

***Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅: The Fall of the House of Ximen**
Society for Asian Art (Fall 2022)

Instructor: Stephen Roddy
roddys@usfca.edu
415-422-6080/sidingwen (Wechat)/sidingwen (Line)

Text: *The Plum in the Golden Vase, or Chin P'ing Mei*, Vols. 3-4 (*The Aphrodisiac* [Ch. 41-60] and *The Climax* [Ch. 61-80]; Vol. 5, not assigned as our reading, is titled *The Dissolution*). Translated by David Roy. Princeton University Press, 2011-2015.

Traditional Chinese novels tend to be epic in scope, and *Jin Ping Mei* is no exception. The last twenty chapters of this book cover not only the destruction of the Ximen household and the dispersal of its surviving members, but the fall of the Northern Song Dynasty at the hands of the Jürchen (Jin) invaders as they overrun the North China Plain. But before that happens, the author gradually brings all of the physical and moral excesses of the first 40 chapters to a crescendo in the momentous events of the four “decades” of Chapters 40-80. Variations on the familial and societal dynamics that we have witnessed earlier—infidelity, jealousy, financial entanglements and mismanagement, political corruption, etc.—become progressively more convoluted, revealing ever greater complexity and depth in Pan Jinlian, Li Ping'er, Wu Yueniang, their servants and others in or outside the household. To what extent can we feel empathy or at least pity for characters who have sinned so egregiously? Should we take some comfort in the ways in which nearly all of them receive their just deserts? We will ponder these questions as we make our way through the material splendor that only begins to fade as the family enters its final, terminal decline.

For reading assignments, we will cover 10 chapters in each of the three sessions. The final class on May 23 will also present a brief “overview” of the last 30 chapters—without assuming you will have read any of these sections in advance, but to prepare you to finish the book at your leisure. As with Volumes 1 and 2, Volumes 3, 4, and 5 of the David Roy translation are all available as e-books. Moreover, the entire two-volume translation by Clement Egerton (*The Golden Lotus*) appears to be accessible for free, divided into two online sites:
<https://freelibrary.overdrive.com/media/900522> (Chaps. 1-53) and
<https://freelibrary.overdrive.com/media/900523> (Chaps. 54-100).

Schedule of Readings

October 17 10:30-12:00
Chapters 40-50

October 31 10:30-12:00
Chapters 51-60

November 14 10:30-12:00
Chapters 61-70

Selected Bibliography

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