

Psychiatry in pictures

CHOSEN BY ROBERT HOWARD

Dorothy H. (1899–1980):
The Story of a Chinese Emperor, Empress, Green Dragon (1958)

Dorothy H. was a patient in St Augustine's Hospital, Canterbury, from 1929 until her death. Diagnosed as having schizophrenia, she had an elaborate system of beliefs around a central conviction that she was married to the Chinese Emperor. She embroidered pictures, like the cushion cover illustrated here which was given to the medical superintendent, Dr Ainslie. All of these featured stories about the Emperor. Although their bizarre narrative content makes them harder to follow, her embroideries are reminiscent of the Willow Pattern plate design. In an earlier picture, *My name is Chadros. Story of the real Chinese Emperor and Empress, the green dragon and seven-eyed cat* (1947), she had detailed her transformation from a mortal woman to the resurrected Chadros, following application of a gold serum invented by 'tiny Chinamen with infinite patience'. The picture (right) continues the story. Although it takes some effort to follow her own description, this slightly abridged version shows that her life with the Emperor was filled with religious and mythological meaning and had been ultimately tragic.



'Three bridges are the theme of this picture. A green Dragon, mighty in winged splendors, climbs the top bridge of rope ladder connecting roof to roof. A lady opens a window and hands him a nice pot of tea. The young Empress plays Ma-Hong on the roof with her baby boy, sable winged. Only dead Converse with Caste, in mauve descaced walks up arm out off over green shrub angels soon forecasting the failure, guillotine and cross and thorne crown ere God his tiny people will hearon the Sun platform the legless Emperor Jesus wears real crown forget me not on guise Tron. Nor Man a woman huddles her bade to breast, rearing, charging steeds plunge forward in man's arms and slumbers two more. Second bridge connecting door of stone houses stone constructed. My own family in left two bays in red below a tame peacock feeding out of bogs best basket bonnet. The stone work is covered with blossoms. Right boy naked climb from sailing vessel to rope ladder. A marble woman holds air up in glass slaps water bark in blue ball stands on ash sand ridge cosmos square. Centre piece charging bull Hercules follows stone shield held high. Cage holds corpe in spikes slowly ground for ammunition. The stone bridge is divided by monument holding gigantic ball over-roofed. Passing in mauve holy man swings Owl lamps, to light Una Dea – Confisscius Pallas on bridge with scarlet banner sometimes raising ded. Two Hearse bearer carry first war victim. A general my fathers uniform cock helmet look of Roman Dynamite in ton one child brings to explode the other babe stands on head kicks its wells to fire. Mother looks on her door is Alp violet under Glass Fish Roof. Three princes under clef and procede past drinking tea, veiled nurses hold bamboo sticks. Two pairs of men women dancers hold between them, to the beat of the bango the ladies gracefully rotate holding sword in sun shade their arrival and death burning under fish signal war and child's protection. The base is a cross bridge swung on invisible golden boxes. In the distance 1600 bridges pines snow laden are seen towers of execution, pagodas like front. On the other side a floss carrying a fisherman under his red flag beseching his son to hand him baby down. A nice kind second dragon hides all a bit from enemy. I forget on right over Pagoda a one eyes tortured cat myself the Zar H. Romanoff Christ Next to her cross staffed red bearing Nepomak on sandstone block, the signpost to my hill castle holds. In middle the Imperial Rickshaw is open a ring of bamboo alone draws attention to the royalty, a kakadu in cage and bells ring admirably in. The Empror wears shell pink of the ocean wife plays mondoline to beguile her fair sposer back from the journey he never starts, overhead a foul murderess stabs his pulsating heart.'

This and other embroideries by Dorothy H. can be seen at the Bethlem Royal Hospital Archives and Museum in Beckenham, Kent (Tel: 020 8776 4307).