itself in this episode. Each of the three characters represent not only different attitudes, but different generations. Thus, the episode points not only synchronically to three co-existing attitudes, but implies a diachronic shift in temperament among the members of succeeding generations. The youngest (Hsi-feng) has "dethroned" the others. She ascends to the place of honor. Each of the items functions not only individually, but as *thematic*

units.

As Hrushovski has noted, one way of portraying a group of characters economically and skillfully is to motivate their characterization around a pivotal event or topic. How each one reacts to acts in that event/topic helps to define their position. Their identity emerges by way of this device (cf. Lacan's notion of the Other). The theme of "ascension" We have noted above takes on another color in this chapter with regard to Pao-yü. He should ascend to his father's position, yet he constantly avoids all the trappings of Confucian duty and propriety, sobriety and commonsense. When he leaves the performance to visit Pao-chai, he decides to take an out-of-the-way path in order to avoid his father. Unfortunately, he meets two of his father's literary associates, and later, some servants who praise his calligraphy. His calligraphy and skill at composition are the only aspects of Confucianism Pao-yü enjoys, and this is treated in this chapter. His attempts to avoid his father succeed in this chapter, yet this only forestalls his upbraiding by his father in the next chapter. Education plays an important part in this chapter, as we've noted above in Ch'in Pang-yeh's desire to enroll his son in the Chia family school. Pao-yü also wishes Ch'in Chong to be admitted, but for different reasons. While Pang-yeh wants his son to be well-educated and successful, Pao-yü wants a playmate. Interestingly enough, he argues Ch'in Chong's case on the fact that Ch'in Chong will help further Pao-yü's education! ("He pointed out that a congenial study companion would stimulate him to greater effort. . . .") Actually Pao-yü has no thoughts of furthering his education to lead to his "ascension," as the details of his homosexual relationship with Ch'in Chong point out.

We have hoped to show the nature of the *Chih-yen-chai* Commentary in this brief passage, and to point out how it fails to clearly link the various devices into functional units. Although it does *imply* their functions, it fails to detail the closely-knit narrative construction. Nevertheless, the commentary does point out the underlying narrative strategy behind the isolated items, and some of their symbolic meanings.

Let us now turn to Chapter 11, a chapter that, as has been mentioned, *Chih-yen-chai* has not commented upon. Chapter 11 obviously came out of later revisions of earlier manuscripts. In previous versions, the author intended to reveal the incestuous relationship between Ch'in-shih and her father-in-law Jia Chen, and have Ch'in-shih hang herself. This is made clear in the following passage from Chapter 5, which remains intact. Pao-yü

is visiting the Land of Disillusionment; he sees prophetic pictures that refer to the twelve beauties of Chin-ling. Here is Ch'in-shih's—

The picture . . . showed an upper room in a tall building in which a beautiful girl was hanging by her neck from a beam, having apparently taken her own life. The words said:

Love was her sea; in such excess
Love, meeting with its like, breeds wantonness.
Say not our troubles all from Jung's side came;
For their beginning Ning must take the blame.⁴⁴

Yet, in the extant versions, Ch'in-shih dies instead of a mysterious illness. Critics presume that a hanging, and the overt mention of incest, might have been found too distasteful, and the episode deleted, perhaps even at the suggestion of *Chih-yen-chai*. Incest is alluded to in Chapter 7. A drunken servant cries out, "Up to their dirty tricks every day. I know. Father-in-law pokes in the ashes. Auntie has it off with neevy. Do you think I don't know what you're up to? Oh, we 'Hide our broken arm in our sleeve'; but you don't fool me."⁴⁵ Chapter 11 lays down numerous threads that imply what the author could not write openly. Perhaps through discretion, the commentators refrained from explicating this chapter.

It is our contention that the chapter gives strong evidence of incest, suggests that Ch'in-shih might actually be pregnant, and relates the incident to a larger theme of degeneracy, illicit passion, and decay. The analysis which follows hopes to show the textual evidence for this contention, and how the author has segmented and motivated the chapter, pointing out the pattern of development. We have isolated items in more or less syntagmatic order.

Item 1: The Chapter title, "Ning-kuo House celebrates the birthday of an absent member; Chia Jui conceives an illicit passion for his attractive cousin" (慶壽辰寧府排家宴，見熙鳳賈瑞起淫心), sets up a parallel correspondence between "setting up a family feast" (排家宴) and "starting up an illicit passion" (起淫心). Most notable is the juxtaposition in the couplet between "family" (家) and "illicit" (淫). The ceremonial propriety of the first event is contrasted with the impropriety of the second. The theme of incest is both a signified (Chia Jui + Hsi-feng → incest), and a signifier (Chia Jui + Hsi-feng → incest → Chia Chen + Ch'in-shih).

Item 2: The role of the father with regard to propriety and responsibility is implied in this chapter. The ceremony is given for Chia Ching, the patriarch of the clan, who has renounced his earthly responsibilities to seek Taoist immortality. His son is Chia Chen, who has also become irresponsible, seducing his own son's wife. Irresponsibility brings culpability. Hawkes feels that the verse mentioned above with regard to Ch'in-shih's picture, "Say not our troubles all from Jung's side came; for their beginning Ning must take the blame," refers specifically to Chia Ching's denial of his duty.⁴⁶

Item 3: Propriety continues to be stressed, developing into a major theme of this chapter. "We realize," said Cousin Chen, "that Lady Chia is a generation older than Father. Father is only her nephew, of course, and strictly speaking it wasn't correct form to invite a person of her age at all"⁴⁷ (cf. Item 13 below). The codes of propriety with respect to age and relation are broken.

Item 4: Lady Chia's absence is attributed to her uncontrolled appetite. Just as Chia Ching's absence is due to his irresponsibility, Lady Chia's (another elder member of the clan) is due to her self-indulgence:

Yesterday evening she saw Pao-yü eating some peaches and the greedy old thing couldn't resist trying one herself.

In Chapter 5 Pao-yü is introduced to lust after being led by Ch'in-shih into her chamber. While he sleeps he dreams of a fairy resembling Ch'in-shih who initiates him into sex. Upon awakening he calls out Ch'in-shih's name, which "Nobody here knows." Ch'in-shih wonders how he came to say it. Lady Chia's greed for what Pao-yü has had serves to hint at Chia Chen's own greed for what Pao-yü has presumably enjoyed. He remarks, "Well, that's all right then, knowing how much Grandma enjoys a bit of fun, I thought it didn't seem like her not to come today unless she had some good reason for not coming." This remark seems perfectly innocent and plausible given the immediate frame of reference, yet, as the novel progresses, this information joins other pieces of information in constructing the theme of incest. We move from the immediate (fr) to an implied (FR).

Item 5: Lady Chia's illness serves as a motive for beginning another segment which treats Ch'in-shih's illness as a topic: "The other day Hsi-chun was telling us that Jung's wife is not very well," said Hsi-feng. "What exactly is wrong with her?" The motif of illness caused by inordinate

appetite passes from Lady Chia to Ch'in-shih, and will be in turn passed to Chia Jui.

Item 6: You-shih explains that Ch'in-shih has missed her menstrual period for two months. This offers a possible closure to the enigma of her illness — she is pregnant.

Item 7: At this moment, a servant announces that the male guests have arrived. This serves as a device to have Chia Chen left in order to greet the guests. This calls attention to him, especially the verbal phrase “hurry out” (忙出去了). The code of propriety calls on him to greet the guests, but his seemingly earnest fulfillment of that duty might be more properly attributable to his anxiousness to avoid a delicate subject. The women resume their conversation. A doctor has said that according to his diagnosis, she is not pregnant. Although this seems to query the possibility of her being pregnant, the very fact that it *was* a possibility leaves itself in the reader's mind.

Item 8: You-shih says to Hsi-feng, “It was only because the two of you [Ch'in-shih and Hsi-feng] have always been so close and she didn't want to miss you that she made the effort.” This sets up a link between the two women. The transition to this link is motivated by Hsi-feng's persistent and concerned questioning of You-shih about Ch'in-shih. This link prepares the way for the upcoming confidential talk between the two, and also to Ch'in-shih's later appearance in Hsi-feng's dream.

Item 9: Hsi-feng asks Chia Jung (Ch'in-shih's husband), “How is it really with your wife?” This device operates as referential grounding. The author uses the topic of Ch'in-shih's illness to motivate the comments of the various characters in order to help define their positions. Chia Chen says nothing and leaves when the subject of pregnancy comes up, Hsi-feng remains concerned and presses for more information, Chia Jung simply says that she is not at all well, and that Hsi-feng will “know what he means when she sees her.” This last item serves also to prepare us for the importance of their eventual meeting.

Item 10: “After all these years of spiritual self-improvement, Uncle must by now be practically an Immortal. And with immortals, as we all know, it's the thought, not the ceremony, that counts.” Here the separation between thought and act, the inner material and the outward manifestation is mentioned. This too begins the pattern of appearances vs. reality that has often been mentioned in other chapters. For example, the drunken servant's

speech mentioned above notes that the family is trying to hide their "broken arms" within their "sleeves." What lies beyond outward appearances? This also sets the stage for Chia Jui's eventual demise. He is consumed by illicit thoughts of incest; he never actually performs it.

Item 11: You-shih says, "I know she will always do anything you ask her to." This resumes the pattern begun in Item 7 – the link between Ch'in-shih and Hsi-feng.

Item 12: Pao-yü recalls the last time he was in Ch'in-shih's room, the time of his dream. The scroll on the wall provokes this. This brings in further information from that episode; for example, we recall the sensuous furnishing of the room:

As Pao-yü entered, a subtle whiff of the most delicious perfume assailed his nostrils, making a sweet stickiness inside his drooping eyelids and causing all the joints of his body to dissolve. . . . On the table stood an antique mirror that had once graced the tiring-room of the lascivious empress Wu Tsu-t'ien. Beside it stood the golden platter on which Flying Swallow once danced for her emperor's delight. And on the platter was that very quince which the villainous An Lu-shan threw at beautiful Yang Kuei-fei, bruising her plump white breast.⁴⁸

Item 13: Ch'in-shih's numerous allusions to the kindnesses of Chia Jung's family towards her take place in the presence of Chia Jung and Pao-yü. However, after they leave, Hsi-feng and Ch'in-shih engage in a "long and intimate conversation . . . (Hsi-feng) ignoring two or three messages from You-shih urging her to join the party." This undisclosed dialogue becomes the key "off-stage" element, prepared in advance in Items 7 and 10. The enigma arises, "What are they talking about?"

Item 14: The code of propriety and morality is resumed with Hsi-feng's encounter with Chia Jui:

Chia Jui: "I suppose a young person like your good self is not in a position to receive visitors of the other sex."

Hsi-feng: (feigning a laugh) – "We're all one family – all one flesh and blood. I don't see that age enters into it."

Two taboos are mentioned — one dealing with age (cf. Item 3), the other, sex. Hsi-feng disregards the issue of age, the issue of sex remains open. Chia Jui is “secretly delighted by this encouragement.” The fact that they are of the same family is used here as a justification for the acceptability of their breaking of the taboos, yet on the reconstructed level, it rings ironic. The scene might well be an instance of *metalepsis* (see above), describing as well an imaginary dialogue between Chia Chen and Ch’in-shih.

Item 15: Hsi-feng’s “feigning” carries on the theme of appearance/reality (cf. Item 9). This is reiterated again by Hsi-feng, “appearances are certainly deceptive . . . who would’ve guessed he. . . .”

Item 16: “You had better hurry back to the party,” said Hsi-feng. “If they catch you playing truant, you will find yourself being scolded!” She is speaking to Chia Jui. Later Hsi-feng meets some serving women who tell her that their mistress (You-shih) is concerned and angry about her tardiness (cf. Item 13). She laughs this warning off. This incident corresponds to her own warning to Chia Jui. There are set forth numerous codes of warning and punishment, and the ignoring of these warnings. Later, when thinking about Chia Jui, Hsi-feng mutters, “He’d better look out! One of these days I’ll settle his hash for him; then perhaps he will realise what sort of person he is up against!” This warning takes the form of various tricks she plays on Chia Jui, but he persists in his illicit scheme. In Chapter 12 a monk also warns him not to follow his carnal instincts by looking at the wrong side of the mirror, yet he does, and consequently he dies.

Item 17: Throughout the chapter the author manipulates the distribution of the characters on and off stage, finding various motives for their movements (i.e., Chia Chen has to leave to greet the guests, Hsi-feng must attend the ceremonies, etc.). This enables him to reveal through dialogues certain information meant for certain ears alone. The extreme case of this takes place when he chooses to describe, but not reveal Hsi-feng and Ch’in-shih’s conversation to the reader. Hsi-feng wonders what she and the other women are being kept ignorant of, when she finds out the men have all gathered elsewhere — “What is wrong with this place? Heaven knows what they can be getting up to behind our backs.” Again, the element of deceit, of appearances and reality, is put forth. Chia Chen has hidden his incestuous relationship with Ch’in-shih, Chia Jui furtively seeks a tryst with Hsi-feng, Hsi-feng plots to trick Chia Jui.

Item 18: Hsi-feng's frequent visits to Ch'in-shih takes up again the theme of their bond. Again, nothing is revealed as to the subjects they discuss.

Item 19: Hsi-feng's visits coincide with Chia Jui's visits to Hsi-feng, they are always at cross purposes. This has the effect of forestalling and heightening the effect of their eventual encounter. The drama of sympathy between Ch'in-shih and Hsi-feng is juxtaposed with the drama of illicit passion and deceit between Hsi-feng and Chia Jui.

Item 20: "He'll come to no good" prophesies the maid of Hsi-feng. "I know how to deal with him" says Hsi-feng. This closes the chapter and sets the stage for the next, wherein the drama of Chia Jui is brought to an end.

We have seen the many clues that the author has left in this chapter to suggest the incest between Chia Chen and Ch'in-shih. The drama between Chia Jui and Hsi-feng clearly serves as a metaleptic device. One may still wonder, what did Hsi-feng and Ch'in-shih talk about? I think we can see two clues. When Hsi-feng becomes angry about the men meeting elsewhere, the women laugh at her, "We can't all be as straight-laced as you!" (cf. Item 17). Hsi-feng is obviously disapproving of the men and what they may be doing. She views Chia Jui with particular disgust. Could it be that Ch'in-shih has revealed the incest to Hsi-feng? Is that why Hsi-feng seeks to destroy Chia Jui for his illicit lust?

Those questions can only be interpreted. We have tried to show by our analysis some methods by which Ts'ao Hsüeh-ch'in (曹雪芹) has structured the chapter to allow for the development of themes, and how he has achieved a unity among these various strands by use of specific motivations. We cannot arrive at a clear understanding of the full impact of these themes without, as we have done occasionally, departing from the immediate (fr) and theorizing a (FR) through the use of our interpretive intuition and material from other chapters. It is through the interaction of these elements that we may arrive, as noted above, at the metaphoric, thematic content of the action.

Notes

1. John C. Y. Wang, "The Chih-yen-chai Commentary and the *Dream of the Red Chamber: A Literary Study*," in *Chinese Approaches to Literature*, ed. Adele Rickett (Princeton, 1978), pp. 190-191.
2. Wang, from *Wu Shih-chang*, pp. 193-194.
3. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. R. Howard (Cornell, 1977), p. 22.
4. Wang, p. 210.
5. Pierre Fontanier, *Les Figures du Discours* (1830), ed. G. Genette (Paris, 1977), p. 127 (my trans.).
6. Wang, p. 214.
7. Fontanier, p. 379.
8. B. Vickers, *Classical Rhetoric in English Poetry* (New York, 1970), p. 134.
9. Wang, p. 215.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
11. Todorov, p. 70.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
13. David Hawkes, *The Sotry of the Stone*, Vol. I (Penguin, 1976), p. 71f; translation of *Hung lou meng* by Ts'ao Hsüeh-ch'in. Throughout the remainder of the paper, the quotations from *Hung Lou Meng* in general are from Hawkes' translation with emendation by the author for the purpose of discussion.
14. Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York, 1974), p. 19.
15. Wang, p. 211.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 213.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 212.
18. Shlomith Rimmon, "A Comprehensive Theory of Narrative: Genette's *Figures III* and the Structuralist Study of Fiction," in *PTL* #1 (1976), p. 43.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
20. Hawkes, p. 430.
21. Wang, p. 216.
22. Benjamin Hrushovski, "Segmentation and Motivation in the Text Continuum of Literary Prose," in *Papers on Poetics and Semiotics*, eds. B. Hrushovski and I. Even-Zohar (Tel Aviv, 1976).
23. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
24. Wang, pp. 210-215.
25. Hrushovski, p. 8.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
32. Wang, pp. 212, 213, 214.

33. Hrushovski, p. 23.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
35. Wang, p. 211.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Hrushovski, p. 34.
38. Wang, p. 213.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 212.
40. Liu Hsieh 劉勰, *Wen-hsin tiao-lung* (文心雕龍, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*," trans. Vincent Shih (Taipei, 1970), p. 277.
41. Hrushovski, p. 5.
42. Andrew Plaks, "Issues in Chinese Narrative Theory in the Perspective of the Western Tradition," in *PTL* #2 (1977), p. 345.
43. Items from the *Chih-yen-chai* Commentary taken from Chan Hing-ho (陳慶浩) *Hsin-pien Hung-lou meng Chih-yen-chai p'ing yu chi-chiao* (新編紅樓夢脂硯齋評語輯校) (Hong Kong, 1972), pp. 120-121. *Hung-lou meng* excerpts from Hawkes, pp. 185-186.
44. Hawkes, p. 135.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 534.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 229-230.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127.

