

Jin Ping Mei 金瓶梅: A Tale for Our Times

Society for Asian Art
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Text: *The Plum in the Golden Vase, or Chin P'ing Mei*, Vol. 1: *The Gathering*. Translated by David Roy. Princeton University Press, 1993. ISBN 9780691016146

Repeatedly banned, burned, and (verbally) blasted by authorities from its first printing around 1609 through to the present day, *Jin Ping Mei* is a transgressive text par excellence. Even today its circulation remains controversial: two recent scholarly editions (of 1985 and 2008) expurgate approximately 4300 words (helpfully showing the size and location of each offending passage). Although the novel's scandalous reputation rests largely on its explicit descriptions of sexual acts, these erotic interludes are interspersed with other unseemly behavior, including gluttony, drunkenness, political and moral corruption, physical violence, and perhaps most memorably, extended fits of vituperative rage. It is, in short, an utterly captivating portrait of a society in crisis and (as subsequent history proved) on the verge of collapse. The work is also known for its descriptions of the material culture of the late-Ming period, a time of nearly unequalled creativity in the fine arts but also cuisine, clothing, theatre, popular songs, games, horticulture, and many other domains.

All 100 chapters of the novel have been translated in five volumes by the late David Roy (Professor of Chinese at the University of Chicago [1967-1999] and brother of Stapleton Roy, U.S. Ambassador to China, 1991-95). Roy's translation is based on the earliest of the three main recensions, *Jin Ping Mei cibua* (ca. 1609). The other two versions (published in the 1630s and the early Qing, respectively), diverge from their predecessor mainly in the introductory chapter and a few other sections, but otherwise are quite similar. Most of the extant editions of the novel follow the later versions, and include both woodblock print illustrations and commentary by the critic Zhang Zhupo (1670-98). Another complete translation (Clement Egerton's *The Golden Lotus*, 1939) appears to be available for free online at: <https://freelibrary.overdrive.com/media/900522>.

Schedule of Readings

Feb 21

Introduction, Prefaces, Colophon, Appendix I & Chapters 1-5 (pp. 4-110, 429-436)

Mar 7

Chapters 6-10 (pp. 111-204)

Mar 21

Chapters 11-15 (pp. 205-315)

Apr 11

Chapters 16-20 & *Appendix II* (pp. 316-427, 437-447)

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