Cognitive Approaches to Literature and *Honglou Meng*

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Absrtact: This essay is based on the talk that I gave at the 2nd International Conference and the 4th National Conference for Cognitive Poetics at Guandong University of Foreign Studies in Guangzhou in the fall 2015. When inviting me to participate in that scholarly meeting, Professor Xiong Muqing suggested that I start by discussing the relationship between cognitive approaches to literature (a field that I represent) and cognitive poetics. So here, too, I will begin by considering the issue of this relationship before turning to one particular area of research within cognitive literary studies and the possible application of that research to Cao Xueqin's Honglou Meng (《红楼梦》).

1. The Relationship Between Cognitive Poetics and Cognitive Approaches to Literature

Cognitive approaches to literature is an area of literary studies that draws on neuroscience, cognitive linguistics, cognitive evolutionary anthropology and psychology, and developmental psychology. It's associated largely, though not exclusively, with scholars located in the U.S., and it has an official affiliation with   the Modern Language Association (MLA), which is the main scholarly organization serving English and foreign language teachers in America. The cognitive approaches to literature group at the MLA was started in 1999 with only 250 people; as of November 2015, it had 2118 registered members. Cognitive approaches include but are not limited to such areas as cognitive narratology, cognitive historicism, cognitive ecocriticism, neuroaesthetics, cognitive disability studies, cognitive queer studies, studies in emotions and empathy, and the cognitive study of the moving image and theater (Zunshine, 2010: 3; 2015a: 3).

When it comes to cognitive approaches to literature and cognitive poetics, I believe that the two fields are so compatible that it might have been just one broad field of cognitive poetics. That we have instead two names and two fields is really

an artifact of geography and history. Cognitive poetics was formed in Europe, while cognitive approaches to literature was formed in the United States, and it happened before the massive advent of the internet (Richardson, 2004: 9). This means that the respective trajectories of each field often depended on the scholars' travel budgets and library budgets, that is, it depended on who talked to whom at scholarly conferences and which books and journal subscriptions were available through one's university libraries. Developing in relative isolation from each other, cognitive poetics and cognitive approaches to literature produced a number of key players whose research has shaped the thinking of younger scholars working with them, thus further contributing to the divergence of the two fields and reinforcing their original self-encapsulation.

Still, in spite of these geographical and historical contingencies, scholars working with cognitive approaches to literature are connected with the field of cognitive poetics more closely than one would think. For instance, in my book, Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel, I use the work of Reuven Tsur, one of the founders of cognitive poetics, as my main point of reference when it comes to cognitive literary criticism (Zunshine, 2006: 18). Here is another example. When, in 1999, a group of scholars petitioned the Modern Language Association for establishing a discussion group entitled "Cognitive Approaches to Literature," out of eight people who wrote that petition, four worked with various aspects of conceptual blending, a paradigm pioneered by Mark Turner, another key figure in cognitive poetics. Indeed, Mark Turner was one of the authors of the petition.

Moreover, if you read the programmatic studies that have been shaping the field of cognitive poetics, including the work of Elena Semino, Peter Stockwell, and Joanna Gavins, you realize that there is a good reason why the two fields could have been one field. Their goals, philosophy, and understanding of the relationship between the disciplines of cognitive science and literary studies are the same. Consider, for instance, Peter Stockwell's argument about the relationship between cognitive science and literary analysis that draws on cognitive science. As he puts it in Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction.

In my view, treating literature only as another piece of [scientific] data would not be cognitive poetics at all. This is simply cognitive linguistics. Insights from that discipline might be very useful for cognitive poetics, but for us the literary context must be primary. That means we have to know about critical theory and literary philosophy as well as the science of cognition. It means we have to start by aiming to answer the big questions and issues that have concerned literary study for generations. (2002: 6)

As a practitioner of cognitive approaches to literature, I could not agree more. As I emphasize in the introduction to The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies, though "vitally interested in cognitive science, cognitive literary critics work not toward consilience with science but toward a richer engagement with a variety of theoretical paradigms in literary and cultural studies." Just as their colleagues in cognitive poetics, scholars working with cognitive approaches to literature are committed "to issues that animate literary and cultural studies" (2015a: 2).

Another question that Professor Xiong asked me to contemplate was the future of the relationship between cognitive poetics and cognitive approaches to literature. I believe that this future is directly influenced by conferences such as the one I attended in Guangzhou, which bring together scholars from the two fields and remind them how much they have in common. There is no better way to shape the future than to create such opportunities for talking together, especially as both fields continue to grow and branch out into unforeseeable and exciting new directions.

Here is what I don't want to see happen in the future. I don't want us to lose sight of the geographical and historical contingencies that initially divided cognitive poetics and cognitive approaches and to start treating that division as something objective and necessary, that is, as reflecting some essential differences between the two fields. When one starts looking for differences, one finds them - or invents them — and I don't think that is productive, especially now that we have technologies for reading each other's published work and integrating each other's insights.

2. Fiction and Theory of Mind

I will now switch gears and talk about my own research, as a way of introducing one particular line of inquiry within cognitive approaches to literature. I want to stress, however, that this is just one of many different areas within the field and urge you to learn about the variety of approaches available to literary critics interested in cognition and literature.

My main borrowing from cognitive science is the concept of theory of mind, also known as mind-reading, which refers to our evolved cognitive ability to explain our own and other people's behavior as caused by mental states, such as thoughts, feelings, and intentions. Theory of mind is as fundamental a feature of our social life as it is flawed. We can't help seeing behavior in terms of mental states (e.g., as I am speaking at a faculty meeting, I notice my colleague's facial expression and wonder if he is frowning because he doesn't like what I am saying), even

though we have had myriad opportunities to learn that we are often wrong in our mind-reading attributions (e.g., my colleague might be frowning because he just realized that he forgot his reading glasses at home). Mind-reading would have been more accurately called mind-misreading, a name reflecting the fallibility of this pervasive cognitive phenomenon.

Our daily mind readings and misreadings are endlessly nuanced, fuelled by cultural stereotypes, power dynamics, and personal histories. They are so profoundly context-dependent that any claim that some people are "better" at it than others makes no sense. For instance, studies have shown that people in weaker social positions may engage in more active and perceptive mind-reading than people in stronger social positions. Interestingly, "when one is given the role of subordinate in an experimental situation, one becomes better in assessing the feeling of others, and conversely, when the same person is attributed the role of leader, one becomes less good" (Snodgrass, 1985: 49; quoted in Vignemont, 2007).

Theory of mind is profoundly implicated in our reading of fiction. In Why We Read Fiction, I emphasized the social aspect of our enjoyment of fictional narratives, arguing that whereas theory of mind evolved to track mental states involved in real-life social interactions, on some level our theory-of-mind adaptations do not distinguish between mental states of real people and of fictional characters. Fiction feeds our theory of mind and experiments with it, giving us carefully crafted, emotionally and aesthetically compelling social contexts shot through with mind-reading opportunities.

3. Nested Mental States

For the last couple of years, I have focused on one particular aspect of social mind-reading present in fiction. To introduce this aspect now, I will first tell you about several emotionally charged dilemmas that I've had to deal with recently.

(I)I love bringing my son to the Metropolitan Museum of Art when we stay in New York in the summer. On Thursdays, they have a special hour for children, when a curator first talks with them about an artwork and then encourages them to draw pictures inspired by it. Yet much as my five-year-old enjoys it when he is actually there doing it, every time I tell him that we are about to go to the museum, he says that he doesn't want to go. Don't you remember, I plead with him, that you loved it last Thursday? No, he says, he didn't. I cajole and bribe, and keep hoping that a day will come when he will remember how he felt about it last week.

(II)An old tree next to my house needs to be cut down, yet the contractor keeps postponing, and I'm worried that yet another dead branch will fall on my neighbors' car. I don't know how they explain to themselves that I haven't yet taken care of it. I want them to know that I am thinking about this issue. I shall email them.

(III)During a dissertation defense, I ask a question, and, as the candidate begins to answer, I realize that she must have misunderstood my question. What she is saying is interesting, though. Should I just go with it, or should I restate my original query in different terms? I wonder, too, if other committee members think that she misunderstood the question or that she did understand it but didn't know how to answer it and so decided to talk about something else.

A thought within a thought. A feeling within a feeling. A feeling within a thought within a feeling. I hope that my son will remember next week how he feels about the museum this week. I want my neighbors to know that I didn't forget about the danger posed by the tree. I wonder if the other committee members think that the candidate intentionally chose not to answer a difficult question.

It's difficult to say how much of our daily social functioning involves nesting thoughts and feelings within each other, particularly since we don't stop and think about it consciously the way I just did. It seems safe to assume that when a social situation is complex it calls for thoughts and feelings nested in this recursive fashion.

Still, as socially meaningful and emotionally charged as nested thoughts and feelings may be, in real life they are only occasional. Fiction is where it gets interesting. Mental states nested at the third level - a thought within a thought within a thought, or a feeling within a thought within a feeling - are omnipresent in many types of fiction, including novels, short stories, drama, narrative poetry, and memoirs concerned with imagination and consciousness. More precisely, they are omnipresent in the experience of reading, as opposed to being immanent in the text. That is, the text prompts us to construct complex nestings to make sense of what we read, but the configuration and content of such nestings differ from one particular, historically-situated reader to another. What remains stable is the structure of nestedness itself.

To make it all less theoretical, here are several examples of nested mental states, culled from a second-century Roman novel, an eighteenth-century English novel, an eighteenth-century Chinese novel, and an early twentieth-century Russian novel. I chose each passage to demonstrate a particular feature of high-level nesting, and I will discuss these features as we go along.

4. Features of Nesting

(1)We cannot reduce a third-level nesting to the first or second level and still get an accurate sense of the meaning of the passage.

In Apuleius's novel, The Golden Ass (second century A. D.), a young widow learns that her beloved husband was treacherously murdered during a boar-hunt by the man who had long wanted to wed her himself. Unaware that she knows about his perfidy, that man is now pressing the widow for marriage. She "pretend[s] to be won over" and suggests that they have a clandestine affair, "just until the year travels the full length of its remaining days," at which point they would marry. She wants him to believe that she is eager to sleep with him yet is ashamed that people would think it unseemly for a new widow. So he agrees to come to her house late at night, muffled "from head to foot and bereft of [his] escort" (167), thus leaving himself vulnerable to her gory revenge.

Note that you can't reduce third-level nesting of mental states to first or second level and still grasp the revenge plot created by Apuleius. "The widow is eager to sleep with the man who killed her husband" is plain wrong. "The man thinks that the widow is eager to sleep with him" reflects only the limited perspective of the doomed character. "The widow wants the man to think that she wants to sleep with him," or, "The widow wants the man to think that she is afraid of what people will say if she becomes his mistress so early into her bereavement" begin to get there.

(2) The number of nested mental states does not have to correspond to the number of characters.

Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe (1719) is shot through with introspective musings which demonstrate that writers do not need multiple characters or even flesh-and-blood characters to nest multiple mental states. Defoe's protagonist spends twenty-eight years alone on a desert island. He has literally nobody to talk to, yet he nests mental states continuously, reflecting on his own thoughts and feelings and, occasionally, speculating about the intentions of God.

Thus Crusoe:

From this moment I began to conclude in my mind that it was possible for me to be more happy in this forsaken, solitary condition than it was probable I should ever have been in any other particular state in the world; and with this thought I was going to give thanks to God for bringing me to this place.

I know not what it was, but something shocked my mind at that thought, and I durst not speak the words. "How canst thou become such a hypocrite," said I, even audibly, "to pretend to be thankful for a condition which, however thou mayest en-

deavour to be contented with, thou wouldst rather pray heartily to be delivered from?" (177-178)

Here is one way to map out Crusoe's reasoning in terms of its nested mental states: Crusoe is shocked to realize that he would deceive himself into believing that he could be thankful for a situation that, even as he wants to think best of it, he would still strongly prefer to escape. I consider this a series of parallel third- and fourth-level nestings, but, however you map it out, you can see that a solitary character can be a source of high-level nesting.

3.The writer doesn't have to spell out the characters' mental states. In fact, sometimes mental states are not mentioned at all, and readers have to deduce the implied nested thoughts and feelings to make sense of what's going on.

Consider the following excerpt from Cao Xueqin's Honglou meng (The Story of the Stone, in David Hawkes' translation[1]):

And now suddenly this Xue Bao-chai had appeared on the scene — a young lady who, though very little older than Dai-yu, possessed a grown-up beauty and aplomb in which all agreed Dai-yu was her inferior. (124)

不想如今忽然来了一个薛宝钗，年岁虽大不多，然品格端方，容貌丰，人多谓黛玉所不及。

Here is one way to spell out the mental states that we infer as we make sense of this sentence: the narrator wants his readers to realize that Dai-yu feels more insecure than usual because she is certain that everyone around her considers her inferior to Bao-chai. That's at least four nested mental states, but to articulate them, we have to take in subtle cues, such as the unhappy tone with which Dai-yu refers to her cousin (一个薛宝钗: "a Xue Bao-chai"; "this Xue Bao-chai" in Hawkes' translation) and our previous awareness of Dai-yu's near-paranoid self-consciousness (Zunshine, 2015b: 177).

Here is another example, from Russian literature. Yevgeny Zamyatin's novel We (1921) positions itself as not depicting thoughts and emotions yet it completely depends on readers' nesting of the characters' mental states. We is set in a dystopian future in which feelings are jettisoned for mathematical formulas and even people's names are numbers. Apparently this has fooled enough readers in several languages, because when I give talks, We is the text that is almost inevitably brought up during the question-and-answer period as an example of a work of fiction that must contain no nested mental states. Yet consider the first meeting of its protagonists:

All this without smiling, I'd even say with a certain reverence (perhaps she knows that I'm a builder of the ?Integral?). But I'm not sure - in her eyes or eye-

brows - there is some strange irritating x, and I can't quite catch it, can't assign it a numerical expression. (translation mine)

Все это без улыбки, я бы даже сказал, с некоторой почтительностью (может быть, ей известно, что я - строитель «Интеграла»). Но не знаю - в глазах или бровях - какой-то странный раздражающий икс, и я никак не могу его поймать, дать ему цифровое выражение. (7)

There is a whole constellation of triple nestings here. For instance, D-503 wonders if I-330 is impressed because she knows what he does. Also, he is irritated that he can't fathom her exact attitude. Moreover, the implied reader understands that D-503 doesn't realize that he's falling in love with I-330. Here, as everywhere else in Zamyatin's novel, we wouldn't be able to make sense of what's going on if we didn't construct nested mental states, imputing thoughts and feelings not just to characters, but also to the (implied) author and the (implied) reader (Zunshine, 2015c: 728).

Here is a very different example. A classic book for children, Pat Hutchins' Rosie's Walk (1968), features a chicken going for a stroll while a hungry fox is following her closely, ready to pounce. The joke of the story is that the chicken never finds out that the fox is right behind her. Strikingly, Rosie's Walk features no references to mental states; children have to deduce the implied thoughts of the characters to make sense of what is going on and to appreciate the joke. Young readers delight in their knowledge that Rosie the hen doesn't know that the hungry fox wants to devour her and that she has one lucky escape after another.

In fact, looking at books marketed for preschoolers, one notices that those books often encourage their readers to imagine the mental state of characters who are not aware of their true situation, that is, of other characters' intentions involving them (e.g., A. A. Milne's Winnie-the-Pooh, Jon Klassen's This Is Not My Hat; Julia Donaldson's Gruffalo [based, incidentally, on 狐假虎威]). The book market seems to operate on the assumption - which, to the best of my knowledge, has never been explicitly articulated in this commercial context - that readers start nesting implied mental states early in development, perhaps around the age of four or five, or even earlier.

The mind-reading expected from a preschooler to enjoy Rosie's Walk, Winnie-the- Pooh, This is Not My Hat, and Gruffalo is thus quite sophisticated. Arguably, readers build on that early sophistication as they continue to engage with a broad variety of fictional minds. By the time they get to The Golden Ass, Robinson Crusoe, The Story of the Stone, and We, they have learned to seek out and savor this engagement, even if they are no more aware of nesting fictional thoughts and

feelings than they are aware of nesting thoughts and feelings while dealing with actual social situations.

5. Explicit Nested Mental States in Honglou Meng

All novels build on our theory of mind, but some novels also make thinking about thinking their overt theme. Honglou Meng is one of those. Its characters spend most of their waking hours in other people's heads. This leads to some spectacular instances of explicit discussions of nested mental states.

Many of those discussions originate with Honglou Meng's main protagonists: Jia Bao-yu (贾宝玉) and Lin Dai-yu (林黛玉). Bao-yu is afflicted with the "lust of the mind" （意淫）. He wants to understand and share the emotions of girls, dozens of them, servants, cousins, and young aunts, populating the Jia sprawling aristocratic households.

Dai-yu, on the other hand, always worries about what other people think about the propriety of her behavior. Brilliant poet and astute observer, she uses her formidable intellect to plumb ever-new depths of social paranoia. Dai-yu and Bao-yu are in love, but, more often than not, instead of bringing them together, their obsession with reading each other's minds, leads them to misunderstandings and quarrels.

Here is one typical example of explicit nested mental states that involve Dai-yu's overreading of others.

Dai-yu and Bao-yu are visiting their cousin, Xue Bao-chai （薛宝钗）. As they are sitting there, chatting and drinking tea and wine, Dai-yu's maid, prompted by another maid, brings her a hand-warmer, and Dai-yu scolds her for it. Used to Dai-yu's "peculiar ways," neither Bao-yu nor Bao-chai say anything, but Bao-chai's mother, Mrs. Xue   （薛姨媽）, protests that it was "nice" of Dai-yu's maids to think of her, because she often feels chilly. Dai-yu responds thus:

You don't understand, Aunt. It doesn't matter here, with you; but some people might be deeply offended at the sight of one of my maids rushing in with a hand-warmer. It's as though I thought my hosts couldn't supply one themselves if I needed it. Instead of saying how thoughtful the maid was, they would put it down to my arrogance and lack of breeding. (193)

黛玉笑道:「一码归一码不知道。幸亏是姨妈这里,倘或在别人家,人家岂不恼？好说就看得人家连个手炉也没有,巴巴的从家里送个来。不说丫头们太小心过余,还只当我素日是这等轻狂惯了呢。」

Dai-yu is imagining people who'd think that she thinks that her hosts are not taking good care of her. That's bad enough, yet Dai-yu apparently goes easy on her aunt, who, after all, can only respond with the head-scratching "you are altogether too sensitive, thinking of things like that. Such a thought would never have crossed my mind" (" 你这个多心的，有这样想。我就没这样心"). It gets worse when Dai-yu's audience is Bao-yu, with whom Dai-yu can really spread her wings. Bao-yu's "lust of the mind" - that is, his sympathetic interest in girls' feelings - makes him a particularly inviting audience for Dai-yu's paranoid nestings.

At Bao-chai's birthday party, while the family is watching a play performed by a group of professional child actors, Bao-yu's cousin-in-law Wang Xi-feng（王熙凤), comments slyly on the resemblance between "someone we know" and a beautifully made-up boy who plays the main heroine. Bao-chai and Bao-yu merely nod without responding （once again, they know better), but another young relative, Shi Xiang-yun （史湘云), is "tactless enough" to blurt out that the actor looks like Dai-yu. Bao-yu shoots "a quick glance in [Xiang-yun's] direction; but [it's] too late," for now the other guests catch on to the resemblance and start laughing.

Shortly after the party breaks up, the offended Xiang-yun orders her maid to start packing. Bao-yu overhears it and attempts to make her change her mind, explaining that the only reason he gave her that look is that he "was worried for [her] sake." He knew that Xiang-yun didn't know how sensitive Dai-yu can be and "was afraid that [Dai-yu] would be offended with [Xiang-yun]." Bao-yu wants Xiang-yun to think that he worried about her feelings, in case Dai-yu gets angry at Xiang-yun. But Xiang-yun won't have any of it. To her, Bao-yu's glance implied that everyone thinks that she is "not in the same class as [Dai-yu] and hence mustn't make fun of "the young lady of the house."

But then it turns out that Dai-yu overheard Bao-yu's conversation with Xiang-yun, so the real fun begins. First Dai-yu "coldly" explains to Bao-yu that even though he didn't compare her with the child actor and didn't laugh when others did, his secret thoughts, of which she's apparently the best judge, implicate him severely:

'You would like to have made the comparison; you would like to have laughed,' said Dai-yu. 'To me your way of not comparing and not laughing was worse than the others' laughing and comparing!'

Bao-yu found this unanswerable.

'However,' Dai-yu went on, 'that I could forgive. But what about that look you gave Yun? Just what did you mean by that? I think I know what you meant. You meant to warn her that she would cheapen herself by joking with me as an e-

qual. Because she's an Honourable and her uncle's a marquis and I'm only the daughter of a commoner, she mustn't risk joking with me, because it would be so degrading for her if I were to answer back. That's what you meant, isn't it? Oh yes, you had the kindest intentions. Only unfortunately she didn't want your kind intentions and got angry with you in spite of them. So you tried to make it up with her at my expense, by telling her how touchy I am and how easily I get upset. You were afraid she might offend me, were you? As if it were any business of yours whether she offended me or not, or whether or not I got angry with her!' (438)

黛玉道：「你还要比？你还要笑？你不比不笑，比人家比了笑了的还利害呢！」宝玉听说，无可分辨，不则一声。

黛玉又道：「这一節还恕得。再你为什麼又和雲兒使眼色？这安的是什麼心？莫不是她和我玩，她就自轻自贱了？她原是公侯的小姐，我原是贫民的丫头，她和我玩，设若我回了口，岂不她自惹人轻贱呢？是这个主意不是？这却也是你的好心，只是那一个偏又不领情，一般也恼了。你又拿我作情，倒说我小性儿，行动肯恼。你又怕她得罪了我，我恼她。我恼她，与你何干？他得罪了我，又与你何干？」

Dai-yu feels bad about Bao-yu pretending not to enjoy the joke made at her expense. She also claims that what makes her feel even worse is that she believes that Bao-yu wanted to protect Xiang-yun from feeling humiliated in case Dai-yu dares to answer her as an equal. I am sure that there are other ways to map this passage in terms of its nested mental states, but what's important to keep in mind is that we will not get an accurate meaning of the passage unless we nest mental states on a high level. For instance, Dai-yu feels bad doesn't capture its meaning; Xiang-yun feels humiliated doesn't capture it either. Bao-yu is worried about Xiang-yun's feelings is too simple. To do justice to the complexity of the social situation conjured up by Cao we have to nest mental states on at least the third level.

6. Implied Nested Mental States in Honglou Meng

Bao-yu's and Dai-yu's private mindreading travails are but one instance of the malady afflicting all the Jias. The clan's daily life is a complex network of social manipulation. Every character worth her salt seeks to anticipate and control the emotional responses of others, yet in the long run, their plans backfire. People do not respond as their would-be manipulators hoped they would. The craftiest mindreaders, such as the beautiful and ambitious Wang Xi-feng come to pitiful ends.

Here's a typical Xi-feng moment, involving her philandering husband, Jia Lian

（贾琏）, and her trusted maid, Patience （平儿）. One day, as Xi-feng and Jia Lian are talking together about Jia Lian's recent long trip, they hear voices in the next room. When Xi-feng asks who it is, Patience comes in to explain that "Mrs. Xue sent Caltrop （香菱）[her maid and her son's "chamber-wife"] over to ask [Patience] about something," and that Caltrop has already received her answer and is gone. "Apparently pleased" by the mention of Caltrop, Jia Lian recollects that he saw her earlier that day and that she looks "most attractive" (308). Xi-feng then suggests that if Jia Lian likes Caltrop, Xi-feng will exchange Patience for her, so that Caltrop will become Xi-feng's new maid and Jia Lian's chamber-wife.

At this point, Jia Lian is called away, and, once he leaves the room, Xi-feng asks Patience "what on earth did Mrs. Xue want, sending Caltrop here like that."

'It wasn't Caltrop!' said Patience. 'I had to make something up and hers was the first name that came to mind. [A woman who owes Xi-feng money came over to pay the interest.] It's lucky I was in the outside room when she came, otherwise she might have blundered in here and Master ［二爷］would have heard the message. And we all know what Master is like where money is concerned ... Once he found out that you had savings, he'd pluck up courage to spend them in no time. Anyway, I took the money from her quickly and gave her a piece of my mind — which I am afraid you must have heard. That's why I had to say what I did. I'd never have mentioned Caltrop in the Master's presence otherwise!'

Xi-feng laughed.

'I was going to say! Why, for no apparent reason, should Mrs. Xue choose a chamber-wife to send here the moment Master gets back? So it was you up to your tricks, you little monkey!' (310)

平儿笑道：「那里来的香菱，是我借他暂撒个谎。奶奶说说，旺儿嫂子越发连个承算也没了。」说著，又走至凤姐身边，悄悄的说道：「奶奶的那利钱银子，遲不送来，早不送来，这会子二爷在家，他且送这个来了。幸亏我在堂屋里撞见，不然时走了来回奶奶，二爷倘或问奶奶是什么利钱，奶奶自然不肯瞒二爷的，少不得照实告诉二爷。我们二爷那脾气，油锅里的钱还要找出来花呢，听见奶奶有了这个梯己，他还不放心的花了呢。所以我赶著接了过来，叫我说了他两句，谁啊知奶奶偏听见了问，我就撒谎说香菱来了。」凤姐听了笑道：「我说呢，姨妈知道你二爷来了，忽喇巴的反打发个房里人来了？原来你这蹄子肏鬼。」

Here Jia Lian comes back and the husband and wife resume their conversation, but neither mentions Caltrop again.

If you look for references to mental states, you notice that Jia Lian thinks that Caltrop is attractive, and that he likes money; that Xi-feng is surprised that Mrs. Xue would send in Caltrop while Jia Lian is in; and that Xi-feng is willing to get a

chamber- wife for her husband. These are explicit mentions of thoughts, feelings, and attitudes, and they describe isolated mental states. The meaning of the scene, however, resides not with them, but with the complex nestings that are implied rather than explicitly referred to by the narrator.

For instance, why is it that neither Xi-feng nor Jia Lian return to their discussion of Caltrop once Jia Lian comes back? It must mean that Jia Lian has known all along that the madly jealous Xi-feng would never allow him to bring in another chamber- wife, and that she was merely playing with him, pretending to be a dutiful wife who wants her husband to have a new concubine and hence another shot at a son. Moreover, Xi-feng knows that Jia Lian knows that Xi-Feng merely pretends to be magnanimous about a concubine, just like she knows that he knows that she would never want to part with Patience, who is smart and loyal, more a friend that a servant.

In fact, we have just seen the amazing Patience in action. Because she knows that Jia Lian shouldn't find out about the money, she figures that the best way to distract him is to make him think about a pretty girl. She also knows that if Jia Lian starts thinking about the girl, Xi-feng will be unhappy, yet that she will be more unhappy if Jia Lian finds out about the money. Patience counts on Xi-feng's appreciating her "Caltrop" ruse upon finding out that it was meant to protect her purse, and she knows that Xi-feng will be able to use her husband's lustful musings about Cal trop to remind him who's really in charge in their family.

At the same time, Xi-feng's talk about trading Patience for Caltrop has a certain edge. It is as if Xi-feng were reminding Patience that she could exchange her for another maid if she wanted. Because Xi-feng doesn't know what happened in the next room and suspects that Mrs. Xue would not send her son's beautiful concubine with a message to Xi-feng at the time when Jia Lian is sure to be around, she knows that something is up with Patience's mention of Caltrop. We thus can only guess if she is playfully teasing Patience when she proposes to Jia Lian, in Patience's hearing, to trade her for Caltrop, or if she is quietly warning her that her position as trusted confidante is only as secure as Patience's latest demonstration of absolute loyalty.

Note again that the extremely involved social situation created by Cao cannot be understood and appreciated without nesting a mental state within a mental state within another mental state. "Xi-feng wants to trade Patience for Caltrop" captures exactly nothing. "Xi-feng wants to scare Patience" captures little. "Xi-feng wants Patience to be amused about the cat-and-mouse game she's playing with her hus band" or "Xi-feng wants Patience to remember that she would not forgive her a

disloyalty" begin to get there.

Though not a stupid man, Jia Lian is always at least one step behind both Xi-feng and Patience in their mind-games. His relative cluelessness is consistent with the pattern we find elsewhere in the novel. Cao correlates his characters' ability to nest complex mental states with their age, gender, and class. That is, his young women of any social class are much more likely to be capable of contemplating complex nested mental states than are rich men (such as Jia Lian) and older rich women (such as Mrs. Xue).

In fact, that's yet another insight made possible by the cognitive perspective: we've always known that Cao's sympathies lay with his young female characters, but now we see just how he makes his young women sympathetic.

Not that readers automatically sympathize with any character who is more ca-pable of nesting complex mental states than others. While such a character comes across as more interesting, she may also seem unpleasantly manipulative. To re-main appealing, she has to be somewhat of an underdog. Hence Cao keeps his young women sympathetic by making them sick, powerless, or doomed.

Wang Xi-feng is an interesting case in point. She comes across as fun but also manipulative and dangerous. When I teach Honglou Meng to undergraduates, she is the one they love to hate. It's open to debate to what extent her character is "re-deemed" by marital unhappiness, illness, and eventual tragic demise. (Zunshine, 2015b: 184)

I ended my talk in Guangzhou on this sad note, although I would have loved to con-tinue talking about mindreading and misreading in Honglou Meng. What I had hoped to have demonstrated is that Cao's novel brilliantly anticipated cognitive lit-erary theory and that it is a treasure trove for scholars who want to explore how works of fiction create meaning by nesting both explicit and implied mental states.

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