

## Raise the Red Lantern by Su Tong

### **Brief summary of the novella**

In a Chinese town in the 1920's or 30's, four wives in a polygamous marriage jockey for what limited power is available to them within a claustrophobic and patriarchal household. Issues of class, gender and sexual hierarchies, and questions about the role of history versus fate emerge in the increasingly tension-filled atmosphere of this marital hothouse, where servants who are keenly aware of rank and status also act to resist and perpetuate the traditions of the Chen household.

### **Connections to other literary works**

This lesson is designed to follow the end of a unit that begins with authors commonly associated with--often contentiously--magical realism, such as Gabriel Garcia Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortazar and Luisa Valenzuela. The unit then moves beyond these Latin American works to other stories that arguably share some thematic or structural similarities (a list is included at the end of the lesson plan). The unit ends with a reading of Salman Rushdie's short story "The Firebird's Nest" and excerpts from Ovid's Metamorphoses, the ancient Roman poet an original magical realist of sorts. As part of our study of "The Firebird's Nest," I ask students, given the subject matter of the tale which follows, why Rushdie might have chosen Ted Hughes' translation of Ovid's Metamorphoses for the story's opening quote. Together we read three poems, "You Hated Spain" by Ted Hughes and "The Goring" and "Alicante Lullaby" by Sylvia Plath, exploring the differences between how the two poets represent their honeymoon trip. We compare these differences in representation to the alternate explanations for why multiple women are dying in a rural Indian locale in the Rushdie story. This discussion makes for a logical transition to Su Tong's novella Raise the Red Lantern. Included in this packet are

copies of the Rushdie story and the Hughes and Plath poems. Using these works together offers students valuable practice in making intertextual comparisons and connections.

Reading Raise the Red Lantern after the magical realism unit also allows students to make connections between the looming presence of the well and its ghostly occupants in the novella to the slippery boundaries between the living and dead in some of the Latin American short stories, particularly “In the Family” by Maria Elena Llano, “Up among the Eagles” by Luisa Valenzuela, “The Night Face Up” by Julio Cortazar, and “August 25, 1983” by Jorge Luis Borges. Additionally, the questions posed in many of the stories in the preceding unit that involve the relationship between reality, fantasy, dreams, perception, and how we explain certain realities to ourselves and others, provide an introduction to Raise the Red Lantern. Students will already be primed to ask certain questions of the text, its characters, and their perceptions.

Finally, this lesson plan asks students to explore connections between the mechanisms for the enforcement of order in the household represented in Raise the Red Lantern and the mechanisms for the enforcement of order in Jeremy Bentham’s pantopticon as examined in Michel Foucault’s Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison. I already use an excerpt from this text in conjunction with showing several episodes of the 1967-68 British television series The Prisoner, but it fits strategically with this unit as well, especially as students view and analyze the film adaptation of Su Tong’s novella. After making this connection between Tong and Foucault, I discovered a piece, written by a New York University graduate student for a course on prison narrative, that examines the relationship between the panopticon and two films: Raise the Red Lantern and Nawal El Saadawi’s Woman at Point Zero. Although these connections go beyond the scope of this lesson plan, teachers might want to explore the use of

these two films in conjunction. The URL of this website is:

<http://pages.nyu.edu/~scs7891/rrtl.html>.

**Materials/resources included in this lesson plan**

- \* list of stories included in the preceding unit
- \* copy of Salman Rushdie's "The Firebird's Nest"
- \* copies of Ted Hughes "You Hated Spain" and Sylvia Plath's "The Goring" and "Alicante Lullaby"
- \* cartoon from Origins of Chinese Festivals by KI, Goh Pei, explaining the origin of using red lanterns as auspicious signs
- \* excerpt from Michel Foucault's Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison

**Additional materials/resources needed for the lesson**

- \* Xerox copy of Raise the Red Lantern by Su Tong for each student (page numbers used in this plan refer to the novella as it appears in Raise the Red Lantern: Three Novellas, trans. by Michael S. Duke, 11-99. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1993.
- \* 1991 videotape of Raise the Red Lantern (commonly available at Blockbuster and other video rental stores)

**Activities prior to reading:**

I share a few brief details about the author, title and genre (novella) of the work at hand:

- \* I ask students whether they are familiar with a definition for novella or whether they could hazard an educated guess.
- \* The title was originally translated as Wives and Concubines (or Plural Wives), but now generally appears as the title of a film adaptation. I ask students whether they have heard of

any similar case. I also note the definition of concubine if no one in the room can explain it to the class.

- \* The story is set in a Chinese town in the 1920's or 1930's.
- \* As a frivolous aside, I note that author Su Tong and I are about the same age (he born in 1963 and I 1964)!
- \* Su Tong is often cited as an example of Chinese "New Wave" writing. I ask students if they are familiar with this expression in regard to any other art forms, periods or countries (the one that is likely to be mentioned is New Wave rock music) and what are the implications of the phrase.
- \* Two other novellas by Su Tong easily available to students are: Nineteen Thirty-Four Escapes about a village family in which the father leaves for a larger town in order to earn money. While he takes a mistress, his wife, pregnant with her seventh child, and the rest of the family struggle to survive planting rice. The story explores the various calamities and choices with which the mother is faced. Opium Family explores the life of a rich family that sells opium and becomes involved in a variety of corrupt scandals.
- \* I will show them the cover of my copy of Chairman Mao Would Not be Amused: Fiction from Today's China (Grove Press, 1995), another collection in which the novella appears. I ask students what they know about Mao Zedong, the Cultural Revolution, and what kinds of things might not amuse the Chairman. After listening to any contributions offered, I lead into:

### **Group assignments for presentations of background material**

In order to increase student investment and involvement with the text and offer practice in making presentations (and to avoid unnecessarily dreary teacher lectures), I divide students into small groups prior to beginning the reading to research the background issues/items listed

below. Groups make brief presentations (preferably no longer than 10-15 minutes) to the class on days to coincide with the appearance of the issues/items in the reading for the day. The first three items on the list are presented before reading any of the story. The topics that follow are listed in the order of appearance in/relevance to the story. The third-to-last and the penultimate presentations are made just prior to the film screening, and the last after the film screening. As I teach in a special school for the arts, some of these topics are deliberately selected for their connection to student art areas – music, drama, design, architecture, dance and film. Students may choose to sign-up for a presentation linked to their art area, but are also encouraged to explore beyond these boundaries. Students are invited to prepare handouts, visual or auditory materials to supplement their oral presentations. I note that as we have access to a “smart” classroom, groups can notify me if they would like to present in that space. This option will be particularly suited to the final presentation.

### **Presentations before the reading**

- \* overview (brief) of Chinese political history (2 groups):
  - a. Mao and the Cultural Revolution (approx. 1949-1976)
  - b. Post-Mao revisions until today, including the Ti An Men Square events
- \* educational practices/opportunities for women in the era in which the story is set
- \* marriage and family practices in the era in which the story is set

### **During the reading**

- \* Buddhist Sutras and prayer practices
- \* the Double Ninth festival and chrysanthemum arrangement
- \* traditional Chinese opera

\* mahjong (I bring in my mahjong set for this day; you might want to explore tracking one down for borrowing)

\* traditional Chinese wooden flute music

### **Before the film**

\* Chinese architectural/housing styles in the era of the story

\* the career of Zhang Yimou in the context of the history of Chinese filmmaking

### **After the film**

\* the National Ballet of China adaptation of Raise the Red Lantern by artistic director Zhang Yimou, composer Chen Qigang, and choreographer Wang Xinpeng

Teachers may elect to direct students to particular websites and resources, or have them find information through their own searches. Below are some recommended websites for the various topics (there are many additional relevant ones as well):

<http://sun.sino.uni-heidelberg.de/igcs/index.html>

Buddhism, History, Society, Education, Music, Fine Arts – Architecture, Motion Pictures/Film (in the Pl. Literature section)

[www.chinavoc.com/festivals](http://www.chinavoc.com/festivals)

[www.asianinfo.org/asianinfo/china/society\\_celebrations.htm](http://www.asianinfo.org/asianinfo/china/society_celebrations.htm)

[www.china.org.cn/e-china/religions/Festival.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/e-china/religions/Festival.htm)

[www.chinavist.com/experience](http://www.chinavist.com/experience)

Festivals, holidays, celebrations

[www2.newpaltz.edu/~knappr](http://www2.newpaltz.edu/~knappr)

Architecture

[www.chinapage.com](http://www.chinapage.com)

Chinese opera – click on Beijing opera

[www.china-inc.com/education/music](http://www.china-inc.com/education/music) and [www.chinesemusic.com](http://www.chinesemusic.com)

wooden flute music

[www.mahjongmuseum.com](http://www.mahjongmuseum.com)

Mahjong; there are also simulated computer mahjong games at [ninedragons.com](http://ninedragons.com) and [mahjon.real-time.com](http://mahjon.real-time.com)

[www.asianfilms.com](http://www.asianfilms.com)

Chinese film history and Zhang Yimou

[www.websitesaboutchina.com/art/dance\\_1.htm](http://www.websitesaboutchina.com/art/dance_1.htm)

[www.china.org/cn/english/10121.htm](http://www.china.org/cn/english/10121.htm)

ballet adaptation

### **First day of reading (begin after initial four presentations)**

The class will begin the reading together, stopping frequently to look closely at textual details and implications, both to accustom the students to the text and to offer further practice in close reading.

Things to note/discussion questions for pages 12-14 (possible comments in parenthesis)

- \* How do the first 3 words resonate for a contemporary (American) reader? (Polygamy is an unfamiliar concept for most Americans. So too is a woman being referred to and ranked as a numbered mistress).
- \* the mode of transport used to bring Lotus to the house
- \* Why the back gate? (11) (Perhaps the Fourth Mistress arrives through the back door).

- \* Why might Su Tong describe Lotus' face as "dull and lifeless as a paper doll?" (Dolls, like puppets, are played with and manipulated. This description suggests that Lotus is a passive player in a scheme).
- \* the assumptions and observations of the servants, especially as these observations relate to social class (Lotus wiping her brow with her sleeve as opposed to her handkerchief, for example); How do the servants' class assumptions affect how they treat Lotus? (They assume she is a lowlier member of the Chen extended family. They seem keenly aware of these distinctions in rank, and serve to reinforce them).
- \* How does Lotus establish her position in regard to the servants in this first scene? (She commands Swallow rudely, as if to establish her status over Swallow before any more time elapses).
- \* What do you notice about the names? (All the women's names are nature words).
- \* Ask students to imagine the architecture of the household (after hearing about the south wing).
- \* What do you make of the contrast between Lotus' clothes upon arrival, and the outfit into which she changes? What larger changes might the contrast exemplify? (Her school clothes are simple, perhaps "western" and, although they are gendered, are not particularly sexualized. She changes into fabrics more lush and sensual, perhaps signaling a new form of currency and definition).
- \* What do you think of Lotus' treatment of Swallow regarding her hair? What do you think of Swallow's response? (Lotus humiliates and demeans Swallow to establish her own dominance. Also, by criticizing Swallow's hygiene, Lotus suggests she herself has greater beauty, refinement and sexual currency. Swallow's responds by sullyng and degrading, albeit privately, Lotus' clothing. Spitting is often considered a particularly insulting act).

Students are now ready to begin reading on their own for homework. Successive classes will therefore involve all-group discussions and the group presentations on the topics previously listed as they become relevant. My students are involved in two full curricula (academics and intensive arts) in a residential setting, and therefore my reading assignments per day tend to be shorter than in a more traditional setting due to time pressures. My students will be asked to read approximately 15- 20 pages a day. Every other day they will also turn in a “passage analysis.” These are frequent assignments in my class; students select one passage they find significant, interesting, strange, confusing, etc., and then in a substantial paragraph squeeze as much meaning out of it as possible—exploring issues and questions that emerge, patterns detected, notable uses of language, and certainly any personal reactions, although the emphasis is on literary analysis. Every day, whether or not a passage analysis is due, students are expected to come to class prepared with seeds for discussions—quotes and moments from the text, reactions and questions. 30% of a student’s grade in my class is dependent on informed participation, coming to class prepared to speak about the text, and performance on regular but unannounced reading quizzes. The teachers in my English department model classes on our post-secondary literature seminars, and therefore our usual practice involves daily all-group discussion. We generally expect students to raise issues and questions from the text instead of giving them predetermined questions, thereby allowing a “reading” of the text to emerge through the combination of everyone’s comments. Nonetheless, we have our own lists of issues, comments and “devil’s advocate” questions that we will often nudge students towards in the event that they do not raise them. I usually begin class with open-ended questions such as “What did you think?” and “What did you notice?”

**Issues/questions for discussion on the reading, divided into sections of approximately 15-20 pages:**

*Note: Although for this lesson plan I have offered comments in parentheses about each item, I am much more interested in what students do with the textual evidence and with the meaning they make. While I will certainly acknowledge their “stronger” and more viable readings of details, I am not interested necessarily in providing an authoritative reading of textual details. Relevant group presentations will accompany these discussions. A small percentage of the questions below will be used on brief, plot-oriented, unannounced reading quizzes.*

Page 14 (middle) to page 34 (2/3 way down page) to be accompanied by Buddhist Sutra and prayer practices, the Double Ninth Festival, traditional Chinese opera and mahjong presentations)

- \* What can we intuit about First Mistress Joy from her actions and reaction to meeting Lotus, and from Lotus’ reaction to her? (Joy is pious and disapproving of the practice of multiple mistresses and/or of the house’s new resident; she could be jealous and emotionally crushed by the repeated introduction of new mistresses. Lotus seems self-congratulatory and mocking in her laughter about Joy’s piety; perhaps she finds Joy to be old-fashioned and aged. It is interesting to note that Joy being “fat” is mentioned specifically. Appearance has already emerged as a currency in the household).
- \* Compare and contrast Cloud’s welcome with that of Joy. (Cloud, unlike Joy, welcomes Lotus “enthusiastically” and offers welcome snacks and conversation. Cloud seems comfortable, homey even.)

- \* What do you make of Lotus' response to Cloud? Why does she want to leave and why do you think she offers Cloud the respectful title of "Elder Sister?" (Lotus experiences boredom and perhaps a moment of class disjunction when faced with Cloud's "common" snacks. She intuits that Chen is quite comfortable here as they linger. This observation might trouble Lotus, as well as being an indication of Cloud's status. Lotus evaluates Cloud's face, possibly comparing herself again to another mistress. Perhaps she offers Cloud the respectful title out of recognition for her looks and graces, although such recognition might be based more on Lotus' realization that Cloud likely achieves status with others. In other words, Lotus recognizes Cloud's potential power/clout as being greater than Joy's. Therefore it would be more beneficial to ally herself with Cloud. Perhaps already a hierarchy is being laid out/negotiated.)
- \* What attitudes does the conversation about Coral between Lotus and Chen reveal? (Lotus wants very much to meet Coral, perhaps because of her beauty's reputation. Does Lotus simply admire beautiful women, or does she want to determine where she figures in the hierarchy of beauty in the household? Chen reveals his opinions about women who have the futile desire to achieve power over men: "Women can never be more important than men).)
- \* What synchronicity alarms Lotus? (She and Coral are both staring at each other through a window).
- \* What do you make of Lotus' reactions to the first sexual experience with Chen? (She makes some bold statements; she experiences some type of "fall;" interestingly, she sees the image of Coral's face).
- \* Why do you think Coral, claiming illness, sends for Chen? (Jealously? To assert her power over Lotus and Chen?). Why does Chen answer her call? (Perhaps she does indeed wield

power over him; perhaps he thinks it's easier to go to her than to cope with the consequences of not going).

- \* What might the suicide of Lotus' father suggest about the larger culture at the time? (The shame that ensues from financial loss might be a powerful incentive to suicide).
- \* What do you make of Lotus' responses to her stepmother's plans for her marriage? (She seems pragmatic and almost resigned to the necessity; as long as she has to do it, she might as well marry rich. She makes starkly realistic comments about her situation and how she doesn't have the luxury of having hope for her own status).
- \* What are your reactions to the "date" between Chen and Lotus? Why might Chen find her intriguing and different from other women he knows? (Lotus seems already to wield a certain power over Chen. Chen realizes this difference might have to do with her education. He seems intrigued by these differences. The narrator's comment about Lotus' sexual behavior, and whether it was natural or shaped to please Chen, is interesting. This question, considered more broadly – whether the wives act the way they do naturally or as some sort of strategy – might be a useful question to keep in mind for the rest of the story).
- \* How does the description of and information about the well affect the mood of the story? (Perhaps this scene and its sensory details introduce a sense of mystery—of the unknown—into the story. The reader has questions about what happened to the women. The story is now haunted by Lotus' sensations at the well, and Cloud's somewhat cryptic comments about the women. Clearly there is more information to be had. A new tension has been introduced into the story).
- \* What do we learn about children and their status in the household? (We learn that First Mistress Joy's children enjoy a higher status and greater privileges. Even servant Swallow is

able to use their status to insult Lotus. Joy's daughter is away at school, and the reader wonders whether she will be able to complete her education in a way that Lotus cannot. It's interesting to note that Cloud's daughters whisper about the status of their mother and of Lotus in a disparaging way. Everyone – children, servants and wives—is aware of the hierarchies implicit in the family setup. We also learn that Lotus assumes boys are better than girls, perhaps because boys would increase her status in a household which privileges men).

- \* What do Lotus and the readers learn about the interaction between Swallow and Chen, and what does Lotus conclude about women as a result? (The “Master” sometimes fondles Swallow. Clearly he assumes this privilege as head of household. Swallow might be both oppressed and oddly empowered by these acts, and Lotus somewhat disempowered. Lotus' comment “A woman is just that sort of creature” could be ambiguous. Is she saying that all women play games, or all women are put in a position to have to play games to survive?).
- \* What does Lotus point out about the banquet that welcomes Joy's son Feipu home for the Double Ninth Festival? (She notices that her welcome banquet was less grand, another indication of her status or lack thereof).
- \* Why is Lotus so surprised that Feipu calls her by her own name? What does she gain by inventing a dislike for a particular type of chrysanthemums? (She has been accustomed to the appellation “Fourth Mistress,” and the sound of her own name might be strange to her. Although her rank calls for Feipu to use her title, their proximity in age makes this usage strange. Perhaps she exercises some power over Feipu in her manipulative game of flower likes and dislikes).

- \* What is going on in the discussion between Lotus and Chen when she asks which wife he likes best? (Is this one of the many moments in which one of the wives tries to establish their spot in a hierarchy of wives?)
- \* How do you read Lotus' tears in response to hearing Coral sing? (Perhaps the song seems like an expression of real emotion, as opposed to strategy, and it causes a release in Lotus. Interestingly and eerily, the piece is called "The Hanged Woman." Might this title prefigure events late in the novella?).
- \* What is implied by Coral's and Lotus' comments about Chen's request for help dressing? (They suggest that the husband is infantilized but also put on a pedestal in this situation. Coral notes that it "Looks like people are divided into the worthy and the unworthy," implying that there is a clear division between the men and the women in the household.
- \* Are there any further examples of Coral's control over Chen? (She refuses to come sing to him. Interestingly, Chen explains to Coral that he has spoiled her and that she has the audacity to curse his ancestors).
- \* Is Lotus' suggestion to go easy on Coral authentically altruistic? (Perhaps so, considering her reference to Coral's background, although this reference could also be a sign of scorn or patronizing pity).
- \* Why does Lotus disdain mahjong? (The text seems to suggest that she perceives the game to be a pursuit of a lower social class).
- \* What does Lotus discover during the mahjong game? Why does she feel a little "exultant" after the discovery? (She discovers the entwined legs of Coral and the Doctor. She now has a sort of upper hand as she has condemnatory evidence against Coral).

Page 35 to page 54 (1/3 of way down page) to be accompanied by wooden flute presentation

- \* Why does Lotus seem to lose her desire, initially pronounced in this first scene? (The rain and dark seem initially to spark her desire, but when the conversation turns to the other wives she loses interest. She is somehow not alone with Chen even in this intimate moment).
- \* What does she report seeing in the well? (Two women who look like her).
- \* How does Lotus respond to the seeming lack of privacy in her quarters? (She insults Swallow, assuming she's spying, and throws a perfume bottle at the door).
- \* How does Lotus respond to Feipu's flute playing, and what do we learn about her own flute? (She seems transported by the music, and seems to experience genuine emotions just like when she hears Coral singing. We learn that she too had a flute, which is now missing, a discovery which provokes her to smash Swallow's trunk on the assumption she stole it).
- \* What do Lotus' old clothes seem to represent? (Unfulfilled dreams, her old life, an education aborted).
- \* What does Lotus discover in Swallow's trunk, and what logical assumption does she make about it? (She discovers what we might stereotype as a voodoo doll, with the name Lotus on it. She realizes that one of the literate wives must have written the name, as Swallow can't read or write. The surprise is that Cloud, the wife that has been most solicitous of Lotus, wrote the name).
- \* What, in the end, happened to the flute, and what is Lotus' reaction to this discovery? (Chen took it and destroyed it, wrongly assuming it had been a present from a man. Of course Lotus has to live with the constant knowledge that Chen has other wives! Lotus' father had given the flute to her and it was perhaps her only tangible connection to him. Lotus becomes melancholy

after she learns of the loss, prompting Chen to leave in frustration but noting his luck at having other wives).

- \* Why does Cloud want her hair cut? What might such cut represent? What is the outcome of the cut and what is Coral's reaction to this outcome? (The shorter hairstyle seems to be linked to modernity and education, and perhaps to "Western" styles. Perhaps Cloud wants to be "modern." The cut goes awry, with Cloud's ear cut. Coral smiles and laughs in response).
- \* Why did Coral and Cloud compete in their pregnancies? To what length did they go? (The honor of having a boy child first would endow the mother with greater status. Coral claims that Cloud poisoned her and that Cloud took labor-inducing drugs to have her child ahead of Coral. In the end, Coral had the boy. Coral insults Cloud's daughter Yirong in a competitive tone).
- \* How does Lotus' request/demand to the servants to cease burning the leaves resonate for Joy and the others? (Lotus dares to question and overturn what was tradition in the household).
- \* What do you make of Lotus' anti-analogy: "The leaves will rot by themselves; do we have to burn them? Leaves aren't people, you know." (This reverse analogy suggests that people must be "burned." Is this a moment that is suggestive of the story to come?).
- \* What details about Lotus' room might be indicative of her situation and mood? (The flowers are wilted and black, and now that it is winter, the windows are shut so tight they can't be opened. Both images paint a claustrophobic picture of death, isolation, and entrapment).
- \* In her conversation with Feipu when he comes to visit, what does Lotus note about books? Why do you think he does come to visit? (Lotus acknowledges that her past life as a student is over. Although they might provide some relief, she seems to suggest that books hold no currency in her life as one of Chen's mistresses. Perhaps Feipu recognizes something familiar

in Lotus due to her age and education. In this sense perhaps she is a more likely confidant in the house than anyone else).

- \* How does Lotus treat Swallow in this scene of Feipu's visit? (She is rude and mocking, and again notes the lack of privacy she feels with Swallow always so near).
- \* What do you make of Feipu's and Lotus' discussion about sweets? (Feipu seems to be perceived as different and womanly due to his taste for sweets. The notion that men like salty things and women like sweet things suggests an essentialist view of the temperaments and tastes of men and women. Might then the comment act as more than a detail about food?).
- \* Is there anything ironic about Joy's insult ("Whore's brats, whore's brats") to the others' children? (Interestingly, she too is in the same situation as the other wives, but perhaps as the First she can claim that she is a true wife while the others are prostitutes. Of course, it is probable that most of the wives entered the household by arrangement, not by choice, although Chen suggests at some point that Coral came willingly).
- \* As the argument about the broken vase escalates, how does Joy demonstrate her loyalty to and defense of her situation? (She claims that the others are going to ruin the "fine old Chen household).
- \* What does Lotus perceive about the well after the argument? (She senses that she is being called by an "apocalyptic voice." Is this another instance of prefiguring the story to come?).
- \* Why do you think Su Tong represents Lotus as so drawn to the well? Is she really hearing voices and seeing hands? (Could this be a useful storytelling device to "haunt" not only Lotus, but also the story itself, with a threat and sense of foreboding? Are our eyes slowly being opened to see what is at the bottom of the well?).

Page 54 (1/3 way down page) to 74 (2/3 way down page)

- \* How does Lotus feel when she looks in the mirror? (The image is that of a stranger, as if she doesn't know the new Lotus).
- \* Why might Lotus' birthday gift to Chen differ from those of the other wives? (Perhaps in her background or school life, it was considered appropriate to give simple gifts like scarves presented without any formal wrappings. The other wives seem familiar with the Chen family tradition of the red bows).
- \* Why does Lotus kiss Chen at the table, and why do the others react the way they do to this incident? (Lotus is angling to achieve greater status or make up for her humble gift with this special kiss. She doesn't seem to anticipate that the reverse will happen. The others seem to consider the kiss an audacious, inappropriate act that only serves to highlight Lotus' misguided, unknowing behavior. It is proof that she doesn't "get" or can't decode the traditional dynamics in this household).
- \* What is revealed about the characters and the household in the next scene between Lotus and Coral? (Clearly, children serve as a kind of currency for the wives. Lotus seems to have become increasingly nonchalant and resigned to her status, saying women are "like anything, anything except human beings." Coral too is resigned ("People like us are all the same"), but less pessimistic, perhaps because she has outlets like going to the theater. Lotus reveals her suspicions about the doctor when she suggests that he could accompany Coral to the theater. Lotus also shows that she is uninterested or unwilling to discuss her sex life with Coral.
- \* As Feipu and his friend the flute teacher approach Lotus' quarters, what behavior surprises and intrigues her? (The two men arrive hand in hand).

- \* What is Lotus' concern about her ability to put her heart into learning to play the flute? (She compares her heart to a plate of sand, and notes that it is difficult for her to "concentrate it in one place).
- \* What is the flute teacher's theory about the holes/notes of the flute? (That each represents an emotion. Question for musicians in my class: are there any comparable theories about notes in the so-called "Western" tradition?).
- \* Why does Joy really summon Feipu? (Perhaps she is jealous and angry that he is visiting one of the other wives).
- \* What might be the implications of the teacher's comment that "As soon as Feipu left, the flute wouldn't play well?" (Perhaps there is the suggestion of a romantic liaison between the two men).
- \* Does Cloud's comment to Lotus that if she has done nothing wrong she need not "fear a ghost knocking" at her door remind you of anything else in the story so far? (Perhaps it evokes the well, and Lotus' sense that voices or forces deep inside it are drawing her in).
- \* How do you read Feipu's self-declared fear of women? (It might be that Feipu is gay, but this doesn't necessarily explain his fear. Perhaps growing up in an atmosphere in which he is privy to the devious and desperate competition of women has given him a skewed sense of the range of female behavior).
- \* What might Feipu represent for Lotus? (Perhaps the possibility of romance or a way out, although this notion is thwarted by Feipu's "fear" and his preferences, and by Lotus' sense of the impossible and the risk of gossip. Perhaps he is simply the only man close to her age to which she has access, like she did in school).

- \* What does Feipu's language seem to confirm about him and the flute teacher? (His comment that his friend is also "afraid of women, too, just like me" seems further suggestion of their romantic link).
- \* What did you observe about the scene that follows between Lotus and Chen? (Some possible things to note: they both gloss over the public kiss incident; Lotus wants to eradicate the smell of the other women on Chen; his age has begun to show in his inability to perform sexually; Lotus seems to feel humiliated by his sexual request; he calls her a whore, but of course he has set her up in this situation! As he leaves, Lotus returns the insult!).
- \* Which wife now seems to be "winning" the competition? (Cloud).
- \* Look closely at the text of Coral's song. Does it share any themes with the story? (It speaks of a woman who seems congruent with a shadow of herself – as if she is not what she used to be—a woman very aware of her beauty but also aware that it can't override her tragic fate. The woman seems trapped and seems to long for death). Does this song remind you of any other texts you have read? (It could be seen as similar to certain speeches in ancient Greek tragedies, such as Oedipus the King and Antigone, with all its talk about fate, death, loss, and resignation).
- \* Why might Coral's comment that "There is only a breath's difference between people and ghost?" (Could she be contemplating suicide, or, aware that she soon might die?).
- \* What has furthered a sort of ironic bond between Joy, Coral, and Lotus? (They are united in their loss of Chen's attention to Cloud).
- \* What do we learn about the history of the women who have died in the well? (They were adulterous. Perhaps now we have some confirmation that Coral is aware of her risk of death due to her adulterous relationship with the doctor).

- \* What is Coral's theory about Chen's impotence? (That the female principle in the garden is so powerful that it has essentially emasculated Chen. She notes that such is the fate of a household arranged like this, possibly suggesting that the patriarchal setup ultimately backfires upon itself).
- \* Compare Lotus' and Coral's relationship to the well. (Lotus seems haunted and afraid, while Coral seems resolute, unafraid, and direct about the wrongful murders of past wives).

Page 74 (2/3 way down page) to the end of the novella

- \* What is revealed as a result of Cloud's daughter's beating at school, and what do you make of Lotus' response to the incident? (It turns out that Coral seems to have paid a little boy to do this. Lotus feels like a spectator, an outsider, and, interestingly, feels more sympathy for Coral than the little girl. Perhaps her sympathy is more like empathy).
- \* Why does the arrival of Lotus' period feel like an assault? (Once again, she has lost an opportunity to become pregnant, which is one of the only ways of increasing her status in the household).
- \* What does Lotus discover in the toilet? How does she interpret it and what action does she take? (She discovers toilet paper that seems to have an image of a woman on it in blood. She assumes it is one of Swallow's curses, and threatens Swallow that she must either eat the paper, or suffer the consequences of Lotus telling on her).
- \* How does Lotus justify her actions? (She claims that the method of using someone's own technique to control them is written in the classics. Ironically, although tradition serves to oppress Lotus, here, she uses it to justify her own actions, like the other wives do against Lotus.).

- \* What happens to Swallow and how do the others react? (She becomes very ill. Lotus does feel pangs, like a knife cut. Servants gossip, and Chen yells at her for stooping so low—to a servant’s level).
- \* What might we assume from Chen’s use of the word “bondservant” to describe Swallow? (Perhaps that Swallow is her family “debt” to the Chen household or that there is some type of contractual arrangement).
- \* What does Lotus’ new maid Mama Song take as a sign of the decline of the Chen household? (The gold jewelry given to each wife has gotten increasingly small and less ostentatious).
- \* How does Mama Song explain her reasons for staying in the household? (She notes that she is so used to this life that it would feel strange to have leisure, and that individuals are fated anyway to be servants or masters. She adds, however, that if people don’t accept that fate has dictated these hierarchies, they better accept them anyway. Is she resigned or fearful?).
- \* After Mama Song shares some details about a woman who died in the well, Lotus asks, “Then after she committed adultery, she jumped into the well.” What does her question indicate to us? (That she still maintains that the women committed suicide and perhaps is still haunted by the idea of her own suicide).
- \* How has Lotus’ behavior changed and how do the other wives interpret it? (Lotus has become more withdrawn, and has lost interest in competing. She has twice now referred to herself as an outsider. The others think the change is due to her reaction to neglect by Chen).
- \* How does Lotus’ birthday serve to highlight her place in the household, and what events coincide with this day? (Her birthday seems to highlight her loneliness, isolation and rejection, as no one else remembers or acknowledges the day. We learn that Swallow has died and has cursed Lotus, although Mama Song says that all is fated so there is no blame. Lotus drinks and

remembers the scene of her father's death. Feipu arrives home from his unsuccessful business trip. An awkward moment ensues between him and Lotus, and Feipu reiterates that he has always been scared of the women in his household).

- \* How does the household respond to Lotus' drinking episode, and what ensues? (Chen is furious and insulting. Joy arrives and tries to administer medicine. Lotus offers to perform any sexual act for Chen and Joy indignantly declares Lotus' behavior shameful. Chen, curiously, criticizes Joy's strong words).
- \* Why might Su Tong have chosen to close the story with the season of winter? (Perhaps the atmosphere of death, cold, stillness and silence fits the trajectory of Lotus' mood. Lotus notes the invisibility of the world created by the snow, which might parallel her growing sense of her own invisibility to the world, and even to the household).
- \* What does Lotus dream about Swallow and how does the dream seem to coincide with reality? (She dreams that Swallow takes her revenge by killing Lotus with a hairpin. When she wakes, there is a hairpin stuck in the bedcovers and the window is half open as in her dream).
- \* Why do two servants bring Coral home? (Cloud discovered her with the doctor and reported her).
- \* How does Chen explain to Lotus that certain things must be done to Coral? (He acts as if what will happen must happen, and that Coral knows it to be so. He speaks as if there is no choice).
- \* What is the content of Coral's midnight song? (It's a song of lament of a woman for her lover, and woman subject to fate. It's full of longing and a sense of incompleteness).
- \* As Lotus tries to sleep, why does she say "I'm going to die again?" (She anticipates that Swallow will revisit her in a dream. Perhaps the comment also prefigures Coral's death and the state in which Lotus will be left).

- \* What happens to Coral and how does Lotus respond? (Bound and gagged she is forced into the well. Lotus, a witness, screams and howls, pulling at her hair. She tells Chen she has seen a murder).
- \* How does the household explain what happened to Coral and Lotus? (They say that what happened to Coral was understandable—that adulterous women can reach no good end. They brand Lotus as insane).
- \* What do the householders mean by the comment “The fox mourns the death of the hare?” It seems to imply that while Lotus is a predator and Coral the prey, they are actually both alike. It suggests that the wives are this way by nature or instinct, a conclusion which fails to acknowledge the system to which they have been subjected).
- \* What effect does Su Tong create by ending the story with the arrival of another wife? (It suggests the cycle is endless, and that tradition has won).

### **First day of film**

- \* presentation about film director in the context of Chinese cinema
- \* presentation about Chinese architecture of the era
- \* class reading of cartoon explanation of the red lantern as a sign of auspiciousness (Xerox copy included at end of packet)
- \* prompt students to note comparisons and contrasts with the novella, thinking about the effects of what has been added and what has been excluded
- \* viewing of about 30 minutes of film followed by discussion, questions, and comparisons to novella. See section below for some suggested issues and comparisons.

## **Second day of film**

\* watch the rest of the film, followed by discussion as time allows. Further discussion may have to continue the following day.

*A list, by no means inclusive, of film issues, themes and symbols likely to surface in discussion (or to bring up if they don't); students can be encouraged to consider the effects of these additions/contractions and visual representations*

- \* changes in the representation of Lotus' arrival at the house and her appearance
- \* the exclusion of the date between Chen and Lotus
- \* the use and effects of sensory visual and auditory details such as red lanterns and foot massages
- \* the use of visual details to characterize each wife
- \* Swallow's imitation of the wives
- \* the exclusion of some details in the conflicts between Swallow and Lotus
- \* the exclusion of some of the novella's information about sexual relations in the house
- \* the abbreviation of the role of Feipu
- \* the ambiance created by the architecture of the house
- \* the notable absence of a garden and well and the presence of the rooftop chamber
- \* the depiction (or non-depiction) of Chen
- \* the inclusion of the poem recited by Chen's son
- \* the inclusion of Lotus' staged pregnancy

## **Reading after the film**

After the film, I introduce an excerpt from a Michel Foucault's Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison, telling students it might help give us a vocabulary for describing the

functioning of the collective household represented in both the novella and the film. I inform students that the chapter we'll look at is called "Panopticism" and ask if anyone knows the meaning of the suffix pan. If no one knows, I will explain that pan is a suffix meaning all. Then I will ask them to make an educated guess about the meaning of the word panopticism or panoptical. They will most likely be able to piece together that this word refers in some way to a notion of all-seeing or all-visible.

Then I distribute Xerox copies of the drawings/photographs that accompany this chapter and the excerpt from the text that we will use. We look on the second page at a drawing by Jeremy Bentham and I explain briefly that Bentham (1748-1832) was a British philosopher and reformer generally thought of as a leading exponent of utilitarianism. I ask students to hazard a guess about the tenets of utilitarianism. Depending on the comments, I go on to explain that, in brief, utilitarianism judges actions by their consequences as opposed to their motivations or intent, by how much happiness is promoted or created by the actions. I comment that one criticism of this approach has been that happiness for the majority might be result in the unhappiness of a minority, as under a system of slavery. Bentham was very involved in imagining educational and penal institutions that would run efficiently, and in imagining perfectly organized communities. As a human-interest story, I will note that if students ever travel to London, they can see Bentham's body preserved and propped up in a decorative chair/cabinet in a hallway at University College of London. I will explain how odd it is to turn the corner, and see a very dead man displayed at the end of the hallway.

Students might note that Bentham's drawing of a panoptical building reminds them of our dormitory. This of course could lead to quite an interesting conversation! We then look at page 3 of the handout that features drawings and photographs of other panoptical buildings.

Students should be able to ascertain that the panopticon is constructed around a central tower or building, with all the rooms, chambers, or cells built around this central structure. I explain that the chapter begins with descriptions of plans for organizing towns in the event of a plague, and plans for isolating and containing leprosy, and then after several pages moves on to a detailed examination of Bentham's panopticon, which Foucault argues is an architectural model that grows out of urban planning for emergencies and disease. I will nudge students to notice, even in the first few pages, any proposals or goals that remind them of the household portrayed in Raise the Red Lantern. Students will be asked to read from page 195-203 (stopping at end of paragraph on the top of the page) and to make a list of features or mechanisms that remind them in any way of Chen's household and to be ready to turn in and share their lists in discussion the next day.

Below I have listed possible quotes for discussion. Hopefully the students themselves will bring many of these to the class' attention. Under each quote I have added some commentary linking the quote to Raise the Red Lantern, both the novella and film. These comments are noted in declarative sentences or phrases, but can easily be turned into questions to nudge the students towards making connections.

**Quotes for discussion and connection with commentary**

\* "It is a segmented, immobile, frozen space" (195).

The claustrophobic nature of the household, its isolation from the rest of the world, the sense that there is little to do "inside."

\* "The gaze is alert everywhere" (195) and "This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing

links the centre and periphery, in which power is exercised without division, according to a continuous hierarchical figure, in which each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings, the sick and the dead—all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism” (197).

The women and servants monitor each other and tell on each other. They constantly negotiate a hierarchy between themselves, but of course they are all under the rule of Chen and the traditions established by the ancestors. The household is a sort of model for order and discipline with all kinds of checks and balances. Of course the women are also objects of Chen’s gaze. The film bears this out very overtly in that we see the women’s faces, but never get a full look at Chen. The camera replicates Chen’s gaze.

\* “It lays down for each individual his place, his body, his disease and his death, his well-being, by means of an omnipresent and omniscient power that subdivides itself in a regular, uninterrupted way even to the ultimate determination of the individual, of what characterizes him, of what belongs to him, of what happens to him” (197).

The women are classified according to the order of arrival as one of Chen’s mistresses; the household is subdivided with defined quarters. Rarely does Chen have to step in to “discipline”—there is a strange omnipresent and omniscient power that seems to regulate and contain the women’s behavior. Of course for some of the Chen women, a certain early death is “laid down.”

\* “abandoning their statutory identity and the figure under which they had been recognized, allowing a different truth to appear” (197) and “the assignment to each individual of his ‘true’ name, his ‘true’ place” (198).

The women are defined relative to Chen and each other. Even in the way the story is told, each woman comes to be defined by a particular principle, habit or avocation (Joy+religion, Coral+opera, Cloud+seeming compassion and friendliness and then ruthlessness). The sense of these women as individuals in the world is lost.

\* “this is the utopia of the perfectly governed city” (198).

Perhaps this is what the males in the Chen family have attempted to establish for generations. The well (or chamber in the film) serves as a reminder of what will happen to those who mar or disrupt the utopia.

\* “branding (mad/sane; dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal)”, “how he is to be characterized; how is he is to be recognized” and “the constant division between the normal and the abnormal” (199).

Lotus gains a reputation for being dangerous/aberrant (the kiss at Chen’s birthday gathering, her smoking, her drinking), as does Coral (her affair). Lotus is of course deemed mad/insane after her reaction to Coral’s murder. She is easily written off as the mad woman.

\* “They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible” (200).

The mistresses are isolated in their own wings or sections, yet constantly on stage before each other and the servants.

\* “It reverses the principle of the dungeon...Visibility is a trap...And this invisibility is a guarantee of order” (200).

Although the home is not a literal prison, the surveillance of others serves as a kind of “keeper” or warden.

\* “he is the object of information, never a subject in communication” (200).

The wives are objects in myriad ways, and when they are agents of action, they act within highly circumscribed circumstances. Their movements and behaviors are so circumscribed by the house and by conventions and they are objects of others’ desires (especially in the film. In the novella, there is more information about female desire).

\* “The crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect, is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities. From the point of view of the guardian, it is replaced by a multiplicity that can be numbered and supervised; from the point of view of the inmates, by a sequestered and observed solitude” (201).

Again, the women are so alone even though they live collectively. They are numbered, sequestered, and supervised.

\* “...the automatic functioning of power...the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action...the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary...the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they themselves are the bearers” (201).

Chen rarely has to intervene (Coral’s murder is a notable exception). The women become the bearers of the discipline as they compete with one another, trying to check the other women from gaining power, and trying to undermine each other’s status in the household. In this way, ironically and perversely, the women perpetuate the situation into which they have been placed.

\* “Any individual, taken at almost random, can operate the machine; in the absence of the director, his family, his friends, his visitors, even his servants” (202).

The servants too become players in the household, watching, judging and manipulating in the limited arena in which they are allowed to act. It's particularly interesting to explore Swallow's attempt to secure the red lanterns in the film.

- \* "The heaviness of the old 'houses of security', with their fortress-like architecture, could be replaced by the simple, economic geometry of a 'house of certainty'" (202).

This seems an apt description of the geometric compound visible in the film version of the story. Visible signs, like the red lanterns lit or covered, reinforce the certainty.

- \* "he who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who know its, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (203).

The women play two roles – victim/inmate and jailer/warden of self and other. There is an ironic and convenient (for the maintenance of male power) reinforcement of the system by its residents. It's a well-oiled "machine" for pitting the women against each other, thereby reducing any possibility that they would use their collective effort to overturn the system. The setup divides and conquers, and enlists those being divided in the process of conquering.

### **Final group presentation**

- \* presentation about the ballet adaptation of Raise the Red Lantern..

**Unit assessment****Passage analysis test**

Students will select 9 out of 13 quotes from the novella. Firstly, students will identify the context and parties involved in the scene (3 points each passage). Then, they will analyze each passage briefly, discussing issues and implications that emerge, the possible significance of the passage in the development of themes and characterization in the novella, patterns from the work as a whole that might be evident in the passage, notable uses of language and imagery, etc. (7 points per passage). After each quote below I have included possible responses in parentheses.

“The maidservants thought this newly arrived guest was one of the Chen family’s poor relations. They could tell the status of nearly all the Chen family’s guests” (12). (This scene takes place upon Lotus’ arrival at the Chen household. The servants demonstrate that they are keenly aware of class and status hierarchies within the family and can read the outward signs that indicate this status. Ironically, the servants participate in reinforcing these categories).

“I was afraid you’d think of someone else, so I put it away” (41). (Chen speaks to Lotus of the flute he had confiscated and ultimately destroyed. He feared that it had been given to her by a male admirer, and was jealous. Of course, Lotus has to live with Chen having 3 other wives! The flute was the only real connection to her deceased father, as it had been a gift. Its disappearance is consistent perhaps with the disappearance of Lotus’ old life).

“Lotus was startled at his direct use of her given name; she nodded and said, ‘According to our generational difference, you shouldn’t call me by my name.’” Feipu stood on the other side of

the flowerbeds, smiled as he buttoned up his shirt collar. ‘I should call you Fourth Mistress, but you must be a few years younger than I am’”(28) (Lotus has essentially lost her real name, so is surprised to hear it. She has been assigned a designation based on her place in the hierarchy of wives, and is now defined by her role in relation to Chen and the other mistresses. First Wife Joy’s son Feipu is similar to Lotus in age, so it is more natural for him to use her name. This moment might represent the first sign that the relationship between these two differs from other relationships in the household).

“ ‘The leaves will rot by themselves; do we have to burn them. Leaves aren’t people, you know’” (47). (Lotus speaks of a family practice that annoys her—the burning of leaves in the garden. Her complaint is perceived as audacious, because she is questioning on old Chen tradition reinforced and defended by the wives, especially by Joy. They are agents of perpetuating these traditions imposed upon them. Lotus’ last observations here might prefigure the realization that the Chen family has killed wives in successive generations).

“At that she stood up, walked over in front of Chen Zuoqian, put her arms around his neck, and kissed him twice on the face” (56). (On Chen’s 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, Lotus arrives late for a banquet; to increase her favor in the household, and perhaps to amend for bringing a non-traditional gift, she kisses Chen publicly. The others are astonished and think her act impertinent and audacious. The reader is told that Lotus’ status sinks immediately. Apparently such public displays of affection are inappropriate).

“I’m afraid of trouble, afraid of women; women are really frightening” (65). (First Mistress Joy’s son Feipu says repeatedly that growing up in such a household has made him terrified of most women. Perhaps he has seen the cruel jockeying for power, and could be haunted by the history of “suicide.” There are suggestions throughout that he might be gay, but this does not explain his fear per se).

“There is only a breath’s difference between people and ghosts; people are ghosts and ghosts are people” (72). (Coral says this to Lotus, perhaps eerily prefiguring a death, and suggesting that she is well aware that hers is inevitable. For Lotus, who seems to think the well area is haunted, this sentence might further her sense that she is connected to the well).

“The female principle is too powerful in this garden; it would only be what fate ordains if it injures the masculine principle” (74). (Coral speaks to Lotus of Chen’s impotence, suggesting that somehow the power of women past and present emasculates Chen. She notes that such is the fate of a household arranged like this, perhaps suggesting that the patriarchal setup backfires upon itself).

“That flow of dark purple menstrual blood represented a merciless assault on her person” (77). (Lotus’ period has arrived, signaling again that she is not pregnant. Children seem to be one of the main forms of currency in the household and here again Lotus is bankrupt).

“This is known as ‘using someone’s own methods to control them; it’s written in the classics and can’t be wrong” (79). (Lotus threatens Swallow that if she doesn’t eat the bloody toilet

paper Lotus has found and assumed to be a curse, that Lotus will tell all. Lotus justifies her actions as following a strategy commended in classic literature. Ironically, tradition and history have placed Lotus in this confining life, but here she evokes tradition and history to oppress another—just as the other wives do to Lotus).

“ ‘As soon as people are born, they’re fated to become masters or servants; if you don’t believe it, you still have to believe it’ (82). (Mama Song, Lotus’ new maid after Swallow becomes ill, comments about her status after Lotus asks her why she is still with the Chen household. She cites fate, as do many of the women in the household, but also adds that even if you don’t believe in it, it’s best to accept class hierarchies as they are. Is she resigned or scared?).

“ ‘Then after she committed adultery, she jumped into the well?’ (83). (Lotus asks this of Mama Song after hearing about a woman who died in the well. Despite the warnings, Lotus still seems to accept that the deaths were due to suicide. All throughout the text she has felt called by the well, as if prefiguring her suicide. Very soon after this question, she realizes murder is the cause).

“ ‘What can we do to her? She knows herself what has to be done’ (95). Chen comments to Lotus about Coral. He seems to suggest that what will be done has to be done, and that Coral knows it also. There’s seems to be no admission that he has decided to carry on the family tradition of murder; his statement reflects either a willful or resigned acceptance of the practice).

**Essay assignment for an exercise in synthesis and argumentation**

*Note: These essay questions also make for useful topics for discussion and synthesis at the end of the unit.*

Target length: 3 pages typed and double-spaced, with 11-point font and 1-inch margins, using MLA style and rules for the citation of quotes. Students will choose from one of the topic areas below (I have called them topic areas, not topics per se, as students will be responsible for formulating what specific argument they want to make within their topic area):

Topic area choices

1. Make an argument about the role of a specific image, object, entity, or process in the text or film. Then, if you are working with something in the novella, discuss the presence or absence of it in the film, and the effects of its presence or absence in the visual and auditory medium. Similarly, if you are working on something that is exclusively in the film, or is presented differently in the film, discuss in detail how this addition or adaptation changes and interprets the text's story. You may work with more than one item if it makes good sense for your argument.

A short (not inclusive) list of objects or symbols around which this argument could be structured

- \* the well and the flora that surrounds it and/or the chamber in the film
- \* the arts (opera music, flute music, the poetry in the film)
- \* signs and symbols of class distinctions
- \* the red lanterns
- \* the details used to differentiate the wives from one another
- \* the architecture of the house

2. Make an argument about the role of the servants in the story/household as represented in the novella and the film.
3. Make an argument about the decision of Zhang Yimou not to show Chen's full face in the film and what "reading" of or interpretation of the story this decision might represent.
4. Make an argument about attitudes about and representation of:
  - \* history and tradition as the explanation for actions versus fate as the explanation for actions and outcomes; or, similarly,
  - \* essentialist versus circumstantial explanations for behavior in the novel and film.
5. Make an argument linking Rushdie's "The Firebird's Nest" and Raise the Red Lantern through a specific comparison and/or contrast.
6. Although both the novella (1990) and the film (1991) are set in pre-Mao China, make an argument about how these works are distinctly post-Mao/post-Cultural Revolution productions.

**List of texts included in preceding unit**

- \* "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" and "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" by Gabriel Garcia Márquez
- \* "Garden of Forking Paths," "August 25, 1983," "Blue Tiger," and "The Rose of Paracelsus" by Jorge Luis Borges
- \* "Axolotl," "The Night Face Up," and "Blow-up" by Julio Cortazar
- \* "In the Family" by Maria Elena Llano
- \* "Up among the Eagles" by Luisa Valenzuela
- \* "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" by Ambrose Bierce

- \* “The Swimmer” by John Cheever
- \* “Cartoon Man” by Robert Coover
- \* “Videotape” by Don DeLillo
- \* “The Island of Doctor Death” by Gene Wolfe
- \* “A Game of Clue” and “At the Barnum Museum” by Stephen Millhauser
- \* “Firebird’s Nest” by Salman Rushdie

Raise the Red Lantern by Su Tong

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