

Turning Japanese: Japonisme in Victorian Literature and Culture

by

Elizabeth Sara McAdams

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(English Language and Literature)
in the University of Michigan
2016

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Lucy Hartley, Chair
Associate Professor Daniel S. Hack
Associate Professor Leslie B. Pincus
Professor Yopie Prins

For Scarlett

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my committee members: Lucy Hartley, Yopie Prins, Daniel Hack, and Leslie Pincus. They all encouraged my work and pushed me to make this project conceptually and intellectually more rigorous than I initially imagined. Many other have helped this project evolve through the years and I'd especially like to thank Carolyn Williams, Kate Flint, the Nineteenth Century Forum members, and many of my fellow graduate students for helping me see this project through to the conclusion.

I'd also like to specifically thank the fourth grade class of Ms. Norita in Aomori, Japan for asking me if I knew the Victorian woman their grandmothers said had hiked from one end of Japan to the other. Without them, I would not have discovered Isabella Bird and this project might never have begun.

Reflecting on the time it took to get to this stage, I'm overwhelmed by the support I've received from friends and family. Thank you, all of you.

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Abstract

When Matthew Perry opened Japan to foreign trade in 1854 after more than two centuries of official isolation, Japan became an immediate locus of extraordinary curiosity and fascination for the West. How Japan would thereafter be understood, negotiated, and imagined became an important part of mid-to-late Victorian consciousness. While Japanese influence has been examined piecemeal in disparate disciplines, the unification of this topic as a larger, interdisciplinary, multimodal discourse is still a necessary step for a better understanding. This study of Japonisme as a discourse brings into sharp relief how transnational encounters produce a moment of paradox in which the other nation must be unlearned and simultaneously imaginatively peopled. This process is alluded to in Oscar Wilde's declaration that, "The whole of Japan is pure invention. There is no such place, no such people." I differ with Wilde: I say that both the pure invention and the tangible reality are important parts of the transnational encounter.

Japan's relations with Western nations are always in part dictated by commodity exchanges. Japonisme merchandise was far from a simple ambassador of Japanese culture. The proliferation of Japonisme merchandise created a cultural disparity between male professionals of taste and female consumers of the products. In literary incarnations of Japonisme, Japanese merchandise is often placed between public and domestic spheres, caught between masculine and feminine influences, as I demonstrate in my first chapter. Once Japan had been "opened," however, travel narratives began to trickle back to England. Japan had unusual popularity with female travel writers producing bestsellers and male scholars who inveighed against the quantity of competitor texts; again re-enacting the Japonisme's position as the fulcrum between public and private, male and female. These informative texts, the focus of the second chapter, eventually were out-sold and out-numbered by the popular Japonisme novels that I examine in my third chapter. These novels bring the interlocking issues of masculinity and femininity back to a Japan of "pure invention." The generic norms of the Japonisme novels, delineated in my final chapter, create a literary space in which to debate Wilde's hypothesis, that Japonisme erases Japan's reality.

Introduction.

In 1891, Oscar Wilde published a collection of essays entitled *Intentions*, uniting a series of four essays that had previously been published separately. In particular, the first essay, “The Decay of Lying,” has become a manifesto for Wilde’s conception of Aestheticism.¹ Two of the essays, “Decay” being the more prominent, in the collection stand out methodologically from Wilde’s conventional essay format because they are written as dialogues.² Besides being a self-aware homage to the Platonic dialogues, the dialogue format allows Wilde to enact the conversion of one half of the dialogue, a character named Cyril, to the ideals and precepts of the other, a Wildean mouthpiece named Vivian. The central conceit of the dialogue is that Vivian is currently employed to write an essay, named with an authorial wink the same as the essay in which the dialogue

¹ Wilde’s role as the principal public figure of Aestheticism was a contentious position both contemporaneously and today for scholars of the movement. As Ruth Livesey explains, “Wilde...drew mass interest to a European movement decades old while obscuring something of the context of artistic innovation from which he emerged.” “Aestheticism,” *Oscar Wilde in Context*, ed. Kerry Powell and Peter Raby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 261. My interest in Wilde specifically as an icon of Aestheticism is specifically because of his “mass interest.”

² Michèle Mendelssohn notes that “Decay” is “one of Wilde’s most substantial contributions to aesthetic criticism” because it performs public “review-as-revision,” the mode of public discourse for which Wilde was already a household name. His character writes an essay within the dialogue, but the dialogue under-writes, expands, and refutes it even as it is being enunciated. “Oscar Wilde, Henry James, and the Fate of Aestheticism,” *Oscar Wilde in Context*, ed. Kerry Powell and Peter Raby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 137-149.

is taking place, and Cyril has arrived just in time to have portions read aloud to him. Cyril represents other rival conceptions of Aestheticism, those associated with and advocated by figures like James Whistler, Henry James, or Walter Pater.³ Vivian is Wilde's self-conscious rebuttal to these perceived threats to his ascendancy as the principal figure of Aestheticism. Wilde-through-Vivian espouses an anti-realist, anti-Nature ethos that consciously cultivates an artistic style exempted from questions of morality.

In the larger debate between the two characters, Wilde gives Vivian a lengthy diatribe on the aesthetic value of Japan and the products created by (or in imitation of) that nation. "I know you are fond of Japanese things," he begins, attributing the preference to Cyril rather than claiming it as a larger part of a cultural movement. Cyril would not have been in the minority in 1891, nor would he have even been exceptional in the preceding four decades. Since Matthew Perry had insisted on Japan dissolving its policy of isolation in 1854, Japanese merchandise had become a hot commodity in Western markets.⁴ Thanks to the support of Parisian artists and wealthy collectors, the fashion for "all one sees that's Japanese" had transitioned from something only the very wealthy could afford to something the middle class could (and did) eagerly participate in. Cyril, the naïve interlocutor positioned to allow Vivian-as-Wilde to play the lecturer, is

³ Aestheticism has traditionally been conceived of as a battle between binaries, though who (or what) is given pride of place in the two poles depends on the scholar. This is partly due to the historical fact that the great figures of the movement also considered themselves frequently to be in opposition to the other great figures of the movement, with the future of art as the stakes of the contention.

⁴ Though, thanks to some trading policies with Dutch and Chinese merchants, Japan's historical period was less absolutely isolated than has been previously assumed. Japanese merchandise made its way to Western markets in a slow trickle before 1854; afterward, it was a deluge.

exactly the sort of middle class enthusiast who would have recently joined the fad for Japanese merchandise.

Vivian continues: “Now, do you really imagine that the Japanese people, as they are represented to us in art, have any existence?”⁵ Vivian has begun by clarifying that he only means the Japanese people as represented mimetically, but the differentiation between the mimetic form and real Japanese people, living and breathing in a geographical space identified as “Japan,” begins to blur as he continues. He transitions to flatly claiming that, “the whole of Japan is a pure invention. There is no such country, there are no such people,” a far cry from the original nuanced claim. He acknowledges the impossibility of accessing “real” Japan through mimetic forms, a point which both we the audience and Cyril happily grant him. The complication comes from the fact that he expands on this point, finally asserting that if mimetic representation is not direct access, no difference exists between himself and the imagined Japanese people: “The actual people who live in Japan are not unlike the general mill of English people.” Vivian has acknowledged the poverty of “real” knowledge of Japan and then paradoxically declared himself the arbiter of what “Japanese” is and what it means.

Wilde’s essay is not the only prominent example of the progression from recognizing the limitations of mimetic forms of Japan as access to Japan to then assuming that Japan must in fact be another Britain. In the first scene of Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Mikado* (1885), a chorus of Japanese nobles begins by establishing their relation to Japanese merchandise: “If you want to know who we are, / We are gentlemen of Japan: /

⁵ Oscar Wilde, *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Richard Ellmann (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 315. Subsequent references will be by page number in the body of the discussion.

On many a vase and jar—/ On many a screen and fan, / We figure in lively paint.”⁶ Here, the men who speak *are* the paintings, the vases, the jars of Japan, even as they are also simultaneously English actors portraying a very English version of Japan. *The Mikado* also reflects on its own fascinations and creates a hall of mirrors in which the Western fascination with Japan reflects itself ad infinitum. Objects look at people looking at people looking at objects and somehow all of it is settled geographically in a Japan that is most definitely not Japan.

Yet, for all that these characters assert that they are their mimetic representations and that the merchandise of Japan is in fact direct access to Japan, the operetta is really a thin excuse to discuss British politics and British manners. Like Wilde, Gilbert and Sullivan follow the same thought experiment and find that their Japan is England itself. As Carolyn Williams has already noticed, “The strangeness of the opera’s fictive ‘Japan’—as most viewers of *The Mikado*, then and now, have understood—then turns its mirror to reflect England. Thus *The Mikado* is an autoethnographic project through which English culture is defamiliarized, yet remains familiar.”⁷ Williams attributes this to an innovation of Gilbert and Sullivan and to their particular blend of satire and serious social critique. While Williams does contextualize *The Mikado* among the general impetus in late-Victorian culture for “all one sees that’s Japanese,” I argue that these very elements are an integral part of the reception of Japan in the West, not an innovation of the Savoy opera.

⁶ William S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan, *The Complete Gilbert & Sullivan*, Ed Glinert, ed. (New York: Penguin, 2006), 365. Subsequent references will be by page number in the body of the discussion.

⁷ Carolyn Williams, *Gilbert and Sullivan: Gender, Genre, Parody*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 257.

It is not without cause that “Japanese” is such an unstable descriptor for Wilde or for Gilbert and Sullivan; aesthetically, certainly, but also geographically, culturally, and historically. Matthew Perry’s intrusion in 1854 coincided with fortuitous (for Perry at least) commercial and cultural decline in Tokugawa Japan, making the nation primed for cultural and military revolution.⁸ In the years between 1854 and the formal declaration of a new form of government following a bloody Civil War in 1868, Japan grappled internally with questions about geographical boundaries, legislative agendas, and legalized xenophobia.⁹ The victors of the Civil War declared that their new government would “re-instate” the imperial power of the hereditary emperor of Japan, a nation that had not existed before the war, led by an emperor who had been a religious figurehead for centuries. Emperor Meiji rose to the task and swiftly modernized the nation, making substantial shifts in cultural hierarchies and normalizing Western culture in the process.

Thus, the “Japan” that suddenly emerged from self-imposed isolation in 1854 was a vastly different nation from what it would be in 1868, let alone 1885 when *The Mikado*

⁸ The period of isolation, or *sakoku* (“locked country”), began with a series of edicts by the first of the long line of Tokugawa rulers, Tokugawa Iemitsu in 1633. The idea of Japan in complete isolation from outside (but, more importantly, specifically Western) influences was an integral part of the aesthetic of Japonisme. However, the description of Japan as unilaterally locked from foreign influence or against foreign trade is not strictly true. Dutch traders were allowed as far as a man-made island off the coast of Japan constructed expressly for the purpose of allowing Dutch trade to continue without compromising the edict of the *sakoku*. See Donald H. Shively, William H. McCullough, *Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁹ Japan’s Civil War is often referred to as the “Meiji Restoration” or the “Meiji Revolution.” While it was common practice to refer to the war as a “restoration” of the imperial line, the reality is rather more complex. The Tokugawa Shogunate, the military power in place when Perry arrived in 1854 that had been in control since 1603, was responsible for the unification of most of Japan under a single ruler. The “emperor” who would be restored by revolutionaries in the Meiji Revolution was part of a line that had never actually ruled Japan but had been the religious leader of a small portion of Japan that had been put to use as a propaganda tool by the Shogunate.

first opened or 1891 when Wilde published his essay. The geographical space called “Japan” had coalesced and been codified in the interim and disparate cultures of previously independent states had been homogenized into one cohesive cultural identity.¹⁰ Determining what that central, cohesive identity would be was the intellectual work of the Meiji Era (1868-1912) and, indeed, stretched far into the next era as well. If the Japanese themselves could not clearly articulate what was and was not essentially “Japanese,” how could Wilde be expected to ventriloquize it through Vivian? Yet, having come to the reasonable conclusion that “Japanese” was an unclear descriptor to the point of meaninglessness, why did Wilde then make the leap to declaring the Japanese interchangeable with the “general run of English people”? If the Japanese people are not “Japanese,” must they be integrated into a pre-packaged discourse, i.e., the “commonplace,” of the British?

Wilde’s perspective is limited to the perspective of an avowed novice in the understanding of Japan. He (through Vivian) does not comment on Japan to assert truths about Japan for Cyril’s sake, but rather to illustrate a larger claim about Aestheticism. Yet, the struggle to localize a Japanese identity in Western conception without reference to Britain is apparent even in the texts of those who consider themselves the experts on Japan, willing to hold forth for the general public. Take, for example, Basil Hall

¹⁰ The traditional English practice for describing the pre-Meiji distribution of power is this: the *shogun* ruled as the highest ranking “warlord” (*daimyo*); each “warlord” ruled his own “fiefdom” and was required to pay tribute to the *shogun*. I chose to use the term “states” to describe the daimyos’ respective lands and I use the Japanese terms in place of the English equivalent of “fiefdom” or “warlord” because of the crudeness of those terms. The archaizing of those terms belies the fact that similar divisions of nations were fairly common, as in the cases of Italy and Germany, at the time. The Civil War did centralize power with the emperor, but the antiquated quality of those terms makes the difference between pre- and post-Meiji governments more melodramatic than is necessary.

Chamberlain, a self-proclaimed “Japanologist.” Unlike Wilde, Chamberlain concerns himself with “facts,” and with answering the questions the Western world has about Japan.¹¹ In *Things Japanese* (1890), a work intended to be a reference source for those with practical questions about Japan and whose popularity thoroughly established it as the vocalization of popular culture’s conception of Japan, Chamberlain muses briefly on the West’s understanding of Japan:

Europe’s illusions about the Far East are truly crude. Who would dream of coupling together New-Englanders and Paragonians, simply because arbitrary custom has affixed the single name “America” to the two widely separated regions which these two peoples inhabit? Yet persons not otherwise undiscerning continue to class, not only the Chinese, but even the Japanese, with Arabs and Persians, on the ground that all are equally “Orientals,” “Asiatics,” though they dwell thousands of miles apart in space, and tens of thousands of miles apart in culture....the very same folks blow hot and cold, raving about Japan’s perfections at one moment, fearing her possible excesses at another (9-10).

Chamberlain echoes the troubled nature of the referent “Japanese,” from Wilde’s essay.

However, unlike Wilde, Chamberlain understands the instability as coming from the Western language, not the Japanese identity. While Wilde destabilizes the concept of

¹¹ I’ll allow Chamberlain to explain his academic project in his own words: “We are perpetually being asked questions about Japan. Here then are the answers, put into the shape of a dictionary, not of words but of things,—or shall we rather say a guide-book, less to places than to subjects?—not an encyclopedia...but only sketches of many things” See Basil Hall Chamberlain, *Things Japanese: Being Notes on Various Subjects Connected with Japan for the Use of Travellers and Others* (London: John Murray, 1905). Subsequent references will be by page number in the body of the discussion. in the body of the discussion.

“Japanese,” Chamberlain destabilizes the English word, “Japanese.” Thus, a pattern is apparent: Japan is a locus for the unstable conceptual content of paradoxical cultural forces.

There was already a term in place in the Nineteenth Century to describe the popularity of Japanese merchandise and material in a Western context. It was originally coined to refer to the artists of Paris who used Japanese woodblock prints as imaginative fodder for new schools of painting (most memorably in the case of Impressionism).¹² The term should be expanded to include more generic forms, more media, and more modes of cultural awareness. The term in question is “Japonisme,” or, if the speaker happened to be averse to the Francophilia implied by using a French term when an English one could be invented, “Japonism.”¹³ I have adopted this term to apply more widely than it was originally conceived. Instead of narrowly confining the term to the artistic influence (always conceived somehow as a single direction in which Japanese art arrives in Paris and works its influence from there), I have expanded the scope of this term to cover the entirety of the larger cultural discourse of Japan’s reception in the late-Nineteenth

¹² Even a partial list of the Parisian artists influenced by Japanese art is lengthy. To name a few: James Tissot (discussed in the next chapter), James McNeill Whistler, Édouard Manet, Claude Monet, Vincent Van Gogh, Edgar Degas, Auguste Renoir, Camille Pissaro, Henri de Toulouse-Latrec, and Paul Gauguin. Many, like Georges Ferdinand Bigot or Helen Hyde, eventually moved to Japan to pursue a closer relationship with their muse-nation. Art historians can thus be excused for having lingered so long with these artists and the rich supply of Japonisme paintings.

¹³ I differentiate between Japonisme/Japanism and “Japanology” and “Japanologists,” the terms experts like Basil Hall Chamberlain, Lafcadio Hearn, and Ernest Satow tended to use. In my usage, Japonisme/Japanism refers to material that tends towards the lower end of the cultural hierarchy, to those objects and materials that are traded commercially and have mass attraction. I use Japanology to refer to the mode in which the material is intended scientifically or pedagogically as an expert conferring knowledge on lesser informed audiences. It is an important distinction because this study is more concerned with the larger cultural valences of Japonisme/Japanism than it is with the rarefied fields of academic study in Japanology.

Century. There is a useful historical bracket already in place for understanding the role of Japan in Western conception in this era, begun by Perry in 1854 and then neatly packaged on the other end by the Emperor Meiji's death in 1912, after which Japan's response to Western fascination changed.¹⁴ Within this timeframe, Japan arrived on the international scene and then ascended into an empire of its own in its chrysalis stage. Also within this timeframe, Japan went from a blank space in Western imagination to a complicated nexus for competing cultural forces. The discourse of Japonisme is both a simple formulation of transnational encounter and simultaneously far more complicated than it has been given credit.¹⁵

When I speak of the “discourse” of Japonisme, I intend the term in the sense codified by Carolyn Williams: “The notion of a ‘discourse’ is produced by grouping texts and practices across generic boundaries (either within a given time frame or over

¹⁴ Not nearly as neat a bookmark as Victoria conveniently dying just as the Nineteenth Century closed for British demarcations of eras, Emperor Meiji was born in 1852 (only two years before Perry landed in Tokyo Bay) and died in 1912. According to Japanese tradition, the year is reported according to the year of the Emperor's reign. Thus, 1868 becomes Meiji 1. Meiji's death in 1912 began a new emperor's reign at 0. The new era, the Taisho Era, lasted from 1912-1926. The new emperor was sickly to begin with and thus was not in a position to prevent the movement of power from the imperial seat to the Diet (*Kokkai*) of Japan. This era is generally considered a liberal democratic era in stark contrast both to the fractured nature of the previous Meiji government and to the subsequent militant Showa government (1926-1989). The Showa era is more familiar to Western audiences as the rule of Emperor Hirohito, the era during which Japan sided with Germany and Italy during the Second World War.

¹⁵ I use the term “transnational encounter” in both macro- and micro- senses. In the macro-transnational encounter, the nation of Japan met the imperial forces of dominant Western nations like Great Britain, France, Germany, and United States head on and struggled to find a place in their company without sacrificing the essential qualities that made Japan its own (newly unified) nation. In the micro-transnational sense, each new encounter between a Japanese national and a foreign individual gives rise to a much smaller but no less compelling iteration of the transnational encounter. In both cases, I conceive of the encounter itself as a necessarily traumatic event in which both parties are confronted by the unknowable Other and forced to realign their conceptual apparatus to include their new conception of the Other.

time)...A discourse, so conceived, names the grouping of various cultural practices around forms of discipline.”¹⁶ Examinations of Japonisme as a historical and cultural movement have been hampered by the presupposition that the movement is entirely or even primarily a mercantile movement. I could not—nor would I want to—argue that Japonisme merchandise was not a principal marker of the Japonisme movement. I question the validity, however, of using the omnipresence of Japonisme merchandise to end the discussion of the Japonisme movement at the end of the field of aestheticism. Japonisme crossed many generic boundaries and found its way into myriad forms of representation. Besides the woodblock prints that are so familiar even to this day, Japonisme merchandise like tea-pots, lacquer-ware, silks, and garments were also circulating with vigor. These objects became so commonplace in Western homes that they made their way into the canonical texts of the era. The circulation of these objects had validity and significance for the Victorian public that has not been unpacked. Even beyond the circulation of these objects and prints, literature about and set in Japan became highly sought after. Indeed, Japonisme literature was once so prolific an industry that Basil Hall Chamberlain complained that “*not* to have written a book on Japan is fast becoming a title to distinction” (10).¹⁷

¹⁶ Carolyn Williams, “‘Genre’ and ‘Discourse’ in Victorian Cultural Studies,” *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 27:2 (1999), 519.

¹⁷ Basil Hall Chamberlain (1850-1935) is a name that will recur throughout this dissertation. He was one of three famous Japanologists (the other two being Ernest Satow and W. G. Aston) and the Professor of Japanese at Tokyo Imperial University. He was a prolific author of informative texts about Japan intended to elucidate Western readers. He is perhaps best known for a one-volume encyclopedia called *Things Japanese*, which he revised and republished in six different versions between 1890-1936. (The Charles E. Tuttle Company has issued several reprints of *Things Japanese* since 1971, but these versions have reversed the order of the words. They are simply titled *Japanese Things*.)

These “books on Japan” came in a vast number of types, genres, qualities, and other typological categories. The wives of formal governmental ambassadors produced a significant quantity of travel narratives, as discussed in Lorraine Sterry’s *Victorian Women Travellers in Meiji Japan: Discovering a 'New' Land* (2009).¹⁸ Sterry also discusses the professional travel writers who made Japan their destination to capitalize on Japan’s popularity with their readers back in Anglo-American nations. Japonisme literature also encompasses far more than these “factual” accounts of experiences on Japanese soil. There were also numerous novels written set in Japan, using Japanese characters, or establishing characters in Western settings through their use of Japanese merchandise. In this final category—that of literature that uses Japonisme merchandise to establish necessary or even contextual evidence about the otherwise strictly Western contents of the work—that I see the clearest transition from speaking of Japonisme as a movement or consumerist trend to a cultural discourse.

It has become a commonly acknowledged quality of the Victorian novel that it is festooned with objects and that these objects cannot be read strictly for allegorical or metaphorical significance. Victorian literature is simply too populated with these objects to allow for such a straightforward reading process.¹⁹ Elaine Freedgood explains the difficulty in reading the plethora of objects that populate the Victorian novel: “These objects are largely inconsequential in the rhetorical hierarchy of the text—they do not

¹⁸ Lorraine Sterry, *Victorian Women Travellers in Meiji Japan: Discovering a 'New' Land*, (New York: Global Oriental, 2009).

¹⁹ My characterization of metaphorical and allegorical readings of objects as “simple” is not intended to imply that these readings are uncomplicated or that the significance drawn from them is un-nuanced. My intention is to draw a comparison between the processes of extracting significance in which an allegorical or a metaphorical reading is by comparison the easier process.

ascend to metaphorical stature; they suggest, or reinforce, something we already know about the subjects who use them. But each of these objects, if we investigate them in their ‘objectness,’ was highly consequential in the world in which the text was produced” (19).²⁰ Victorian literature has been mined for these critical objects —though technically “inconsequential” as Freedgood described them—by Victorian scholarship since Arjun Appadurai’s *The Social Life of Things* (1986) opened the field of study.²¹ Scholars like Mary Poovey, John Plotz, and Elaine Freedgood have reinvigorated the field of study by examining Victorian objects with a newly globalized perspective, allowing these objects to have fuller significance beyond the scope of their strictly British settings. John Plotz in particular has delved into the transient nature of Victorian objects in his *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move* (2009). These objects do not simply have significance as stationary set-pieces for Plotz; rather, they have acquired layers of significance from their global movements and associations: “[Objects] generally serve not as static deadweights, but as moving messengers...[they] acquire meaning primarily from their earlier peregrinations” (1).

²⁰ Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006).

²¹ John Plotz summarized one of the fundamental problems of Thing Theory: “Thing Theory is at its best...when it focuses on [its] sense of failure, or partial failure, to name or to classify. Thing Theory highlights, or ought to highlight, approaches to the margins—of language, of cognition, of material substance.” *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008), 110. Thing Theory is not simply a deepening of the significance of a particular object’s providence; it is not enough to simply point to an object and identify a path between its place of origin and its contemporary location. Thing Theory historicizes objects but refuses ultimately to categorize. The complexity of the object is the key significance. No object can be simplified to a single meaning or even to parallel meanings. Everything (and every Thing) contains contradictions. Subsequent references will be by page number in the body of the discussion.

It is this global “peregrination” of objects that interests me. Scholars like Plotz have investigated the global movements of objects in apparent adherence to questions of empire and colonialism: his focus, for example, seems to be on Indian objects as locations for discussion about Anglo-Indian relations and Freedgood examines the connections to the slave trade and the exploitation of African and Caribbean resources. Scholarship has tended to avoid the Far East beyond discussions of China (another important setting for conversations about imperialist ideologies) and altogether have avoided discussing Japanese objects as a precursor to Japan’s mid-century introduction to the Western world.²² Yet these objects populate the canon of British and American literature just as they populated the houses of the Japonisme enthusiasts at every level of society during this period.

Even beyond the placement of these objects in the pages of canonical literature, the overwhelming quantity of Japonisme objects is one of the generic tropes of Japonisme literature. Travel narratives, novels, pedagogical texts, and scientific discourses on Japan and Japanese culture repeatedly insist on the sheer breadth of merchandise that threatens to overwhelm them. Pierre Loti describes the “invasion” of his incoming vessel by the “mercantile, bustling, comical Japan,” and proceeds to

²² Jessica Rawson draws particular attention to Chinese ritual vessels in “The Ancestry of Chinese Bronze Vessels.” Her essay follows the trail of the *ding* as it moves through history, ending with the neat conclusion that, “Ancient Chinese bronzes are special cases. But the episodes in their lives and the new lives that they generated are matched in parallel ways all over the world among all peoples. All objects have an ancestry that is as important to an understanding of their roles as are their current appearances and functions.” See Jessica Rawson, “The Ancestry of Chinese Bronze Vessels,” *History of Things: Essays on Material Culture*, Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery, ed. (New York: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2013), 70. The sentiment is too neat for my purposes. I offer the opposite conjecture; that each of the “parallel” objects in parallel cultures functions in a unique way that has bearing on our discussion of material objects for the very reason of its uniqueness.

breathlessly enumerate as many of the articles as he can.²³ John La Farge described the quantities of merchandise being “unloaded at our door or at our friends’ for us,” as “bales of merchandise....patient pack-horses stand in the yards; big parcels, and piles of boxes and bundles, encumber our veranda.”²⁴ The mistaking of Japonisme merchandise for the totality of the Japonisme movement occurs, as we can see here, within the pages of literary Japonisme as well as within subsequent critical appraisals. Japonisme literature perpetuates its own erasure.

It is imperative for my project to establish Japonisme as a larger discourse to begin by doing the critical work of appraising Japonisme merchandise’s role within literary Japonisme. It is also critical for another reason: Japonisme’s emphasis on its own consumerist constrictions gives rise to an important blurring between Japonisme objects and the second most recognizable aspect of Japonisme: Japanese women as fetishized objects. If Japonisme has been forgotten as anything other than a consumerist impulse to purchase “all one sees that’s Japanese,” this has been most clearly destructive in the role of Japanese women within this movement. Lafcadio Hearn, a prominent defender of Japan in Western contexts, expressed the sentiment directly in his book on Japanese culture helpfully titled *Japan: An Attempt At Interpretation* (1904): “For it has well been said the most wonderful aesthetic products of Japan are not its ivories, nor its bronzes, nor its porcelains, nor its swords, nor any of its marvels in metal or lacquer—but its women.”²⁵ Japanese culture is flattened into Japanese woodblock prints to paper the walls

²³ Pierre Loti, *Madame Chrysanthème*. trans., Laura Ensor (London: G. Routledge and Sons, 1897).

²⁴ John LaFarge, *An Artist’s Letters from Japan*, (New York: The Century Co., 1890) 128.

²⁵ Lafcadio Hearn, *Japan: An Attempt At Interpretation* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap Publishers, 1904), 393.

of Parisian artists, but Japanese women fare even worse. They are literally objectified: made into the porcelain objects that have already crowded out “real” Japan from the Japonisme movement. This is the perception that has been widely accepted of the Japonisme movement.²⁶

In this conception, Japonisme is yet another iteration of imperialist ideology of late-Victorian Britain by depicting colonial subjects as lesser than their British oppressors and thus in need of management. The depiction of the empire within Victorian political discourse can be roughly divided into two disparate camps: those who saw the colonies as appendages of the central British state and those who conceived of those same colonies as extensions of the central state; indivisible, even if geographically distant.²⁷ Yet, for all that Japan benefited from Britain’s colonial presence in nearby China²⁸ and had a close

²⁶ This is also the perception of the late-Twentieth Century’s renewed interest in Japanese culture through the influx of Japanese cartoons (*anime*), comic books (*manga*), films, and fashion. Gwen Stefani’s Harajuku Girls prove this: the women are the merchandise and the merchandise is a woman.

²⁷ I borrow this binary from Duncan Bell’s “The Victorian Idea of a Global State” in his larger collaborative discussion from *Victorian Visions of Global Order: Empire and International Relations in Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1-25. While his concern is with mapping the multiplicity of thought within this larger binary, my needs are both more and less specific. For the purpose of narrowing the scope to the specific Japonisme movement—one aspect among many in cultural geopolitical negotiations during the era—I accept this deceptively simplistic binary on its own terms, though I acknowledge that it is a vastly oversimplified version of a complex system. Japan cannot be *quite* folded into a larger imperialist ideology for the simple reason that Japan never was a British colony, for all that it functioned in some ways in very similar manners. A larger discussion of the intricacies of a system that does not apply to this case would be out of place in this discussion.

²⁸ Japan provided a safe haven for British diplomats during the Boxer Wars (or Yihetuan Movement) between 1899 and 1901. This further emphasized the perceived difference between the Chinese and Japanese populations in which the Japanese are seen as closer to an Anglo-European ideal. Edward H. House, Basil Hall Chamberlain, Ernest Satow, and other prominent “Japanologists” perpetuated this conception of the distinction between the two nationalities. Yet even as far back as the original 1860 delegation from Meiji Japan to the United States, the American public became enamored of a young attendant

political relationship with Britain that in some ways reflected aspects of other colonies, Japan was never an actual part of the British Empire. The cultural milieu in which Japonisme occurred was thus flavored by colonialist ideology, but not determined by it. Japan is neither an appendage of the British Empire nor is it a far-distant piece of the central whole. It is something else, something that evolves in a way unique among the Pacific nations that moves beyond the relation of colonizer and colonized but never reaches to a relation between equals. It is something new.

Besides being unique in a geopolitical sense, Japan's interaction with Britain is also notable for being a transnational encounter that occurs almost entirely in a tangible way, in an exchange of mercantile forces and in public discourse. Beyond the *objet d'art* for which Japonisme has conventionally been known, this relationship also occurred in a strongly literary sense. Texts were an essential part of the cultural encounter—not just for Britain's reception of Japan, but also for the reverse, for Japan's reception of Britain. For all that Bunthorne complained of the late-Victorian fashion for Japanese objects—a complaint that H. L. Menken echoed when complaining about the “absurd vogue” for all things Japanese demonstrated by the popularity of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*—Japan was undergoing a similarly invasive affection for all one sees that's British.²⁹

to the delegation (whom they dubbed “Tommy” and described in a June 2, 1860 edition of *Harper's Weekly* as “a sharp, active, intelligent little fellow...a great pet of the ladies”). The sexual viability of “Japanese Tommy” is a sharp contrast to the deformed caricatures of Chinese nationals seen in the same periodical in the same era.

²⁹ The extreme popularity of British literature in Japan is nowhere so obvious as in the long duration of a kabuki adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice*, renamed *Sakuradoki Zeni-no yononaka* (or “It's a cherry blossom world in which only money matters”), in Osaka from 1885 through 1891. It was so successful, in fact, that the title had to be adapted yet again once the cherry blossoms of the title had wilted and been replaced by autumn leaves. See Minami Ryuta, Ian Caruthers, and John Gillies, ed. *Performing Shakespeare in Japan*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

English language productions were performed piecemeal for Westerners living in Japan through the early Meiji era, serialized extracts were printed (in translation and in English) in popular magazines, and short stories adapting Shakespeare via imitation of Charles Lamb's adaptations were the rage in Meiji Japan. Even as late as 1974, *The Merchant of Venice* has been the most popular Shakespearean play to be performed in Japan, beating second-place *Hamlet* by ten times as many productions.

The Mikado opened its doors within months of the first kabuki-production of *The Merchant of Venice* in Japan.³⁰ Both were powerful demonstrations of the cultural capital and the intense curiosity associated with the other nation and its literature. These movements have never been discussed in tandem, however their synchronicity and mutual interdependence seem to demand it. In no other transnational encounter is the spirit of the encounter so thoroughly literary and so reciprocal in its literariness. Meiji Japan's impulse to "Westernize" has been seen as an ideological anomaly, a singularly freak occurrence in the long history of international encounters. Yet, for all that Japan clearly articulated its intention to "turn Western," can we not also see a strong impulse in its mirror, in an impulse to "turn" Japanese? Were Western women not draping themselves in kimonos? Were Western painters not painting mirrors of Japanese woodblock prints?

It is in this sense that I title this dissertation "Turning Japanese: Japonisme in Victorian Literature and Culture." I am specifically interested in how the impulse to turn

³⁰ *The Mikado* launched in March of 1885, the ninth of Gilbert and Sullivan's fourteen collaborations. It ran at the Savoy Theatre for 672 performances, one of the longest runs for any theatrical piece at the time. Mencken approximated that 150 companies were playing it across Europe and America by the end of 1885. He goes on to claim that, "One night, in October in this country alone, there were no less than 117 performances." See H. L. Mencken, "The Mikado," *Baltimore Evening Sun* (19 November 1910), 22.

towards Japan is refracted through ideologies of dominance and imperialism, but also in how the magnetic pull towards Japan is returned by a Japanese impulse to “turn” British. In the following chapters, I investigate the various characterizations of the Japan-British transnational encounter as literally transcribed in this uniquely literary cultural movement. This moment provides a special opportunity to “read” the encounter between cultures in a way that is authentic, contemporary, and also the best iteration of the encounter available in any medium. This cultural collision chose literature for its medium; I am following its impulse in re-stitching the pattern of its choice.

I cannot begin with any other discussion than with the most widely believed misconception about the extent of Japonisme as a cultural force, both from within its own era and following through to our own era. I mean, of course, the idea that Japonisme is the fashion for “all one sees that’s Japanese” in a strictly consumerist sense. In my first chapter, I begin with the formulation Wilde established in “Decay of Lying,” with the question of Japonisme merchandise’s role in Western comprehension of the new nation. Wilde’s answer is that no, Japonisme merchandise cannot provide access to Japan, but it does allow a space in which the British observer can create a somehow *more* authentic Japan through Aesthetic effect. My answer is that, no, Japonisme merchandise cannot give *direct* access to Japan, but that it does provide some portion of the transnational encounter between Britain and Japan and, thus, is part of the larger journey to intellectual access to Japan. To that end, I follow the pathways provided by mimetic forms of Japan and demonstrate how these various representations can be collated into a larger cultural awareness of Japan.

While these mimetic forms of Japan are a useful and functional port to the larger issues of transnationalism, the literary forms of representing real encounters with Japan are also an important piece of the puzzle. Japonisme is clearly partially determined by these mimetic forms through Japonisme merchandise, but there was also a lucrative and popular market for texts that dealt directly with Japan as a geographical space inhabited by real people. In my second and third chapters, I divide my time between the two dominant trends within literary Japonisme: experiential accounts and imaginative fiction. The division is in some senses an arbitrary one. Pierre Loti, for instance, had a real encounter in Japan with a real Japanese woman that he then fictionalized in his novel, *Madame Chystantheme* (1898) and I put him firmly in the latter category of “imaginative fiction.” Isabella Bird, who rode horseback from Tokyo to Hokkaido, wrote an experiential account that I devote most of the second chapter two, making her my case study in Japonisme experiential accounts. She is guilty of fudging the occasional detail and, as I discuss at great length, tempering the reception of her “characters” according to preconceived notions of racial superiority. Yet still she maintains her position as the case study for experiential encounters of Japan. The difference between the two works, justifying my division between my two binaries, is a difference of authorial intention. Bird intends her work as a travel narrative, with all the cultural and generic expectations that includes. Loti does not, allowing him to elude the restrictions Bird places on herself for “authenticity.” I discuss the experiential accounts first because they inevitably give rise to the second half. Where else but from travel narratives like Bird’s can authors with no lived experience in Japan draw their material for the imaginative fiction I discuss subsequently? How else did Bird intend her work to be read but as the source for

knowledge about Japan—even if she did not conceive of her work as being the apparatus by which an author like Clive Holland or John Luther Long might set their novels in Japan? These two chapters pose questions of authenticity and authorial expertise, blurring as they do the divide between the “real” encounter with Japan and a fictional encounter with a “Japan of pure invention.” These are questions that existed for Japonisme as a cultural movement before this generic difference posed them as literary questions. Japonisme was always already a blurred distinction between a “real” Japan and the aesthetic space that Oscar Wilde claimed “does not exist.”

Turning Japanese: Japonisme in Victorian Literature and Culture thus establishes a cultural discourse that both creates and mediates the framework of an important geopolitical collision between disparate cultures. Far from being strictly the aesthetic relationship in which new forms of art are integrated into the Western canon of painting, Japonisme’s reach is vast and pivotal. By putting *Madame Butterfly* back into a larger cultural context that includes figures like George Meredith and Elizabeth Gaskell as well as more obscure figures like Clive Holland and Isabella Bird, the true complexity of Japan’s place in Victorian culture becomes clearer. Japonisme does not only contain vital clues to the true nature of the initial transnational encounter, it also provides further elaboration on a cultural movement that was a vocal, lively part of Victorian culture. The result of putting Japan back in its true place as a part of Victorian culture adds complexity to our ever-increasing understanding of the true global scope of Victorian culture. To re-frame Wilde’s original postulation, Japan is neither simply a far-distant land unconnected to Victorian England, nor is it entirely a land of pure invention. It is both invention and fact, as every interlocutor must be in a larger cultural discourse.

Chapter One

Those Sumptuous Stuffs: Japanese Things in Victorian Literature

I. Introduction

When Oscar Wilde's Vivian says to his interlocutor that, "I know you are fond of Japanese things," in "Decay of Lying," the true breadth of the statement is easy for a modern reader to miss.¹ The understated "fond" Vivian uses is a far cry from the real rapacity of the market for Japanese "things" in Nineteenth Century Britain and, indeed, in all Western nations. By invoking this popular trend in his essay, Wilde moves the discussion about the structure and function of Aestheticism into a consciously populist arena.² Wilde had already proven that he understood the wide appeal of Japan in a letter

¹ Oscar Wilde, *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Richard Ellmann, (New York: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 121. Subsequent references will be by page number in the body of the discussion.

² For introductory purposes, I have greatly oversimplified the central precept of Aestheticism, that of an aesthetic discourse that can be divorced from the parochial constraints of everyday life. Wilde himself had a complicated relationship to the paradoxical appeal he made to both middle class bourgeois society and an elitist impulse towards a rarified, select cadre of intelligentsia. In "Decay of Lying," Wilde proposes that there is a version of the elite aesthetic phenomenon that is accessible even for the general populace and, indeed, this unification is frequently part of his Aesthetic project. When it came to uniting "art for art's sake" and practical, everyday concerns, as Regenia Gagnier states, "it was life—specifically middle-class life—that sought a divorce from art, not

to James Whistler in 1882 when he proposed they travel together to Japan: "...when will you come to Japan? Fancy the book, I to write it, you to illustrate it. We will be rich."³ By choosing "Japanese things" in "Decay of Lying" as the illustration of a philosophical point, Wilde provides intellectual access to the debate for a broader range of readers.

While Wilde invokes the fashion for "Japanese things" tangentially to his main point, his treatment of these "things" reveals the underlying complexity of these objects. In his discussion, he draws attention first to the prevailing presumption that Japanese objects give some sort of intellectual access to a "real" Japan through their mimetic forms. The point Vivian is illustrating through his invocation of Japan is that "no great artist ever sees things as they really are. If he did, he would cease to be an artist" and, thus, the artistic renderings of Japan cannot be reflective of how Japan "really [is]" (315). If the artist's access to the subject he portrays is always already divorced from representation, no mimetic form can provide accurate information about its subject. Wilde's artist cannot even "see" his subject, let alone reproduce it in his art. Therefore, no Japanese artist is capable of truly replicating Japan through mimetic forms and, thus, no Japanese "thing" can grant any access to Japan itself.

Wilde's claim becomes more complicated as Vivian continues. By severing the connection between the mimetic form and its referent, Wilde has left no clear conception of the referent for the viewer to access. In other words, the viewer is left only with a sense of what is seen in the art itself and must assume that it bears no resemblance to the original, making the original subject an unknown quantity. There is a "Japan" that exists

vice versa" (11). See Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986).

³ Oscar Wilde, *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962).

in the mimetic form, but it does not relate back to the geographical reality of Japan. He fills this lacuna by asserting that, “the actual people who live in Japan are not unlike the general run of English people; that is to say, they are extremely commonplace, and have nothing curious or extraordinary about them” (315). For Wilde, the blank space he has created in the place of the referent must necessarily be filled by “the general run of English people.” If the Japanese people of the paintings are unrelated to the subjects, the real Japanese people must be “not unlike” familiar English people. This claim presumes that “the general run of English people” are a natural default for people whose identity has been erased by divorcing them from their representational forms.

Putting aside the implicit racism of Wilde’s assumption, his claim has created another interesting problem.⁴ If mimetic Japan is not Japan, but Japan is not Japan either, the mimetic Japan reverts to being the location of the “real” Japan. Wilde’s claim’s evolution requires a final stage in which he claims, “In fact the whole of Japan is pure invention. There is no such country, there are no such people” (315). Jeffery Nunokawa has summarized this rhetorical shift as proceeding from “the modest claim that Japan as it is depicted in art does not actually exist outside of it” to “the bolder announcement that

⁴ Wilde had conventionally racist attitudes towards the swath of Asia that can generally be referred to as the “Orient.” Stopping in San Francisco’s Chinatown in 1882 during his tour of the United States, Wilde decided that Chinese art possessed no element of beauty and was instead a structure built around grotesqueness. As Colin Cavendish-Jones has remarked, “[Wilde] seems to have accepted the opinions of Hegel and his lecturers at Oxford and taken China as a symbol of inartistic conformity without devoting any serious reflection to the subject.” Colin Cavendish-Jones, “Oscar Wilde’s Radically Revised View of China,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 54.4 (2014), 923. Similar conventional Orientalism positions can be seen in other works in his oeuvre, such as “The Sphinx,” and *Salomé*.

Japan only exists there.”⁵ Nunokawa has re-phrased Wilde’s claim in a positive assertion of where Japan is; Wilde, however, phrased his original claim as an absence. He has denied the existence of a “real” Japan altogether, thus evacuating the referent in the process of artistic creation. Instead of mimetic representation of a subject, his conception of art empties the subject and prioritizes the artist’s imaginative reality.

Having both erased and then reconstructed the “reality” of mimetic Japan, Wilde makes one final development on his claim. He claims that the mimetic forms of Japan produce a “mode of style, an exquisite fancy of art...a Japanese effect” (315). This effect can only be experienced through the mimetic Japan, not by “behav[ing] like a tourist and go[ing] to Japan” (315). His prescription for accessing the “Japanese effect” is: “...you will stay at home, and steep yourself in the work of certain Japanese artists, and then, when you have absorbed the spirit of their style, and caught their imaginative manner of vision, you will go some afternoon and sit in the Park or stroll down Piccadilly, and if you cannot see a Japanese effect there, you will not see it anywhere” (316). Wilde has trumped his claim that the mimetic form of Japan is the true access to Japan; now, only the viewer can access the real Japan as a process of effect, privileging the viewer over the artist and the passive reception of Japanese art over the act of artistic production. The viewer accesses Japan by assimilating the mimetic forms of Japan, translating those objects into a “spirit” and a “manner of vision,” through which he then invents Japan around himself as he circulates in his familiar setting. Japan is thoroughly delocalized; it is no longer a place, but a process.

⁵ Jeffery Nunokawa, “Oscar Wilde in Japan: Aestheticism, Orientalism, and the Deracialization of the Homosexual,” *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*, (2.1, 1994), 54.

Wilde's complicated form of processing Japanese art has been cited on occasion as an evolution (or an aberration) from the broader cultural trend for Japanese merchandise, the discourse I refer to as Japonisme.⁶ I see him rather as representative of this discourse, not as subversive to it or as exceptional from it. Wilde's understanding of Japan's "reality" is a moving target. The fact that it shifts multiple times within the limited scope of Vivian's example demonstrates how mercurial a subject Japan truly was. Wilde chose "Japanese things" to illustrate his point not because he could creatively adapt their cultural milieu to his purposes, but rather because of the aptness of the fit. The tension between the Japan represented by those "Japanese things" that Cyril is so fond of and the real, tangible reality of Japan is a fertile cultural discourse that transcends this one example.

Before they even reach their metaphorical significance in texts like Wilde's, the "Japanese things" already have a complicated significance accrued by their circulation within levels of society, geographical spaces, presumptions of gender, and other conflicted determiners. The Parisian artists from whom I have drawn the term "Japonisme" owned collections of Japonisme art from genres and mediums beyond the stock of woodblock prints usually cited as evidence of Japonisme influence.⁷ They owned functional and domestic Japonisme objects as well; objects that were part of a larger market that was dominated by middle class female consumers seeking to establish

⁶ According to Fumiko Sato, "While Wilde tried to appropriate the general trend of Victorians' 'Japan', he added a subversive nature to it in his writings" (72). Fumiko Sato, "Oscar Wilde and the Victorian popular image of Japan," 経営論集 / 大東文化大学経営学会 編 (13, 2007), 65-73.

⁷ William Merritt Chase's *In the Studio* (1880) clearly shows a number of Japonisme objects ranging from ceramics and silks to a blurred miniature figure holding a koto harp. Photographs of James McNeill Whistler's drawing room in 1865 show scrolls, screens, fans, and ceramics of Japanese style, if not Japanese make.

themselves in a new class system.⁸ Those female consumers sometimes appear in the paintings themselves, whether as consumers considering their purchasers (as in the series of Tissot paintings I will discuss at length later in this chapter) or as models for kimonos, posed in ways that emphasize their non-Japaneseness.⁹ The “Japanese things,” refracted through paintings by Western painters or in the intimate domestic spaces of Western women, also carry representations of real Japanese figures, depicted by Japanese artists.¹⁰ As Wilde has already demonstrated, these figures often seem to be simultaneously more “real” than the object they inhabit and also completely flattened by their position as mimetic forms. They seem to beg Wilde’s question: are these the “real” people of Japan or are they “pure invention”?

Wilde’s essay provides a convenient example of the complexity of conceiving of Japan in the era following Perry’s 1854 visit. In negotiating the sometimes conflicting, sometimes collaborating pull of cultural forces, I need to particularize three threads. First, I need to mark the conception of Japan that exists before tangible goods become a real anchor between the Western audience and Japan. Along this thread, I would chart the presumptions of cultural influence that Japan is presupposed to have for its visitors. It is

⁸ In her introduction to *Women and British Aestheticism* (1999), Talia Schaffer notes the connection between women’s purchasing power in the *fin de siècle* era and the re-focusing of art culture on functional, everyday objects: “The women who produced and consumed aestheticism were deeply concerned with art and daily practice, whether they were involved in the aestheticization of the everyday through dressing, decorating, and gardening or intent on portraying the comic or tragic collision of the aesthetic and the ‘real’ in parody or anti-aestheticist fiction. This work makes important contributions to art’s relation to commodity culture.” See Talia Schaffer, *Women and British Aestheticism*, (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 5.

⁹ For example: *La Japonaise* (1876) by Claude Monet depicts his wife, Camille Monet, in a kimono. She is staged with a garish blonde wig to emphasize her Western ethnicity.

¹⁰ *La Japonaise* (1876) also features a Japanese figure depicted in Monet’s wife’s kimono skirts. His vitality seems to stretch his mimetic un-reality until he too seems to have the same liveliness as Camille Monet.

here that Western visitors would have scope to boast of the cosmopolitanism they have accrued through checking Japan off on the list of countries they have visited. Secondly, I need to then mark the mode in which the merchandise of Japan is consumed in a Western context, taking account for market forces and preexisting cultural trends. In this thread, I am able to clearly delineate the subtle influence of, for example, having a Japanese teapot handled everyday by servants and their employers alike in the intimate teatimes of the family or of storing precious letters from a far distant son in a Japanese box. Thirdly, I need to mark the reality of Japan as it truly exists, as a real geographical space peopled with real inhabitants. The relationship between these three threads, which I will call “conception,” “consumption,” and “reality,” is, in a sense, the formula by which the historical conditions of this transnational encounter between Japan and the West can be understood.

I use the term “transnational encounter” here to describe a phenomenon in which a solidifying national identity, the Japanese, comes into contact with pre-existing (though not, I will argue, stable) national identities that, for convenience’s sake, I have lumped together under the rubric of “the West.” French, American, and British responses to Japan are too thoroughly interwoven to judiciously separate them into single strands, though their particularity does create reverberations in the larger cultural discourse that belie my homogenizing gesture. My use of the “trans-” portion of the word “transnational” is adopted from Julie F. Codell’s definition of “transculturation”: “Transculturation is a complex term that embraces time, space, place, culture, nation, and globalization...Most importantly transculturation does not result in the homogeneity associated with

globalization.”¹¹ Yet, where Codell’s focus remains on broad concepts rather than methods or processes, I am primarily concerned with the interlocking influence of the exchanges between cultures as a process related directly to national identity. It is in that sense that I use the term “*transnational*” rather than Codell’s “*transcultural*.”¹² I am particularly interested in the “-national” because of the close connection between Japan’s subsequent imperial heritage and later iterations of transnationalism that imagine their imperial past.¹³ It is in this sense that moving critical attention backwards in time, back to the Meiji Era and its interactions with Victorian England, can put subsequent anomalies in their proper context.

In the following sections, I shall proceed with the three threads of my conceptualization of Japanese-Western transnational encounter (“conception,” “consumption,” and “reality”) as it occurred around the pivotal points of Perry’s intrusion in 1854 and through to the end of Japan’s Meiji Era in 1912. I will begin with how Japan was conceived of by the general public before Perry’s intrusion and then trace connections between those pre-encounter ideas and their descendents. Following from

¹¹ “The Art of Transculturation,” *Transculturation in British Art, 1770-1930*, ed. Julie F. Codell, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 2.

¹² Another rejected possibility was Lauren M. E. Goodlad’s “geopolitical aesthetic.” Goodlad’s project encompasses a vast array of transnational encounters and seeks to unify them into a singular aesthetic whose concept can encompass all their varieties and idiosyncrasies. My purposes are on a smaller scale as I find there is more than enough tempest in the teacup of the cultural reception of Japan. See Lauren M. E. Goodlad, *The Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic: Realism, Sovereignty, and Transnational Experience*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹³ Japan’s role as an imperial power in the Twentieth Century is remarkably divergent from the pre-existing assumptions of racial and national hierarchies, but also anomalous for its historical brevity. Japan had not been the dominant imperial power in Asia at any point in its history, nor has it been since. While at risk for oversimplifying thousands of years of Asian political and geographical conflict, it is fair to say that China has been the clear imperial power in Asia, both historically and currently.

there, I will discuss the practical circulation of Japanese objects in Western cultures. I will show how Japonisme objects were interstitial and thus not bound by clear generic conventions. Though these objects carried the lion's share of the responsibility for the transnational exchange between Japan and the West, I argue that these objects' connection back to Japan is as murky as Wilde's conception of a "Japanese effect." By expanding the generic boundaries of Japonisme, I will show how Wilde's "Japanese effect" brings new levels of complexity to his Aestheticist project.

The circulation of the Japonisme objects that carry so much significance in their peregrinations occurs within a context of a prepared Western audience. Japan may have been "closed" to international trade since 1603, but Western imagination was happy to overleap that border during the interim. Japan's "closure" was hardly a hermetic seal, as well. The Dutch merchants who maintained partial access to Japan through the entire historical period of isolation circulated rumors and tall tales about their experiences. Though trade may not have been in effect, Japan was hardly a blank space in Western conception. Without direct access, however, this could indeed be a Japan of "pure invention" at times.

II. Conceiving Japan: Japan in Victorian Imagination

In an article from April 25th, 1792 titled "Notices Concerning Japan" in *Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer*, the author notes that, "No civilized nation on the globe is so little known by Europeans as Japan. For about two centuries past all access to it has

been prohibited to Europeans.”¹⁴ Despite this claim of absolute ignorance, there was some simmering information about Japan available during this period. The fact that Japan was “so little known” did not, for example, prevent another periodical, *Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*, in January of the same year from asserting with absolute confidence that, “the ladies of Japan gild their teeth,” in a list of the international oddities of “female beauties and dress.”¹⁵ It is a conspicuously intimate detail about the so-called least-known civilized nation on the globe. It is, broadly speaking, also correct: Japanese married women did indeed blacken their teeth in a process called “お歯黒” (literally, “tooth black”). Thus two paradoxical things are true about what pre-Victorian European culture “knew” about Japan: less than about any other nation and intimate details about their day-to-day lives.

Before Perry’s voyage in 1854, the loudest calls for forced trade negotiations with Japan were from Christian periodicals like the *Christian Watchman*. As late as 1833, the *Christian Watchman* was still dropping hints that “this great eastern empire” was showing prospects of “a happy change in this rigorous and unnatural policy [of isolation from Europe.]”¹⁶ For all that a tone of missionary zeal predominates in Christian periodicals of this ilk, the general tone regarding Japan before its 1854 re-introduction is highly flattering. Indeed, some descriptions of Japan, as in this excerpt from a children’s

¹⁴ The article goes on to note that the Dutch were exempted from this prohibition. They and other Asian nations continued to have access to Japan throughout the period of isolation through the use of the constructed island Dejima, built to house foreigners when they were absolutely necessary for trade purposes. See “Notices Concerning Japan,” *Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer* (8, April 25 1792), 299.

¹⁵ “Curious Varieties of Taste in Female Beauty and Dress,” *Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* 90 (1792), 16.

¹⁶ “Prospects of Happy Changes in Japan.” *Christian Watchman*, (14.7, February 15, 1833), 27.

magazine, seem magically idyllic: “There is a clock in Nagasaki, which is said to be five feet in length, and three in breadth, embellished with a landscape of neatly varied features and a golden sun. When striking the hour, a bird flaps its wings; a mouse creeps out of its hole and climbs a little hill; while a tortoise creeps slowly along for the purpose of marking the hour on the face.”¹⁷ While tensions with China grew ever worse, Japan was being depicted as the creator of clever children’s toys. Japan is notably not depicted as a land of savages; even the *Christian Watchman* called it a “great eastern empire,” and *Bee, or the Literary Weekly Intelligencer* went so far as to call it a “civilized nation.”¹⁸ Eastern it may be, but it is also somehow conceptually closer to Europe than, say, China.

In a circular in Brooklyn from 1852 discussing Perry’s imminent expedition, the unknown author emphatically denounces the “nonsensical reserve of that people [i.e., Japanese] toward foreigners” and insists that “one way or another, however, Japan will be made to follow the example of China, and come into open line with the rest of the world.”¹⁹ The tone of that portion of the circular seems initially more in line with previous imperialist encounters with Asian nations. Yet, what is singular about this instance of transnational exchange—between Perry’s United States and Edo Japan—is precisely how *unlike* the pattern set by the exchanges between other nations (especially China) it was. Indeed, the same circular quotes from the letter entrusted to the expedition

¹⁷ *Parley’s Magazine*, (January 1st, 1835), 388.

¹⁸ The qualitative ranking of “civilized” would later become an important locus for debate in Meiji Japan. Mitchell’s *New School Geography*, which was widely used as an English textbook in Japan during the Meiji Era, divides races and cultures into five categories: savage, barbarous, half-civilized, civilized, and enlightened. European races predictably rank highest, but Japan is notably positioned as “half-civilized,” a rank higher than its Asian neighbors received. See Haruo Erikawa, “英語帝国主義の図像学” (Iconography of English Imperialism Linguistically), *現代英語教育* (Education in Modern English), (May 1995).

¹⁹ “The Opening of Japan.” *The Oneida Circular*, 1.24 (April 25, 1852), 95.

from the current president, Millard Fillmore, in which he promises repeatedly that the expedition's interests are purely mercantile. He wants to "promote friendship and commerce between the two countries," and promises that "our object is friendly commercial intercourse, and nothing more. You may have productions which we should be glad to buy, and we have productions which might suit your people." President Fillmore's tone is at odds with the circular author's more military tone, but both are equally invested in the end result: a fertile economic opportunity for their country despite cultural differences.

As the pivotal moment approached in which trade would really commence between Japan and the Western world, the differences between Japan and its nearest geographical neighbors became a matter of pressing concern in cultural discourse. Like, Japan, China had been "opened" to foreign trade as part of a larger cultural spectacle in mid-Nineteenth Century. Unlike Japan, China's "opening" led not to an internal Civil War, but direct conflict with the Western powers that had pressed for the initialization of trade. Also unlike the case with Japan and the discourse that preceded its "opening" in 1854, pre-1830 discussions of China almost always link a discussion of trade in that nation to similarly fraught trade in India and eventually find their way to debating the dangers for the East India Company in undertaking the task, not China and India directly after all.²⁰ Japan (and its national interests) is always first and foremost in the discussions about "opening" Japan; China was not in parallel discussions. The difference is subtle but

²⁰ In "Proposal for Opening a Foreign Trade with China" from *The Spectator* (March 3rd, 1832), the diversionary rhetorical strategy is in exemplary form. The author's topic is ostensibly trade, but no mention is made of specific goods or any specific item that could be gained through trade. Rather, the focus is on the dangers for Westerners in China, the despotism of the "barbarians" who hamper free trade, the risk for the East India Company, and the value for the plan's duplication elsewhere in the empire. 206.

significant. Toshio Yokoyama, one of the few English-language scholars to discuss Japan's interaction with Victorian Britain on a cultural level, theorized that the positive expectations for Japan were in fact due to "Britain's difficult relations with China since the turn of the 1830s."²¹ The transnational tensions—eventually giving rise to outright hostility—set the scene for a profitable and peaceable relationship with Japan. The fact that cultural discourse about Japan tends to focus on mercantile and not military matters demonstrates an anxiety about the conflicts already happening in East Asia.

Differentiating between Japan and the rest of Asia thus became an underlying necessity in cultural discourse. In the very phrasing of Japan's virtues, it is clear to see the underlying anxiety about Japan also becoming a militant oppositional force in the same manner China had. Japanese exceptionalism is fervently defended as a cultural push against the fear of another transnational war. Yokoyama notes that, "the idea that Japan was a 'strange and singular country'—which implied uniqueness and bizarre qualities—was to persist in British magazine and review articles not only in the 1850s, but throughout most of the following thirty years." For a nation so thoroughly engaged in radical change, this ongoing perception of stability is remarkable. Between the "opening" in 1854 and the end of the Meiji era in 1912, Japan consciously transformed itself into a formidable international power, yet the cultural discourse in the West remains steady in the portrayal of the nation as charmingly unique and singularly placid. The full scope of

²¹ Toshio Yokoyama, *Japan in the Victorian Mind: A Study of Stereotyped Images of a Nation 1850-80*, (Hong Kong: Macmillan Press, 1987), 1. Yokoyama's book is remarkable for dealing primarily with the most effervescent of Victorian texts to discern the reception of Japan, i.e., periodicals, newspapers, and advertisements. However, the premise disassociates the reception of Japan from the longstanding reception of Japanese artifacts. Without acknowledging this pre-existing condition for transnational exchange, the "image" of the title can only be partially finished.

this perception is even more impressive. By the time a full century had passed from that pivotal encounter in 1854, Japan had gone from absolute hermit nation to one of the Axis of Evil in the Second World War and back yet again to the location of the “strange and singular” qualities that Yokoyama had noted as only lasting thirty years.²²

Literary representation of Japan was a popular sub-genre in the Nineteenth Century, as I discuss in my third chapter, though the sheer volume of those texts has been largely forgotten. In what is now regarded as the “canon” of British literature, however, Japan tends to be represented more as a generative space for merchandise than as a geographical space. When it is mentioned as its own destination, the actual journey is less important than the fact that the journey attributes a specific characteristic to the character in question. In Gissing’s *The Odd Women* (1893), Everard Barfoot’s recent return from Japan is treated as proof of his decadence.²³ In Trollope’s *The Eustace Diamonds* (1873), Miss Macnulty’s interest in the fact that Sir Griffin has gone to Japan is dictated not by any particular interest in Japan, but by the status the length of the journey appends to his emotional turmoil: “‘To Japan!’ said Miss Macnulty, really interested. Had Sir Griffin gone no further than Boulogne, her pleasure in the news would have been much less.”²⁴ In another novel, Trollope’s *Prime Minister* (1876), Lopez, “though he had no interest in Japan,” pursues an opportunity to be a part of a deputation destined there.²⁵ It would seem that the unifying characteristic of these characters bound to or from Japan is that

²² The 1950s saw an influx of films set in and about Japan including everything from those by Japanese director Akira Kurosawa to Marlon Brando’s popular hit, *Sayonara* (1957).

²³ George Gissing, *The Odd Women*, (New York: Norton, 1976).

²⁴ Anthony Trollope, *The Eustace Diamonds*, revised edition, (New York: Penguin, 2004), 734.

²⁵ Anthony Trollope, *The Prime Minister*, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1876), 175.

Japan is, as Wilde claimed, a non-space. These characters have achieved that final stage that Wilde prescribed in which they seem to carry a “Japanese effect” with them through the otherwise recognizably British context of their respective novels. Japan could be exchanged for another cultural signifier and the result would be the same. In other words, though Japan functions as a key signifier, Japan itself is nearly irrelevant.

These are only those few references in the canon of British literature that deal with Japan as a real space. If it were possible to set the references from canonical literature on two sides of a scale, references to Japan that deal directly with Japan would be by far the lighter of the two. The other side would be far heavier and it would hold another way Wilde demonstrated for understanding Japan: understanding it through the circulation and consumption of its merchandise. Thus, we move on from the first thread of my paradigm to the second, from conceiving of Japan to consuming the merchandise of Japan. These are the objects that will promote Wilde’s “Japanese effect,” and that will provide Western audiences with the conceptual ability to inhabit Japan at will. These are the objects that are the “real” Japan and simultaneously cannot be “real” Japan.

III. Consuming Japan: Japonisme Objects in Circulation

For most of the contemporaneous Japonisme enthusiasts, the first reaction that Japonisme objects provoked was that of being overwhelmed by plentitude. Before any other observation can be made, Japonisme objects declare their existence en masse specifically *as* a mass. John La Farge published a collection of letters he had written to Henry Adams during his travels through Japan in 1886 and he devoted an entire chapter-

letter to a subject he called “Bric-a-brac.” This is how he describes the experience of sorting through the piles of merchandise for the “bric-a-brac” he seeks:

Coming from afar,—from Tokio, a hundred miles away, and from Ozaka, four times that distance,—bales of merchandise are unloaded at our door, or at our friends’ for us. Patient pack-horses stand in the inclosure of the yards; big parcels, and piles of boxes and bundles, encumber the verandas. Weary hours, beginning with excitement and ending with gentle disappointment, are spent in indecision of judgment and uncertainty of purchase. But there remains always at the bottom of the boxes a delusive hope, and some treasure may perhaps reward our patience.²⁶

La Farge is overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of Japanese objects. They are so numerous that they intrude on the privacy of his home, they “encumber the veranda,” they follow him to his friends’ houses, and they require hours of emotional and mental consideration to differentiate the “gentle disappointment” from the “occasional beauty.” H. Seymour Trower complained of the same difficulties in *Artistic Japan*, a periodical Siegfried Bing published simultaneously in France, England, and Germany between 1881-1891: “Naturally, the rude toggles of the poorer classes vastly outnumber the *chefs-d’œuvre* which graced the girdles of aristocratic dandies, but all have been lumped together in dealers’ shops, and I have often handled hundreds to discover a dozen worth

²⁶ John LaFarge, *An Artist’s Letters from Japan*, (New York: The Century, Co., 1890), 128.

preserving.”²⁷ Both men are exhausted by the responsibility of sifting through the vast quantity of “rude toggles of the lower classes” to find the “occasional beauty.”

Thus, there are implied to be two classes of consumers of Japonisme objects: those cultivators of taste who recognize the “occasional beauty,” and those who happily purchase the “rude toggles.” The demarcation between the two was cultivated by the former as a means of distinguishing themselves from the latter and the binary has been perpetuated since in scholarship.²⁸ Japonisme has been seen historically as the purview of the former class, of those with the requisite aesthetic sensibilities to differentiate themselves from the rest. However, both groups were purchasing their merchandise in the same space, sorting through the same hordes of objects, and making equally valid (though very different) judgments of taste in their selections of their purchases. As Jonathan Freedman states, “For like all true professionals, the aesthete claims the purity of his vocation—in this case the disinterestedness of his dedication to the ideal realm of art—places him beyond the claims of grubbier occupations, lesser trades.” Yet, even while he claims elevation above other consumers of the same merchandise, his professional identity relies on their adherence to his superiority of judgment. Without a class of loyal adherents, the aesthete would simply be another consumer in the same class

²⁷ Originally from Hamburg, Samuel Bing publicized his stock of Japanese merchandise through the periodical and through it effectively started the Japonisme phenomenon. See Siegfried Wichmann, *Japonisme: The Japanese Influence on Western Art since 1858*, (New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., 1999), 348.

²⁸ The understood division between the elite class of Aesthetes who make determinations of aesthetic value and the larger class of consumers of aesthetic merchandise/culture has been partially dismantled by Jonathan Freedman in *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture*. His argument is that the elite class was in fact professionally employed as determiners of taste and therefore absolutely engaged in the larger discourse that encompassed both the elites and the mass consumers. See Jonathan Freedman, *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), xix.

as the ones he is rhetorically insistent on differentiating himself from. In fact, the difference between the two classes of consumers seems illusory when seen in that respect. I want to join these two halves back together and to consider them as two points on a spectrum of the multi-faceted cultural discourse of Japonisme. Both halves of this false binary are part of a larger cultural discourse and subject to its dynamics.

Japonisme is a discourse that is strongly bound to mercantile forces and to the hierarchizing of consumers. By confining scholarly attention to the elitist portion of the spectrum, Japonisme has been seen as a decadent, apolitical part of a larger trend towards consumer culture. However, reintegrating the rest of the cultural discourse allows an opportunity for seeing Japonisme as it truly was. Instead of decrying the cultural trend towards decadence and away from moralism, Japonisme allows for the discussion of consumer culture as it relates to moral questions of race and gender. In another context, Regenia Gagnier notes a line of scholarly thought that has placed the blame for “a decline in working-class consciousness” on a “feminine desire to consume and imitate the decadent leisure class, a betrayal that led to universal commodification and massification.”²⁹ Gagnier believes—as do I—that the “feminist, gay, and multicultural responses to masculine leftism were in defense of desire...this defense of desire was as justified as the earlier marxist defense of the value of labor.” Gagnier goes on to dispute that an absolutist gendered claim for the shift from production to consumption can be

²⁹ Gagnier is speaking of “masculine leftism” as tied to Marxist practices of the Nineteenth Century, though her point could be broadly applied to the critical and theoretical fracturing of the past thirty years in an academic context. There has indeed been a fracturing of critical practice into the interests in Queer, minority, and feminist theoretical models. See Regenia Gagnier, “Productive bodies, pleased bodies: on Victorian Aesthetics,” *Women and British Aestheticism*. Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades, eds. (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 271.



Figure 1.1 Large tureen and cover with landscape decoration, Edo period (1615–1868), late 17th century, Japan. Porcelain with underglaze blue (Arita ware); Diam. 10 in. (25.4 cm), Dr. and Mrs. Roger G. Gerry Collection, Bequest of Dr. and Mrs. Roger G. Gerry, 2000. Metropolitan Museum of the Arts, New York, NY.

made at all. She differentiates between the homogenizing impulse to lump Victorian aesthetes in to a single category: “some were concerned with productive bodies, whose labor could be creative or alienated, while others were concerned with pleased bodies, whose tastes established their identities.”³⁰ Japonisme consumers used Japonisme to establish an identity as fashionable or artistic, but also as globally connected (though geographically conscribed) even in their domestic spaces. The Japonisme style crossed class boundaries as much as it crossed the boundary between respective schools of Aesthetic theory.

These consumers of Japonisme objects can only dictate so far the significance of the objects themselves. These are objects that traveled extensively before they found their way into the dealer’s shop where an expert of aesthetic taste or a layman can compete to determine its value. Many Japonisme objects provide a pictorial version of Japan, peopled with an ink-blot populace or miniature porcelain figures. These objects exist as depictions of the far-distant nation in the domestic spaces they occupied in Western nations and are then replicated in the Impressionist paintings of those domestic spaces, moved back into a public arena. Yet, despite this most public of public spheres implicit in the Japonisme objects, the objects tend to be domestic objects with functional use value. A large portion of Japonisme objects are made of porcelain and intended for the use in food preparation or similarly domestic occupations. A perfect example is a large tureen found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Figure 1). The object’s shape was not widespread in Japan, but, rather, definitely indicates that the object was intended for a

³⁰ Regenia Gagnier, “Productive bodies, pleased bodies: on Victorian Aesthetics,” *Women and British Aestheticism*. Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades, eds. (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 274.

Western market. The distinctive blue and white coloring also aligns the object with a popular Chinese-inspired trend in European markets, a style that was popular in Europe in the first half of the Seventeenth Century. The tureen is decorated with an ambiguously Asian scene marked more by natural topography than for the single domicile pictured on one side (which the view in Figure 1 allows a view of). Yet, for all of the shadowy exoticism of the depiction, the object is still a simple tureen, clearly intended for domestic use.

Given the domestic nature of Japonisme objects, the purchasers can be understood to be female (or feminine in their allegiance).³¹ Yet, painters who depicted Japanese objects as establishing points of reference in their own Western paintings were mostly male.³² There is a layering of gender implicit in these Impressionist paintings that uses Japonisme products as a reference for an identity group. The viewer—and the painter—is assumed to be male; the spaces inside the painting are aligned with the female. Yet the female spaces contain an enclosed version of the distant reaches of a public, masculine space; the traces of transnational, rugged travel and commerce conducted to bring that

³¹ Though male Japonisme enthusiasts existed and, in fact, have dominated historical accounts of Japonisme, I argue that their “allegiance,” so to speak, is in their larger dedication to decorative arts beginning in the 1870s. As Talia Schaffer notes in *Forgotten Female Aesthetes*, “By the mid-nineteenth century, the home became synonymous with the woman who inhabited, a projection of her essential self.” Yet, it is precisely this arena that male aesthetes began to pursue as a “legitimate subject for the application of artistic knowledge” (78). Schaffer points to an example of the differences between the kinds of aesthetic determinants for male and female consumers of domestic objects in the purchase of furniture. She notes that male aesthetes would “scour antique shops and open markets for ‘finds’” while the female purchaser would seek “sturdy objects [that] would last for generations” (74). Therefore, the dominance of domestic objects with use value locates Japonisme closer to the female consumers with practical requirements for their decorative art. Talia Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 74. .

³² Mary Cassatt (1844-1926) is a notable exception to the gendering of the painters of Japonisme. She is among a minority of female Japonisme painters.



Figure 1.2 *Young Women Looking at Japanese Articles*, 1869, Oil on canvas. 27 3/4 x 19 3/4 in. (70.5 x 50.2 cm) Gift of Henry M. Goodyear, M.D., 1984.217, Cincinnati Art Museum.

object on the peregrination that places it in that specific space. The male space, the exhibition or the painter's own studio, also contains implied within it an alliance with the feminine space it depicts; with, as Gagnier puts it, "the defense of desire" depicted by reveling in the consumerist achievements of that feminine domestic space. Where, then, do the Japanese figures depicted in the paintings—refracted through the Japonisme object in the painting—fall in this already confused layering?

A convenient opening to ask these questions occurs in a series of paintings by James Tissot depicting his understanding of the market for Japanese objects. *Young Women Looking at Japanese Articles* (1869) is one of three paintings by James Tissot depicting a pair of female consumers or spectators watching Japanese merchandise (Figure 2). These solitary women are the only audience present for the room of "Japanese articles." Their clothing differentiates the two women, clearly marking one as a married woman and the other as a younger, unmarried relative or friend. The younger woman is connected to the older woman through the familial resemblance in their hair color and facial features, but also physically connected by her hand on the older woman's back as the older woman leans towards the doll-sized Japanese boat. The older woman's skirt also brushes up against the white dress of her companion, showing an intimate closeness between the two. They occupy the minority of the Japanese space around them, huddled together as they are, though they occupy the larger significance in the painting of the space that prioritizes them in its title. In one sense, this painting could be titled "Young Women *versus* Japanese Articles." Their closeness and the inherent contrast between their bodies and the objects around them project a sort of defiance.

Their gazes are both fixed on a spot on the miniature boat. The older woman's gaze gives the impression that she considers purchasing one of the "Japanese articles" the title of the painting boasts of (perhaps even the decorative doll's boat itself). Neither woman is looking directly at the tiny Japanese figure standing on the lower deck facing the viewer, though the older woman's lowered face could move its tiny hair with her breath at such a close distance. Behind them, two separate Japanese faces look out from different objects, from the doll seated on a tiny settee and from the golden panel behind it. Those other Japanese faces are also directed away from the two Western women, just as the two women have a clear line of sight that evades any of the Japanese figures. There are two worlds depicted here: the imaginative space inhabited by the Japanese figures and the market of the two women. They co-exist, but somehow only barely overlap.

The women get even closer to the Japanese art objects in *Young Ladies Admiring Japanese Objects* (1869), another of the paintings in Tissot's series (Figure 3). This time the Japanese figure is more clearly articulated if still miniscule and obscured compared to the two women. His gaze is hidden, but this time both women have their attention fixed on him. The figure on the prow of the boat in the previous painting was so tiny and so assimilated into the boat that it is hard to notice it on first viewing. This new Japanese figure is placed on a threshold between the two women and his own imaginative, Japanese space. The architecture of his dollhouse is definitively Japanese, from the ornate designs on the walls that let in partial light to the lanterns hung over his head. His position in the doorway makes him the guard against Western entry into his home, though we (the viewer) can see behind him through the ornate walls into the recesses of his home. The older of the two women seems to be raised on her feet, trying to see



Figure 1.3 *Young Women Admiring Japanese Articles*, 1869, Oil on canvas. 27 3/4 x 19 3/4 in. (70.5 x 50.2 cm). Getty Museum.

beyond the confines he has allowed her. It is a decidedly animated relationship between the two humans and a doll. The Japanese doll has been invigorated by the overlapping cultural discourse of Japonisme, given vivacity through Japan's unique position in Western imagination and consumption.

These paintings are clearly part of the vogue for painting well-dressed women in the latest fashions participating in the latest trends, a movement that Tissot had built his career on.³³ The central focus of the paintings, despite their titles, is not the exotic Japanese articles surrounding the two women but is, instead, the older women's fashionable dresses. While the tiny Japanese figure on the boat in *Young Women Looking at Japanese Objects* (Figure 2) lacks the detail of even a face, the folds of the older woman's dress are vivid, dark lines that immediately attract the viewer's attention and the velvet train is so delicately depicted that a viewer might be excused for trying to reach out and touch it. Indeed, Tissot was just the artist for the task of bringing to life the fashionable velvet folds of the dress since he was the son of a linen-draper and a successful milliner with a keen sense of the properties of various fabrics.³⁴ In *Young Women Admiring Japanese Articles* (Figure 3), the two women dominate the Japanese articles around them as the Western female consumer dominated the market for Japanese articles. Their downward-facing gaze shrinks even the warlike boat until the younger woman is secure enough in her relative power that she is bored by its masculine aggression.

³³ See Tamar Garb, "Painting the 'Parisienne': James Tissot and the Making of the Modern Woman," *Seductive Surfaces: The Art of Tissot*, (New York: Yale University Press, 1999).

³⁴ See Edward Maeder, "Decent Exposure: Status, Excess, the World of Haute Couture, and Tissot," *Seductive Surfaces: The Art of Tissot*, (New York: Yale University Press, 1999).

Despite the apparent apathy towards the tiny Japanese figures displayed by the women in these two paintings (especially by the bored expressions of the younger women), art objects like the ones depicted here created a context for the eventual real encounters with Japan (as facilitated by the post-1854 commercial relationships). In one of the most pivotal works of Japonisme literature, *Madame Butterfly* by John Luther Long, the titular character sings a lullaby to her baby in which she asserts her child's relative reality to that depicted in art objects: "Rog-a-by, bebbly, off in Japan,/ You jus' a picture off of a fan."³⁵ The baby *is* the figure from the art object, making Cho-cho-san the geisha/mother figure already familiar to a Western consumer before she had a name. They, like the tiny samurai figure on Tissot's doll-boat (Figure 2), exist already as the flattened art objects in circulation in Western markets, dictated by female consumers and depicted yet again by Western painters. Yet, if Cho-cho-san's baby is the baby off of the fan, that means the baby on the fan has been enlivened by his connection to the "real," articulated figure of the baby in Long's story. The directionality of the layering of the experiences of depiction and observer is thus negotiable to a certain extent: the porcelain figures gain vibrancy from their connection to the real Japan. This version of Wilde's "Japanese effect" has wider implications than he imagined: these mimetic forms create their *own* Japanese effect, regardless how the Western observer perceives them, and thus become embodied ambassadors of Japan.

It is now clear how complicated the existence of these Japonisme objects is, both as they exist in themselves and how they are negotiated as consumerist products. It was the Japanese objects themselves that created the context for "real" contact with Japan, not

³⁵ John Luther Long, *Madame Butterfly and A Japanese Nightingale: Two Orientalist Texts* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 71.

vice versa. These objects are circulated outside the scope of their literal circulation: that Japanese dollhouse in Tissot's painting was already circulated in its travel from its Japanese origin to Tissot's imagined Western consumerist space. It circulates on both the literal and metaphorical level. It is a mimetic form, but it also is a representation of a mimetic form. Cho-cho-san has added another pathway through which the circulating object can travel: not to a mimetic representation, but to a literary one. She speaks her circulation of the Japonisme object and her speech is textual. She has moved the discussion from the artistic to the literary, yet it is still Japonisme objects that dominate the conversation.

As John Plotz argued in *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move* (2008): "The novel...is the logical breeding ground for reflections on cultural portability in large part because of its own form—the self-sufficient but mimetic narrative, bound in covers but free to roam—makes it an ideal inhabitant of this world of portable cultural property."³⁶ The Japonisme objects positioned in this already fertile ground for conceptual mobility, bringing with them their own inherent migration, allow for another level to the conception of Japonisme. The objects bring with them the conceptual baggage from their previous circulations. The dynamics of the larger discourse persist despite the shift in medium.

Elizabeth Gaskell utilizes Japonisme objects in three of her novels, in *Mary Barton* (1848), *North and South* (1854-5), and *Wives and Daughters* (1865). In all three occasions, Japonisme objects allow her to problematize the boundary between the intimate domestic spaces of her female characters and a larger, global context in which

³⁶ John Plotz, *Portable Property*, 72.

their lives occur. The Barton home is described by a summary of the contents as illuminated by Mrs. Barton's candle as she enters including a "bright green japanned tea-tray, having a couple of scarlet lovers embracing in the middle" and "a crimson tea-caddy, also of japan ware."³⁷ In *North and South*, Mrs. Hale sends Margaret to her "little japan cabinet" to find a packet of letters from the absent brother.³⁸ In *Wives and Daughters*, Molly retreats from a conflict with Miss Browning to her bedroom and her "japanned *toilette*-table, full of little boxes, with a small looking-glass affixed to it, that distorted every face that was so unwise as to look in it."³⁹ In all three instances, the Japanese articles are associated with a safe space to which women can retreat. Yet, the retreat is deceptive since Gaskell has, in all three instances, enclosed the unsafe exterior world within this object of domestic security. Mrs. Barton's tea-tray is decorated by the sort of love story her daughter's destructive narrative will follow, Mrs. Hale's "japan cabinet" brings with it the odorous reminder of Fred's exile, and Molly's *toilette*-table's mirror refuses to reflect back the reality that surrounded it as if it could not correctly reproduce the domestic safety of Molly's room. The Japanese merchandise is at once intimately domestic and dangerously foreign. The significance of the usage of the Japonisme merchandise remains constant even though *Mary Barton* and *North and South* were written and published before Perry's expedition in 1854. Molly's Japonisme table reflects the new reality of abundant Japonisme merchandise since the re-established trade relations with Japan: like John La Farge and Siefried Bing, Molly's Japonisme is tinged with the quality of overflow.

³⁷ Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, (New York: Penguin Classics, 1996), 15.

³⁸ Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, (New York: Norton Critical Edition, 2005), 98.

³⁹ Elizabeth Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters*, (New York: Penguin Classics, 1997), 172.

Gaskell is using Japonisme objects to draw attention to the blurred boundary between domesticity and the larger global context. Wilkie Collins includes a crucial “japanned tin case” in *The Moonstone* (1868),⁴⁰ once used on “on board ship, for keeping their maps and charts, and such-like, from the wet” and then re-purposed by Rosanna to “put my cuffs and collars in, and keep them from being crumpled in my box,” making the once hyper-masculine token into a receptacle for her own domestic tokens.⁴¹ George Meredith, who I will discuss at more length later in this chapter, made the tension between domestic security and public danger implicit in Japonisme objects most clear in *Diana of the Crossways* (1885) where the “ivory figures Chinese and Japanese” are part of a larger recreation of Diana’s former home by her new lover.⁴² The replica space has been drained of familiarity by the very familiarity of it; her Asiatic figurines now have an underlying connotation of public spectacle. Upon seeing the recreation of her formerly private space, Diana recoils: “Crossways had been turned into a trap.” What had once been intimate and secret has been unveiled as containing public spectacle within it. Japonisme objects reinforced this quality of existing as both public and private objects. Even Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) uses the device when Lucy, once the paragon of domesticity, has been turned into a vampire and her “lovely, blood-stained mouth grew to an open square, as in the passion masks of the Greeks and Japanese.”⁴³

These examples are all predictable placements for Japonisme objects as all of these novels deal directly with the precarious relationship of public and private; domestic

⁴⁰ Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*, (Ontario, CA: Broadview, 1999), 127.

⁴¹ Rosanna’s japanned tin box, of course, brings more danger than domesticity with it. It becomes one of the key pieces of evidence in solving the mystery of the titular Moonstone’s disappearance.

⁴² George Meredith, *Diana of the Crossways*, (New York: Norton, 2014), 333.

⁴³ Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, (New York: Signet Classic, 1992), 338.

and public; male and female. The use of Japonisme objects in literature was far wider than the unity of these examples suggests. Sabine Baring-Gould, most famous for having written the words to “Onward, Christian Soldiers,” is so far removed from the Aesthetic popularity of Japonisme that it makes the appearance of Japanese art objects in his 1891 adventure romance, *In the Roar of the Sea*, all the more noteworthy.⁴⁴ The novel is ostensibly the story of how Judith, the virtuous daughter of a recently deceased parson in a poor Cornish coastal town, rejects the romantic overtures of Captain “Cruel” Coppinger, a sometimes-pirate captain and sometimes-smuggler, in favor of the more virtuous alternative of the son of her guardian. In actuality, the virtuous alternative, Oliver, does not appear in the novel until very late and is never actually victorious in his matrimonial pursuit while the dismissal of the pirate captain is hardly the easy plot development my synopsis suggests. Compared to the lifelessness of Oliver’s storyline, Coppinger and Judith have a visceral, deadly attraction and her continued rejection of his proposals is based on her fear of that attraction.

The two men have as much in common as they have differences. Both suitors are transient figures, both arrive mysteriously and unannounced on ships, both have ties to foreign lands, and both have an affection for the heroine that the narrative approves of and that morally uplifts him. It is Coppinger, however, who has a room filled with foreign trinkets that he offers to Judith, an offer of material objects that stands in as the first romantic overture: “Then, swinging open the door, she looked inside. The door opened into an apartment crowded with a collection of sundry articles of value: bales of silk from Italy, Genoa laces, Spanish silver-inlaid weapons, Chinese porcelain, bronzes from Japan,

⁴⁴ Sabine Baring-Gould, *In the Roar of the Sea*, (London: Methuen and Co., 1895). Subsequent references will be by page number in the body of the discussion.

gold and silver ornaments, bracelets, brooches, watches, inlaid mother-of-pearl cabinets—an amazing congeries of valuables heaped together” (85). The objects seem to move outwards from the familiar to the unfamiliar, starting with long-established European objects of trade and only then moving into the colonies and recently “opened” lands of the Far East, but even that movement is illusory, coincidental more to Judith’s gaze than any organizational impulse. The impression is that Coppinger’s closet of treasure is a hodgepodge of international artifacts, almost as indeterminate of origin as the man himself. Just as Trower and La Farge are overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of Japonisme artifacts, so too is Judith (and the reader) in this moment in the narrative. The objects are too numerous and too confusing to enumerate further and the author ends with the vague “amazing congeries of valuables” tangled together, completely indistinguishable. Yet the text demands she perform the aesthetic (or even “Aesthetic” as it demands distinction of taste about merchandise to elevate her) discernment of “choosing” the best of the articles to claim as her own. These are the emblems of Coppinger’s criminal past and his most public of masculine existence. Judith is asked by the text and by Coppinger himself to make a judgment of taste and to claim some piece of it as her own.

Coppinger’s offer to Judith is direct: “Choose—take what you will...What do you most admire, most covet? Put out both hands and take—take all you would have, fill your lap, carry off all you can.” This is an opportunity to make exactly the sort of Aesthetic distinction the connoisseurs of Japonisme propounded, an opportunity for Judith to wade through an ocean of foreign artifacts to distinguish the “occasional beauty” from the “gentle disappointments,” as La Farge expressed it. Judith could fulfill her role as

Aesthetic arbiter of taste here by making a choice from among the ocean of valuables. Yet, Judith chooses not to make this discerning judgment and rejects the divorce of art from questions of morality. Rather than evaluate one object aesthetically over another, Judith chooses to reject the entire collection and to choose hypothetical objects that would come only with sentimental value, not economic value.⁴⁵ Though her choice is framed in terms of morality—she is unsure whether the objects were legally obtained—her refusal also doubles as a rejection of the connoisseur (and masculine) system of judgment. As Regenia Gagnier articulated the cultural movement away from Aestheticism in the 1890s, Judith embodies the conflict of the “art world’s divorce from middle-class life.”⁴⁶ She would, in effect, prefer sentimental objects whose history is sentimental to the art objects Coppinger offers her. The affective significance of the art object is inseparable from the aesthetic value in her paradigm. Coppinger is annoyed by her refusal to choose and uses the moment in which she returns the key to the treasure closet to steal a kiss against her will. When she responds with fear, he claims his intrusion was prompted by a position of servitude: “What! Have I offended you again? Why not? A subject kisses the hand of his queen; and I am a subject, and you—you my queen” (87). This invasion is an invasion of a male’s aesthetic criteria onto female systems of judgment: Coppinger re-writes the scene using a coded linguistic subservience to assert his dominance.

This debate over value systems and gender dynamics is repeated throughout the novel in Judith and Coppinger’s interactions. In almost every pivotal scene between them,

⁴⁵ Judith’s answer is to choose articles from her own poor family’s stock because of the heightened sentimental significance.

⁴⁶ Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986), 11.

there is a beautiful art object positioned between them. Each time, Judith resists the impulse to apply the hierarchy of discerning taste to the objects in question. She eludes every attempt to force her feminine judgment into these unfamiliar systems of aesthetic value. When the novel asks her to express the sort of connoisseur judgment both Trower and La Farge expressed, a judgment that implicitly condemns alternative (and feminine) systems of attributing value, Judith consistently rejects the premise. Talia Schaffer has articulated the two categories of objects in a very different context from Baring-Gould's novel. She posits that the category of connoisseur choices is opposed naturally by practical consumer choices made by women in middle class homes: "Male aesthetes used their connoisseur-ship to oppose middle-class consumerist ethos. Unfortunately, ... the movement is fundamentally structured by its commodification of artistic items and its anti-commodity ideology."⁴⁷ Schaffer posits that the natural alternative to the (male) Aesthetic paradox of commodification was in the homemade items in circulation among female consumers: "Gifts whose value was sentimental rather than financial, women's homemade items could operate as alternatives to commodity culture."⁴⁸ Schaffer's paradigm is embodied by Judith and Coppinger's relative appraisal of objects. Coppinger interrupts Judith's understanding of value, but does not recognize that her value system provides him with a way of resolving the paradoxes of his moral quandaries. The novel therefore enacts Schaffer's argument for female aesthetic valuation of sentiment over male aesthete's value system.

Just as the art objects provide the site of feminine resistance in *In the Roar of the Sea* (1891), George Meredith endows a Japonisme art object with similar significance in

⁴⁷ Talia Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes*, 81.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 78.

The Egoist (1897). In that novel, the plot revolves around the central question of whether Clara will follow through on her promise to marry Sir Willoughby Patterne. Meredith ties her final decision to break off the engagement to the physical destruction of a large Japonisme porcelain vase. As I will discuss in far more detail in the next chapter, the significance of the connection between porcelain and women in Japonisme is too great to be overstated. In this case, Clara is aligned early on with the smiling figures painted in porcelain and then that connection is reinforced by the moment in which the vase dramatically shatters in her crisis of conscience. Yet, the Japonisme porcelain is not simply tied to Clara, but is woven throughout the novel.

Robert D. Mayo first drew attention to the importance of the “willow pattern” (so popular in Asian-inspired porcelain) to Willoughby Patterne in his essay “*The Egoist* and the Willow Pattern” in 1942 and his work was expanded by Patricia O’Hara in her article “‘The Willow Pattern That We Know’: The Victorian Literature of Blue Willow” in 1993.⁴⁹ Mayo unearthed the “romantic legend” associated with the willow pattern, the “most popular single design ever to be employed on English earthenware” (71). O’Hara added to this revelation by presenting a context for the role of the willow pattern design as it appears in *The Egoist* and as it has continued to function through the Twentieth Century.⁵⁰ While Mayo does candidly discuss the fact that the legend *and* the porcelain in question are produced domestically in imitation of Asian originals, that is the end of his discussion of the Asian influence on this novel. He does not draw a connection between

⁴⁹ Robert D. Mayo, “*The Egoist* and the Willow Pattern,” *English Literary History*, (9: 1942) pp. 71-78. Patricia O’Hara, “‘The Willow Pattern That We Know’: The Victorian Literature of Blue Willow,” *Victorian Studies* (36.4: 1993), 421-442. Subsequent references will be by page number in the body of the discussion.

⁵⁰ George Meredith, *The Egoist*, (New York: Norton, 1979). Subsequent references will be by page number in the body of the discussion.

the fact that Patterne and Whitford travel through Asia, with stops in both China and Japan, and the presence of the Asiatic porcelain that plays so vital a role in the plot of the novel as indications of the participation of the novel in the larger Japonisme discourse of the era.

O'Hara takes up the thread that Mayo left unexamined and presents a compelling argument for the racist connotations of Meredith's construction of the spectrum between barbarism and civilization. She argues that "throughout the novel, the oriental is associated with the primitive, and the novel's argument—that in their treatment of women, the 'most highly civilized' of men revert to an 'original savage...'—is reinforced by the parallels between British characters in the novel and the Chinese figures in the legend [of the blue willow pattern]" (421). O'Hara's article depends on the assumption that the willow pattern will be read as a reference to China and Mayo's article depends on the assumption that the willow pattern will be read as a reference to a sentimental plot that happens to have once been set in China. Neither article considers the possibility that the willow pattern's function in the plot can (and should) be separated from the function of the racist references to a broad "oriental posture" (4).⁵¹ Nor does either draw a connection between to the fact that Clara's comparison to a "dainty rogue in porcelain" is actually a common comparison made regarding Japanese women in the popular

⁵¹ This quote, which holds a great deal of significance for O'Hara's reading of the racist connotations of Asia in this novel, is contained within a prelude that Meredith titled, "A Chapter of Which the Last Page Only is of Any Importance." While not denying the racism of this moment, I would argue that Meredith's de-valuation of this portion of the narrative belies the emphasis O'Hara would put on it.

Japonisme literature of the time.⁵² Both articles contain an awareness that this originally Chinese porcelain pattern was being produced in multiple locations at the time of the novel's publication, but neither discusses the fact that porcelain had become closely tied to Japan in the late-Nineteenth Century and what this means for the way that China and porcelain each function in *The Egoist*. While Mayo does notice in passing that the “rogue in porcelain” phrase recurs “like a musical theme,” neither Mayo nor O'Hara examine the broader implications of the phrase's resonances with Japonisme.

In Clara's case, the encomium is itself a moment of contention. It is an invention of Mrs. Mountstart Jenkinson, a woman who prides herself on the wit of her epigrams. The dissection of the phrasing is anathema to her, however much Willoughby might press her to explain either the “rogue” or the “porcelain” in more detail. Just as Oscar Wilde was famous for pithy phrases that he refused to parse, the comparison to a “rogue in porcelain” is one that denies further clarification. Once the phrase has been spoken, the two characters perform a rapid-paced catechism, the majority of which is transcribed without the identifying tag of who is speaking. Willoughby's questions are consistently evaded. When he asks, “Why rogue?”, he is answered not by an explanation but by a clarification: “I said—in porcelain.” When he declares he “shall never comprehend it,” she returns that she “cannot help [him] one bit further.” The phrase continues to rankle Willoughby through the course of the novel, remaining permanently unresolved for him. The narrator would have us believe that Willoughby is so bothered by this phrasing because it “stopped short where he declined to begin.” Egoism, the titular humbug of this

⁵² The role of porcelain women is of particular significance in Japonisme literary discourse, as I will discuss at great length when commenting on the “Madame Butterfly” character type in Chapter Three.

novel, is declared at fault because Willoughby is fooled by his superficial reading of Clara's character as a mirror image of his own. Yet, the explanation still falls short of explaining the comparison and it is hardly Willoughby alone who is fascinated by the phrase. The narrative itself returns again and again to the phrasing, allowing it to resurface as a symptom of Clara's instability within the traditional marriage plot. The contention between Willoughby and Mrs. Mountestuart is repeatedly re-enacted by the narrative and always left unresolved.

Porcelain was a contentious referent within the Aesthetic movement. While popular culture associated Aestheticism with porcelain (and with the blue and white willow pattern specifically), Aesthetes themselves were quick to disavow an interest in the majority of porcelain.⁵³ It tended to be associated with the masses of "gentle disappointments" that Trower and La Farge both demonstrated their aesthetic judgment by rejecting. Porcelain was part of the feminine domestic arts that the male connoisseur defined his aesthetic abilities partially by rejecting and partially by usurping. Porcelain seems to be a type of object that is neither practical enough to be aligned with the female consumers who shopped for use value first, nor aesthetic enough to be valued primarily for its artistic integrity.⁵⁴ It is unsurprising, therefore, considering the extensive use the

⁵³ The references to blue and white porcelain in conjunction with Aestheticism tend to occur in humorous or satirical depictions of them, such as in Bunthorne's claim to be "such a judge of Blue-and-white and other kinds of pottery" in *Patience* (1881). Oscar Wilde's reputed complaint regarding "how often I feel how hard it is to live up to my blue china" (quoted in O'Hara, 430) is similarly a moment of self-mockery for humorous effect.

⁵⁴ With the notable exception, of course, of Whistler's Peacock Room as the aesthetic stamp of approval for porcelain, porcelain so far retained its problematic status that its role in Japonisme has traditionally been overlooked until recent museum exhibitions included it in major Japonisme exhibits. See Gabriel P. Weisberg and Petra ten-

comparison of Clara to porcelain gets in *The Egoist*, that Meredith's alliance with porcelain has led to a reputation that has always been haunted by a debate regarding the consistency of his taste. Wilde quipped that Meredith "breaks his shins" over his own wit. Subsequent readers of Meredith have followed Wilde's pattern in questioning Meredith's prowess: "George Meredith is a canonical writer generally agreed to be bad at writing."⁵⁵ Sean O'Toole summarized contemporary reviews of *The Egoist* by pointing to the fact that "the four words most frequently used were 'affectation,' 'obscurity,' 'artificiality,' and, 'weakness.'"⁵⁶

Meredith's comparison of Clara to the "rogue in porcelain" is complicated by the fact that it is not Clara who wears the reference to the willow pattern porcelain in her name: instead, the male ostensible protagonist is the one named Willoughby Patterne. What Mayo called "the musical theme" of the willow pattern is therefore more than a pattern, it is a trenchant aspect of the novel. Jacqueline Banerjee only notes the "closely entwined threads of imagery" (meaning the various narrative recurrences of porcelain) as an effort to neatly tie together disparate strains of the narrative.⁵⁷ Willoughby's name is explained as simply a "clever echo" of Clara's porcelain encomium that, in turn, is echoed again by the shattering vase and the intact wedding present of a tea service in porcelain. Like Tissot's paintings were dismissed as pretty fashion plates, the porcelain

Doesschate Chu, *The Orient Expressed: Japan's Influence on Western Art, 1854-1918* (Mississippi: Mississippi Museum of Art Publication, 2011).

⁵⁵ Jami Bartlett, "Meredith & Ends," *ELH* (76.3: 2009), 547.

⁵⁶ Sean O'Toole, "Meredithian Slips: Embodied Dispositions and Narrative Form in *The Egoist*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* (39: 2011), 499.

⁵⁷ Jacqueline Banerjee, *George Meredith*, (Newcastle, UK: Northcote House Publishers, Ltd., 2012), 74.

motif has been dismissed as a pretty narrative device, lacking in substantive cultural import.

Clara's association with porcelain foregrounds a feminine sense of fragility and this insertion of Willoughby Patterne into her porcelain metaphor endangers her narrative's cohesion. Willoughby's connection to the "pattern" of porcelain is through Clara, a colonizing of her metaphor: it is the epigram that haunts both of them. While Clara is the one actually pursued by the epigram and is also the one tied physically to the shattering of the porcelain vase, Willoughby's obsession with the "owl's hoot of 'Willow Pattern' and the hag's shriek of 'jilted twice'" is a presumption upon Clara's internal conflict. He sees his own disquiet at the comparison as preempting Clara's. While the function of the comparison for Clara includes a dangerous instability due to the shattered vase, Willoughby is haunted by public perception and feels that his annoyance trumps Clara's vulnerability. In a sense, this male aggression into Clara's internal conflict re-enacts the appropriation of female decorative arts by male aesthetes as delineated by Talia Schaffer.⁵⁸ As with Judith in *In the Roar of the Sea*, the role of the foreign Japanese object coincides with a conflict over gendered value systems.

Willoughby's name has another far more direct reference to the willow pattern of porcelain that the narrative makes full use of when comparing Willoughby and his cousin, Vernon Whitford. Willoughby's surname is a play on "pattern," making him both the copy of every one of his ancestors and a blueprint for future generations. The comparison between the "patterned" masculinity and Vernon's alternative masculinity begins early

⁵⁸ Like the delicacy of the porcelain object in question, the circulation of the porcelain's Japonisme connotations is similarly delicate. The movement of the larger quandaries of Japonisme within the novel can shatter by over-emphasis. I indicate here similarity more than concrete allegiance.

on: “One was a Patterne; the other a Whitford. One had genius; the other pottered after him with the title of student. One was an English gentleman wherever he went; the other was a new kind of thing, nondescript, produced in England of late” (23). The qualities that accompany Willoughby’s surname here are a secure national identity and “genius.” Vernon, by comparison, has no secure geographical heritage and seems to only have coincidentally been formed in England. Like porcelain itself—which had slowly shed the determinacy of being absolutely Chinese—Vernon is a “new kind of thing” and could as easily have been produced in England as in the distant corners of the empire. Indeed, Vernon is “pottering” after Willoughby, stumbling into his porcelain metaphor clumsily.

The word “pattern” has its roots in the word “patron,” an etymological significance that is highlighted in the way Willoughby is characterized by his surname. He is surrounded by other Patternes, male and female, young and old. His two aunts seem dimmed by an over-abundance of copying; like photocopies, they lose their connection to the original even as they replicate it. Crossjay Patterne confounds Willoughby’s intention of providing the fount of the Patterne-pattern: he neither wishes to imitate Willoughby nor values him higher than Vernon’s alternative “pattern.” Willoughby’s sense of self-worth is dictated by the double-edged goal to both *set* a pattern and *conform* to a pre-existing pattern. It is both the most aristocratic of aspirations and the most common of activities, for any woman in a shop could buy a “pattern” for the newest fashionable garment just as much as the vanguard of haute couture set new fashionable patterns with each passing season, using the same word in both contexts.

The double valence of the word “pattern” is also relevant to the way Willoughby is haunted by Mrs. Jenkinson’s comparison of Clara to a “rogue in porcelain.” The rogue



Figure 1.4 Plate decorated with Willow Pattern, late 19th century, Japan. Porcelain with underglaze blue; Diam. 24 x 23.5 cm., Gift of Mrs V. Silberberg 1966 Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australia.

in question, on a literal level, is a composite of the recurring figures from a style of porcelain, not any one individual instance of the figure. The “rogue” is a broadly defined figure, more recognizable than definable. Any number of artists hailing from any number of nations could have been responsible for any one iteration of the “rogue in porcelain” she refers to. In Figure 4, the willow pattern is produced according to the type and yet, although it fulfills all the requirements of the type, it features no rogue. The willow pattern style, in fact, often contains no figures whatsoever. The sheer quantity of porcelain figures at the time, however, meant that even *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) was reproduced in porcelain, as in “Tom et Evangeline” and “La Fuite d’Elise,” two decorative figurines created between 1853 and 1854, exactly at the historical epoch in which Perry was re-introducing Japan directly to the Western public. Infinite replication emptying both the original and all subsequent iterations of significance is the ontological danger of patterning. Clara, by being compared to a figure from a popular style of porcelain, is in danger of being “common.” As Willoughby says in his catechism with Mrs Jenkinson, “Rogue and mistress of Patterne do not go together....To be frank, rogue does not match with *me*” (38). To be the head of the “pattern,” Clara must not be a replicable figure and especially since replicable figure, who must come with a matching partner, cannot be associated with Willoughby’s “pattern.”

James Whistler, like many Aesthetes, commented on the growing concern that replication should not be mistaken for art: “The imitator is a poor kind of creature...It is for artists to do something beyond this.”⁵⁹ Whistler qualifies his concern by admitting “this is now understood indifferently well—at least by dressmakers.” While his comment

⁵⁹ James Whistler, *Whistler on Art: Selected Letters and Writings of James McNeill Whistler*. Nigel Thorp, ed., (England: Carcanet Press Limited, 1994), 52.

has the tone of a facetious joke, the role of sewing and the production of clothing underwent several significant changes over the course of the nineteenth century.

“Starving needlewomen,” as Harriet Martineau called them, were one of two narratives of female labor that were so often repeated that she (and her readers) had been

“wearied...with the incessant repetition of the dreary story.”⁶⁰ Yet, *haute couture* fashion

was on the rise over the next few decades, leading to Whistler’s acknowledgement of

“dressmakers” as one of the only careers in which “true” artistry was at play was not only unproblematic, it was also unconventional. The terms of this exception to Whistler’s

foreboding about pattern-making can be extended to another feminine aesthetic arena, to

that of domestic porcelain. As with fashion, the claim that the entirety of the medium was

dictated by replication can be contradicted by observing the idiosyncrasies and

originalities of particular instances. While the “willow pattern” style of porcelain was a

highly recognizable decorative pattern, it also allows for a wide variety of specific

instances. In one example of a plate decorated with the willow pattern (Figure 4), the

pattern performs exactly according to the style of the “willow pattern” while

simultaneously missing several elements (such as any figures at all, least of all the lovers

of the story or even the “rogue in porcelain” figure). Thus, a pattern could clearly be

fulfilled even while the individual instance provided a unique expression of the pattern.

The “willow pattern” of the shattered vase escaped its porcelain form when Colonel de Craye’s vase shattered. Thematically, the shards of the shattered porcelain find their way into metaphors, themes, and motifs throughout the novel. However, the

⁶⁰ Harriet Martineau, “Female Industry,” Susan Hamilton, ed., *Criminals, Idiots, Women, & Minors: Victorian Writing by Women on Women*, 2nd ed., (New York: Broadview Press, Ltd., 2004), 9-49.

vase itself is never described: was it blue and white? Was it patterned, as the narrative refrain of the “willow pattern” and the “rogue in porcelain” seems so strongly to suggest, in a willow pattern after all? We cannot know. The vase was shattered before it could be seen. The blue and white colors skip off the porcelain and recur elsewhere. Willoughby wants a wife of “ornamental whiteness,” however much the narrator might warn against ignoring the parts of a woman enameled, as it were, onto her “white celadon undercoat” (93). Vernon’s sublime encounter with the rain before he finds Clara at the station makes the landscape into a “travelling sweep that rolls asunder overhead, heavens laughter of purest blue among titanic white shoulders,” thereby reflecting the blue-and-white style of the willow pattern and its emphasis on nature (216). Where Willoughby clings to the pattern-less ornamental white, Vernon has found himself in the scene depicted in the willow pattern, lost in the blues and whites. Clara is also dressed in blues more than once and often a color that is mentioned in contrast to her fair skin or, as Willoughby would have it, her “ornamental whiteness.”⁶¹ (Clara’s stockings, however, can never be blue. Willoughby specifically disdains having a bluestocking wife.) The entire novel ends with a meeting of nearly all the principal characters in The Blue Room; a nod, perhaps, to Whistler’s famous Peacock Room built specifically to house a collection of willow pattern porcelain.

Yet, for all that *The Egoist* plays on the theme of the unseen shattered porcelain vase and its missing blue-and-white willow pattern, the truth of the matter is that Japanese porcelain was not confined to those two colors and not at all confined to the

⁶¹ In Chapter 39, Clara and Willoughby cross-examine Crossjay on the subject of how she looks in her evening gown, a dress that is described as “a voluminous robe of pale blue silk...matching her...clear skin.” *The Egoist*, p. 245.

subject matter of patterned willows. The striking difference between Japonisme's products and the Chinoiserie parallels in the late-eighteenth century is the focus on individual expression through each Japanese porcelain objects and the absence of repetitive decorative patterns.⁶² The official report of the 1878 Paris Exhibition specially remarks on the "charming, fantastic creations" of individual Japanese artists who were on the scene and condemns imitations by saying that the "gulf [between them]...is so striking that a comparison is hardly possible."⁶³ Each individual item is an artisanal creation, utterly unique. The "ornamental whiteness" that Willoughby values so highly is not used uniformly, it is the negative space around the single object towards which the viewer's attention is arrested.

The Egoist allows Meredith to fully explore the complexity of the Japonisme object, allowing various significances to dance off the surface of his porcelain vase and for its implicit cosmopolitanism to refract through the intimate, domestic scope of the plot. Like the larger discourse of Japonisme itself, this novel never resolves these various threads, but, rather, allows them interact in the institial space Meredith has created. Yet, for all that Meredith has so thoroughly explored the possibilities of Japonisme discourse, he has elided that central issue to which Wilde originally drew our attention: where is Japan in all of this aesthetic discourse? While Wilde ended with the answer that Japan is an effect that is produced by the viewer, Meredith has emptied Japan entirely. Clara is no Japanese woman and thus is conspicuously positioned in the place of the Japanese woman who could (perhaps even *should*) have been portrayed as the "rogue in porcelain."

⁶² Nagatake, Takeshi, *Classic Japanese Porcelain: Imari and Kakiemon*, (New York: Kodansha, 2003).

⁶³ Sigfried Wichmann, *Japonisme: The Japanese Influence on Western Art Since 1858*, (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1999), 340.

Thus Meredith has clumsily missed the final stage in Wilde's development of the theme in "Decay of Lying," where Japan is re-populated by the viewers of Japonisme merchandise. In *The Egoist*, the egotism of the title can perhaps be located in the fact that Meredith populates Asian porcelain with people of his own ethnicity rather than acknowledging the native inhabitants of the space that created his merchandise.

IV. Conclusion: Looking for Japan

Late-Victorian Aesthetic sensibilities and precepts were an essential part of the larger discourse of Japonisme. Like Aestheticism, Japonisme requires an elite class of connoisseurs to define taste patterns for an equally important mass consumer market. Also like Aestheticism, Japonisme aligned itself with feminine sensibilities and patterns of taste, but disdained the active female participants, preferring to herald the small cadre of male connoisseurs in their place. Japonisme merchandise plays an essential role in understanding the nuances of the moment of transnational encounter between Japan and the West as it occurred in the mid-to-late Nineteenth Century. Yet, even as these "Japanese things" play such a vital role, the reliance on mimetic representation of Japan to the exclusion of experiential accounts sometimes caused problematic side effects in which Japan's historical and literal reality were ignored. In total, Japonisme both reveled in the exceptional qualities of Japan and downplayed the particularities of the nation and its artistic products.

I conclude this chapter with a final literary representation of the complicated nexus of the interlocking preoccupations of Japonisme. Unlike many of the other instances I have examined in this chapter, this final representation of Japan comes

geographically (though not racially) from within, from a man who was intimately and passionately familiar with Japan. In Edward H. House's 1888 novel, *Yone Santo*, he tells the tale of a clever, hard-working, and hyperbolically virtuous Japanese woman told through the narrative of an ex-patriot American doctor, Doctor Charwell, who provides a kind of avuncular mentoring in the thorny interactions between Yone and other Western visitors to Japan.⁶⁴ Yone volunteers for those aspects of Western culture that she finds appealing, but consistently and effectively draws a line in the cultural sand that she will not cross.⁶⁵ This line is textual evidence of the larger transnational encounter between Meiji Japan and the West (represented here by Scottish Charwell and an American Gibson Girl) and is at one point written on her body in a second skin: her clothing. At this point in the narrative, Charwell has introduced Yone to a "Miss Gibson," a forward-thinking young American woman who is the very model of her Gibson Girl surname, and he has taken both women on a very necessary vacation. Yone has been unlucky in love—first married to a working-class Japanese man by her greedy family (before the doctor took an active role in her life) then nearly seduced by a callous American merchant, and consequently abandoned by her missionary friends. Charwell has come to the rescue and whisked her away to Hakone to spend, as he puts it, "the first hours of peaceful and unbroken enjoyment she had ever known" (152).

Thus we find our party of three relaxing among the woods and mountains of Hakone, separated from the metropolitan center of Tokyo and the equally destructive

⁶⁴ Edward H. House, *Yone Santo*, (Chicago: Belford, Clarke, and Co., 1888). Subsequent references will be by page number in the body of the discussion.

⁶⁵ Yone's requirements for the elements of Western culture she embraces bear a resemblance to Judith's value system in determining which objects she would choose to keep from Coppinger's treasure trove in *In the Roar of the Sea*.

influences of seductive American men and oppressive missionaries. Miss Gibson begins her holiday by insisting that “Yone should lay aside the garments of her people, as being cumbersome and ill-suited to intricate sylvan explorations,” and replaces Yone’s clothing, a kimono, with a “loose robe of [Miss Gibson’s] own.” Miss Gibson regards the result as a decided improvement; the narrator, however, is not convinced. “Convenient it certainly was,” he says, referring to the costume change, “but harmoniously becoming it did not appear to me.” He remains unconvinced until Miss Gibson makes one further change to Yone’s appearance: she “abolished the elaborate capillary structure which surmounted her friend’s head.” Yet, having intended to “replace this by a foreign coiffure, she was restrained by the sight of Yone’s descending rush of dark hair, which fell quite to her knees and enveloped her like a mantle.” The result is an unqualified success; Miss Gibson declares, “Now, Yone...at last you *are* a pretty girl.”

Three stages occur in this interlude: first, Yone’s current, nationally determined clothing is deemed insufficient to her native environment; second, Miss Gibson replaces it with clothing of an indeterminate origin and nature, described only as a “loose robe;” and third, Miss Gibson’s projected transformation of Yone into a “pretty girl” is stalled by the revelation of Yone’s hair, making the homogenizing process take an unexpected turn. The result of the three stages is the declaration both by the enthusiastic Gibson Girl and the cantankerous narrator of an aesthetic success. The three stages refract Wilde’s three stages in “Decay of Lying” in which he posited that Japan cannot be understood through art, then that it must only be represented through art, and then yet again that it is an effect performed in and through the viewer no matter the nationality. Yone’s transformation also begins with the problematizing of her national identity as defined by

her aesthetic expression (her nationally defined clothing). It also continues to a stage in which Western experience supplants Eastern, just as Wilde's second stage proffered the hypothesis that the Japanese originals of mimetic representation are actually dressed-up Englishmen. Both end by re-affirming something characteristic to Japan, though Wilde's viewer is given access while Yone cedes the qualitative judgment to Miss Gibson and, through her, the West at large. These stages result in both cases with a transnational encounter that is as problematic as it is productive.

In the first stage, Yone's initial clothing is textually unidentified, but can easily be inferred to be a kimono. The kimono was understood—and has continued to function as—the “national garment” of Japan. As part of the effort to centralize a national identity, the Chinese-derived “kosode” was re-worked as a specifically Japanese style of clothing and given a new term: the “kimono.”⁶⁶ It took the contrast of Western clothing appearing in Japanese streets for a comprehensive word for Japanese clothing—and a standard model—to develop. The word “着物” literally means “the thing worn.” It is an expansive word, coined only when it became necessary to describe the garments to a Western audience. Yet, even though the word was still in its chrysalis stage, the garment in question was already being denounced as essentially un-Japanese. The emperor Meiji's

⁶⁶ Japan's political relationship with China is as anomalous in Asia as its relationship with Western empires would be in the Nineteenth Century. Chinese culture was an essential part of Japanese culture since as early as 1 A.D. Japanese language itself is a mixture of a pre-existing Japanese spoken language and a written Chinese-derived series of alphabets. From the first through the fifth centuries, China's influence on Japan was largely indirect, brought to Japan through Korea. Chinese religions, clothing, texts, cultural norms, and class structures were all well established in Japan before any of the Tokugawa shoguns began to plan for a unified Japan under one ruler, as one nation. In the late Tokugawa era, as the shoguns' power was beginning to wane, Chinese-derived cultural norms began to dissatisfy the general populace, leaving Japanese culture well-primed for the influx of new cultural influences from Western nations after the shoguns gave way to the modernist Emperor in 1868 (*Cambridge History of Japan*).

new political power depended on his continued allegiance with Western powers and sensibilities and he made this explicit in his choices in clothing. In an edict in 1871, he said that he “greatly regret[ted] that the uniform of our court has been established in the Chinese custom, [as] it has become exceedingly feminine in style and character.”⁶⁷ In addition, his edict legally abolished the role of the court arbiters of taste who had defined proper clothing and color combinations since the fifteenth century, effectively legislating against the connoisseurs and taste patterns of past eras. A mere four years after the Meiji Restoration put Meiji on the throne in 1868, he ordered the construction of the Rokumeikan, a building that is still a controversial symbol of Westernization in Japan. No Japanese person who attended an event at Rokumeikan was allowed to wear a kimono. Women, unused to the restrictions of corsetry and the added weight of a bustle, frequently fainted during the balls held there. As the aristocracy took more and more to Western clothing, the “kimono” became a less accurate emblem of Japanese culture. Miss Gibson’s edict that Yone’s clothing does not suit her is both a preemptory declaration from an outsider, but also simultaneously an uncomfortable truth about the state of nationally unified clothing customs in Japan at the time. The point is Wilde’s first point refracted through a prism: where he asserts that no access to the original Japan is available through mimetic forms, Miss Gibson insists that Yone (or Japan as represented through her) is not effectively represented by her own native clothing.

Miss Gibson does not simply dismiss Yone’s “garments of her people;” she replaces them with new clothing, a “loose robe.” Oddly, her alternative to Yone’s

⁶⁷ Nakagawa, Keiichiro, and Henry Rosovsky. “The Case of the Dying Kimono: The Influence of Changing Fashions on the Development of the Japanese Woolen Industry.” *Business History Review* (37.1-2: 1963), 59-78.

“oppressive” and “ill-suited” garment seems to reverse the practical reality of the Western response to the kimono. In the genre of paintings commonly referred to as “kimono still lifes,” Western women dressed in kimonos create silhouettes notable for comfort and languor. Their bodies mimic the poses from the popular Japanese woodblock prints in which kimono-clad Japanese women make S-curves, a posture impossible from the rigidity of corsetry common in Western dresses. In Guy de Maupassant’s *Bel Ami* (1855), Madame de Marelle appears briefly in a “Japanese dressing-gown” in the pivotal scene in which the novel’s protagonist, George Duroy, begins his affair with her.⁶⁸ He thinks her “bewitching in her pretty gown.” Madame de Marelle’s Japanese kimono fits the “shabby apartment,” she meets with Duroy in, marking the encounter as collegial, private, and the beginning of a long romantic friendship. Compared to Madame Forestier, who inspires Duroy with the impulse to silently kiss the hem of her nationally appropriate Parisian dress, Madame de Marelle in her Japanese gown creates an ancient (and erotic) friendship in five minutes of conversation. The Japonisme garments are marked for their intimacy and the ease of movement that allows for the dissolution of social convention.

The kimono’s greatest influence historically on Western couture was in loosening the constrictions of the fabric, especially around the torso, and diminishing the weight of the entire outfit. The idea that Yone’s kimono would be “cumbersome” and “ill-suited to sylvan explorations” while a Western garment could fill these deficiencies is absurd. Even Mary Kingsley, that intrepid Victorian explorer who argued for the “blessing of a good thick skirt” in her travels in West Africa, could not have argued that her skirts were

⁶⁸ Guy de Maupassant, *Bel Ami*, (New York: Oxford World’s Classics, 2008), 58.

less “cumbersome” than the airy silks of the kimono.⁶⁹ Indeed, Kingsley’s argument in favor of her “good thick skirts” was precisely because of the excessive “fullness” of her skirts as a barrier between her body and “nine ebony spikes some twelve inches long.”

In effect, Miss Gibson seems to be offering not her own national costume as an alternative, but the Westernized kimono-as-dressing gown. It is the same garment refracted through transnational exchange, replacing itself. As Roland Barthes described in the case of the inexact overlap between the description of a garment and the photographed garment, Yone’s “real” kimono is transformed through Miss Gibson’s “loose robe” kimono; they are, as Barthes says, “equivalent...but not identical.”⁷⁰ To borrow from Barthes, “the two garments refer to the same reality...and yet they do not have the same structure, because they are not made of the same substance and because consequently, these substances do not have the same relations with each other.” Barthes is referring to the “substance” of textual description and image; I have borrowed his system in a different vein. The “substance” of the Western-circulated kimono-robe has been changed by its journey through Western commodity culture, changing even the word used to refer to it; the “real” kimono is determined to be “ill-suited” even to a Japanese context, changing its inherent significance for the Japanese woman inside it. Her clothing has been declared insufficient, but the Western replacement is a reiteration of the same garment.

While this confusion over the two “equivalent” garments leaves Yone precariously perched between clothing—linguistically naked, both in and out of her

⁶⁹ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa* (New York: National Geographic Reprint Edition, 2002), 209.

⁷⁰ Roland Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*, Andy Stafford, trans., (New York: Berg, 2004), 3.

kimono—it demonstrates how a seemingly simple, straightforward conversation about clothing can be exposed as a far more complicated negotiation about race, class, and gender. This is the fate of Japonisme objects, just as it is with this literary representation of a Japanese woman. In a way, this exemplifies the final stage of Wilde's conceptual process in which the various complications of attempting to access knowledge of "real" Japan through mimetic representation are suddenly resolved by a magician's trick. Yet, where Wilde produced the happy resolution in which every viewer of Japonisme merchandise becomes the creator of his or her own Japan, Yone's case demonstrates how the Japanese body is left out of the equation. Wilde assumed that Japan was a "pure invention" and that the inhabitants could be nothing more than superficially different English people. Real encounters with Japan undermine that assumption and prove far more complicated. Far from being "pure invention," the people of Japan prove themselves to be fully formed and thoroughly different people who stake a claim on their interlocutors in the experienced moments of transnational exchange.

Chapter Two

Curious Inventions: Travel Narratives of Japan in the Nineteenth Century and the Japan of Pure of Invention

The geographical territory that could broadly be described as having “exotic” interest to Western travelers was traditionally depicted in travel narratives by a daring few to a populace that would not, due to financial considerations, be able to launch such an expedition for centuries.¹ For Japan, the original “opening” and its accessibility to common travel were shockingly close chronologically and thus prevented the traditional stage during which travel narratives provided the only access to a far distant space.²

¹ Robert T. Tally Jr. (among others) refers to a “spatial turn” in recent critical theory, indicating a turn towards conceptualizing texts in a geographical or, rather, a geocritical context. *The Geocritical Legacies of Edward W. Said: Spatiality, Critical Humanism, and Comparative Literature*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1-16. This is in part due to Edward Said’s theorizing of “Orientalism” not as an inherent quality of a geographic space (and its inhabitants), but as a reflected statement of selfhood. “Exotic” therefore refers not to spatial distance, but to a process through which the subject uses a perception of otherness to reinforce preexisting conceptions of culture and discourse. Thus, while “exotic” traditionally refers to African, East and South Asian, and Middle Eastern nations specifically because of the contrast—racially and culturally—between Anglo-European nations, it can also be conceived locally, as Pamela K. Gilbert demonstrated in *Imagined Londons* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002).

² Travel writing is a remarkably difficult genre to delineate. As Jonathon Raban notes, “Travel writing is a notoriously raffish open house where different genres are likely to end up in the same bed.” *For Love & Money: Writing—Reading—Travelling 1968-1987*, (London: Picador, 1988), 253. Yet, I would argue that earlier travel writing at least has the position of being cultural ambassador.

While Marco Polo's Thirteenth Century account of his experiences in China predated efficacious and cheap travel technology by centuries, Matthew Perry's account of his 1853-4 voyage was not even printed until the second voyage was already underway. Travel thus outstripped travel writing. Within a few years, Japan was signing trade and travel agreements with all the major trade nations of the world, making it much more accessible to both trade and leisure travel than Marco Polo's Thirteenth Century China.³ Thus travel narratives for Japan in the Victorian era function less as exceptional (and traditionally embellished) experiences in the exotic "other"-sphere and more as publicity material to promote travel to Japan.⁴ In function, Japanese travel narratives always must prioritize downplaying dangers and inconveniences and heighten accounts of fairytale wonder.

Japan is also conceptually separated in another pivotal sense from the rest of the geographical space surrounding it. As Susan Morgan explains, "What connected these multiple, particular, and scattered British activities in the places the British called the 'East' was...captured in the phrase invoked again and again to describe and defend British imperial enterprise: 'the China trade.'"⁵ The "China trade," was the production and

³ Matthew Perry's second expedition launched in 1854, less than half a year after his previous 1853 mission returned. Russia launched a similar exploratory mission in 1855 and then United States, Holland, Russia, Great Britain, and France, all signed trade treaties with Japan between July and October of 1858.

⁴ Though promotional intention must always be included in the rubric of travel writing. Whether to sell more copies of the travel narrative or to inspire future travelers, travel writing is at its core a mercantile genre.

⁵ Morgan specifies that her geographical scope includes: the Indian subcontinent, the Straits Settlements, the Malay Peninsula, the East Indies, and China. Susan Morgan, "The 'Spheres of Interest': Framing Late Nineteenth-Century China in Words and Pictures with Isabella Bird," *A Century of Travels in China: Critical Essays on Travel Writing from the 1840s to the 1940s*, ed. Douglas Kerr and Julia Kuehn, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), 105.

distribution of opium. Miles Taylor identifies the Asian maritime front during this era as “the largest deployment of British warships,” making a vast maritime network out of previously unconnected spaces.⁶ The enforced production of opium stifled farmers in some parts of the empire while the enforced consumption of opium in China resulted in decades of war and the beginning of the Victorian political enforcement of the “imperialism of free trade.”⁷ Japan is uniquely unconnected with the opium trade for an Asian nation. One of the reasons for this was the fact that Japan was primed for international trade by the decline in previous centuries under Tokugawa rule and, thus, did not inspire the incoming Western forces to falsely stimulate trade. Expenditures of the daimyo, the rulers of sub-divisions of Japan, were highly regulated by the shogun to prevent them investing in civil disobedience or from rising beyond the status of the daimyo.⁸ This meant that the daimyo had been consistently losing money by spending excessive capital on state-mandated occasions and ceremonial journeys to the capital to

⁶ Miles Taylor, *The Victorian Empire and Britain's Maritime World, 1837-1901: The Sea and Global History*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 5.

⁷ This is, of course, a topic well worth intensive investigation and discussion that must be left to other scholars as it is well beyond the purview of this study. The issue with relevance to this particular point is the connection between disparate parts of the “East” by the trade in opium. Jesse S. Palsetia, “The Parsis of India and the opium trade in China,” *Contemporary Drug Problems* 35.4 (2008).

⁸ The first Tokugawa shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu, capitalized on the military success of the daimyo Oda Nobunaga (as well as a weak plan for succession) to create a unified kingdom of Japan. Thus, the Tokugawa Shogunate was founded on the back of the efforts of an individual daimyo to rise beyond the limited purview of that station. Ieyasu's grandson, Iemitsu, eventually re-distributed the land among the daimyo to settle fractious daimyo in poor trade lands and instituted a revised version of a pre-Tokugawa policy for ceremonial attendance on the shogun (*sankin kotai*). The system was fully codified between 1635 and 1642. It required costly ceremonial processions back and forth to visit the shogun as well as opulent second homes in the capital city with certain family members essentially held hostage by the shogun in the capital to prevent rebellion. Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa to the Present*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

pay homage to the shogun. By the time Perry arrived in Japan, there was a thriving merchant class who produced the materials necessary for the daimyos' ceremonial journeys and their obeisance. The ruling classes were simultaneously weakened (both economically and militarily) by their increasingly impoverished status. It was, in effect, a perfectly primed market for new investors.

For all that Japan is unique in these ways, the travel narratives produced about Japan have many things in common with the preexisting genre as it applied to other so-called "exotic" nations. They these essential qualities with the preexisting conventions: they provide a critical space for an examination of empire as it occurs on a practical, cultural level, not as a theoretical discourse among politicians and scholars.⁹ These texts walk a fine line between engaging the reader in a fictive enterprise of the exotic's appeal and clearly delineating the boundary between the familiar and the exotic. The exotic space must be characterized as familiar enough to be appealing, but alien enough to be worth the time spent vicariously re-experiencing the author's travels. Japan, because of the turmoil in other Asian relations and the novelty of its appearance on the global stage, was primed to be the site for a prodigious quantity of travel literature. Basil Hall Chamberlain wryly remarked in his 1890 book aptly entitled *Things Japanese* that, "not to have written a book about Japan is fast becoming a title to distinction."¹⁰

⁹ When I refer to as "theoretical discourse," I am strictly speaking about conscious discourse about the transnational relationship between nations that exists outside the practical level of people cohabiting in a space. In other words, travel narratives engage with transnational encounter in practical level that theoretical discourse cannot. Often, travel narratives are ideologically tied to the concepts established in the "theoretical discourse," but as I will show with Isabella Bird later in this chapter, engaging in a practical sense can complicate pre-existing ideologies in way that is blocked to theoretical discourse.

¹⁰ Basil Hall Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, (London: John Murray, 1890), 64.

Japan was far from a stable space, however. While parts of Japan remained wholly untouched by the recent changes, the metropolitan centers of Japan became dizzyingly up-to-date with all the latest Western technological advances and fashions. As an example of this incongruity, Isabella Bird, on arrival in “unspoiled” Hokkaido, wrote with obvious glee that, “you can lead a half-savage life, and swim rivers, and climb mountains and ‘light a fire in the woods,’ without offending against ‘regulations;’ in a word, you can do all that you may not do on the main island.”¹¹ When she wrote this exultant description of her “half-savage life” available in one part of Japan on August 13th, 1878, the first Japanese-built railway had been making nine daily round-trips between Tokyo and Yokohama for almost six years. It was a dizzying paradox that fascinated the travel writers who all rushed to Japan and that fascination was as compelling as Japan itself. Frequently, the authors who wrote the many “books on Japan” that Chamberlain bemoaned are as fascinated by their own fascination as they are by the country itself. Perhaps the most direct attempt at an explanation for the Western fascination with Japan is offered by, unsurprisingly, the account of Commodore Matthew Perry’s 1853-4 Expedition. “Viewed in any of its aspects,” it begins, “the Empire of Japan has long presented to the thoughtful mind an object of uncommon interest. And this interest has been greatly increased by the mystery ... of this remarkable country. The curiosity of Christendom has been on alert.”¹² Curiosity is inextricably tied to the “mystery” of the nation and supplies the motivation for an eclectic group of Westerners

¹¹ Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, 2 vol. (Bristol, UK: Ganesha Publishing Ltd., 1997), 10. Subsequent references will be by page number in the body of the discussion.

¹² Matthew Calbraith Perry, *Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Seas and Japan, Performed in the Years 1852, 1853, and 1854 under the Command of Commodore M. C. Perry*, (New York: D. Appleton Company, 1856), 3.

to make their way to Japan. Perry predicts the multiplicity of motivations for this varied group, but also promises that “a common interest unites all in a common sympathy; and hence, the divine and the philosopher, the navigator and the naturalist, the man of business and the man of letters, have alike joined in a desire for the thorough exploration of a field at once so extensive and so inviting.” The universalizing “interest” is, according to Perry, curiosity.

Yet, for all that Perry asserts the longevity of the West’s curiosity about Japan, the collection of accurate information available about Japan can be surprisingly sparse. Curiosity itself is the constant, not an accumulation of substantial information, and the Sisyphean task of attempting to satiate that curiosity is inevitably met with failure, it seems. In May of 1852, *Bentley’s Miscellany* published a short sketch called “What We Know About Japan” that proves the shallowness of British knowledge about Japan the year before Perry left on his voyage to Japan. In it, a child is asked by his uncle, a former captain in the East India Company, what “we” know about Japan. The child responds: “I looked down at my boots. I had a vague idea of Japan blacking and Japan leather. . . . My mother looked at the tea-tray. . . . My father took up the newspaper. There was a pause,— and the question repeated.”¹³ Despite the chronological distance and the massive production of informative texts on Japan, Isabella Bird comments on the same lack of common knowledge at the beginning of *Unbeaten Tracks* in 1880: “The few who have never previously read a book on Japan, and *the many who have forgotten what they read*, or whose far eastern geography is rusty, or in whose memories the curious inventions of some early voyagers stick, or who still believe in *hara kiri* and the existence of the

¹³ “What We Know About Japan,” *Bentley’s Miscellany* (London: May 1852), 545.

shadowy Mikado in Kiyôto, and a solid Shôgun in Tôkiyô, are requested to read it” (italics mine) (vi). She assumes the material that had accumulated between *Bentley’s* sketch in 1853 and her own text in 1880 has been erased as quickly as it was produced or has strayed too far from authenticity (being, as she calls them “curious inventions” rather than fact) for true edification. The representative child from *Bentley’s* sketch, who would be an adult by 1880, seems to have learned nothing lasting about Japan in the interim. If anything, there seems to be less of a general comprehension about Japan by the time of Bird’s text because she includes military men and merchants (i.e., the former captain of the East India Company from Bentley’s sketch) among the uninformed, while *Bentley’s* sketch positioned the former East India Company merchant as the arbiter of truth.

Perry’s formulation, unlike Bird’s, focused on the “common interest” that unites the disparate parties in a “common sympathy.” He makes no promise about the satiation of the curiosity that spurs this “common interest,” just as he makes no promise that the united group will be able to maintain this “common sympathy” beyond the original impulse for exploration. Curiosity is the constant and no quantity of informative texts will fill the perceived dearth of information. It is worth pausing to consider the term “curiosity” itself. For three representative examples of the philosophical understanding of the concept of “curiosity,” I turn to three important discussions of the term. In Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (1651), curiosity, “a Lust of the mind,” is the desire to know “why” and “how” and it is the special purview of humankind.¹⁴ Hume ends the last section of the Passions in his *Treatise* (1739), titled “Curiosity or the Love of Truth,” with a discussion of how

¹⁴ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan: Or, The Matter, Forme & Power of a Commonwealth, Ecclesiasticall and Civill*. Alfred Rayney Waller, ed. *Cambridge English Classics* series. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1904).

and why curiosity is valuable for intellectual achievement.¹⁵ Heidegger, on the other hand, complained that attributing the origins of philosophy to curiosity was “a weak and pitiful determination of origin.”¹⁶ He continues to explain that the impulse behind the origin of philosophy is necessarily inexplicable and that the attribution to curiosity allows an epistemological bridge to cover the discomfiting nature of the unknown. In all three of these iterations, curiosity bridges a division between a bodily desire—identified as weaker and less worthy—and a purely intellectual process that propels the individual towards greatness. To use Hobbes’ term, it is a “lust” but it is specifically a “lust of the mind.” The fact that the spur to Japanese travel narratives comes from an impetus that is both bodily and intellectual, both crude and refined, is important. It mirrors Japan’s complicated relation to the West as it occurred on, as it were, the home front. When Japanese merchandise circulated in Western markets, it also satisfied contrary impulses and functioned as both a marker of exquisite taste and crass commercialism. Yet again, Japan has appeared to straddle Western presumptions and cultural trajectories.

The contradiction of curiosity itself is a useful framework for a discussion of the reception of Japan in the late Nineteenth Century, not the least because “curiosity” is how the explorers who wrote accounts of their travels in Japan justified themselves. An interest in Japan could take the form of a sort of bodily desire—a grasping effort to collect the merchandise of Japan and capitalize on the popularity of Japonisme. It could also indicate a purely intellectual interest in, as Wilde called it, “the Japanese effect,” or

¹⁵ David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning Into Moral Subjects; and Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1874).

¹⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected "Problems" of "Logic,"* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994), 135-159.

the perceived differences between Eastern and Western art and philosophy.¹⁷ The latter group, as famously represented by Wilde, could claim an ultimate separation between their intellectual and aesthetic interest and the physical reality of Japan: “In fact the whole of Japan is a pure invention. There is no such country, there are no such people.” Then again, Kipling’s first letter sent from Japan in 1889 began with this rejoinder to Wilde’s comment: “Mister Oscar Wilde...is a long-toothed liar!....Rock and tree and boat made a panel from a Japanese screen, and I saw that the land was not a lie.”¹⁸ For all that Wilde claimed the reality of Japan was irrelevant to the interest in Japan, Chamberlain’s complaint about the ubiquity of the “books on Japan” was not unfounded. What is clear from these facts is that the curiosity about Japan remained unabated through the production of information about Japan, somehow always filling the same gap of knowledge no matter how many other informative texts were poured into the same gap. Once the “curiosity of Christendom” was put on alert, it never left, but it was also never satisfied.

It is this genre to which I dedicated this chapter. As I have already explicated in the previous chapter, this is a different vein of the larger discourse of Japonisme from the reception of the Japonisme merchandise being handled in Western markets, but also in Western literature. This is a different literary production. While Japonisme merchandise circulated within and around the cultural movement of the Aesthetics back in Britain, these pedagogical texts do not seek that sort of elite approval for a Japonisme aesthetic of their own. Instead, these texts claim scientific rigor or the fulfillment of the undying

¹⁷ Oscar Wilde, “The Decay of Lying,” *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*. ed. Richard Ellman, (New York: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 315.

¹⁸ Rudyard Kipling, *Kipling’s Japan: Collected Writings*. ed. Hugh Cortazzi and George Webb, (New Jersey: The Athlone Press, 1988), 35.

“curiosity” regarding Japan as their motivation. Yet, even while they rely on the assumption of Japan’s absolute reality for the fundamental requirements of their generic status as travel narratives, Japan’s unreality is still an important part of the discourse. They continue to beg Wilde’s question about the true reality of Japan even while they claim experiential fact as the basis for their texts. Thus, these texts can be called “Japonisme travel narratives,” even though they would disdain the term. While many authors of this part of the discourse called themselves “Japanologists,” and referred to their field of expertise as “Japanology,” I choose instead to expand the scope of their discourse and include them in a larger framework. Instead of the pseudo-scientific “Japanology,” I continue to use “Japonisme” to delineate the discourse.

In the following sections, I will investigate the part of the discourse of Japonisme that seeks to satiate the “lust of the mind” through literature. I have two purposes in this chapter: first, to explicate the conventions of this sub-set of Japonisme and, secondly, to pursue a single example of the type to prove how contradictory and paradoxical the conventions truly proved to be. To this end, I will enumerate the three most prevalent patterns of the Japonisme travel narrative: the comparison to fairies and magic, the identification of Japan as a chronological anachronism, and the search for a useful parallel among the other countries of the world. After this discussion of the literary type as a whole, I will narrow my focus to Isabella Bird as a case study of how the hallmarks of Japonisme travel writing appear in her text and how she combats the pull of established tropes at the same time. I discuss Bird’s position in an international community of explorers, authors, and experts. Then, I explore her fraught relationship with metropolitan Japan and in particular with her interpreter and guide, Itō Tsurukichi.

Finally, I show how these established networks of interrelation are challenged and modified by the introduction of the Ainu, the fair-skinned native inhabitants of the northernmost island in the Japanese archipelago. In conclusion, I demonstrate how the factual accounts of Japan laid the groundwork for more sensational accounts of Japan in popular Japonisme novels.

I. Fairies, Anachronism, and Analogy: The Tropes of Japonisme Travel Narratives

“Thus we babbled of the natures and dispositions of men we knew nothing about till we had decided (1) that the painful politeness of the Japanese nation rose from the habit, dropped only twenty years ago, of extended and emphatic sword-wearing....(2) that this politeness will disappear in another generation, or will be seriously impaired; (3) that the cultured Japanese of the English pattern will corrupt and defile the tastes of his neighbors till (4) Japan altogether ceases to exist as a separate nation and becomes a button-hook manufacturing appendage of America; (5) that these things being so, and sure to happen in two or three hundred years, the Professor and I were lucky to reach Japan betimes; and (6) it was foolish to form theories about the country until we had seen some of it.” —excerpted from a letter from Rudyard Kipling, 1889.¹⁹

The fundamental contradiction that authors of Japonisme travel narratives had to contend with was the fact that Japan was always familiar *and* alien, modern *and* ancient, real *and* unreal. The rapid Westernization of the last few decades of the Nineteenth Century seemed like a magic trick. Westerners were flabbergasted to see their own culture—their clothing, their architecture, and their newspapers—side by side with a culture that looked to them like a frozen medieval tapestry. The “books on Japan” Chamberlain deplored all seek to replicate this emotional encounter for their readers.

¹⁹ Rudyard Kipling, *Kipling's Japan*, 77.

Often, they use the word “fairy” to encompass a magical quality that seems out of step with modern Victorian life. Yet, Japan was not wholly unrecognizable, despite the fact that Victorian visitors could see the traces of a culture that seemed completely alien when compared to their own. Travelers with experience with the rest of Asia were eager to single Japan out. They claimed that the rest of Asia was permanently mired in the past and that only Japan showed traces of the ambition to rival a Western power.²⁰ As proof, they looked to the effects of their own culture as it interacted with Japanese culture: only a nation *like* our own, they conclude, could value our culture so highly. And yet, for all that they valued Japan specifically for its efforts to mimic the West, they also tut-tutted at the hybridity of cultures they saw, as Kipling made clear when he wrote that the “cultured Japanese of the English pattern will corrupt and defile the tastes of his neighbor.” For the majority of Japonisme travel writers, Japanese people in Western clothing evoked disgust, nothing could be worse than Japanese architecture being fitted with Western furniture, and the influx of Western literature can only bring an antediluvian fall from innocence for the so-called childlike Japanese. And despite all of these gnarly contradictory forces, the curiosity that Perry felt continues.

In this section, I examine three ways in which Japonisme travel writing seeks to solve the fundamental contradictions of Japan and to satiate the irresolvable curiosity the West felt towards Japan. I will begin with the frequent use of the word “fairy” to describe

²⁰ Indeed, Japan’s political ambitions were very much in line with Western aspirational, nationalist agendas. Japan intended to build an Eastern empire with Western political tools. Japan used the rhetoric of the “Pan-Asian” movement during World War II in its propaganda during the years of conflict in China. Rana Mitter attributed the gruesomeness of the behavior of the Japanese troops in Nan-king in part to the failure of the Chinese people to fall in line with a vision of a Japanese-led Pan-Asia. Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China’s World War II 1937-1945*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013).

various aspects of Japan, from the physical characteristics of the landscape to the mannerisms of the inhabitants. Expanding upon that theme, I will also look at the ways in which Japan is positioned as being magically plucked from an ancient era for the modern Victorian tourist to observe and visit. Both of these metaphors function as ways to explain away the illusive fundamental ambiguity of Japan. The final recurrent trope I discuss is a different rhetorical strategy for resolving the irresolute Japan. Instead of metaphor, many authors look to analogy to explain Japan. They seek parallels in terms of culture, history, language, and physiology in order to export pre-existing codifications of transnational encounter to a discussion of Japan. What all three tropes have in common is that all three attempt to construct Japan as fragile, vulnerable, and ultimately feminine in comparison to the masculine onset of Westernization while simultaneously singling Japan out as the exceptional country wise enough to emulate Western models. While these vulnerable characteristics make Japan preeminent among Asian countries for Western observers, Japanese culture is also specifically valued for this constructed victimhood. The fairy magic must be shattered, despite the fact that it is specifically the fairy magic that makes Japan such an appealing destination.

Of the many “books on Japan” that I examine in close detail in this section, every one employs a term like “magical” or “fairy” to describe Japan. While this choice of terminology is not unique among travel narratives of the era, the ubiquity of the sentiment is worth investigating further. The definitive ambiguity of Japan, already in existence thanks to the circulation of Japonisme merchandise, turns up in the genre as a magical quality, something inexpressible and otherworldly. In a rhetorical move that in one word evokes an ancient mythological quality, out-dated superstitious thinking, and an

extraordinary and inscrutable power,²¹ many of these authors describe Japan in terms of its relation to “fairy.” Eliza Scidmore’s *Jinrikisha Days in Japan* (1891) describes Kyoto’s riverbed as “like a scene from fairy-land throughout summer.”²² William Elliot Griffis’s *Japan in History, Folk Lore, and Art* (1892) prescribes the correct interpretation of Japanese scenery: “To read aright the meaning of Japanese fairyworld is to hold a key to an enchanted palace of beauty.”²³ Anna Hartshorne’s *Japan and her People* (1902) recalls the early days of a visit to Japan, “when all seems half unreal, when one says ‘fairy like’ and ‘funny’ at every other breath.”²⁴ Marie Stopes’s *A Journal from Japan: A Daily Record of Life as Seen by a Scientist* (1910) contains twelve comparisons to fairy, ranging from the direct, “At night, [Tokyo] is a fairy-land” to the more fanciful, “It still remains a problem whether perhaps a fairy, listening to my thoughts, had not touched with her magic wand the branch nearest me.... Fairies are most useful to scientists!”²⁵ Even when the author means to separate his or her text from the rest by scoffing at their comparisons to fairy enchantment, he or she must first admit to having made such a comparison in the early days of their visit. Isabella Bird’s *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (1880) contains numerous comparisons to fairies but also this important contradiction

²¹ As proof of the lasting power of fairy folklore, I would point to the murder of Bridget Cleary in 1895 by her husband because of his belief that she had been exchanged for a changeling. For more information about the murder of Bridget Cleary and the sensational trial of her husband that followed, see: Angela Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, (New York: Penguin, 1999).

²² Eliza Ruhamah Scidmore, *Jinrikisha Days in Japan*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1891), 225.

²³ William Elliot Griffis, *Japan: In History, Folk-lore and Art*, (New York: The Riverside Press, 1892), 41.

²⁴ Anna C. Hartshorne, *Japan and her People*, (Philadelphia: Henry T. Coates & Co., 1902), vii.

²⁵ Marie Carmichael Stopes, *A Journal from Japan: A Daily Record as seen by a Scientist*, (London: Blackie & Son, ltd., 1910), 86, 211.

during an encounter with extreme poverty in Fujihara: “But truly this is a new Japan to me, of which no books have given me any idea, and it is not a fairyland” (154). Bird is confronted by a brutal reality of Japan and the mirage of “fairy” dissipates. As Hartshorne says, it is only when Japan seems “half unreal” that a word like “fairy” surfaces. What Hartshorne fails to see (but Bird recognizes) is that “*half* unreal” is only *half* otherworldly and *half* unrecognizable. By relying on the magical framing, Hartshorne and others willfully ignore the “half” that reminds them of Japan’s reality and of its similarity to their own culture.

If the geographical distance could not explain Japan’s “half unreal” ambiguity, these texts often employ another metaphorical option: temporal anachronism. Frequently, the comparison to a fairyland goes hand in hand with a description of Japan as a land that has been frozen in time. By the time Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Patience* debuted in 1881, it was assumed that an interest in Japan and a medievalist streak were both necessary for any budding aesthete.²⁶ Though purporting to be on the other end of the cultural spectrum from the Aesthetes, Marie Stopes’s “scientific” text begins with a poem that refers to Japan as “Land that mused while the world was striving,” “Land that dreamed while the nations fought,” and “Dreamland of Beauty, girt by glowing seas.”²⁷ Walt Whitman, in a poem written to honor the 1860 delegation from Japan to the United States, refers to “the Originatress,” “the race of eld,” and “the nest of languages.”²⁸ Basil Hall Chamberlain’s

²⁶ When listing the essential characteristics of an aesthete that he lacks, Bunthorne mentions both “I do *not* long for all one sees/ That’s Japanese” and “my medievalism’s affectation.” *The Complete Plays of Gilbert and Sullivan*, (New York: Norton, 1997), 112.

²⁷ Marie Carmichael Stopes, *A Journal from Japan: A Daily Record as seen by a Scientist* (London: Blackie & Son, Ltd., 1910), v.

²⁸ Walt Whitman, “A Broadway Pageant,” *Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Collected Prose*, (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1982), 115.

Handbook for Travelers in Japan (having been written by Chamberlain since its third edition in 1891), after describing the way Perry made Japan “burst open” in 1854, goes on to describe the replacement of “feudalism” with a series of efforts to “Europeanise.”²⁹ “In short,” he says, “in every sphere of activity, the old order gave way to the new.”³⁰ In the Introduction to *Things Japanese* (in six editions between 1890-1936), Chamberlain explains more directly: “To have lived through the transition stage of modern Japan makes a man feel preternaturally old; for here he is in modern times.... and yet he can himself distinctly remember the Middle Ages” (1). So Japan is a fairyland and the Japanese people are time travelers.

The metaphor of temporal anachronism begins to reveal more clearly how Western fear that their own influence threatens the essential characteristics of Japan that had first put, as Perry put it, the “curiosity of Christendom on alert.” The various visitors and admirers bemoan the despoiling of the antique magic even as they congratulate themselves and each other on Japan’s rapid modernization. Chamberlain explains: “Fortunately for the curious observer, [Japan] continues in a state of transition,—less Japanese and more European day by day, it is true, but still retaining characteristics of her own...Those who wish to see as much as possible of the old order of things should come quickly” (2). Kipling, as I quoted in the epigraph of this section, expressed the same sentiment when he and his traveling companion congratulated themselves on arriving in

²⁹ The Japanese “daimyô” system was frequently translated in feudal terms well into the Twentieth Century. This practice has only recently been replaced by the Japanese term itself in a Romanized form. While “feudalism” and “fiefs” are, broadly speaking, reasonable parallels in British/European culture, they lack the specificity of the Japanese terminology.

³⁰ Basil Hall Chamberlain, *A Handbook to the Japanese Empire*, 3rd ed., (London: John Murray, 1891), 1. Subsequent references will be by page number in the body of the discussion.

Japan betimes. In other words, both Chamberlain and Kipling urge those varied curious people that Perry described in 1854 to make their voyage before their opportunity to witness the “uncommon interest” has expired. The careful balance between new and old, East and West, and magical and scientific is collapsing, they warn. The authors of these “books on Japan” continue to give this same warning throughout the last few decades of the Nineteenth Century and the warning persists in travel guides and travel narratives well into our modern era. Again, as we saw with the expression of the West’s curiosity regarding Japan, the imminent dissolution remains the same despite the fact that time marches forward.

Both the metaphor of magic and the comparison to the past feature prominently, but both of these tropes seek to contextualize Japan with an unreal, fantastical referent. They seek to stabilize the literary tradition by de-stabilizing Japan’s reality, yet, as I have already demonstrated, Japan’s absolute reality was also key to the success of Japan’s reception in the West. Therefore, a more stabile, pre-existing context needed to be generically established for this alternative side of the discourse. Therefore, even while the first two recurring tropes align Japan with fantasy, a third trope becomes apparent that strongly ties Japan back to reality. This third trope is the analogizing of Japan to other pre-existing nations and examples. Japan was not the only nation being introduced to a global community for the first time in the Nineteenth Century. The *Illustrated London News* wrote this sentence not about Japan ending the 250-year period of official isolation, but about China at the end of the first Opium War in 1842: “A large family of the human race, which for centuries has been isolated from the rest, is now about to enter with them

into mutual intercourse.”³¹ The use of the central phrasing (that of “opening” China) replaces a potential military formulation. Instead of having been “colonized” or “seized,” China is euphemistically “opened.”³² This is the same phrasing that was adopted to describe Perry’s entrance into Japan in 1854 and continues to be used in history textbooks to this day. Using China as a springboard from which to discuss Japan was not uncommon, thanks to similarities like this.

In effect, they prove Japan’s exceptionalism by pointing to differences (or similarities) between Japan and China. The underlying conceit of pointing to a difference between China and Japan is that they share a natural inclination towards the model the reception of China has already established: of warfare, of frivolity, of idleness, and other similar racist connotations. To assert Japan’s difference from China is to assert that Japan has overtaken natural impulses that should have aligned it with the rest of the “Orient.” Take, for example, Scidmore’s opening paragraph:

All of the Orient is a surprise to the Occidental. Everything is strange, with a certain unreality that makes one doubt his sensations. To appreciate Japan one should come to it from the main-land of Asia. From Suez to Nagasaki the Asiatic sits dumb and contented in his dirt, rags, ignorance, and wretchedness. After the muddy rivers, dreary flats, and brown hills of China, after the desolate shores of Korea, with their unlovely and unwashed peoples, Japan is a Paradise, beautiful from the first green island off the coast to the last picturesque hill-top. The houses seem toys,

³¹ *Illustrated London News*, (December 3rd, 1842), 469.

³² This phrasing recurred 130 years later when President Nixon “opened” China again in 1972. China seems to be in a similarly persistent state of stasis, always being opened but never permanently so.

their inhabitants dolls, whose manner of life is clean, pretty, artistic, and distinctive.³³

While Scidmore's account tends towards the fanciful and the romantic, R. Mounteney Jephson's and Edward Pennell Elmhirst's (of the 9th Regiment) account of Japan, *Our Life in Japan* (1869), describes the difference between Japan and their previous assignment, Hong Kong, a bit more succinctly: "We shall never forget the delight we took in our first rides and rambles in Japan, through green lanes and over wooded hills with lovely, peaceful views on every side. How we did revel in all this after the heat and fever of that barren rock, Hong-Kong."³⁴ These two accounts show how two vastly different texts seem to require an account of Japan's miraculous beauty and comfort to be given at the expense of the rest of Asia. Sir Rutherford Alcock further explicated the difference between the two nations in an article called "China and Japan" for the *Edinburgh Review* in 1865: "Notwithstanding a certain family likeness and close proximity, to assume anything approaching to [similarity between the two countries] would be a grave error...[In Japan] there is a rough independence and patriotic feeling, which in China we look for in vain."³⁵ It is odd that Alcock would criticize China for a lack of independence and patriotic feeling when that country had just, in fact, been engaged in a second war with Britain for control of its own trade and diplomatic policy, just as it is odd that Japan would earn his praise for those characteristics in the period of

³³ Eliza Ruhamah Scidmore, *Jinrikisha Days in Japan*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1891), 1.

³⁴ Richard Mounteney Jephson and Edward Pennel Elmhirst, *Our Life in Japan*, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1869), 7.

³⁵ Rutherford Alcock, "China and Japan" *The Edinburgh Review*, (1865: 122), 175.

severe political unrest leading up to the Meiji Civil War (1868). Yet, the strongly worded contrast is typical of the “Japanologists,” both amateurs and scholars.

The distinction between Chinese and Japanese people—a distinction that the layman of the West often found difficult to make at all—was essential to those Westerners who touted Japan’s exceptional status among Asian nations.³⁶ Another famous Western fan of Japan, American abolitionist and journalist Edward H. House, wrote: “We find, that, while, on close examination, the imagined attractions of China disappear, those of Japan become only more definite and substantial.”³⁷ Japan, to House, was the successor of the formerly Chinese empire, just as America would become the inheritor of the British Empire. The idea that Japan could be swapped for China as the most readily available Empire in the Far East was widely appealing.³⁸ The trade arrangements between England and China during this period centered on one very contentious product: opium. British merchants who navigated the perilous journey between Calcutta or Bombay and China ran many risks, not the least of which was

³⁶ As an example of the contemporary inability to differentiate between Chinese and Japanese, Kirk Monroe’s novel, *For the Mikado: A Japanese Middy in Action* (1905), contains a vital plot point in which even the titular Japanese character’s best friend cannot differentiate between his friend and unknown Chinese servants.

³⁷ Edward H. House, “The Thralldom of Japan.” *The Atlantic Monthly: A Magazine of Literature, Art, and Politics* (60.362: 1887), 721.

³⁸ It could be argued that the United States was most comfortable with the idea of a Japanese Empire in the Far East instead of a Chinese or Korean one. Kirk Munroe, a popular Boys’ Adventure author, explicitly makes a connection between the United States and Japan in *For the Mikado, or, A Japanese Middy in Action* (1905) in which his heroic Japanese Middy and his loyal American friend battle the evil Russians during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5). Kirk Monroe, *For the Mikado, or, A Japanese Middy in Action*, (New York: Harper and Bros, 1905).

derived from the deadly properties of their cargo.³⁹ In an article in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1857, even an opponent of the opium trade feels it necessary to pause and extol the bravery of those merchants who take the risk of transporting it: "I looked at [the merchant's] wife, and I thought I saw a brightening of the eye and a swelling of the breast as [the merchant] spoke [of the route between Calcutta and China]... I looked, and knew not whether to most admire or condemn this the last of the resolute adventurers."⁴⁰ The two Opium Wars with China (1839-1842 and 1856-1860) were the culmination of a dispute between the Qing Dynasty and the British Empire regarding, among other things, the distribution and sale of opium by the British in China. Combining the tension of war with the lingering desperado-allure of the merchants themselves, the British position regarding China was exceedingly hostile. Trade relations with Japan, by comparison, seemed miraculously uncomplicated. In the same 1857 article that discusses the opium trade in *Blackwood's*, Japan is described as "exceedingly interesting, and withal very amusing." Alcock's distinction between the "rough independence and patriotic feeling" present in Japan but absent in China speaks to two important points. First, it shows how he sees a reflection of Britain in Japan, just as House had seen a reflection of the United States. Secondly, it shows how both America and Britain responded positively to the "rough independence" and patriotism of Japan as it emerged as a modern nation. Unlike the case with China, where the desperado-allure lay entirely with those European merchants who ran the risk of transporting opium, the Japanese themselves are the repositories of the adventurer mythos. They are the

³⁹ For a more thorough understanding of the complex moral position of opium trade in the Nineteenth Century, see Hunt Janin, *The India-China Opium Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: McFarland, 1999).

⁴⁰ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, (Edinburgh: 1857), 706.

desperadoes, even when that “rough independence” puts them at odds with the Western empires.

This is not to say that Japan was exempt from the racist discourse that attends transnational encounter with an imperial power. There is frequent reference made to the unsightly tradition of Japanese women blacking their teeth, their shorter stature, and the color of the Japanese people’s skins in many travel narratives. Most of these travel narratives turn critical in their descriptions of physicality only after witnessing a moment of cultural hybridity, most often when Japanese people dressed in Western clothes.⁴¹ In other words, most of these travelers are content to note the cultural differences as “simply” different until a half-finished attempt at Westernization becomes apparent. Scidmore describes such a scene:

Before the following April, Paris fashions had set in with great rigor, and all the soft, pink reflections from the clouds of cherry blossoms in the Hama Rikiu palace garden could not give the groups of little women in dark, ugly, close-fitting gowns any likeness to the beautiful assemblages of other years. Gone were poetry and picturesqueness. Progress and Philistia were come.⁴²

Scidmore’s unhappiness at the imposed Western clothing is nothing, however, compared to Bird’s:

Fanny Parkes, aged six, said, “Papa, how *very* funny all those ugly men look!” and if she had been aged sixty she could not have made a more apt

⁴¹ Interestingly, female characters often swap their clothing for Western styles in the novels set in Japan during the late nineteenth century. I will discuss this crucial difference in my next chapter.

⁴² Scidmore, 120.

remark. The yellow, featureless faces, all alike, the bullet-shaped craniums, the coarse cropped hair bristling up from the head, the flat chests, round shoulders, and lean, ill-shaped legs, were exhibited in all their ugliness in western dress, for the first, and I hope for the last time.... They stood in one deplorable attitude, with lean arms hanging limp by their sides, hands crammed into badly-fitting white kid gloves, and looking like miscreants awaiting castigation (I.61).

Bird's text is one of the most explicit in terms of racist physical description. It is not, however, unusual in its castigations of the mixture of East and West. In this moment, Bird has allowed the shock of disgust to bring to the fore all the racist physical descriptions she has (for the most part) avoided up to that point. This careful avoidance is far more common in the rest of the travel narratives. Scidmore's bewailing of the loss of some aesthetic quality is more common, but even that shows the marks of the unspoken critique of the physiognomy of the Japanese people. Scidmore (and others) might be too polite to use such severe phrasing, but they would agree that Western dress leaves the Japanese people exposed for the physical demerits of their race.

Thus, while the metaphors of fairies and anachronism allowed writers to discuss Japan in purely idealistic terms, the rhetorical analogies bring to light some of the darker aspects of these transnational encounters. It is in the comparison to something familiar—to familiar clothing especially—that Japan begins to accumulate racist discourse. When it is “half unreal,” it can be a fairyland and a medieval dream. Take away the unreality and the authors of these Japonisme travel narratives are left confronted with very real Japanese people, the people that Wilde claimed didn't exist. The Japanese are not

Chinese, surely, but they're not White either. They're also not barbarians, obviously, but could these travel writers be confident in using the word "civilized" to describe such a different culture from their own?

Isabella Bird's 1880 text, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, provides an interesting nexus of these questions and concerns. Firstly, her journey in 1878 places her chronologically after the Meiji Revolution of 1868 but before the finished transformation into an international empire of its own. Secondly, Bird's focus is to pursue a "novel and sustained interest" by leaving the "beaten tracks" to other tourists. She, unlike other narrators who contained their travels to the larger metropolitan centers of the south of Japan, pushed northward into Hokkaido. Thirdly, by traveling so far north, Bird encounters the natives of Hokkaido, the Ainu, and is forced to re-evaluate her own assumptions of racial superiority and difference. Fourthly, despite Bird's vehement racism, her relationship with her guide and interpreter is unlike most other travelers' and their guides. There is a great deal of respect and also a great deal of patronizing disdain in her attitude towards him. This is called into question when they meet the Ainu and Bird is forced to admit that her physical similarity to the Ainu does not prevent Ito, her interpreter, from being a closer connection than the fairer-skinned, more European-looking Ainu.

II. Isabella Bird Among Her Own People

While travel writing was traditionally a man's genre, written for and by men, technological innovations in travel and communication and shifting societal values allowed women to participate more widely in the nineteenth century. By the time Japan

had been “opened” to foreign trade and communication in 1854, several female travel authors had established themselves as celebrity tourists and amateur naturalists. A little more than two decades later, Isabella Bird was already the author of best-selling epistolary travel narratives of previous expeditions in Hawaii (1875), Australia (1877), and the Canadian Rockies (1879) by the time she set her sights on Japan. Her continued commercial success was so certain that John Murray promised to publish anything she might write about her next destination. When he received the completed manuscript in 1880, he published a two-volume edition of her epistolary account of her trip, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, and a shortened “popular” edition five years later. This text would prove to be the most popular work of Bird’s oeuvre. She earned approximately £1,458 from the 6,536 copies of *Unbeaten Tracks* sold during her lifetime; almost double the amount she earned from her second-best seller, *A Lady’s Life in the Rockies* (1879).⁴³

Anna Stoddart, Bird’s first biographer, ranks her as one of only four memorable female travelers of the late-nineteenth century, placing her alongside Mary Kingsley, Marianne North, and Constance Gordon-Cumming: “Four Englishwomen have, during the last thirty years, established themselves a well-grounded fame as travelers—Mrs. Bishop [nee Bird]...has shown what English ladies can do, and with pen and pencil aroused the interest of the reading public.”⁴⁴ Isabella Bird, born in 1831 in Yorkshire, was plagued by bad health until a doctor prescribed a long journey in 1854, the same year of Perry’s expedition to Japan. This trip, which sent her through Nova Scotia, Chicago, Ontario, Boston, and New York, provided the temporary cure to her ailments. It also furnished her with the source material for her anonymously published *An Englishwoman*

⁴³ Isabella Bird, *A Lady’s Life in the Rockies*, (London: John Murray, 1879).

⁴⁴ Anna Stoddart, *The Life of Isabella Bird*, (London: John Murray, 1906), v.

in America (1856), thus providing the beginning of the pattern in which Bird would live for the rest of her life.⁴⁵ She would fall ill, be prescribed travel, regain her health as soon as she touched foreign soil, publish an account upon her return, fall ill again, and start the cycle anew. Until Henrietta, her sister, died in 1880, all of Bird's narratives were epistolary accounts addressed to her. While Bird was briefly married to her sister's doctor, John Bishop, the marriage only lasted six years, the longest span Bird had spent in England since travel had first been prescribed to her. Unsurprisingly, she spent the majority of those six years as an invalid. She was the first woman inducted to the Royal Geographical Society (1892) and elected to membership in the Royal Photographic Society (1897). She died in 1904, still planning her next trip. The fact that Bird chose Japan as her location in 1878 shows how canny she was as a genre writer: books on Japan were selling fast, as Chamberlain's complaint demonstrates, and *Unbeaten Tracks* capitalized on their popularity. She was already thoroughly competent in her genre through the success of previous narratives. She struck a careful balance between the occasional florid passage and the workmanlike prose of a critical commentator and preempted any attacks on her femininity by prefacing all of her more daring traveling choices as a medical necessity. It was the concurrence of her deft negotiation of the conventions of the travel narrative genre and her choice of destination that cemented her status as one of the four female travelers worth talking about.

A key component of popular Japonisme was the sense of the community involved in the perpetuation of the movement. While Japanologists such as Basil Hall Chamberlain, Ernest Satow, and William George Aston saw themselves as curators of the Western

⁴⁵ Isabella Bird, *An Englishwoman in America*, (London: John Murray, 1856).

reception of Japan, the typically female authors of popular Japonisme travel narratives understood their texts to be testimonies of individual experience that would democratically and organically combine to determine Western response to Japan. Lorraine Sterry, who recently published an analysis of specifically female-authored travel narratives of Japan from the Nineteenth Century, noted that this genre is unusually, “related not only through their various focuses on Japan, but also through the cultural mores shared” by anomalous traveler women.”⁴⁶ As Bird says in her preface, “this is not a ‘Book on Japan,’ but a narrative of travels in Japan and an attempt to contribute something to the sum of knowledge of the present condition of the country” (I.vii). Bird here uses the same phrase Chamberlain used to refer to the genre she is participating in, the travel narrative, to describe the genre she is rejecting, the informative guidebook of the kind that Chamberlain wrote. She makes clear that a community of similar texts, the “sum of knowledge” that can be drawn from experiential accounts of “the present condition of the country,” is an important part of her own text’s moral project and is vital to her authorial objectives. In the work of an elite Japanologist like Chamberlain, the author positions himself as singular arbiter of knowledge: “We are perpetually being asked questions about Japan,” he writes in his own Introductory Chapter, “Here then are the answers” (2). Chamberlain’s royal “we” is thus the font of knowledge about Japan: the readers have questions and he has the answers. To specifically differentiate his text from the popular travel narratives, he rejects the idea of “padding,” or personal anecdote and observation, since “padding is unpardonable in any book on Japan, where the material is so plentiful that the chief difficulty is to know what to omit.” The “padding”

⁴⁶ Lorraine Sterry, *Victorian Women Travelers of Meiji Japan: Discovering a ‘New’ Land*, (New York: Brill, 2009), 15.

he rejects so strenuously is exactly the portion of her text that Bird prioritized by listing first, the “narrative” portion of her text. For Chamberlain, the pedagogical content of his text is always the priority; for Bird, it is the communal sharing of personal experience.

The communal aspect—a specifically female community of authorship, sympathy, and collaboration—is also reinforced by the dedication of her text to her close friend and mentor, Lady Parkes. The memorial reads: “To the memory of Lady Parkes, whose kindness and friendship are among my most treasured remembrances of Japan, these volumes are gratefully and reverently dedicated.”⁴⁷ Lady Parkes does indeed play a vital role in this text and, in a broader sense, in Bird’s experiences in Japan. Bird frequently cites her as a collaborator in her project, an enthusiastic supporter of her more wild aspirations, and a textual interlocutor through frequent correspondence. This correspondence is especially important given the epistolary nature of this text. Near the conclusion of the text, when Bird has re-joined the Parkes family and just before Lady Parkes left to return to England (where she shortly thereafter fell ill and died in 1879),⁴⁸ Bird explains the significance of this single woman’s varied contributions to a complex social network in Japan:

Lady Parkes carries with her the good-will and regret of the whole foreign community, for, besides the official and semi-official courtesies and hospitalities which she has shown as a necessity of Sir Harry’s position,

⁴⁷ Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, (London: John Murray, 1880), dedication.

⁴⁸ Another important characteristic that Lady Parkes shared with Bird is her propensity for illness: both women were confirmed “invalids” for years at a time at multiple points in their lives. Bird, however, was told at a very young age that travel would cure her. Lady Parkes, here, is told by medical advice to return home and soon dies. Bird, on multiple occasions, was told by doctors to travel and always recovered as soon as she reached a foreign shore.

she has given liberally of those sympathies in sorrow and of those acts of unostentatious kindness, which are specially appreciated by those who are ‘strangers in a strange land.’... She has labored long and earnestly to promote good feeling among all classes. She will be much missed by the higher classes of Japanese women, for she has used all the opportunities within her power to win their confidence and friendship (I.216).

Bird specifies that Lady Parkes’s influence extends beyond the boundaries of race, gender, and, in a qualified sense, class. Bird’s praises move beyond the standard formula for complimenting a woman for her feminine qualities by specifically referring to the community of foreigners who owe their practical knowledge of Japan to Lady Parkes and to the “higher classes of Japanese women” to whom she has offered her friendship.⁴⁹ This interlocking network is comprised of both genders and both races and Lady Parkes’s influence is valued specifically for how she has built and supported this sense of community.

Lady Parkes plays a significant role in the construction of the most important cross-racial relationship in the text when she helps Bird interview and then select an interpreter for her travels, a man named Itō Tsurukichi.⁵⁰ The figure of the translator is a singularly important figure for the frequent traveler. It is impractical (and often unappealing) for such celebrity travelers to spend the time before their journey learning a

⁴⁹ In fact, the relationship that crosses class and race boundaries is Isabella’s relationship with Ito. Besides being of a different ethnicity, he comes from a much lower social stratum than she does. There are many occasions in which she and Ito interact with the “higher classes of Japanese women” that Lady Parkes also is noted as being engaged with, but their interactions are polite and impersonal.

⁵⁰ I refer to him as “Ito” for the duration of this article as per Bird’s construction and as a distinction between a real historical figure and the subjective version of him created by Bird’s text.

new language, especially one comprised of, as Bird describes it, “hieroglyphics to which I have no key” (23). Derrida called translation a “sublime and impossible task” that translators make “[their] desire, [their] anxiety, [their] travail, [their] knowledge, and [their] knowing skill.”⁵¹ Yet, the standard practice in travel writing in the Nineteenth Century was to ignore the role of the ever-present interpreter and to depict interactions with native interlocutors as if the Western traveler was conducting an unmediated conversation. Fanny Bullock Workman, an American geographer, cartographer, explorer, and mountaineer posed for photographs in such a way that entirely erased her entourage of native employees.⁵² Mary Kingsley also made no mention of communicative difficulties or the interpreters she must have hired to translate for her. When she did mention the native men accompanying her, it was usually in the decided tone of racial and intellectual superiority: “I urge the men for shelter and they go like storm-bewildered sheep...The men stand helpless under the trees, and I hastily...[throw] a blanket round each man.”⁵³ The fact that Bird included Ito as a named character is therefore a remarkable occurrence. The fact that he plays an important and complicated role in the narrative as it unfolds is even more so.⁵⁴ While Bird sometimes elides Ito’s role in

⁵¹ Lawrence Venuti, ed., *The Translation Studies Reader*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 423.

⁵² See the upcoming work by Christine Neejer (Michigan State University, History) on the subject of bicycles, photography, and women’s travel writing in the nineteenth century for more information on Fanny Bullock Workman’s history of eliding her entourage in her photographic evidence.

⁵³ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (New York: National Geographic, 2002), 587.

⁵⁴ Ito becomes a model for the inclusion of translators in Japonisme travel narratives. He himself appears in two other travel narratives, William Caine Sproston's *A Trip Around the World in 1887-8* (1888) and Eliza Ruhamah Scidmore's *Jinrikisha Days in Japan* (1891), and is both times referred to as “Isabella’s Ito.” His influence has larger rippling effects, though. The Baroness Albert D’Anethan’s novel about Japan, *It Happened in Japan* (1904), only mentions one Japanese character in any specificity and he is also a

conversations that would have necessitated his presence, she also includes her own sense of isolation and dependency, thereby establishing the beginning of an equalizing rhetorical depiction. Relatively early in the journey, she describes a short absence: “Ito was long away, and the coolies kept addressing me in Japanese, which made me feel helpless and solitary” (I.102). At their parting, she writes simply but evocatively, “I have parted with Ito finally to-day, with great regret....I miss him already” (II.162). The sincere regard for Ito visible in Bird’s portrayal of him even prompted a fictionalized retelling of *Unbeaten Tracks* as a love story called *Itō no koi*.⁵⁵ Chieko Ichikawa has compared *Itō no koi* to A.S. Byatt’s *Possession* (1990).⁵⁶ It follows a similar plot to Byatt’s popular novel in that it depicts a mediocre academic’s journey to uncover the true love story of Ito and Isabella with the help of their possible (and bi-racial) descendent.

If Lady Parkes is the guardian angel of this text, then Ito is Bird’s partner and compatriot in the sense that Bird claims to be “among her own people” when she is among foreign communities.⁵⁷ He represents Bird’s most frustrated attempt at categorization because he, like Japan in the larger sense, cannot be dismissed as a barbarian. Bird’s ongoing internal debate about whether to consider Japan a civilized or a

translator. D’Anethan would have been very familiar with Bird’s bestselling *Unbeaten Tracks* (1880) and could very well have been inspired by Bird’s depiction of Ito for her depiction of Suzuki, the translator. William Caine Sproston, *A Trip Around the World in 1887-8*, (British Columbia: G. Routledge and sons, 1888). Eliza Ruhamah Scidmore, *Jinrikisha Days in Japan*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1891). Eleanora Mary Haggard Anethan, *It Happened in Japan*, (Yokohama: Kelly & Walsh Ltd., 1905).

⁵⁵ Nakajima Kyōko, *Itō no koi* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2005).

⁵⁶ Chieko Ichikawa, “Whirlwind Romance between West and East: Isabella Bird’s *Unbeaten Tracks* and Kyoko Nakajima’s *Ito’s Love*,” *The Global and the Local*, NAVSA/BAVS/AVSA Conference, “Japan,” University of Venice, June 3-6, 2013.

⁵⁷ When Bird wrote to her sister from Australia in 1872, she told her that those foreign scenes are “like being among my own people.” Kay Chubbuck, ed, *Letters to Henrietta* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 38.

barbarian nation is consistently troubled by Ito, a man who defies both terms. Bird must admit that such a binary is ineffective: “I think that in many things...the Japanese are greatly our superiors, but that in many others they are immeasurably behind us” (I.362). The binary becomes a sliding scale on which her own civilization is not always the winner.

III. Complicating Binaries: Ito and Isabella

Bird is in many ways a singular figure in the annals of travel literature and her unique situation forces her to respond to the foreign people (in this case the Japanese) she encounters in a markedly different way from the rest of nineteenth century travel authors. Her recurring illnesses when in traditional Western spaces and her remarkably good health in whatever adventurous quandary her travels puts her means that foreign spaces are a better match for her than her own ostensible home. When she travels, she herself feels healthier and stronger and she must therefore interact with these foreign spaces with a degree of more immersion than her parallels. Her unusual treatment of Ito as a character in her narrative is a direct result of this atypical authorial position. The complications she brings to bear on the genre of travel writing make her discuss her relationship with Ito explicitly in a way other travel authors could circumvent or subsume. This ultimately means that the issue of transnational encounter is moved away from the colonial framework of colonizer and barbarian and forces a discussion about the respective virtues of both cultures.

Bird's illness functions as a crucial part of her authorial and celebrity persona. While she was vocal about Western superiority in regards to religion and physical

appearance, her marked uncertainty about the inherent superiority of the epicenters of Western civilization, specifically cities and the markers of industrialization, often resulted in periods of dramatic illness. Since the cure for this recurring illness—an illness that only manifested during stays in Western cities—was travel, foreign communities and geographical distance function in a very different way for Bird than they do for the average travel writer. She qualified any perceived enthusiasm for travelling by insisting that her travels were prompted by urgent medical concerns: “I do not think I have a passion for travelling. I first travelled for health’s sake, and have continued to do so largely on that ground.”⁵⁸ Her travels were directed, she insisted, by doctors’ orders and she disdained the celebrity her accounts of her travels may have afforded her. Visitors and travel enthusiasts who made the pilgrimage to her home in metropolitan London or her sister’s home in Edinburgh, where she often retreated to recover, were shocked to meet a self-professed invalid instead of the robust and courageous woman from her travel narratives. She confounded visitors and admirers so much that her obituary in the *Edinburgh Medical Journal* tellingly described her as “if not a mass of physical contradictions, ... very much an anachronism.... The Invalid at Home and the Samson Abroad.”⁵⁹ To draw a little more from the comparison to Samson, the source of Bird’s remarkable strength in her travels seems to have been the presence of a varied community and the transitory nature of her journeys. Take this transitory community away from her and she collapses, as weak as Samson shorn of his hair.

This means that Bird’s perspective of the foreign communities she finds herself in must, by necessity, be more balanced than other celebrity travel writers whose narratives

⁵⁸ “Mrs. Isabella Bird Bishop, F.R.G.S.” *The Woman at Home* (January 1898), 194.

⁵⁹ *Edinburgh Medical Journal* 16 (1904), 383.

struck such a popular chord with English Imperial sentiment by reaffirming the natural superiority of the Western explorer to the exotic populations they interact with.⁶⁰ The conflict between the two narrative pulls is apparent: she is torn between describing foreign people as being in need of superior Western influence and the contrary, depicting those same foreign cultures as being the medicinal cure for the sickening influence of Western culture. In a single paragraph in the first volume of *Unbeaten Tracks*, she expresses both approbation and her idealistic plan to undertake a neutral study. “Though the sun is shiny, I don’t admire Yokohama,” she begins, “It is dull and has no salient points, and it looks as if it had seen busier if not better days” (I.23). She amends this definitively negative view a few lines later: “I am suffering mainly from complete mental confusion, owing to the rapidity with which new sights and ideas are crowding upon me.” This amendment moves the culpability from Japan onto her own shoulders: her unhappiness is no longer Japan’s fault. By the end of the paragraph, she is back to her ideal of neutrality: “Well, I have months to spend here, and I must begin at the alphabet, see everything, hear everything, read everything, and delay forming opinions as long as possible.” She polices herself against the impulse to jump to rash conclusions based on the prevailing cultural perception of Japan. While she is not always successful in these efforts to curtail preconceived notions, she does continue to strive for authorial neutrality. Nowhere is the vacillation between these two contradictory forces more apparent than in her ongoing discussions of Ito’s character and physicality.

Ito is introduced in a manner very reminiscent of Goldilocks in the familiar fairytale. Bird has interviewed two other candidates and found one too masculine and

⁶⁰ This is, of course, an oversimplification intended only to establish Bird’s position by contrast.

assertive and the other too feminine and lethargic. Ito arrives as an enigma, “a creature without any recommendation at all,” but, like that third bowl of porridge, he is found to be just right for Bird’s purposes. Bird’s appraisal of Ito starts with the physical and, by extension, the conventionally racist: “though bandy-legged, [he] is well-proportioned,” “round and singularly plain face, [but] good teeth,” and “the most stupid-looking Japanese that I have seen....but...I think the stolidity is partly assumed” (I.51). Bird constructs an inhuman creature with this description, more animal than man. In particular, the assessment of his teeth reads more like the appraisal of a horse than of a companion. She says he “flies up stairs and along corridors as noiselessly as a cat” (I.52). Very quickly, however, the “stupid-looking” Japanese man becomes a paragon of fox-like cleverness. Bird very quickly discovers that Ito will not be controlled: “I have never been able to manage anybody in my life, and shall surely have no control over this clever, cunning, Japanese youth, who on most points will be able to deceive me as much as he pleases” (I.54). Indeed, it is his cleverness that she values most about him as the narrative continues. Later, she says bluntly, “his cleverness...and singular intelligence surprise me daily” (I.159).

The crux of their relationship is the pedagogical and linguistic exchange they enact daily. Ito’s role as interpreter makes him both the representative of all of Japan to Bird’s readers as well as a step or two closer to Western civilization than the average Japanese person he and Bird encounter in their travels; certainly more recognizably civilized than the Chinese “coolies” Bird and Ito are both very content to dismiss as barely human. Ito is the embodiment of Bird’s access to communication and her ability to connect at all with those revivifying foreign communities her health depends on. Her

dependence on him is very real, but she is careful to not stress this dependence too heavily. Instead, she constructs Ito as a student eager to learn “*good* English,” as opposed to the “common” English he has picked up from American merchants (I.160). Thus, she re-writes her dependency as a reciprocal relationship: he needs her pedagogical help as much as she needs his practical help. Yet this construction is ultimately a façade and one that Bird secretly recognizes as such. Even as she builds this mirage, she must admit that her dependence on Ito far outweighs his interest in “*good* English” or Western affairs. He remains “intensely Japanese” and “very anxious about my good behavior...everywhere in Japanese fashion” and she remains “entirely dependent on Ito, not only for travelling arrangements, but for making inquiries, gaining information, and even companionship.”

This conflict between her dependence and her pretense at superior cultural instruction comes to a head in a particularly choleric dispute with Ito about a horse. Bird was famous for her expertise in horse management. Many of other her travel narratives focus specifically on the fact that her bravery is manifested in her abilities with horses. She frequently uses the difference between her own humane treatment of the animals and the brutality the “natives” display towards them as a marker of her racial superiority. In this instance, she reproaches Ito for his cruelty but discovers an unexpected obstacle to her rebuke:

I rode back and interfered with some very strong language, saying, ‘You are a bully, and, like all bullies, a coward.’ Imagine my aggravation when, at our first halt, he brought out his note-book, as usual, and quietly asked me the meaning of the words ‘bully’ and ‘coward.’ It was perfectly impossible to explain them, so I said a

bully was the worst name I could call him, and that a coward was the meanest thing a man could be. Then the provoking boy said, ‘Is bully a worse name than devil?’ ‘Yes, far worse,’ I said, on which he seemed rather crestfallen, and he has not beaten his horse since, in my sight at least (II.140).

This exchange highlights many of the tensions of their relationship. The notebook functioned as the marker of her complicated pride at his cleverness. In an earlier entry, she described his use of the notebook: “He is very anxious to speak *good* English, as distinguished from ‘common’ English, and to get new words with their correct pronunciation and spelling. Each day he puts down in his note-book the words that I use that he does not quite understand, and in the evenings reads them to me and puts down their meaning and spelling with their Japanese equivalent” (I.160). She goes on to compare Ito favorably with professional interpreters, citing the use of this note-book as special proof of his superior abilities. The fact that this symbol of his preference for *her* English becomes the tool with which he refutes her scolding is significant. He is not questioning the content of her criticism, but rather implicitly questioning her linguistic authority. It is the specificity of the English language and the fact that he does not correctly understand its usage that seems to be her most efficacious weapon against him, leading to his becoming “crestfallen” after the encounter. It becomes a double-edged sword, however, because his acceptance of her critique becomes a criticism of her as authority on her own language when he draws her attention to it. The key component to her construction of their reciprocal relationship in which he looks to her for “*good*

English” is called into question. She can hardly be his instructor if she cannot even explicate her terminology.

The conclusion must be that Bird is not as good a translator as Ito. While superficially an obvious statement—as Bird herself admits her own inadequacy in Japanese—the destabilizing element here is not whether she can comprehend the Japanese language, but rather can she explicate her own native language. She may be the better English speaker, but the skill of using her English to bridge the transnational gap eludes her here. She claims that the word was “perfectly impossible to explain,” admitting defeat rather than attempting to find a re-formulated definition in English that Ito will understand. Ito, by comparison, has always known better than to give a term up as “impossible to explain” as she does here. He, in fact, has earned her praise in the past by an indefatigable drive to reach full comprehension on both sides of the exchanges he translates. By admitting his superiority as a translator, as she implicitly does here, she shows her readers an awareness of his independence, an independence that is symbolized by the notebook. He is the author of the notebook and its contents remain hidden from Bird, even when she is included in the authorship of this and other linguistic interludes. He transcribes the text, he dictates the content, and he is the narrator. Bird has, in essence, included a parallel text with an independent author in her narrative. Though she has superficially dominated Ito with her rebuke of his behavior, the implicit acknowledgement of his superiority in translation shows the cracks in her racial hierarchy.

Through the first volume, in their travels through the main island of Japan, Bird and Ito come to an uneasy balance of power and cultural exchange. It has a precarious dependence on Bird’s construction of Ito as part of an inferior race and speaker of an

inferior language even while she occasionally must acknowledge his claims to superiority in the manipulation of language for her benefit. By praising his cleverness and reveling in his aptitude, Bird includes an implicit appraisal of Japanese character. It, as a representative of Japan, is begrudgingly given a position of power during their journey. She understands her dependence on him and his superior linguistic agility. In the second volume of the text, this balance changes. This is the volume in which Bird presses northward into Hokkaido, land of the Ainu.

IV. New Allegiances: How the Ainu Complicate the Scale

While Bird was content to align with Ito against the inferior “coolies,” she spent most of the first volume insisting that Japanese physiognomy proved their inferiority to Westerners. Whether Ito’s cleverness may or may not win him a claim to a higher status with her, she relies on the undisputed claim of his “ugliness” for the ultimate proof of Western superiority. Ito is ugly, stupid-looking, and in need of induction into “good” English customs and language according to her and even in the moments in which she is forced to question the power dynamic of their relationship, this physical status remains constant. There remains between them a strict line of difference between them: Japanese culture is ancient but undeniably inferior, degraded by time, and in need of Western modernizing. And though she marvels at the technological innovations occurring in the metropolitan centers of Yokohama and Tokyo (including a railroad between the two cities as early as 1872), she continues to describe the majority of Japan as hopelessly outdated and beleaguered by superstitions and trenchant stupidity. This changes when she is confronted by the Ainu. The Ainu are remarkably Western (even European) in

appearance, but seem more like traditional “barbarians” to her than the Japanese ever did. Her physiognomic determination of civility has betrayed her: she finds the Ainu much more physically appealing and familiar, but Ito is confirmed to be more culturally and intellectually aligned with her.

Early on in the second volume, Ito is “revealed” to have escaped from service with a botanist named Mr. Davies who was “put to the greatest inconvenience by [Ito’s] defection” (II.20). According to Andrew Elliott, one of the few scholars who has discussed this text, this “*éclaircissement*” marks the beginning of Ito’s dismissal from the narrative, though it takes two hundred more pages for him to actually leave. Elliott argues that Bird begins to cordon him off from the main narrative as she explores the “savage” Yezo. He is less necessary (because he doesn’t speak the native language of the Ainu) and, thus, he is allowed fewer of the privileges his usefulness made for him in the first volume. She ventures out without him with more confidence in the rural territory of the Ainu. He is disdainful of the Ainu for being culturally “backward,” and she is ashamed of his obvious scorn: “I asked Mr. Von S. to speak to Ito in Japanese about the importance of being kind and courteous to the Ainos whose hospitality I shall receive; and Ito is very indignant at this. ‘Treat Ainos politely!’ he says, ‘they’re just dogs, not men’” (II.46). While Bird—who, as we have already seen, was always careful to follow the local dictates of manners—is ashamed of Ito’s prejudices, she joins him in them very shortly. She begins, however, by reveling in the rusticity of the “savage” life of the Ainu. It reminds her, after all, of her previous expedition to the Canadian Rockies and the sublime joy she found there. She changes her tone, however, upon closer inspection of Ainu life and switches to Ito’s perspective.

In one of the first chapter-letters written from within an Ainu village, Bird stakes her original analysis of the Ainu's role within Japanese society on an ekphrastic moment. Importantly, it shows her early uncertainty about who is the representative of "civilization," her or Ito, as well as her purely aesthetic appreciation for the Ainu's physicality:

I never saw such a strangely picturesque sight as that group of magnificent savages with the fitful firelight on their faces, and for adjuncts the flare of the torch, the strong lights, the blackness of the recesses of the room and the roof, at one end of which the stars looked in, and the row of savage women in the background—eastern savagery and western civilization met in this hut, savagery giving, and civilization receiving, the yellow-skinned Ito the connecting-link between the two, and the representative of a civilization to which our own is but an "infant of days" (II.59).

This moment begins with a physical description, much like Ito's first appearance. Where Ito was divided up into his least appealing features, the scene is divided up into pure sublime appreciation. The stars, the "strong lights," the blackness of the empty room, and the "fitful firelight" all serve as an emphasis for the magnificence of these "savages." For Bird, the lack of frippery is specifically what makes them so aesthetically compelling. It is the "savagery" of "eastern savagery" that makes them beautiful to her. At first the paradigm is a clearly stratified binary: eastern savagery is submissive to western civilization, literally "giving" and the latter "receiving." Yet, just a moment later, Ito, "the connecting-link between the two," becomes his own "civilization," one that is far more ancient than Bird's. In fact, the qualifier has disappeared: now "civilization"

appears without the regional designation, neither eastern nor western. This is because Ito has joined Bird on that side of the binary, becoming part of the now non-regional “civilization” that is defined as being what the Ainu, the “eastern savages,” are not.

Even Bird’s aesthetic appreciation of the Ainu begins to falter very soon. She admits that the “glamour which at first disguises the inherent barrenness of savage life” has made a beguiling mirage of the Ainu lifestyle. The word “glamour” undoubtedly refers to the fact that the Ainu present a familiar standard of physical beauty, Caucasian in character, but that they then failed to align culturally with the racial group they physically resembled. In the original edition, she introduced the Ainu in a chapter of explanatory notes about Yezo before returning to the main epistolary content. In this addendum, Bird described the Ainu as a race “wholly distinct from the Japanese. In complexion, they resemble the peoples of Spain and Southern Italy, and the expression of the face and the manner of showing courtesy are European rather than Asiatic” (II.9). She makes a very clear racial connection between the Ainu and familiar Western nations here. In the section she marks in her index as “Aino, *physique*,” she repeats the European connection: “[Aino] skin has the Italian olive tint, but in most cases is thin, and light enough to show the changes in colour in the cheek....The features, expression, and aspect, are European rather than Asiatic” (II.75). In the same section, she gives an overview of her unfavorable impression of the Japanese by comparison: “After the yellow skins, the stiff horse hair, the feeble eyelids, the elongated eyes, the sloping eyebrows, the flat noses, the sunken chests, the Mongolian features, the puny physique, the shaky walk of the men, the restricted totter of the women, and the general impression of degeneracy conveyed by the appearance of the Japanese, the Ainos make a very singular impression” (II.74).

While this is the longest diatribe against the Japanese in racialized terms, it is not a new idea. She frequently made mention of her disdain for Japanese physicality in the first volume, especially in regards to Ito's "ugliness."

Bird chooses a champion from among the Ainu who parallels Ito in her affections and in the narrative. Where Ito is frequently compared to horses, both in Bird's efforts to "tame" him and in the quality of his hair, Pipichari, her new favorite and a "splendid young savage" (II.70) with "richly-coloured skin and fine clear eyes," (II.67) is compared to a dog: "Pipichari, who lies at my feet like a staghound" (II.106). As she did with Ito before, this comparison makes dogs out of the Ainu. She has come a long way from her rebuke of Ito for making exactly this comparison: she means it as a compliment here to compare Pipichari to a dog. Like Ito before him, Pipichari has the ability to stage a subtle rebellion against her characterization of him.⁶¹ When Bird asks him why he abstains from alcohol—a quality he has in common with Ito, further proving their parallel roles in the narrative—he explains that "it makes men like dogs" (II.103). In his description of himself, outside of Bird's narrative, he is defined as being distanced from the other Ainu who behave "like dogs." Bird's comparison, though not directly discussed, is implicitly critiqued. Just as Ito's narrative rebellion was staged around the treatment of a horse, the metaphor Bird used to describe him, Pipichari's implicit rejection of Bird and Ito's comparison of him to a dog occurs in a meta-narrative way. Though Pipichari is not allowed the opportunity to directly disavow Bird's comparison, his rejection of the characteristics of men who behave like dogs functions as a narrative rejection. Bird and

⁶¹ Bird's conversations with Pipichari must presumably have been translated by Ito since she says, "[Pipichari] could speak a little Japanese." She makes no explicit comment on Ito's role in these conversations though she does mention his reactions to the Ainu in a general sense closely with every transcribed piece of a conversation. *UT*, (II.69).

Ito are joined in the same problematic position they once found themselves on opposite sides of: the negotiation of racist/racial assumptions of inherent superiority.

In her description of Ito and in her descriptions of the Ainu, Bird makes a snap judgment about the intellectual abilities based on physiognomy and then rescinds it soon after, claiming that her initial impression was the opposite of what we, the readers, know she initially assumed. In her first meeting with Ito, she assumed he was stupid based on his features and then re-wrote that first impression a few chapters later. In the case of the Ainu, her appended explanatory chapter at the beginning of the second volume gives this description: “The ‘hairy Ainos,’ as these savages have been called, are stupid, gentle, good-natured, and submissive” (II.9). This chapter was written long after the epistolary chapters that describe the events as they unfold and is fully comfortable describing the Ainu in terms of barbarian docility. In the body of the text, however, her description of the Ainu begins with a focus on their courteousness and civility, drawing particular attention to the fact that their manners are more civilized than barbarian and then develops into the later assumptions of backwards docility. She introduces them with a comment on their “courteous” manners: “They were very kind, and so courteous after a new fashion, that I quite forgot I was alone among savages” (II.37). She goes on to describe one unnamed Ainu man in particular, a precursor to Pipichari: “I think I never saw a face more beautiful in features or expression, with a lofty, sad, far-off, gentle, intellectual look, rather that of Sir Noël Paton’s ‘Christ’ than of a savage” (II.37). Interestingly, this early example of her preference for the Ainu physicality over the Japanese is not actually a “pure” Ainu: he is half Japanese. He speaks both languages “in the low musical tone which I find is characteristic of Aino speech.” In one figure, she has

evoked both painting and music, the accomplishments of a civilized society. Yet, her continued interaction with the Ainu—and Pipichari especially—shows how her opinion of the Ainu shifts downwardly, making her re-assess where Ito (and, by extension, the Japanese nation as a whole) belongs on the hierarchy between “civilization” and “savagery.”

V. Conclusion

Isabella Bird’s conception of Japan, as it predated and antedated her actual experience of Japan, is a contradictory force to the forward trajectory of her travel narrative. It is possible to watch as it is at times supported and then vehemently contradicted by her various encounters with Japanese people, especially in her long-term association with Ito. While her final account of her travels, the text of *Unbeaten Tracks* itself, shows the recurring impulse to dampen her experiences as they confound her presuppositions, it also bears witness to these fissures as they occur. The Isabella Bird who returned to England and was visited by a reading public that was inspired by her courage and her adventurousness was disappointed by the invalid they found, just as the placid return to the dominant racial hierarchies disappoints the modern reader of her text. Yet, I argue that the figure of Ito remains irresolvable, permanently caught in the interstitial space where Japan can be, as Wilde once said, the land of invention. Ito never speaks for himself, but Bird acknowledges him at various points and feels strongly for him. In the genre of travel writing, a Japonisme portrayal of a Japanese man undercuts some of the more racist aspects of Japonisme as a cultural discourse. When we move from experiential accounts of Japan onward to the fictional depictions, the figure of the

Japanese figure functions very differently. Where Ito provides a narrative space for Bird to confront the reality of her racist assumptions, Japanese women in popular Japonisme novels do not have that luxury.

Chapter Three

“You’re jus’ a picture off of a fan”: Orientalism, Objectification, and the Novels of *Japonisme*

“Rog-a-by, bebbby, off in Japan,
You jus’ a picture off of a fan”
Madame Butterfly, John Luther Long (1898)

In the previous chapter, I discussed the ways in which experiential accounts of travelling in Japan were mediated by tropes of the genre and by the historical context of the sociopolitical upheavals in Japanese society at the end of the Nineteenth Century. In this chapter, I move into the ambiguous space between experiential claims of expertise and aesthetic fiction that occurs when the genre shifts from travel narratives to novels. These are novels that bridge the experiential accounts of the previous chapter and the “Japan of pure invention,” the strictly aesthetic construction and an “exquisite fancy of art.”¹ Many of the authors of this collection of novels began their careers with travel narratives and quite a few of them concurrently wrote in both styles, borrowing conventions from both genres. The vast majority of these novels have been utterly forgotten by history, however popular they might have been in their first edition. Only a couple of names remain alive in our cultural consciousness—*Madame Butterfly* most of

¹ Oscar Wilde, “The Decay of Lying,” *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Richard Ellman, (New York: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 315.

all—but hardly any of the authors’ names are still familiar. These are novels fully cognizant of themselves as pulp literature, written to capitalize on the popularity of Japonisme. They were produced to fulfill a set of derivative criteria, sell as many copies as possible, and then fade into obscurity. Like the oceans of Japanese art objects I discussed in the first chapter, these novels are notable for their quantity, for their sheer volume.

Yet for all that these novels happily conform to the conventions of their genre—a delicate Japanese woman, a cruel Caucasian man, abandonment, and heartbreak—each one proves as much an exception to the rule as an example of it. This is a genre that requires strict conformity from its participants, but also exceptionality. Like the porcelain women who populate these novels, each one is a delicate art piece in its own right. Each novel—and each porcelain woman—must simultaneously conform to expectations and deviate from them.

The three novels I examine in detail also provide a sense of the transnational scope of the Japonisme movement while remaining firmly tied to the British context. National boundaries in literary studies have hampered the critical understanding of Japonisme in previous years. All three of the texts I examine were circulated in Britain and capitalized on the same movement, yet each one originates in a different country.² While Holland was British and wrote primarily for a British audience, the other two authors have more international status. Pierre Loti’s *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887),

² I choose to use Laura Ensor’s 1897 translation as my primary text for the Pierre Loti discussion specifically because it was the most popular iteration of the novel in Great Britain.

though written in French, was translated by Laura Ensor as early as 1897³ and Long's *Madame Butterfly*,⁴ as we all know, has had a vibrant international afterlife thanks to Puccini's 1904 Italian opera. These are all three texts that are conscious of their global positioning, of the transnational function of their language, and each one draws attention to the mechanics of subsidiary Japanese characters transcribing texts of their own in their own language. It is no coincidence that a movement as conscious of its own transnationality as Japonisme would feature a fascination with transcribed language, especially one that could double as a discipline of art as Japanese calligraphy does.

The discussion of the British reception of Japan and the function of Japonisme also necessitates a discussion of racial politics. The novels' derivative plot structure requires Japan be represented by a single isolated woman, often voiceless because of the narrator's lack of language skills and always described in terms of dehumanized fragility. This depiction of Japan as fragile, vulnerable, delicate, and supremely feminine is neither unique to this period nor new information for even the casual observer of East/West interactions. Yet, this model needs to be reexamined in light of national and global contemporaneous transformations and in relation to the aesthetic and genre conventions of the Japonisme movement.

I. Curious and Unexpected Things: The Japonisme Novel

³ Pierre Loti, *Madame Chrysanthème*. Laura Ensor, trans., (London: G. Routledge and Sons, 1897). Subsequent references will be by page number in the body of the discussion.

⁴ John Luther Long, *Madame Butterfly and A Japanese Nightingale: Two Orientalist Texts*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002). Subsequent references will be by page number in the body of the discussion.

If Japanese femininity fascinated the authors of the informative texts and travel narratives that preponderated in the 1860s and 1870s, the Japonisme novels of the 1880s, 1890s, and early Twentieth Century were fascinated to the point of exclusivity. Any novel that could claim the genre of Japonisme had contained within its pages the same basic formula of a Japanese woman: she is always delicate like porcelain, familiarly beautiful despite her exoticism, and, somehow, also unique. In almost every case, the plot revolves around a cruel Western man who is briefly enamored of her and then tragically replaces, rejects, or simply forgets her. This is the Butterfly we are so familiar with, the woman who is so dependent on the Western man for emotional and physical intimacy that she withers and dies without him. She is repeated in iteration after iteration, novel after novel, until she is as familiar as the figures painted on porcelain that were available in every house and in every shop in the Western world. She—and, thus, her genre—is utterly derivative.

Yet every one of these Butterfly figures was required by her narrative to be both derivative and, at the same time, exceptional. Almost every one of the male characters who travel to Japan do so explicitly in search of the figure they are familiar with from porcelain figurines and woodcut prints and yet almost every one of them chooses the woman who somehow defies this category. Like the connoisseurs I discussed in the first chapter, these male characters use the search for a Japanese bride as an opportunity to assert their distinctive taste, to prove their ability to discern quality when presented with a collection of similar women. Each of these Japanese women is touted as a completely unique iteration of the same basic formula: a perfect porcelain woman, completely recognizable, and still an absolutely unique individual. She is valuable and desirable

because she is familiar but she makes each novel a necessity for its reader because there has never been another woman like her.

Her connection to the merchandise of Japonisme often makes her slightly other than human, something slightly closer to an object of art. Lafcadio Hearn expressed the sentiment directly in his book on Japanese culture helpfully titled *Japan: An Attempt At Interpretation* (1904):

For it has well been said the most wonderful aesthetic products of Japan are not its ivories, nor its bronzes, nor its porcelains, nor its swords, nor any of its marvels in metal or lacquer—but its women. Accepting as partly true the statement that woman everywhere is as man has made her, we might say this statement is more true of the Japanese woman than any other.⁵

While Japanese merchandise has an unusually vivacious position in Western imagination in this era, as I discussed in my first chapter, the implication here is that the Japanese woman is as static and movable as these inanimate objects. The artistry of her creation is attributed to the men around her, removing even her physicality from her own agency. She is not just the woman depicted by the porcelain figurines and the woodcut prints; she *is* the porcelain figurines and the woodblock prints. She is the thing itself, artistry completely divorced from the human. Since she is also the representative of Japan within these texts, Japan also becomes something other than real: “My impressions of Japan are charming enough; I feel myself fairly launched upon this tiny, artificial, fictitious world, which I felt I knew from the paintings of lacquer and porcelain. It is so exact a

⁵ Lafcadio Hearn, *Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation*, (New York: Grosset & Dunlap Publishers, 1904), 393.

representation!” (42). Pierre Loti, an author I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter, calls Japan the representation here, not the “paintings of lacquer and porcelain.” Japan is the “tiny, artificial world” that accurately represents the art objects, not the other way around. The relationship of art to reality has been completely reversed: reality holds the mirror up to art now.

While the Japanese women (and, therefore, Japan itself) take on the properties of the decorative objects so popular in the West, the role of the decorative objects themselves is equally complex. Almost every Japonisme text—travel narrative, guidebook, or novel—contains a wealth of Japanese art objects described in cascading and overwhelming detail. Indeed, the novels all seem required to pause at one point in the execution of their narrative to defend their claim to Japonisme fashions by listing all the decorative objects their characters have access to, giving the objects a narrative primacy. The Western man opens the door to his new Japanese dwelling and walks the reader through the rooms and gardens to display the opulence of his everyday life in Japan. They catalogue their Japonisme artifacts. Clive Holland, another author I discuss in more detail later in this chapter, gives over entire chapters in *A Japanese Romance* (1904) to descriptions of an ornamental mirror, a decorative box, and a gilded knife. Winifred Eaton’s *Miss Nume of Japan* (1899) features many lengthy discussions about the relative aesthetic merits of Japanese and Western clothing.⁶ Long’s *Madame Butterfly* (1898) even pauses in the middle of the titular character’s famous suicide to describe the blade in intimate detail. The negotiation of textual territory between plot and merchandise seems

⁶ Winifred Eaton, *Miss Nume of Japan*, (New York: Forgotten Books, 2015).

to be a constant battle, forever re-negotiated. Each Japansime novel must find its own balance between being an enumeration of Japonisme merchandise and a novel.

The clearest iteration of the conflict between the aesthetic cataloguing of merchandise and narrative development occurs in Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887). The plot is clear: he is passing through Japan and is in search of a perfect porcelain bride to pass the time with. Yet, Japan stages a reverse invasion of his incoming vessel. While still in the harbor and firmly ensconced in the safety of his Western ship, a deluge of merchants and their goods overwhelms Loti's narrator. His plan to find a porcelain bride is endangered by the sheer abundance of the merchandise as it invades his Western space and the narrative of events as they transpire:

Invaded by a mercantile, bustling, comical Japan, which rushed upon us in full boat-loads, full junks, like a rising sea; little men and little women coming in a continuous uninterrupted stream...They all carried on their backs little baskets, little boxes, receptacles of every shape, fitting into each other in the most ingenious manner, each one containing several others, and multiplying till they filled up everything, in endless number; from these they drew forth all manner of curious and unexpected things, folding screens, silk slippers, soap, lanterns, sleeve-links, live cicadas chiriping in little cages, jewelry, tame white mice turning little cardboard mills, quaint photographs, hot soups and stews in bowls ready to be served out in rations to the crew;—china, a legion of vases teapots, cups, little pots and plates (17).

The list has utterly disrupted the narrative, foreclosing the possibility of plot development until the list is concluded. It begins with the people, making them diminutive doll-creatures, and then conjures the wealth of Japonisme art objects in a literary display of opulence. The objects invade his Western space, multiplying in their tininess until they have “filled up everything.” When he catalogues the “curious and unexpected things,” he alternates between the predictable screens and porcelain and the more unexpected, spectacle of mice performing tricks. This is the presence of Japanese mercantilism: all the novels in the genre seem to be overrun with these “curious and unexpected things” that multiply magically. Is it any wonder Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Patience* has a reference to “all one sees that’s Japanese,” as if Japanese art objects begin to over-populate the landscape? While the Japanese people are flattened into inanimate objects, the inanimate objects take on a life of their own.

I discussed in the first chapter how connoisseurs of aesthetic Japonisme routinely dismissed these objects of Japonisme in favor of an exclusive version of Japonisme that capitalized on distinctions of taste. I showed how these connoisseurs tied their version of Japonisme more to the rippling effects of Japanese woodblock prints within the avant-garde world of Impressionist painting than to the preponderance of Japonisme merchandise filling the homes of middle class consumers. This tension between modes of Japonisme is referred to in the genre of Japonisme novels. The male protagonists of these novels are often fictional depictions of the Japonisme connoisseur. Their presence—and their cruel abandonment of the Japanese heroines—is an embedded critique of the exclusionary Japonisme connoisseurs. Since these pulp novels are undeniably more a part of the mass consumer version of Japonisme than the connoisseur version, this

representation of the connoisseur as the one who abandons the Japanese heroine and condemns her to death is a critique by one mode of Japonisme of the other. Holland's protagonist in *A Japanese Romance* (1904) is just such a character and explains his artistic relationship with Japan to a friend in one of the final chapters of the book:

‘There was so much to paint. Ah! Old chap, you can have no idea how much. You, with your swell sitters—duchesses and nobodies who want to be immortalized in paint and canvas—know nothing of the fascinating, exquisite beauty of scene and atmosphere, flower and life, out there’ (298).

However much he might reflect on the beauty of Japan from the safety of his Western home, Somerville was incapable of engaging with Japan while he was there. It is only through his artistic medium and only after he has left Japan that Somerville is able to recognize the vibrancy of the country, a recognition he failed to make in his interaction with an actual living Japanese woman. While he was tied to a living Japanese woman, he found Japan tiresome. Freed from the actual human interaction, Japan immediately regains its vivacity—literally, it is more alive for him when there is no living presence to consider. His lack of sympathetic engagement with the real woman in favor of the aesthetic projection of Japan has caused the death of the Japanese woman.

As the genre of the Japonisme novel developed, it became more and more aligned with popular Japonisme, helped in no small part by the massive popularity of John Luther Long's *Madame Butterfly* (1898) and its depiction of Pinkerton as unambiguously cruel. By the time of Clive Holland's career, the allegiance was wholehearted. In the early days of the Japonisme novel, however, the relationship of the genre to both modes of Japonisme was still in flux. Pierre Loti, whose *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887) is often

touted as the first instance of the genre I refer to as the Japonisme novel, is much more fluid in his allegiances than either Holland or Long. It is for this reason that I begin my examination of the genre in its particular iterations with Loti. Though he and Holland both have experiential claims of authenticity in their depictions of marriage to a Japanese woman, having both done so in their real lives, they are also dramatically separated by their allegiances to connoisseur and popular Japonisme. The contrast between these two authors lays the foundation for a discussion of the text with which every other examination of literary Japonisme in English has begun: with *Madame Butterfly* (1898).

II. The Beginning of the Genre: Pierre Loti and Chrysanthème

Pierre Loti, whose real name was Julien Viaud (1850-1923), once the darling of both the popular press and academia alike, has faded from view in English criticism over the past century and, though he continues to be included in anthologies in France, his reputation has suffered there as well. At the height of his popularity at the turn of the century, Edmund Gosse called him “the spoiled favourite of the Parisian press.”⁷ and Henry James called him a “rare and individual genius.”⁸ In his real life, Viaud⁹ was a French naval officer whose many travels furnished him with the material for a series of exotic semi-autobiographical novels. These texts document Viaud’s real experiences in distant lands through the narration of his thinly veiled authorial voice, Pierre Loti. Given

⁷ Edmund Gosse, *French Profiles*, (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1905), 202.

⁸ Henry James, *Essays in London and Elsewhere*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishing, 1893), 160.

⁹ Julian Viaud’s biography does not exactly match that of Pierre Loti’s, his authorial identity, but it is so close that the majority of scholarship dedicated to him has collapsed the two identities. Given the fact that his entire literary career occurred under the pseudonym Pierre Loti and that he referred to himself as Loti, I refer to him by his pseudonym throughout the majority of this work.

his international experience, he was also a collector of foreign objects and his home has been posthumously converted into a museum, including one entire room dedicated to his fantastical Orientalist re-imagining of a mosque.¹⁰ His authorial credentials were as impressive as his experiential ones: in 1892 he was admitted into the Académie française.

Yet for all that Loti—for so Viaud thoroughly became, to the extent that his surviving child's surname was a hyphenated amalgamation of both of his identities, Loti-Viaud—was thoroughly enmeshed in the connoisseur version of Japonisme, he also had many of the hallmarks of the popular mode as well. He achieved the kind of celebrity that we would recognize today. In his journal, he claimed, “I am like a god, or a strange animal, everyone wishes to see, to touch!” (212). He also remarked specifically on the abundance of photographs of him that were marketed both in conjunction with his literary output and distinct from it. Each one of his foreign expeditions and the accompanying novel came with photographic evidence. Like celebrities today, he was aware of the public perception he needed to perpetuate. He wore prodigious amounts of makeup to appear more suited to the romantic adventures of his novels and fitted his shoes with devices to make him teeter on tiptoe to give the illusion of height. Like the genre of Japonisme novels itself, he was aware of the tropes and conventions he needed to meet for the sake of popularity.

Given the fact that the slightly re-invigorated interest in Loti in the past decade has focused on the potential for queer reading,¹¹ it is not surprising that *Madame*

¹⁰ Lesley Blanch, *Pierre Loti: Portrait of an Escapist*, (London: Collins Pub, 1983).

¹¹ See Richard Berrong, *In Love with a Handsome Sailor: The Emergence of Gay Identity and the Novels of Pierre Loti*, (New York: University of Toronto Press, 2003) and Hélène de Burgh, *Sex, Sailors, and Colonies: Narratives of Ambiguity in the Works of Pierre Loti*, (Germany: Peter Lang AG, European Academic Publishers, 2005).

Chrysanthème (1887) has not shared the benefits of increased critical attention. Richard Berrong candidly dismisses the novel: “After *My Brother Yves* and *Iceland Fisherman*, which, directly and indirectly, are two powerful takes of the protagonist’s love for a man, *Madame Chrysanthème* seems very pale as a gay love story. As a heterosexual love story, it is altogether lifeless.”¹² Clive Wake, another of the few English-language scholars to examine Loti since he fell from popularity, called *Madame Chrysanthème* “less a novel than an interlude” in his 1973 examination of Loti’s oeuvre.¹³ For scholars looking for a queer literary history, *Madame Chrysanthème* falls utterly flat. After the token gesture towards the reappearance of Yves, the homoerotic love interest from another novel, and the erotically tinged descriptions of Japanese men’s legs, these scholars ignore *Madame Chrysanthème* altogether.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, Loti’s *Madame Chrysanthème* deserves a place at the beginning of any discussion of the emergence of literary Japonisme as a movement distinct from (though still strongly tied to) literary Aestheticism for two reasons. Firstly, since both Loti’s marriage in the novel is drawn from real experience in a “temporary” marriage with a Japanese girl who he purposefully collapsed with her fictional counterpart in letters and interviews, this novel negotiates a claim of accuracy that shows its influences from the travel narratives discussed in the previous chapter.¹⁴ In its protean form, this new Japonisme novel genre straddles the divide between an experiential account of a real Japan and a fictional account of an imagined Japan, a Japan created by the circulation of Japonisme commodities available in the West. By participating in both

¹² Richard Berrong, *In Love with a Handsome Sailor: The Emergence of Gay Identity and the Novels of Pierre Loti*, (New York: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 124.

¹³ Clive Wake, *The Novels of Pierre Loti*, (Paris: Mouton, 1974), 143.

¹⁴ see Figure 3.1

of these two literary forms, one based on “fact” and the other on fiction, *Madame Chrysanthème* performs a meta-commentary on its own project of melding authenticity with fictionalization, drawing attention to the ways in which both genres were already predisposed to incorporate elements of the other. Secondly, and possibly more importantly, Loti’s novel also has a heightened awareness of its own aesthetic and cultural intentions in beginning a genre. Loti’s narrator discusses his narrative project bluntly, from the original plot point of the quest to find a doll-like woman to temporarily marry all the way through to his authorial uneasiness with his own ability to fit his aesthetic experience into words. As Loti distanced himself and his text from the circle of connoisseur Japonists (like Zola and Goncourt), his novel bridged the gap between popular Japonisme and literary Aestheticism.

In other ways, Loti’s novel follows the pathway we have grown to expect from the fetishization of the Far East, whether in the Victorian era or our contemporary age. There is, as expected, a delicate Japanese woman and there is also, as expected, a cruel Western man who abandons her near the conclusion of the novel. Loti’s narrator performs the traditional rhetoric about Japan as well, from referring to the people in diminutive terms and comparing them to porcelain dolls to being appalled by the tokens of Shintoism and Buddhism in temples and being perplexed by the perceived monstrosity of these deities. As we saw in the previous chapter, these rhetorical traditions are partly adopted from the travel narratives already omnipresent by the time Loti started his novel. His conscious decision to include these traditional rhetorical moves shows his awareness of the tropes of the genre and his willing compliance in the underlying imperialist



Figure 3.1 Pierre Loti pictured with Yves and the "real" Chrysanthème, Unknown Japanese photographer - Unknown Japanese photographer, 1885. Reproduction in "Quand le Japon s'ouvrit au monde", Keiko Omoto

assumptions of Western superiority. Even his positioning in the series of photographs that accompanied the novel shows his nonchalant disdain for his Japanese adventure. In one photograph in particular, he cocks his head at the camera with a humorous tilt.¹⁵

“Chrysanthème,” in contrast, looks solemn, small, and humorless.

Chrysanthème proves to be an elusive figure in many respects. Before she is even developed as a character, she undermines some of his preconceptions of his journey. Without having spoken a word, she changes the course of the novel. His fantasy of a flattened, porcelain-doll Japanese wife has found unexpected opposition in his preference for a woman whose interiority is opaque. In other words, he constructs a fantasy that he then is surprised to find unappealing. Like Isabella Bird, whom I discussed in the previous chapter, he is very vocal about those aspects of Japanese culture and people that he feels mark them as a lesser race. This is especially clear when he originally expresses his expectations for his future bride in the introduction: “Yes—I shall choose a little yellow-skinned woman with black hair and cat’s eyes. She must be pretty. Not much bigger than a doll...[We will have] a little paper house, in the midst of green gardens, prettily shaded. We shall live among the flowers, everything around us shall blossom” (8). His expectations are fantastical and beautiful, yes, but also depict a child’s toy more closely than a real woman. His intentions for marriage are inextricably tied to the aesthetic project of building a perfect aesthetic space, made magical by Japan’s “fairy-like” qualities.¹⁶ The woman he imagines is equally tied to that project and exists as a flattened version Loti is familiar with from Japanese art objects. He goes on later to

¹⁵ see Figure 3.1.

¹⁶ see previous chapter for an extensive discussion of the use of the “fairy” trope to describe Japan in travel narratives.

worry that the reality of Japan might tarnish his fantasy by being too different from the version of Japan he learned to expect from the merchandise he encountered back in France:

And in [old Nagasaki], who knows, there may be, lurking behind a paper screen, some affected cat's-eyed little woman, whom in two or three days (having no time to lose) I shall marry!! But, no, the picture painted by my fancy has faded. I can no longer see the little creature in my mind's eye; the sellers of white mice have blurred her image; I fear now, lest she should be like them (20).

The “sellers of mice” he mentions here are a part of a reverse-invasion by Japan, a cascade of consumer objects that invades his Western vessel before it even has a chance to dock that I already discussed. The mice sellers are picked out of that list and, by their very reality, have overwhelmed Loti's narrator's porcelain-doll fantasy. His hypothetical wife exists in only two senses: she can either fit into the fantasy created by the merchandise circulating back in Western bourgeois circles or she can be a mice seller, appallingly real. Yet even in this construction—where the fantasy is preferable and reality is an encroaching force that endangers the precarious fantasy—Loti's narrator prioritizes a disgust at the “affected cat's eye” over the dismal comparison to the mice sellers. So his hypothetical wife cannot be an affectation, she must be an authentic porcelain-doll woman. Yet authenticity is precisely what makes the mice sellers appalling and prompts this moment of instability.

Loti's narrator's conflicted desire for a porcelain wife is thus well established by the time Chrysanthème arrives. Her arrival—and the fact that Loti's narrator chooses her

at all—belies his stated preference for porcelain women. Chrysanthème was not the woman picked out for Loti's narrator by the intermediary. Instead, a woman named Jasmin was prepared for his selection and meets all his stated criteria, but Loti's narrator responds to her with instant revulsion:

Heavens! why, I know her already! Long before setting foot in Japan, I had met with her, on every fan, on every tea-cup—with her silly air, her puffy little visage, her tiny eyes, mere gimlet-holes above those expanses of impossible pink and white which are her cheeks. She is young, that is all that I can say in her favour; she is even so young that I should almost scruple to accept her....What! Share an hour of my life even with that little doll? Never! (56)

Here, Loti's narrator despises Jasmin for the very reason he initially expressed for finding his own Japanese wife. He wanted a doll-like bride and yet he rejects Jasmin expressly for being too doll-like. Instead, he chooses Chrysanthème from the back of the crowd of female relatives:

In my annoyance, I had not observed her; she had her back to the light, was dressed in dark colours, and sat in the careless attitude of one who keeps in the background. The fact is this one pleased me much better. Eyes with long lashes, rather narrow, but would have been called good in any country in the world; almost an expression, almost a thought...She wore an expression of ennui, also a little of contempt; as if she regretted her attendance at a spectacle which dragged so much and was so little amusing (59).

He chooses Chrysanthème specifically for her contempt for the charade of a marriage, for her beauty, “good in any country” (i.e., according to Western standards), and for the possibility of an unknown interiority. He had wanted a flattened porcelain bride; he chooses a woman who, instead, reminds him of Western standards of beauty and whose interior life eludes him.

This introduction follows the same pattern as Isabella Bird’s introduction of Ito in *Unbeaten Tracks* (1880). In both cases, alternatives are presented to the Westerner before they settle on their choice of companion. They also both declare their requirements for the post and then choose a person who does not fulfill them. Bird was looking for an established interpreter and someone who could prove their trustworthiness. Instead, she chose a young man who could offer no letter of recommendation and who would prove to be more than a little mischievous. Loti’s narrator was looking for the flattened vision of Japanese femininity he had been taught to expect from porcelain dolls and paper fans. He chose, instead, a woman with recognizably Western features and a complex interior life that he would never completely understand. When Loti’s narrator formally accepts Chrysanthème (after the financial negotiations have taken place), he re-enforces which quality he chose her for: “There is actually some expression in her glance, and I am almost persuaded that she—this one—thinks” (63). He was looking for a doll and he chose the only Japanese person he can be persuaded “thinks.”

Loti’s narrator makes sure to insist that Chrysanthème is the exception in Japan and that, in comparison, her family is “a set of puppets” (66). For someone who was searching for the derivative Japanese woman available on all the artifacts of Japonisme, he seems deeply committed to Chrysanthème’s exceptionalism. He explicates this more

clearly in Chapter VII, when he claims that “as a mere outline, Chrysanthème has been seen everywhere and by everybody” but that “her face, no, everyone has not seen it; there is something special about it” (73). This claim shows the conflict of Loti’s experience in Japan and one of the recurring themes of this genre of novel: the mutually exclusive desire to conform to the derivative fantasy created by the artifacts of Japonisme and the to desire to have a unique, transcendent aesthetic experience in or through Japan. Chrysanthème has been seen everywhere and yet no one has seen her before just as every traveler to Japan begins their narrative with the same assurance that this narrative depicts a unique experience.

Whether Chrysanthème is a token of Japanese society or the exception to it, it is also worth noting that Loti’s narrator discusses her exceptionalism in terms of what “everybody” has “seen.” The circulation of the products of Japonisme is invoked by this phrasing. Loti’s narrator has been careful to draw a distinction between Chrysanthème’s body and her face. “As a mere outline,” or strictly in regards to her body, she is derivative. This in itself is not a fault, however, because Loti’s narrator follows this claim with another impressionist passage, reminiscent of the reverse-invasion passage:

Whoever has looked at one of those paintings on china or on silk that now fill our bazaars, knows by heart the pretty stiff head-dress, the leaning figure, ever ready to try some new gracious salutation, the scarf fastened behind in an enormous bow, the large falling sleeves, the dress slightly clinging about the ankles with a crooked little train like a lizard’s tail (72).

Though his tone is condescending, it also shows an earnest enjoyment in the familiar trappings of his wife. She is parceled out in this description, divided among the artifacts

“that fill our bazaars.” She joins the circulation of the merchandise that made her a familiar figure. Then, Loti’s narrator draws the distinction between her familiar body and her exceptional face, insisting that “there is something special in it.” He goes on to elaborate that the “something special” in her face is the fact that a face like hers is exceptional among the “real” Japanese people, but traditional for the “type of women the Japanese paint mostly on their vases.” Her face, therefore, is both familiar from the Japanese art objects and dissimilar from them at the same time. In dividing up his wife into a familiar, divisible body and an exceptional face, Loti has complicated his own categories of “real” (and, thus, ugly) Japanese people and the fictions familiar from art objects. He has, thus, separated her body from her face and then divided her face again. She is, it seems, infinitely divisible. The quality that makes her “special” is always one division away while the qualities that make her derivative are easily parceled out.

Loti’s narrator’s understanding of Chrysanthème shows all the fractures of this logic:

Chrysanthème is an exception, for she is melancholy. What thoughts can be running through that little brain? My knowledge of her language is still too restricted to enable me to find out. Moreover, it is a hundred to one that she has no thoughts whatsoever. And even if she had, what do I care? I have chosen her to amuse me, and I would really rather she should have one of those insignificant little thoughtless faces like all the others (74).

In even this small excerpt, Loti’s narrator careens back and forth between his desire for the placidity of the flattened porcelain wife, the one he originally wanted, and the inscrutable one he chose. While he admits that the language barrier is preventing him

from allowing her to vocalize her interior thoughts to him, he also doubts their existence simply because she has never had the opportunity to express them to him. Then, in a display of resentful logic, he claims not to care whether she does or does not have an interior life beyond what he can grasp from her surface and might even prefer that she did not. Yet, his repulsion towards Jasmin was one of the most intense displays of emotion from the lethargic narrator. He felt compelled to use exclamation points and even a doubled question mark, after all.¹⁷ His disgust at the idea of marrying, even temporarily, one of “those insignificant little thoughtless faces” was very real.

Loti’s novel also deals with the language barriers between himself and his Japanese wife in interesting ways. He recognizes at points that it is a problem of translation that prevents him from gaining access into her thoughts, but also seems to assume that she (and the rest of her people) do not have any thoughts simply because he has not had access to them. While it is common behavior in the age of Imperialism for Westerners to assume their race gives them special access to thoughtfulness, Loti’s narrator complicates this by occasionally philosophizing about the comparative merits in favor of *both* languages, not just his own. Take, for instance, his discussion of the word “mousmé” that ends in a declaration that his own language, French, lacks an equivalent:

The word *mousmé* means a young girl, or very young woman. It is one of the prettiest words in the Niponese¹⁸ language; it seems almost as if there

¹⁷ Lesley Blanch theorizes that Loti’s fall from popularity is attributable to his overuse of exclamation points.

¹⁸ The Japanese word for Japan is, when transliterated into the Roman alphabet, “Nippon” (formal) or “Nihon” (informal). The English word “Japan” is a transliteration of the Chinese pronunciation of the characters that compose the Japanese word, 日本. For a discussion of the Meiji innovation of this official name for Japan as replacement for the problematic “Wa” (spelled either with the pejorative 倭, with implications of being bent

were a little *moue* in the very sound, and as if a pretty taking little pout such as they put on, and also a little pert physiognomy were described by it. I shall often make use of it, knowing none other in our own language that conveys the same meaning (88).

He gives the Japanese language credit for both function and form in this interlude. It fulfills a function his own language is incapable of fulfilling as well as performing its function in the “prettiest” way possible. It adds to his aesthetic project in settling temporarily in Japan as a linguistic flourish of beauty, another piece of Japan that he can carry back to the West.

This is not the only way that language functions as an intermediary between Loti’s narrator and Japan. In another parallel with Bird’s *Unbeaten Tracks*, Loti also provides examples of Japanese people writing parallel (or conflicting) texts. Bird’s parallel text was Ito’s journal and it both fascinated and excluded her. Loti’s text has no central parallel text, but it does show glimpses of alternative texts. Loti’s narrator’s landlord, M. Sucre, for example, is described as writing a “great deal” (108). In the introduction of this quality, it is a clear indication of M. Sucre’s business-like position as landlord and occasional negotiator between Loti’s narrator and the Japanese public. Loti’s narrator does not seem to differentiate between M. Sucre’s textual writing and his artistic expressions, referring to them both in the same manner. This “writing” is described in detail later:

With many affectations, M. Sucre has dipped the tip of his delicate paint-brush in Indian ink and traced a couple of charming storks on a pretty

over or dwarfish, and the flattering 和口, meaning “harmony”), see Joan R. Piggott, *The Emergence of Japanese Kingship*, (California: Stanford University Press, 1997).

sheet of rice-paper, offering them to me in the most gracious manner, as a souvenir of himself. They are here, in my cabin on board, and whenever I look at them, I can fancy I see M. Sucre tracing them in an airy manner (173).

Though the narrator might be dismissive of M. Sucre's "affectations" and only pleased in the most condescending way to be given a "souvenir of himself," the fact remains that M. Sucre's art of writing fascinates the narrator. The artifacts of his writing function outside the temporal present of the narrative and give the reader a glimpse into the future author writing his text after having left Japan. As Ito's text made him a parallel author, M. Sucre's performative writing makes him another "exceptional" Japanese person, like Chrysanthème. "Few Japanese possess the art of interpreting this subject in a manner at once so rapid and so tasteful," the narrator explains (174). M. Sucre's ability is discussed in terms of function and form, just as the word "mousmé" was. He is proficient technically, but the product is a piece of interpretation as well as a drawing. His ink-drawing makes him a fellow interpreter and another "exceptional" figure in the narrator's Japanese acquaintance.

In essence, Loti's narrator could only bring himself to approve of Japan when he declared that person, word, or aspect "exceptional." Yet, for all that he saved his praise for the parts of his wife, landlord, and their language that he declared "exceptional" and despised the rest of Japan for being derivative, he also could not bring himself wholeheartedly to abandon the derivative image of Japan he acquired through fans, porcelain, and other Japonisme products. The tension between exceptionalism and derivativeness is never resolved. This unresolved tension is also fundamental to the

development of literary Japonisme. This tension becomes a more immediate concern in the next section for Clive Holland as he negotiates between the demands of the literary market and a desire for accuracy in his depiction of the homeland of his wife.

III. The Geisha, the Mousmé, and the Pen for Hire

Clive Holland (1866-1959) was one of the many prolific authors of the late Victorian era, producing a prodigious amount of writing for very little critical or monetary recompense. Unlike Loti, who was inducted into the prestigious French Academy and whose *Madame Chrysanthème* was so well known that a tourist in Nagasaki in the mid-twentieth century “could not escape...Madame Chrysanthemum” during his visit, Clive Holland’s reputation never amounted to more than a blip on the cultural radar of Victorian and Edwardian England.¹⁹ A passing mention of his name in a review of a collection of short stories in *The Country Gentleman* in 1893 has only this to say about him: “There are some meritorious short stories in addition to one by Clive Holland, which is not meritorious at all.”²⁰ Basically a pen for hire on any subject, he wrote a user’s manual for amateur photographers (1898), contributed a volume on “Shakespeare’s Warwickshire” to Black’s Popular Series of Colour Books (1906), and wrote numerous travel narratives and novels. Like Loti, Holland’s work shows the bridge between “factual” travel narratives and the “fictional” Japonisme novel. In Holland’s case, this is caused less by an aesthetic project to blur the boundaries between these two genres and more because he actively wrote both types of texts. While he wrote travel narratives

¹⁹ Harold S. Williams, *Foreigners in Mikadoland*, (Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1963), 231.

²⁰ Reviews, *The Country Gentlemen*, (1893), 935.

(fictional and factual) about Paris, Belgium, Northern England, and Penzance, he returned most frequently to Japan as a setting and a topic. This is, at least in part, because his fictional account of a happy (and, surprisingly, lasting) marriage to a Japanese woman in *My Japanese Wife* (1897) and *Mousmé: A Story of West and East* (1901) was based on his real experience.

Holland's greatest commercial success as a writer was in his 1897 semi-autobiographical novel, *My Japanese Wife: A Japanese Idyll*. In the 1902 edition's preface, Holland boasts of the novel's success: "That the present edition of '*My Japanese Wife*' has been called for is a source of satisfaction to the writer. Of previous editions some 60,000 copies have been sold."²¹ Like so many of the genre, it features a Japanese woman, Hyacinth, who falls in love with a condescending Western man (Holland's nameless narrator in this case).²² Also like many Japonisme novels, it is clear from just the ornate introductory page to the first chapter that this work is as much an *objet d'art* as it is a novel.²³ Each of the numbered chapters begins with an ornate design of Japonisme fantasy, completely unrelated to the contents of the narrative. These decorative frontispieces are marketable pieces of the Japonisme aesthetic and only applicable to this novel in the sense that these images portray the standard tropes of visual Japonisme.

Hyacinth is not specifically depicted nor is the narrator. The derivative nature of these

²¹ Clive Holland, *My Japanese Wife*, (New York: F. A. Stoakes, 1902), i. Subsequent references will be by page number in the body of the discussion.

²² Though this name is given in her first chronological appearance in the novel, Holland's narrator consistently refers to her a Mousmé in the rest of the text. The novel is also dedicated to "the real Mousmé."

²³ Other Japonisme novels that include paintings and ornate chapter headings: Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysantheme* (1897), Mary E. B. Wade's *Our Little Japanese Cousin* (1901), Clive Holland's *A Japanese Romance* (1904), and Mrs. Hugh Fraser's *The Heart of a Geisha* (1908). See Figure 3.2.

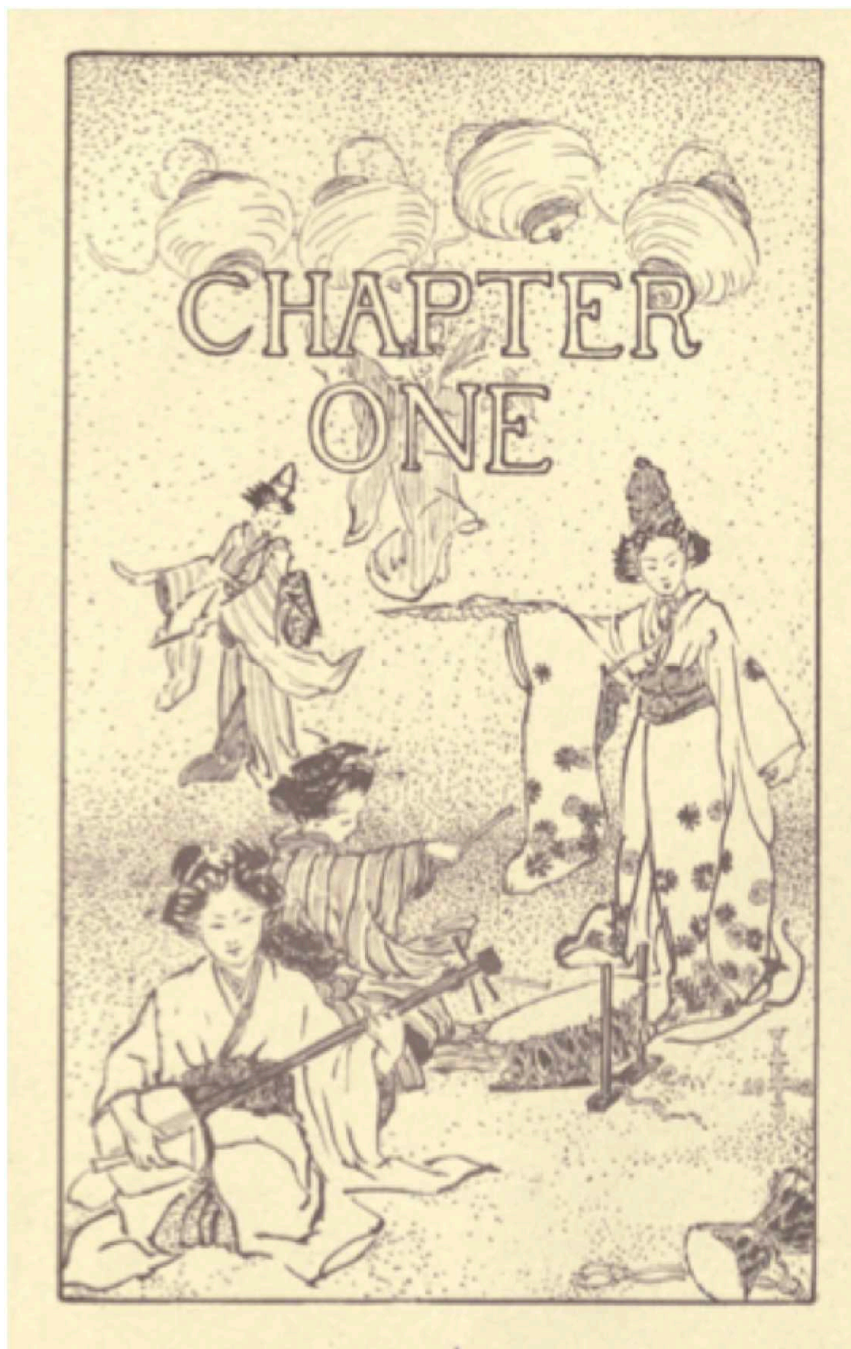


Figure 3.2 the frontispiece for the first chapter of *My Japanese Wife* (1902)

portraits parallels the derivative nature of the plot: Hyacinth is one of a crowd of female Japanese characters who is scooped up by the narrative as the blank bedfellow of the Western hero in this genre of novels. Yet, Holland's novel also differs in several key aspects.

Holland's narrator vacillates between joining the trends of literary Japonisme and rejecting them as early as the first paragraph. Primarily, his rejection of tradition is in his upfront insistence that his mousmé does not get abandoned in his novel and that she returns to London with him after the events of the novel: "Mousmé, a butterfly from a far Eastern land, her dress of apricot silk, with a magenta satin *obi* (sash), a blot of bright colour in the dullness of my English study" (3). Before the sentence has even concluded, he has returned to the major tropes of Japonisme. He falls further back into convention in the next breath when he makes the expected visual comparisons of Mousmé to porcelain and dolls: "My Mousmé! with Dresden-china²⁴ tinted cheeks, and tiny ways; playing at life, as it always seems to me, with the dainty grace of Japan, that idealized doll's-house land." It seems that having bucked tradition in one sense, he rushes to accumulate the rest of the tropes of the genre in one sentence. Porcelain, dolls, performative living, and the vibrancy of color all make an appearance in rapid succession. All of these are established tropes in literary Japonisme and confirm Holland's legitimacy as an author literary Japonisme.

²⁴ Before the Eighteenth Century, the hard paste white porcelain produced in China (and, later, in Japan) was a rarity traded in the Western world by the East India Company at incredibly high prices. In the early Eighteenth Century, however, Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus and, after his death, Johann Friedrich Böttger discovered the formula for the porcelain and went into production of imitation-Asian ceramics in 1707-10. The city of Meissen (near Dresden) was their base of operations and soon attracted enough artists and artisans to establish "Dresden china" as a familiar phrase in any Western household.

Having thus established his place in the genre (both in how he will conform and how he will deviate), the narrative slips out of the present tense and begins the true plot. The story is as familiar as a genre so decidedly derivative requires: he meets his Mousmé (who is only sometimes given a name), arranges with a Japanese negotiator to marry her, and spends the remainder of the novel extolling the beauty of his house, wife, and surroundings. Subtle differences are peppered throughout. Unlike the standard of the genre, in which the introduction to the heroine is either in the same scene as her marriage to the Western man or is performed in silence until they are married, Holland gives his narrator and his heroine two conversations before they are married, the first of which is offhandedly revealed to have been “all...in Japanese, of course” (35). Unlike Loti’s narrator, who disdains learning Japanese (except in moments when individual phrases prove themselves to be “exceptional”) and holds Chrysanthème’s lack of English against her, Holland’s narrator welcomes the moments of cultural and linguistic hybridity his love affair offers. He can speak to her in her language and she, in her turn, is revealed to be educated enough to offer him a handshake “in the English way” a moment later (36). Both characters maintain their original racial identities, as evidenced by Hyacinth’s kimono in London and the narrator’s insistence on English tea in Japan, but each makes practical concessions to the fact of their marriage.

Holland’s narrator, like Loti’s, ponders the ways in which his wife is and is not typical of the figure that he recognizes from the merchandise of Japonisme. Though he often compares Hyacinth to a figure of porcelain, he reproves his sister, “a dragon of propriety,” for the fact that she “will, I fear, never realize that my wife is not an abstraction off a paper screen or a lacquer tray” (53). Yet, even in retaliation to this

imagined confrontation with his sister, he himself returns Hyacinth to the status of art object. In the middle of regretting that he could not bring Japan with him when he introduces his wife to his sister, he explains that, “the rarest gem is best seen in its proper setting” (81). Japan is Hyacinth’s “proper setting” and the narrator never does tell us how she fares in London besides being a spot of brilliant color against a gray background. In the sequel, written in 1901, the narrator objects when his sister attempts to dress Hyacinth in Western style: “I had married Mousmé, and not a hybrid product of sister Lou’s schemes and the dressmaker’s skill” (136). It is a concession Hyacinth would have willingly made she claims, but the narrator insists that she be allowed to continue to dress as ostensibly pleases her best. The fact that he has prescribed which nationality’s clothing pleases her goes uncontested.

Hyacinth’s eventual displacement to England still in her native style of clothing raises another familiar trope, that of Japanese and Western people wearing each other’s clothes. Interestingly, this trope functions very differently in the travel narratives of the time from the way it does in the Japonisme novels. The Baroness Eleanora Mary Haggard D’Anethan²⁵ gives a polite rendition of the travel narrative’s trope when she explains that “the present fashion of wearing European clothes [could] never have the charm or artistic beauty of the Japanese ladies’ own lovely garments” (38). The travel narratives express sadness or, in the worst cases, disgust at the increasing numbers of Japanese people dressed in Western clothing. The Japonisme novel, on the other hand, uses the moment in which the Japanese heroine wears Western clothing as an occasion to prove her superior

²⁵ The wife of the Belgian ambassador to Japan and the sister of the author H. Rider Haggard, D’Anethan’s contributions to the field of Japonisme travel narratives is notable for both its accuracy and her literary skill in its construction.

beauty. Edward House's *Yone Santo* (1888) and Winifred Eaton's *Miss Nume of Japan* (1899) both include moments in which the Japanese woman is mistaken for a European woman and dedicate long florid passages to describing her beauty in the moment.²⁶

Holland refers to this tradition but chooses to align his novel more with the travel narratives' perspective than with his fellow novelists. His narrator and Hyacinth laugh uproariously at the idea of Hyacinth dressed in Western fashion. Even in her displaced, improper "setting" in London, she maintains her Japanese clothes. Holland points to the brilliancy of her colors as the epicenter of beauty, not the moment in which she tries on Western clothes. This is the happy marriage of the two races that Holland imagines: Hyacinth brings the aura of her "proper setting" with her, even into London.

Yet, while *My Japanese Wife* shows Holland's willingness to imagine a happy marriage between the two races, his 1906 novel, *A Japanese Romance*, shows much more hesitancy about the subject. It also shows the movement of the Japonisme novel away from the pseudo-autobiographical and into more fictionalized territory. This novel, of course, also features a young English man, Leslie Somerville, who moves temporarily to Japan and becomes entangled this time with not one but two Japanese women: a Japanese mousmé, named Mio, and a former geisha, named Katakuri. In striking contrast to *My Japanese Wife*, *A Japanese Romance* conforms strictly to the Japonisme novel's tradition of leaving its mousmé-heroine desolate, abandoned, and, ultimately, dead. In the division of the role of the Japanese heroine into mousmé and geisha, however, Holland has

²⁶ Both novels complicate this moment of transnational clothing by describing the Japanese woman as being suddenly inscrutable or melancholic in her new clothes. House claims that the conflict between the two cultures in this moment temporarily liberates his heroine from "any of the fetters of an artificial civilization" (153). By being thus freed, a Western woman declares that the heroine is "at last" a "pretty girl."

provided a means of escape for at least one Japanese woman. Katakuri must be vilified in order to survive this novel, but at least she does survive.

A Japanese Romance also differs from Holland's earlier novels in the ways in which Mio is contrasted with Katakuri, a former geisha who competes with Mio for Somerville's affections despite already being married to his best friend, McKenzie. The two women divide between them the plethora of issues the West had with its conflicted stereotype of Japanese femininity: the "lotus blossom pining for her cruel Caucasian man" as described by Hwang versus the erotic (and often villainous) geisha figure who still fascinates the Western world in, for example, Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha* (1997) and even in Lucy Liu's character in *Kill Bill* (2003). Both versions of Japanese femininity were essential to the West's representations of Japan as a nation, though critical attention has more frequently been drawn to the repercussions of the "geisha" character trope. P.L. Pham posits that, "an underlying structural opposition between 'Japan' and the 'West' might be embodied in a metaphor—now transmuted into the relationship between the genders."²⁷ He goes on to say that it is specifically the archetypal figure of the geisha who functions as the metonymic representation of Japanese nationhood. According to this formulation, the complicated role of the geisha's sexuality mirrors the complicated role of the Orient in the West's construction of itself.

This, however, discounts the history of the understood division between mousmé and geisha as envisioned by Victorian England and the heritage of that understanding

²⁷ Pham, P.L. "On the Edge of the Orient: English Representations of Japan, circa 1895-1910." *Japanese Studies*, (19.2: 1999), 163.

today.²⁸ While the contemporaneous understanding of this division was factually inaccurate, as I will show, it did create a binary of two types of women, not the monolithic Oriental femininity Pham describes. The *mousmé* was understood to be the woman available for the “temporary marriage,” an institution that seems to gloss the prevalent concerns for loss of innocence and immorality in similar cases of sexual promiscuity for Western women. The geisha, on the other hand, seems to have become the depository for the misdirected wrath against licentiousness and promiscuity from which the *mousmé* escaped. In reality, the geisha’s role was very different from this misconception. As Vera Micznik describes it, “a geisha belonged to a special category of female entertainer allowed to work in tea-houses and other designated entertainment areas, populated by other categories of entertainers, such as prostitutes and courtesans.”²⁹ There was a clear distinction between geisha and prostitute. The other category, which the majority of the Western authors of the Japonisme novels discussed here called “*mousmé*,” was actually called “*rashamen*” or “women for rent.” This category has its roots in a completely different vein of Japanese legal tradition from the geisha. Instead of evolving out of a high standard of artisanal performativity, the origin of the “temporary wife” is an attempt in the mid-eighteenth century by the Japanese government to control and regulate the prostitution and entertainment industries. While the Westerners who visited Japan assumed that geisha were a direct correlation to the “courtesans”

²⁸ In *A Japanese Romance*, a character refers to Japan as “the land of chrysanthemum, the *geisha*, and the *musumé*” (293). In Winifred Eaton’s *A Japanese Nightingale* (1901), the man guesses his wife is too virtuous to be “a geisha girl” and she then reveals herself to be of noble descent, a *mousmé*. Even when the term “*mousmé*” is not used, it is clear that Western authors differentiate between the young women who participate in temporary marriages and geisha.

²⁹ Vera Micznik, “Cio-cio-san the Geisha,” *A Vision of the Orient: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts of Madame Butterfly*, (New York: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 39-40.

encountered in other parts of the East (Loti especially hoped to relive the passion of his interlude described in *Aziyadé*), it was actually the rashamen who make a better parallel. Even this parallel is problematic, however, since the rashamen capitalized on a performance of chaste domesticity, and the expectation for a “courtesan” was one of hedonistic sexuality. Instead of interacting with this new complicated division of femininity, the West was attached to the division between geisha-as-whores and mousmé-as-virgins in a classic virgin/whore dichotomy. Yet, it is important to cede Pham’s point that Japan as a whole was indelibly painted as a female nation who was ready to be seduced by the masculine West (which part of the West depended, of course, on the author’s nationality). It is also important, however, to remember the multiplicity of identities in that generalized femininity.

In the metonymic sense, the Japanese Woman who could stand in for the nation as a whole had to have elements of both geisha and mousmé. Holland and Long both require their heroines to be innocent, earnest, and absolutely in love in their temporary marriages, making them necessarily mousmé.³⁰ Even Loti, who had no qualms about depicting his mousmé-heroine as diffident about her temporary marriage, differentiated between geisha and mousmé, elevating the latter at the expense of the former. When his narrator initially suggests choosing a geisha for his temporary wife, his Japanese companion sets him straight and Loti’s narrator is retroactively chastened: “Later, no doubt, when I understand Japanese affairs better, I shall appreciate myself the enormity of my proposal:

³⁰ In all three incarnations of *Madame Butterfly*, the novella, play, and opera, the mistake is made of assuming that Cho-cho-san had to be a geisha to have been available for temporary marriage. In all other particulars, she is depicted as a mousmé. Vera Micznik makes a compelling case for this incongruity being caused by simple ignorance on Long’s part in “Cio-cio-san the Geisha.”

one would really suppose I had talked of marrying the devil” (28). The charade of the temporary marriage is the great difference between the two types of women. While the Japanese woman involved in a temporary marriage in a Japonisme novel is more likely to die than not, she still dies as a martyr of virtuous female devotion. Geisha, on the other hand, function very differently.

Holland clearly delineates the two types of competing femininity in *A Japanese Romance*. Katakuri presents a villainous combination of inferior reasoning, sexual promiscuity, and vicious indulgence. Mio, as a contrast, only flirts apparently accidentally, is overly modest in regard to her own appearance, and fulfills the obligation of the abandoned Oriental woman to commit suicide when her existence crosses her Western husband’s purposes. These aspects tie into larger issues of class and race. Katakuri’s former role as a professional geisha gives her access to a higher standard of living than Mio, who depends upon servant work for her sustenance at the beginning of the novel. Katakuri comes from a decadent background while Mio comes from a background of stoic poverty. Indeed, Mio’s poverty is so gripping that she “falls” into a brothel as soon as Katakuri plots her removal from her position as a servant and is only saved when Somerville rescues her by marrying her. Katakuri, on the other hand, sometimes fantasizes about going back to her geisha life of luxury, unbothered by the potential end of her “marriage” to McKenzie.

Yet, for all that he provides a socio-economic background for both Mio’s servitude and Katakuri’s history as a geisha, Holland ignores the contextual information about both women and instead blatantly instructs the reader in how to morally understand the contrast inherent to the mousmé and the geisha. He paints a misogynist picture of a

natural evil inherent to all women that Katakuri has ceded control of her actions to. In Mio, he describes the conflict between “the submissive spirit of the Eastern woman” and the “primal instinct of woman,” in this case jealousy (217). Holland makes it clear that Somerville is at fault for this temporary conflict between the “primal basic instinct of woman” and Mio’s Eastern “submissive spirit.” Somerville has neglected his wife while he painted a portrait of her, recalling Christina Rossetti’s “In an Artist’s Studio.” Just as Rossetti’s poem shows us a model whose attention is focused on the artist who sees her “not as she is, but as she fills his dream.”³¹ Somerville has not been able to see Mio while he painted her, for all that he stared at her the entire time. Indeed, just as Rossetti’s artist vampirically “feeds on [the model’s] face by night and day,” Somerville’s painting bleeds the very warmth out of Mio’s body. “I was cold,” she tells him, “because your eyes did not see me though they looked at me. I am always much, very much cold when you look like that.” While Loti’s narrator had been perplexed by the inaccessibility of his wife’s thoughts, Holland allows his readers access to Mio’s interiority as “into [Mio’s] heart crept a feeling of jealousy of that other woman, her idealized self that Somerville painted with so much greater attention than he bestowed upon the living woman” (215). Holland describes this “feeling of jealousy” as being part of the “primal instinct of woman,” not part of Mio’s other governing self, her role as “Eastern woman.” Katakuri is the more “primal” of the two characters, driven by unfettered jealousy, but both women have a part of this “instinct” written into the makeup of their being.

Besides his two Japanese love interests, Somerville has a third potential and ultimately victorious competitor for his affections, an English girl named Violet

³¹ Christina Rossetti, “In an Artist’s Studio,” *Poems and Prose*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 71.

Desborough. Violet rejects an offer of marriage from Somerville by the end of the first chapter, thus removing her from the competition between the other two women until much later in the narrative. Holland makes it clear that Violet is the clearly superior choice from the first chapter onwards; it is only Somerville's vanity that makes him try out his Japanese romances. When he does eventually withdraw from both his marriage to Mio and his flirtation with Katakuri, he is comforted by a friend telling him: "But you had run up against God Almighty's problems, the racial one, which mortal men like ourselves get broken trying to solve" (294). This is the inevitable end of the cross-racial encounter in *A Japanese Romance*: it is one of "God Almighty's problems" and too big to be bridged by a mere mortal. Though he had been willing to posit a solution to the "racial problem" in a bi-racial marriage in *My Japanese Wife* and *Mousmé*, Holland's stance here is decidedly circumscribed. It is doubly problematic that in trying to avoid being "broken trying to solve" this problem, Somerville has willfully allowed Mio to be broken in his stead.

Still, it would be an oversimplification to say that this novel's action is determined solely by Somerville and Somerville's whims. All three women write letters that function as pivotal moments in the plot in a return to the pattern set by Loti for including independent counter-texts within the larger text of the novel. Violet's letter to Somerville reminds him of the attractions of women of his own race, Mio's letter to Somerville ostensibly proposes marriage (and is waylaid by Katakuri, who determines to wreak revenge on Mio for it), and Katakuri's letter to Mio encourages (and possibly inspires) her to commit suicide. All three letters come attached with a discussion of the writer's facility with writing. Mio had "learned to write at the missionary's house and in

the village school, but...her characters were not so clear that Yumoto could read all of them at first glance” (121). Katakuri is disdainful of the education she had: “Writing was a somewhat laborious task, as a rule, to her, but to-day she was filled with gratitude that, neglected as her education had been, she had at all events learned to write” (308). Violet discusses her own legibility: “I have but little time for writing this letter, so please excuse its shortness and perhaps incoherence” (244). All three letters are written in haste and in a heightened emotional state. Unlike Somerville (and most of the “cruel Caucasian men” of this genre), emotional intensity is visible in their subordinate texts. By connecting their literacy to their emotional intensity, these three women change the course of the narrative. They become authors of their own narratives—however briefly—through their letters.

These three women’s letters also resonate with Loti’s letter-writing M. Sucre and with Isabella Bird’s depictions of Ito’s notebook. Like both of those texts, Holland has allowed parallel subordinate authors to interfere in the construction of his narrative. All three women’s letters are transcribed directly into the text, making them all temporary usurping narrators. The fact that all three letters mark pivotal plot changes only reinforces the potency of these moments of narrative takeover. Madame Chrysanthème may not have had a voice in Loti’s text and Hyacinth may have barely had a name, but all three female characters in *A Japanese Romance* have a moment to speak in their own voices directly to the reader. The narrative battle between narrator and subordinate authors comes to a head in the final text I will discuss in detail in this chapter: *Madame Butterfly*. There, the roles of narrator and subordinate author are reversed: Cho-cho-san is the first Japonisme heroine to direct the course of the narrative and Pinkerton is the inscrutable foreigner who can only construct his own narrative in subsidiary and marginalized texts.

IV. The Colors of Japan: *Madame Butterfly*, Japonisme Aestheticism, and Race

The *Madame Butterfly* narrative is such a familiar story that when David Henry Hwang wrote his deconstruction of it in *M. Butterfly* (1986), he claimed he didn't even need to read the source first:

I didn't even know the plot of the opera!...Yet I felt convinced that the libretto would include yet another lotus blossom pining away for a cruel Caucasian man, and dying for her love. Such a story has become too much of a cliché not to be included in the archetypal East-West romance that started it all.³²

Hwang has made the common mistake here of assuming that Puccini's opera, *Madama Butterfly* (1904), was the first iteration of that particular narrative. In reality, Puccini adapted his opera from a play by David Belasco, *Madame Butterfly* (1900), that was, in turn, adapted from a novella of the same name by John Luther Long (1898). Long's novella, however, contains internal evidence that it is also not the origin of the archetype either. It opens with a conversation between the infamous Pinkerton³³ and another American man en route to Japan in which Pinkerton refers to having heard just such a story as he is about to enact "a thousand times from you [his companion] and others."³⁴

³² David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly*, (New York: Penguin, 1989), 95.

³³ Pinkerton has such a lasting reputation that he even appears in the title of the alternative rock group Weezer's 1996 album, *Pinkerton*, meant to have a darker sound to reflect the lead singer's disillusionment with rock music. Rivers Cuomo, the band's lead singer explained the title by comparing Pinkerton, an "asshole American sailor" to a rock star. Rivers Cuomo, *The Pinkerton Diaries*, (CA: Rivers Cuomo, 2011).

³⁴ John Luther Long, *Madame Butterfly*, ed. Maureen Honey and Lean Lee Cole in *Two Orientalist Texts*, (NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 29. Subsequent references will be by page number in the body of the discussion.

The fad is, therefore, well under way by the time Madame Butterfly herself arrives on the scene. The plotline that she became the figurehead of is part of the larger fad that we have already discussed at length in both Loti's and Holland's texts, one of which even chronologically predates Long's novella.

David Henry Hwang's mistake in assuming that Puccini's opera was the first iteration of the Madame Butterfly story comes naturally from the fact that Puccini's opera raised this particular story out of the historical constraints that have since condemned the rest of the genre of the Japonisme novel to obscurity.³⁵ "Madame Butterfly" is the only one of the heroines of the three texts discussed in this chapter whose name would be familiar to a non-specialist, after all. Hwang's point was that he didn't need to read the story to be familiar with it. This proves that the story, amplified by the opera's lasting popularity, is still the most prominent example of the Japonisme novel. What has been lost, however, is the innovation and deviation from the rest of the genre that Long included in the original novella. It is only when *Madame Butterfly* is set against the rest of the genre of literary Japonisme that it can be examined thoroughly.

The story of Madame Butterfly has been the feeding ground of critical discourse in all of its iterations, from John Luther Long's novella published in the highly respected *Century Illustrated Magazine* in January 1898 to theater impresario David Belasco's one-act "playlet" in 1900 which, in turn, inspired Giacomo Puccini's opera in 1904. Critical attention has tended to focus primarily on the operatic incarnation. Catherine Clément

³⁵ At one point, the popularity of Japonisme literature was such that Basil Hall Chamberlain complained in his guidebook to Japan, *Things Japanese*, that, "not to have written a book on Japan is fast becoming a title to distinction." Basil Hall Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, (London: John Murray, 1891), 64. Today, very few of these works are widely available or given much critical attention.

cited *Madame Butterfly* multiple times in her landmark feminist analysis of opera, *Opera: The Undoing of Women* (1988). She argues that operas that feature a dying foreign woman tend to mask the horror of the death with an aural aesthetic experience, making the aesthetic experience blunt the compassion the audience might otherwise be compelled to extend to the foreign heroine. Instead of attributing the aesthetic seduction to Puccini's innovation in the operatic adaptation of the Butterfly narrative, however, I would argue that Puccini chose to adapt David Belasco's play because of the ease with which he could modify the Japonisme aesthetic seduction already in place to suit his musical needs. Jeremy Tambling, another scholar to focus on Puccini's opera, highlights the historical context of Puccini's opera in his book, *Opera and the Culture of Fascism* (1996).³⁶ He argues that the operas that use Japan as a setting function as tools of nationalist propaganda to undermine the contemporary fear of "yellow peril." Tambling's concern for historical accuracy, however, does not extend to an establishment of literary Japonisme as a genre. He does point to Pierre Loti for the origins of *Madama Butterfly*, but no further. Loti, then, instead of Long, becomes his first and most important iteration of the Butterfly plot. As I have already discussed in this chapter, however, the genre extends far beyond either author.

Both Tambling and Clément focus specifically on the opera and the function of its aesthetic project. Others have felt a very different pull when discussing this story. Carol Weisbrod, for instance, wrote a collection of essays entitled *Butterfly, the Bride: Essays on Law, Narrative, and the Family*. In it, she analyzes the various legal implications involved in the plot. Where Tambling and Clément both chose to analyze *Madama*

³⁶ Jeremy Tambling, *Opera and the Culture of Fascism*, (NY: Clarendon Press, 1996).

Butterfly as a token of either an aesthetic trend or a historical moment, Weisbrod brings attention back to the gnarly implications of the legal contract between Madame Butterfly and Pinkerton. Importantly, Weisbrod refers to the Butterfly “narrative,” not a specific iteration of it. Though she too confines herself to the three Butterfly documents and Loti’s *Madame Chrysantheme*, her framework of “narrative” rather than a specific work allows for the expansion of the genre that I have further elucidated in this chapter. While she allows only for a Butterfly “narrative,” I argue for an entire Japonisme literary tradition.

Weisbrod’s attention to the function of the marriage in the plot is not unique. Seung Ah Oh also has recently brought attention to the marital home in *Recontextualizing Asian American Domesticity: From Madame Butterfly to My American Wife!* (2008). Like Hwang, Oh is concerned with the pressure on Asian American women to play the Butterfly part in their interactions with Caucasian (specifically American) men. Though Oh makes the common mistake of pointing towards *Madame Butterfly* as the origin of the mythos rather than another token of it, her investigation into the heritage of the Butterfly archetype brings new elements to light. She draws on the work already established by Mari Yoshihara in *Embracing the East* to discuss Adelaide Pinkerton’s role as “the first of many white American women in Asian American women’s literature whose presence inspires, mediates, and frustrates Asian/American women’s desire for domesticity.”³⁷ Unlike the earlier works by critics like Tambling and Clément, Oh and Yoshihara now move our attention to the interaction between the female characters. Before these seminal texts, the Butterfly narrative was discussed strictly in the terms Hwang exemplifies, with

³⁷ Seung Ah Oh, *Recontextualizing Asian American Domesticity: From Madame Butterfly to My American Wife!* (NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), 1.

Butterfly falling victim to a male aggressor. Oh and Yoshihara, however, bring our attention to subtle ways in which the narrative provides other binaries and other negotiations.

John Luther Long is the first of the major authors in literary Japonisme to participate without any firsthand experience in Japan. Instead, he draws on the established genres of travel narratives and other literary Japonisme texts for his depiction. His *Madame Butterfly* is aware of the tropes and conventions of literary Japonisme inherited from the travel narratives discussed in the previous chapter and those Japonisme novels that had begun to circulate. He also drew from the correspondence with his sister, Jennie Correll, who lived in Japan with her Methodist missionary husband, Irvin Correll, until his death. Where Loti consciously navigated the boundary between fact and fiction and Holland slipped back and forth throughout his career, Long is entirely freed from the burden of the “reality” of Japan. While Loti’s narrator feared that the mice sellers of Japan would burst the vision created by merchandise in circulation in the West, Long is in no such danger. His Japonisme aesthetic is crafted entirely out of the popular movement.

Long’s obituary in the *New York Times* in 1927 quoted him explaining that he wrote so frequently on the subject of Japan because of “the color and poetry that is Japan.”³⁸ While literary Japonisme does not tend to refer to the “color” of Japan as a specific source of inspiration, it is a common occurrence in the writing of the artists who promoted Japonisme, such as James McNeill Whistler. In a letter to Henri Fantin-Latour in 1868, Whistler compliments his friend’s newest painting and specifically, “la hardiesse

³⁸ *New York Times*, (November 1, 1927), 27.

de tes couleurs.” He continues to call the colors “pures et crues,” and ends by establishing that this is “comme les Japonais ma foi!”³⁹ Like Long, Whistler speaks specifically of the vibrancy of “color” as the central point in his interest in Japanese art. Also like Long, Whistler refers to the “hardiesse” (or “boldness”) of the colors, not simply their accuracy or their vibrancy. The Impressionists interpreted the Japanese use of color, which had originally been seen as gaudy, as opening the possibility of a subjective naturalism.⁴⁰ It was specifically the “boldness” of the colors that allowed them to express an “impression” that achieved a closeness to nature that painting that had aimed to reproduce nature had failed to accomplish. Long shows the influence of this vein of Japonisme inherited from the Impressionists in his choice of phrasing. By claiming the Japanese colors as his inspiration, Long straddles the boundary between literary and aesthetic Japonisme.

Besides an interest in the “color and poetry” of Japan, Long is also quoted in his obituary as calling himself “a sentimentalist and a feminist and proud of it.” It may seem odd to our modern sensibilities to see the vanguard of the problematic “Butterfly” trope call himself a feminist. The history of the “pining lotus blossom” for which Hwang blames *Madame Butterfly* is as fraught in terms of gender as it is in terms of race. Hwang’s play, *M. Butterfly*, makes this point by having the Butterfly figure herself as an emptied illusion of gender, a male spy in disguise to fool a Western diplomat. On various other occasions in which the racial assumptions of the Butterfly narrative have been questioned, the gender assumptions remain intact and unexamined. Take, for example,

³⁹ According to Nigel Thorp’s translation in *Whistler on Art: Selected Letters and Writings of James McNeill Whistler*: “the boldness of the colors,” “pure and raw,” and “just like the Japanese, good Lord!” Nigel Thorp, *Whistler on Art: Selected Letters and Writings of James McNeill Whistler*, (England: Carcanet Press Limited, 1994), 33.

⁴⁰ Klaus Berger, *Japonisme in Western Painting from Whistler to Matisse*, (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 89.

the 1962 film starring Shirley MacLaine, *My Geisha*, in which MacLaine's Caucasian American character is able to fool her own husband into thinking she's the "real" Japanese geisha who can "authentically" portray Madame Butterfly when no actual Japanese girl has been able to meet his standard of Japaneseness.⁴¹ While the film doggedly confronts the assumption that Japan is a country frozen in the past and that its people can be defined by the Butterfly archetype, it fails to recognize that the Butterfly archetype is anything other than the highest possible achievement of womanly virtue. Can Long truly be a "feminist" when he is in part responsible for the creation of this dangerous standard for women?

Catherine Clément and others would also object to Long's claim of feminism on the basis that Madame Butterfly is herself, like her Lepidoptera namesake, pinned prettily in her death.⁴² Cho-cho-san's death scene is the climactic moment in all three iterations of the Butterfly narrative, a scene in which Butterfly impales herself on a figurative pin and is left, like a butterfly in an enthusiast's collection, a beautiful corpse. In the scene of her suicide, Long describes the blade piercing her breasts with a menacing sensuality:

Then she placed the point of the weapon at that nearly nerveless spot in the neck known to every Japanese, and began to press slowly inward. She could not help a little gasp at the first incision. But presently she could feel the blood finding its way down her neck. It divided on her shoulder, the larger stream going down her bosom. In a moment, she could see it

⁴¹ *My Geisha*, directed by Jack Cardiff, (1962; California, Paramount Pictures, 2002), DVD.

⁴² See Clément (47) and Susan McClary, "Mounting Butterflies," *A Vision of the Orient: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts of Madame Butterfly*, ed. Jonathan Wisenthal, Sherrill Grace, Melinda Boyd, Brian McIlroy, and Vera Micznik, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

making its way daintily between her breasts. It began to congeal there. She pressed on the sword, and a fresh stream swiftly overran the other—redder, she thought (78).

Long has exempted his readers from the squeamish reality of a painful death by pointing out that “nerveless spot in the neck known to every Japanese” that makes Cho-cho-san’s suicide painless. Like a butterfly being pinned to a display case, her death seems inhumanly painless. The caress of the blood streams against Cho-cho-san’s breasts is also the most intimate touch in all of the works I have considered in this chapter, made doubly erotic by the phallic “incision” of the masculine sword. The opponents of Long’s claim to feminism would be very justified in seeing this scene as a voyeuristic enjoyment of graphic violence enacted upon a woman and a sadistic erotic thrill in the caress of her breasts by the streams of blood.

Yet there is precedence for Long’s description of the suicide scene. Cho-cho-san’s suicide is also a token of a growing fascination of Westerners with Japanese ritual suicide, known both as *seppuku* or *hara-kiri*.⁴³ Though *seppuku* was banned as a form of judicial punishment in 1873 by the new Meiji government, there have been prominent instances even up to our modern era.⁴⁴ Its recurrence brings to light the forces at play in the rapid societal changes the Meiji government instated by governmental decree. While Japan might frequently strike its Western visitors as charmingly anachronistic, as I discussed in

⁴³ The term “*seppuku*” is more common in Japan than “*hara-kiri*,” which is more widely known outside of Japan. Both terms use the same kanji but in the reverse order. Both terms roughly translate to “stomach cutting,” though “*seppuku*” refers to the ritual and “*hara-kiri*” simply states the action.

⁴⁴ Mishima Yukio, a famous novelist, playwright, and critic, committed *seppuku* on November 25, 1970. Isao Inokuma, a former Judo Champion and gold medalist from the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo, committed *seppuku* on September 28, 2001.

the previous chapter, *seppuku* struck them with horror. In February of 1868, French sailors got in a skirmish with twenty samurai near present-day Osaka. The French government demanded thirteen samurai be punished for the thirteen French sailors who incurred injury during the skirmish. While French officials looked on, the samurai began to commit *seppuku* in turn. By the fourth samurai, the officials vomited and begged for the ceremony to be stopped.⁴⁵ This was the first recorded instance of a Western witness being present for such a ritual. Though that original audience of French diplomats was repulsed by *seppuku*, Japanese ritual suicide has always held a morbid fascination for many Westerners, especially the British. There are references to *hara-kiri* in British newspapers as early as 1851, where a comparison is made between the “art of ripping one’s self up” and the “honor” of “an Englishman some years ago to fire a pistol at his friend.”⁴⁶ The specific choice of wording in the phrase, “the art of ripping one’s self up” shows the tension between the pull of Japonisme to be aesthetically enamored of all the “arts” of Japan and the xenophobic fear of indigenous violence. By likening *seppuku* to the custom of a prior age in English history, the frightening violence can be smoothed over with familiarity. *Seppuku* then becomes an antiquated tradition, another mark of how Japan is out of step with the Western (and, by extension, modern) world. The very gruesomeness of the tradition becomes a source of comfort: Japan cannot be a modern country (or a threat to the Western empires) if it persists in such an anachronistic ritual.

Thus, while ritualistic suicide was already a part of the West’s understanding of Japan, Long’s insistence on the painlessness of the practice is relatively unexpected.

⁴⁵ This incident features prominently in Mori Ōgai’s short story “The Incident at Sakai,” written in 1914. Mori Ōgai, *The Incident at Sakai and Other Stories*, ed. David Dilworth and J. Thomas Rimer, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1977.

⁴⁶ “Japan and the Japanese,” *The Belfast Newsletter*, (Belfast: May 9th, 1851).

There are numerous indications in newspapers and informative guides to Japan that the West believed all Japanese people were schooled in *hara-kiri* from childhood. The very first reference to appear in British newspapers in 1851 includes a reference to the supposed childhood instruction all Japanese boys receive.⁴⁷ Yet there is never a reference to painlessness. Indeed, the fascination with the practice seems to stem from the revulsion towards the self-inflicted pain that was demonstrated by the French diplomats in 1868. Long's alteration to the common conception of the practices is drastic, then. It removes the comfortable assumptions about racial superiority that come attached to the West's fascination with *seppuku*. Instead of another mark that Cho-cho-san (and, metonymically, Japan) is stuck in a barbarian past, Long's description forces the Western reader to confront the sadistic pleasure to be had from the Western fascination with *seppuku*. In the amplification of the eroticism of her death wound, Long brings attention to the voyeurism already in place.

The painlessness of the death wound also allows Cho-cho-san the ability to contemplate the visual spectacle of her own death and to join the audience in the voyeurism of the moment. It is not simply the audience watching the streams of bloods travel down her neck and breasts; she has joined them from outside the text. The stream of blood must function as a synecdoche in one sense, providing the visual spectacle of Cho-cho-san's death both for the audience and now for Cho-cho-san herself. The erotic gasp becomes the moment of separation in which Cho-cho-san leaves the action of the scene to become a viewer. The blood stream also divides, separating at her shoulder and is then joined by a fresh stream that Cho-cho-san notes is "redder." The vibrancy of the

⁴⁷ "Japan and the Japanese," *The Belfast Newsletter*, (Belfast: May 9th, 1851).

color points to Long's claim that he used Japan as a setting specifically for the quality of its colors. Cho-cho-san's blood provides the vibrancy here. She herself provides the "boldness" Whistler attributed to Japanese colors and which Long claimed as his primary inspiration.

Long has made another drastic change to the West's conception of Japanese ritual suicide here: he has put the sword in the hands of a woman. Cho-cho-san boldly performs the ritual her father performed before her and uses the same blade he did. The sword is specifically identified as a token of masculine honor: "The blade was tempered into vague shapes of beasts at the edge. It was signed, 'Ikesada.' To her father, it had been Honor. On the blade was the inscription: 'To die with Honor/ When one can no longer live with Honor'" (78). Since the blade is decorated with "vague shapes of beasts," is inscribed with a masculine death poem, and once belonged to her father, it is an instrument of masculinity. It is elevated into an artisanal artifact by the reference to the sword-maker's signature. Its value, then, is established both by its function and by its artistry. The next sentence shifts its value away from the commercial and into the personal by asserting that it functioned as "Honor" for her father. Though Long's inscription is overly simplistic, it is meant to evoke the genre of Japanese poetry a soldier would use to commemorate his own death.⁴⁸ Cho-cho-san repeats the opening phrase of the poem, claiming the masculine honor inherited from her father for herself, but then adds an extra step: she puts on her makeup. In other words, she combines the masculine with the feminine in her final spectacle. She is inventing new traditions by doing so,

⁴⁸ It was a tradition for literate Japanese to compose a *jisei*, or "death poem," on their deathbed. It was especially true for those samurai who committed *seppuku*.

starting a series of ritual that combines her experiences with elements of both gender's traditions.

Long brings this death scene back to an explicit moral in the next few lines: "They [Japanese traditions] had taught her how to die, but [Pinkerton] had taught her how to live—nay, to make life sweet. Yet that was the reason she must die. Strange reason!" The imperialist party line is clear in one reading. The invading Westerner may have been heartless but surely his superior culture was a gift large enough to cancel out the debt. Western culture makes "life sweet" and that is the gift Pinkerton has left Cho-cho-san with. Yet, Long also upends this thought in the next sentence. The phrasing must be corrected: Pinkerton did *not* teach her "how to live" because his "sweet life" *also* necessitates her death. Pinkerton—and the invasion of Western culture—is therefore a reinforcement of the philosophy of death. Cho-cho-san herself must create a new culture that frees her from the necessity of suicide. As she had done when she combined her own feminine toilette with her father's inherited suicide ritual, she combines the "sweet life" Pinkerton had shown her with her own innovation, a will to live.

Unlike the other iterations of Madame Butterfly, Long leaves his heroine ambiguously positioned between life and death. The two national cultures—Japanese and American—each push her towards death. For her to live, she must initiate a new philosophy of her own. This begins with her maternal duties: "The baby crept cooing into her lap. The little maid came in and bound up the wound" (79). The lack of a possessive pronoun leaves the reader unsure whether Cho-cho-san survives her *seppuku*, whether she is alive and binding her own wound or whether the maid is binding the wound of a corpse. If the maid succeeds in saving her from her self-inflicted wound, she and Cho-cho-san

will raise this child in a home exempt from both American and Japanese influences. The blurring of their identities in the ambiguous absence of pronouns makes clear the erasure of hierarchy between them. If they can be mistaken for each other by the text, their future life will presumably be one of equality. Their independence is key to Cho-cho-san's new philosophical project. Long gives her this opportunity; Belasco and Puccini both remove it.

This brings us to another key difference between Long's version and the two subsequent ones: the role of B. F. Pinkerton. Both Belasco and Puccini build romance into their narratives. Long's, by comparison, very clearly establishes Pinkerton as villainously cold and unsympathetic. Pinkerton explicitly disavows responsibility or emotional engagement with his Japanese marriage in the first chapter. His unnamed friend describes him as "impervious" to "losing his head" for a wife. Pinkerton is flattered. "Exactly," he says, "I *don't* see much danger to myself in your prescription [to find a Japanese wife]" (30). The friend responds ominously: "The danger would probably be with—the other person." Pinkerton's disavowal of feeling is reminiscent of Pierre Loti's narrator and his lack of emotional attachment to his Japanese wife. While Loti's narrator and Chrysanthème seem mutually unfulfilled in their arrangement, Cho-cho-san falls passionately in love with Pinkerton and it is only he who lacks affection. Long's version explicitly argues that Western romance is too appealing a prospect for Japanese women. This version of the story is not unique to Long's novella. In 1888, former Abolitionist journalist Edward H. House wrote a semi-autobiographical novel, *Yone Santo: A Child of Japan*, in which a Japanese girl cannot resist the romantic overtures of an American merchant. House also explicitly states that this is because Japan lacks a

cultural equivalent to Western romance. The narrator, an avuncular British doctor who has taken an interest in the titular character's welfare since her childhood, tells the American merchant that his flirtation has gone un-comprehended because, "Her honest studies, thank God, have taught her none of the meaning of such foulness as you have tried to poison her with tonight. Poor girl, poor girl! To think that her first revelation of deceit and treachery should reach her through me, after all!"⁴⁹ The doctor has fancied himself a champion of Western culture, the source of "honest studies." The American merchant has disrupted that fantasy by creating an alternative depiction of Western culture that foregrounds sexuality. The binary presented by the two Caucasian men in *Yone Santo* is condensed into one character in Long's *Butterfly*. Where House presents the doctor as representative of the benefits that Japan would reap from assimilating into Western culture and the American merchant as a sinful trap to be avoided, Long makes it clear that the benefits are inextricable from the vices. Pinkerton's "education" of Cho-cho-san is unsympathetic and brusque. Her affection for him seems to occur despite his best efforts, not because of them. Indeed, the scene in which Cho-cho-san's affection is established begins with her in tears: "He had the joke to himself; his wife had gone away to cry. At first she decided to run away from him...[but] she preferred to remain. She had acquired a strange liking for Pinkerton and her new way of life" (32). Though *Butterfly* later almost gives Pinkerton credit for teaching her "how to live," Long makes it perfectly plain here that the "new way of life" is more enticing than Pinkerton himself. He also makes it clear that the "new way of life" is not a unilaterally pleasant experience. The

⁴⁹ Edward H. House, *Yone Santo: A Child of Japan*, (New York: Belford, Clarke and Co., 1888), 102.

shift between cultures is violent and there is no guarantee that a “sweet life” can be found in the new culture.

Both Belasco’s and Puccini’s *Butterfly* texts reverse Long’s portrayal of the marriage. Where Long made Pinkerton sarcastic and disinterested, Belasco and Puccini make him romantic and impassioned. Belasco describes a Pinkerton who “was dotty in love with her for two weeks after [he] sailed”⁵⁰ and Puccini gives Pinkerton and the re-named *Butterfly* (an English word in an otherwise Italian libretto) a passionate love duet leading up to their wedding night (49). Both versions insist on the earnestness of Pinkerton’s love. Pinkerton also returns with his new American wife at the end of both versions to castigate himself for his forgetfulness. In Puccini’s opera, Pinkerton laments, “Sempre il mite suo sembiante con strazio atroce vedrò.”⁵¹ In Belasco’s version, he simply cries, “I can’t face it! I’m going!” and retreats. He re-appears in the final seconds of both versions to cradle *Butterfly* as she dies. In Long’s version, on the other hand, Pinkerton does not bother to disembark from his boat and simply sends his new wife to the consul to see about collecting his son from Cho-cho-san. It is a painful coincidence that Ch-cho-san overhears her message, only made worse by the fact that Adelaide, the new wife, coos over Cho-cho-san and calls her a “pretty plaything” (75). There is no redemption or guilt for Long’s version of the Pinkertons, only further pain inflicted upon Cho-cho-san through a lack of sympathy.

⁵⁰ David Belasco, *Six Plays*. Montrose Jonas Moses, ed. (New York: Little, Brown, 1929), 29.

⁵¹ “Her sweet face will haunt me forever, torturing me agonizingly,” Puccini, Giacomo, *Madama Butterfly*, trans. Daniel S. Brink, (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, 2005), 133. Subsequent references will be by page number in the body of the discussion.

The three narratives agree on one critical point, however. All three versions require progeny from Pinkerton's marriage to Cho-cho-san/Butterfly and so all three versions necessitate a sexual encounter. The tradition of the Japonisme novel was to insist on the immobility of Japanese women once they were in bed, making them seem more like lifeless adornments than sexual beings.⁵² Of the three iterations, Puccini's opera makes the love scene most explicit. His depiction of their sexual encounter, however, is more disquieting than romantic. As the first act closes, Butterfly tells Pinkerton that she has heard that "Dicon ch'oltre mare se cade in man dell'uom ogni farfalla d'uno spillo è trafitta ed in tavola infitta"⁵³ and Pinkerton responds, "Un po' de vero c'è" (100).⁵⁴ Like Long's sexualized suicide description, the sexuality in Puccini's scene is sadistically erotic, but it lacks Long's implied criticism. The action of capturing and then skewering a living butterfly is transformed into a metaphor for romantic love, hidden beneath a seductively beautiful melody. The melody soars throughout, modulating upwards with increasing instrumentation, reaching a climax when Pinkerton insists repeatedly, "Sei mia!"⁵⁵ In comparison to Pinkerton's possessive and narrow affection, Butterfly's exposition of her own joy is expansive. While Pinkerton has narrowed the scope of the love scene to the size of a collector's butterfly and reaches his climax in an expression of ownership, Butterfly encompasses the entire horizon: "A! dolce notte!...Oh! quanti occhi

⁵² Clive Holland mentions Hyacinth's immobility in *My Japanese Wife*: "[The lamp] permits, for one thing, Mousmé properly to arrange her head in the little hollow of her camphor-wood pillow" (193). Pierre Loti refers to Madame Chrysanthème's immobility in bed: "Chrysanthème's pillow is a little wooden block, scooped out to fit exactly the nape of the neck, without disturbing the elaborate head-dress, which must never be taken down" (75).

⁵³ "They say that overseas, if it should fall into the hands of man, a butterfly is stuck through with a pin!"

⁵⁴ "There's some truth in that."

⁵⁵ "You are mine!"

fisi, attenti, d'ogni parte a riguardar!”⁵⁶ She almost breaks the fourth wall in this moment. Just as Long's Cho-cho-san joined the audience briefly to observe her own actions in the moment in which the author used his most sexual language, Puccini's Butterfly seems cognizant of the audience and their eyes fixed on her here, in her most erotic moment. For Puccini, Butterfly's sexual desires help her to transcend the specific context of her romance with Pinkerton and to become a commentator on her own theatrical adaptation.

The progeny that all three versions require of the plot is, of course, mixed race. Long's story, written in 1898, could be read against the 1881 anti-miscegenation code preventing “white-Mongolian” relationships and the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act which, as its title may suggest, excluded groups from naturalization and immigration rights based on national or racial origin. The Japanese were not formally included in this “yellow peril” legislating until the Twentieth Century, with the 1907 Gentleman's Agreement and then formally in the 1924 National Origin Act, when Japan had begun to show the signs of significant empire-building in Asia. Long manifests his anxieties regarding the baby's mixed heritage through Cho-cho-san's fears of mixed cultural inheritance. She panics when she interprets the baby's pre-lingual babble as Japanese rather than English: ““Ah-h-h! You making that non-*senze* with your parent? Now what *is* that you speaking with me? Jap'nese? If it is, I—’ She threatened him direly... ‘Listen! *No* one shall speak anything but United States' languages in these house!’” (38). To aurally purify the baby of his Japanese heritage, Cho-cho-san feels she must remove all the traces of her own racial identity from her speech. She has, after all, cut her own ties with Japanese tradition on Pinkerton's orders and, according to the anti-miscegenation

⁵⁶ “Oh, lovely night!...Oh! What a lot of eyes fixed and staring, looking at us from all sides!”

laws of America, cannot become American either.⁵⁷ As Sandra Stanley explains, “Butterfly’s plight exposes not only Pinkerton’s limitations, but the limitations of a national polity, one that must eventually make a place for the assimilable/inassimilable Asian” (257).⁵⁸ Her biracial offspring expands this critique because, whatever Cho-cho-san’s hopes may be, he will be representative of neither White America nor Japan, but will be a new contested identity. This is reflected in the child’s interim name: “Trouble,” meaning, according to Cho-cho-san’s adaptation of Pinkerton’s sense of ironic humor, “joy.”

Cho-cho-san, unlike the rest of the Japanese heroines of the Japonisme novel, is not a blank slate upon which a “cruel Caucasian man” can heap his Orientalist fantasies. Instead, Pinkerton is Cho-cho-san’s depository of fantasy. In all three iterations, she tells elaborate stories to her maid, painting sometimes fantastical, sometimes masochistic pictures of what her own future may contain. She has more in common with Scheherazade than Loti’s mute Chrysanthème or Holland’s submissive Mio. Unlike Scheherazade, however, Cho-cho-san’s stories can never recover her altogether from her fated death the way Scheherazade’s do.⁵⁹ Her maid performs the role of the interlocutor from a Socratic dialogue, answering only in short bursts to encourage Cho-cho-san to

⁵⁷ Cho-cho-san’s relatives “protested a deal of friendship for Pinkerton that night; but at the final conference... Cho-cho-san was disowned” (34). While Long’s understanding of the importance of ancestry to Japanese culture is misconstrued, this moment functions as a definitive moment in which Cho-cho-san irrevocably is made non-Japanese by her marriage with Pinkerton.

⁵⁸ Sandra Kumamoto Stanley, “The Metamorphosis of Madame Butterfly and Her Transnational Legacy,” *Pacific Coast Philology*, (42.2: 2007), 257-63.

⁵⁹ Scheherazade was introduced to Japan in a translation of *The Arabian Nights* by Nagamine Hideki (1848-1927) as “*Arabiya monogatari*” in 1875. The choice of the title’s translation establishes it in a Japanese tradition of extended prose narrative that includes “*Genji monogatari*” (or “Tales of Genji”) by Murasaki Shikibu. (For more, see Sugita 116)

keep spinning her stories. The stories are sometimes prosaic versions of Pinkerton's return, with plans to hide behind a screen and then to surprise him when he peeps through an eye-hole (44). Others are tragedies, like the idea of Pinkerton returning only in time to see his wife begging for food. Cho-cho-san adapted that image from "the story of the Uncombed Ronin," a story (sans Pinkerton this time) that she spun for her listeners as well (40). It is this aspect of Cho-cho-san's character, her story building, that supplies Puccini's opera with its most famous aria, "Un bel di vedremo" or "One fine day we'll see" (100). As Susan McClary summarizes: "Without question, the lyrics express her tragically deluded hopes, her childlike timidity, even her masochism—but not the music, which actually sounds quite incongruous to the simpering text that serves as the verbal vehicle for her remarkable vocalization."⁶⁰ While McClary would argue that the music makes this imaginative moment transcend the "simpering text," I see this as the opera's participation in Butterfly's heritage as Scheherazade-storyteller. This is Cho-cho-san's victory: she is a capable author in her own right, pressing at the bounds of her genre's narrative cage.

Yet her authorship is constrained by another unexpected factor: both Belasco's play and Long's novella transcribe her speech according to a specious representation of a Japanese accent pronouncing English vocabulary.⁶¹ Spoken phonetically, the dialect

⁶⁰ Susan McClary, "Mounting Butterflies," *A Vision of the Orient: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts of Madame Butterfly*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 24.

⁶¹ None of the most common problems encountered by native Japanese speakers in the pronunciation of English are represented by Cho-cho-san's dialogue. For example, the Japanese alphabet has no R or L—the sound that is often transliterated as an "R" is actually more like a halfway point between L and D. Additionally, the Japanese language works in terms of single-syllable consonant-vowel combinations. This leads to the pronunciation of "straw" as "soo-toh-rah." Cho-cho-san's dialect does not follow these conventional difficulties.

bears little resemblance to a Japanese accent articulating English words. Instead, it often functions more as a visual cue of her foreignness, not as an “accurate” transcription of her speech. George Krapp refers to this as an “eye dialect,” or a written language in which the convention violated is one of the eyes, not the ears.⁶² These words include “an” as a replacement for “and,” “lig” for “like,” and “bebby” for “baby.” In other moments, the transcribed dialect is reminiscent of the traditions of transcribing African American dialect. Both Long and Winifred Eaton, another American author who transcribed her Japanese characters in a similar dialect, adopted some of their depictions of Japanese dialect from more familiar depictions of African American dialect.

The relationship between American dialect writing and the reception of Japan has had a long and surprisingly complex history. Dialect literature was all the rage in the decades immediately following the Civil War, a literary movement that was spearheaded by Mark Twain. Dialect writing might function as a kind of hegemonic control, an attempt to speak for the subaltern and to thus control what the subaltern says. Yet, dialect writing sometimes escaped such a strict hegemony. It could demonstrate the political system of linguistic subordination, but it could also enact the resistance to that system.⁶³ In the hands of Winifred Eaton, a half-Chinese woman who created a “real” geisha authorial disguise to market her novels, dialect writing becomes an expression of “Orientalism with a difference.”⁶⁴ The effect of the Japanese dialect writing is the same that Clément ascribed to the dying foreign woman in opera: the effect is to mark these

⁶² George Philip Krapp, *The English Language in America*, (NY: Century, 1925), 228.

⁶³ Gavin Jones, *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

⁶⁴ Jean Lee Cole, *The Literary Voices of Winifred Eaton*, (NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 8.

characters as notably different. It didn't matter that the dialect writing was an "eye dialect," with no discernible aural difference from standard pronunciation. It only mattered that the dialect writing had established the Japanese character as an outsider.

I would not wish to under-state the negative effects that dialect depictions of minority groups in the United States have had, especially for African Americans. One of the most glaring examples of the deleterious effects of dialect depictions of African Americans occurs in the history of blackface minstrelsy. Yet, as Josephine Lee has recently proven in her book, *The Japan of Pure Invention*, there is an oddly pervasive connection between the history of blackface and yellowface theater.⁶⁵ This connection has its origins in the reception the 1860 delegation from Japan to America, the first international envoy from Japan since the enforced "opening" of 1854. Though the Japanese were frequently praised in letters and private accounts for the lightness of their complexion, depictions in newspapers consistently drew them in a darker hue than the sea of white faces that surround them. In a commemorative poem to celebrate the visit, Walt Whitman insists on the darkness of the delegation's skin color: he refers to them as "swart cheek'd," "sunburnt," and "tann'd."⁶⁶ Together, these adjectives show a connection between African Americans and the Japanese. This relationship is further

⁶⁵ Among other things, Lee details the cross-racial acting performed by African American actors, suggesting that "African American actors seem to promise a uniquely ironic take on the artifice of Japaneseness in [*The Mikado*], destabilizing racial typecasting." Josephine Lee, *The Japan of Pure Invention*, (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 88.

⁶⁶ Whitman, Walt. "A Broadway Pageant." 1891 ed. *Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Collected Prose*, (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1982), 115.



Figure 3.3 "Natural Mistakes" from *Harper's Weekly* June 30, 1860

clarified by a cartoon titled “Natural Mistakes” that ran in *Harper’s Weekly* on June 30, 1860.⁶⁷

On the one side, a black waiter is evading identification as a “nigger” by claiming to be Japanese. The apparent joke is that the “Colored Gentleman” has not escaped being “colored” (or the slur) by claiming Japaneseness. While he seems convinced of the superior reception he would receive if he were identified as Japanese instead of African American, the cartoon’s audience is intended to find humor in the twofold assumption that a better reception would be allotted to a Japanese man as well as the absurd idea that this “Colored Gentleman” could effectively disguise his own racial identity so easily. In the second panel, apparently narratively unconnected but linked by the common title, a drunken Japanese man searches for his real hat in a pile of bricks.⁶⁸ The joke in this panel refers to the common slang “to have a brick in one’s hat,” which refers to drunkenness. It adds to the humor by drawing attention the differences between Japanese national dress and contemporary Western fashions by comparing the Japanese headdress to a brick. Additionally, though the Japanese were acclaimed for their sobriety, it plays on racist accusations of drunkenness. The two “Natural Mistakes” seem to be interacting with each other on the page, with the “Colored Gentleman” from the panel on the left gaining inspiration from the panel on the right. Yet, somewhat tragically, both sides of the cartoon also seem linked by the inextricable racism facing both identity groups. The waiter on the left is tied to his subaltern position like the Japanese man on the right will

⁶⁷ see Figure 3.3.

⁶⁸ The Japanese man is identified by the name “Tommy” in the cartoon as a reference to the most popular member of the 1860 delegation, a teenaged assistant the press re-named “Japanese Tommy.” Interestingly, this title was adopted by a Black minstrel performer named Thomas “Japanese Tommy” Dilward.

now be. The racial categorization of “Japanese” shows the beginning of instability by this connection, poised to become yet another minority group lumped together in popular conception.

Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly* already destabilized the strict Japaneseness of Butterfly’s identity. The setting is Japanese, the libretto is Italian, and the star’s name is English. The dialect writing in both Belasco’s and Long’s versions also disrupted strict racial demarcations, as I have just shown. Cho-cho-san’s mixed-race child, in every incarnation, brings the question of racial identity to the forefront and complicates contemporary assumptions about racial inheritance. What Butterfly is not, however, is only the passive, wounded, “pining lotus blossom” that popular culture has assumed her to be. She is a product of a genre of writing that incorporates an archetypal “pining lotus blossom” but also questions its accuracy and efficacy. In Long’s version especially, she is a storyteller in constrained circumstances, a woman whose future outside the narrative is completely ambiguous. While other literary Japonisme heroines do indeed pine themselves to death, the original Cho-cho-san, Long’s Butterfly herself, might have escaped the narrative altogether.

V. The Death Scene: Butterflies and Blades

The death scenes in the Japonisme novels—of which *Madame Butterfly* is the most famous representative but by no means a solitary example—prove the reciprocal allegiance of the Japonisme art objects to the Japanese woman. Of the adaptations of *Madame Butterfly* that I have already mentioned, all but the last

focus specifically on the decorative objects surrounding Butterfly as she prepares herself for suicide. In Long's original version, this is her blade:

She had a sword in her lap as she sat down. It was the one thing of her father's which her relatives had allowed her to keep. It would have been very beautiful to a Japanese, to whom the sword is a soul. A golden dragon writhed about the superb scabbard. He had eyes of rubies, and held in his mouth a sphere of crystal which meant many mystical things to a Japanese. The guard was a coiled serpent of exquisite workmanship. It was signed, 'Ikesada.' To her father, it had been Honor. On the blade was this inscription: 'To die with Honor / When one can no longer live with Honor.'

This sword could very well have been one of those "aesthetic products" that Lafcadio Hearn listed—and said the Japanese woman reigned supreme over. It is obviously an aestheticized object, as we can see from the golden dragon with rubies for eyes and a "mystical" crystal held between its teeth. When description fails him, Long even says bluntly that the sword shows its "exquisite workmanship." And in case you still didn't know the artistic value of the sword, he appends a poem to the blade itself and gives it an artist's signature.

But this sword is hardly a feminine object, you might object. It's strongly associated with her father—a war hero—and is signed by a male artisan and inhabited by a male dragon. Yet, it's also narratively bracketed by two essentially feminine objects: a mirror and her makeup. Immediately before contemplating the blade, she pulled a looking glass toward herself and then, just after she drew the

blade “affectionately across her palm,” she made “herself pretty with vermilion and powder and perfumes.” Sword, mirror, and makeup are all parts to the final aesthetic product, that most wonderful of all the aesthetic products of Japan: Cho-cho-san herself. The sword becomes another one of these objects that aids her in her suicide spectacle and prepares her to be a wonderful aesthetic product to be consumed and circulated, one of dozens of other Japonisme heroines to end in the same scene. Like her makeup, like her mirror, the sword accentuates her performance of abject submission: this is the function Pinkerton’s philosophy prepared her for.

But she still escapes. She performs the Orientalist fantasy of abasement perfectly—and then she lives. She does this by fully comprehending the aesthetic spectacle Pinkerton has made of her. She watches her own suicide in the mirror and tracks the progress of the streams of blood from the wound in her neck. Like the man in Lum’s documentary who parceled out the Asian woman’s body, like all the Western men who eroticize the anonymous Asian woman’s body piecemeal, Cho-cho-san’s gaze eroticizes her divided body even at this violent juncture: “In a moment, she could see [the larger stream] making its way daintily between her breasts.” She pulls the mirror closer to watch more intently and feels torn between the Japanese religion that “taught her how to die” and Pinkerton’s alternative lessons: not “how to live,” she corrects herself, but “how to make life sweet,” how to aestheticize life. Both schools of thought end the same: with her stabbing herself in the neck. I would argue that this is the pivotal moment of the text: *both* the Japanese instructions of “how to die” *and* Pinkerton’s instructions

on “how to make life sweet” are wrong. In this iteration, the Western aesthetic is as problematic as a cultural ritual that would have seemed barbaric to Victorian readers—a ritual that made the first group of French officials to officially witness it in 1868 vomit and beg for it to be stopped. The dominant colonialist narrative—that Western culture would enlighten native cultures, that Western aesthetics would improve native tastes, that Western morals would better native lives—is called into question. While Long doesn’t go as far as to say that Japanese culture is superior, he equalizes his critique: both cultures would have killed her.

While Long’s subversive elements are slowly stripped away in subsequent adaptations, the Japonisme products retain a bit of their subversive power and enter the Western marketplace en masse. Male aesthetes were united by the fear of the sheer quantity of Japonisme products circulating promiscuously in Western markets—especially when this circulation seemed to occur in a nearly-exclusively female marketplace. The male connoisseur disdains the plentiful Japonisme products in Western women’s houses, chosen by those women according to a distinction of taste that is at odds with the male’s aesthetic. In complaining about these abundant objects, the male aesthete reveals the existence of the alternative; a female taste that eludes the sort of “extraordinary regulation and regimentation” that Hearn prescribed for the perfect woman. In effect, by complaining about the large quantities of Japonisme “knick-knacks” that he must sort through to find the few objects that accord with his aesthetic judgment, the male aesthete is confirming the existence of an alternative female aesthetic judgment. Take, for example, Renoir’s portrait, *Madame Georges Charpentier and her Children*

(1878), which depicts the family at home in their fashionable Japanese living room even though the artist complained that his subject, Marguerite Charpentier, put “Japanese objects everywhere.” The artist’s brother boasted in *La Vie Moderne* that Renoir did not re-arrange any of Marguerite Charpentier’s furniture despite his objections to the plentiful Japonisme objects, making the painting as accurate a representation of the female aesthetic for Japonisme objects as possible. The painting was an immense success financially and critically—it changed the course of Renoir’s career and, when sold in 1907, was called “an absolute masterpiece” by the curator of the Metropolitan Museum of Art who paid 92,400 francs for it, the museum’s first Impressionist painting. Still, the woman whose taste was reflected in the contents of the room depicted by the painting and whose reputation catapulted the painting to fame was criticized by Marcel Proust for being a “ridiculous little bourgeois.” The Western woman is therefore not given credit for her distinction of taste and where her taste runs contrary to the male aesthetic judgment, it is ultimately dismissed.

A year before *Miss Saigon* premiered in London, David Henry Hwang’s play, *M. Butterfly*, opened in New York. The playwright called it a “deconstructivist” take on the Madame Butterfly story, a story that was so engrained in the culture that he didn’t need to read the source material to be familiar with it: “I didn’t even know the plot of the opera!...Yet I felt convinced that the libretto would include yet another lotus blossom pining away for a cruel Caucasian man, and dying for her love. Such a story has become too much of a cliché not to be included in the archetypal East-West romance that started it all.”

His play under-mines the Orientalist story that *Miss Saigon* typifies and that underlies Debbie Lum's documentary series. His Butterfly is an illusion—not only is she not the submissive “lotus blossom” his Pinkerton blindly assumed she was, she's not even, technically, a “she.” When confronted with the reality underneath his fantasy, this Pinkerton dons her discarded Butterfly disguise and performs the ritual suicide himself—better that Butterfly still die, even if he has to kill himself to achieve it, than a world with no Butterfly and, by extension, no colonialist narrative. Yet, what seemed originally like a deconstruction or a counter-narrative turns out to be the closest re-interpretation of that original Cho-cho-san who recognized the aestheticization of the fantasy being constructed around her, who re-imagined the Japonisme art objects as ambassadors of her story, and who used the objectification process to her own advantage. Hwang's most subversive element—the survival of the Butterfly character—is actually the first time Long's heroine has been staged according to the original's narrative.

Coda

“Even bigger than Japan is the inside of your head”: Natsume Soseki and the Afterlife of Japonisme in Japan

Japan played many roles during the course of the Japonisme movement in the late-Nineteenth Century. The complicated nature of Japan added fuel to that ever-increasing nexus of conflicting signifiers, but the reality of Japan was only tangentially relevant in the larger scope of the movement. The West thought a lot about Japan, in other words, without having to spend much time considering Japan's tangible reality. In travel narratives, as I have already demonstrated, Japan was negotiated along terms of its *unreality* and the rhetorical patterns of discussing Japan as a geographical space relied heavily on the distancing metaphors of “fairylands” and antiquity. In the popular novels that cashed in on Japonisme's cultural capital, Japan is even more emphatically magical and its people are enlivened porcelain dolls. Truly, the Japan of Japonisme earned Wilde's claim that it was “a land of pure imagination.” Yet, as I have also demonstrated, Japan also undermines all of these impulses to erase its reality and, thus, complicates the nature of Japonisme.

Japan did exist, whatever Japonisme's focus may have been, and the Japanese people spoke back. The fascination with Western culture that haunts Meiji Japan does not

have a name (a la Japonisme), but the parallel is striking nonetheless. Meiji Japan was socio-politically primed for Western influence by the end of the Tokugawa era. The resolution of the Civil War in 1868 allowed the Meiji government to make a concerted effort to create a new Japanese government and culture according to Western standards and principles. On a cultural (rather than a political) level, Japan was also fascinated with Western literature and culture. Japanese translations of significant English texts could be found in popular magazine and adaptations of British canonical theater were being staged according to kabuki styles, including a notable adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* in 1885 whose title had to be amended twice after the seasonal allusion had to be extended to allow for an extended run past the original “In the time of cherry blossoms...” ceased to be strictly chronologically accurate.¹ To this day, productions of Japanese Shakespeare are a vital and popular theatrical form.² In another example, though Jane Austen’s oeuvre would not be translated as a whole until the 1920s, Meiji Japanese intellectuals discussed her style, produced literary adaptations, and debated her relevance to Japan.³

¹ Inoue Tsutomou’s 1868 translation of Charles Lamb’s story known as *Jinniku shichire-ire saiban* (“The Flesh-Pawning Trial”) was in turn adapted by Katsu Genzou into a kabuki production, *Sakuradoki¹ Zeni-no yononaka¹*, literally translated as “It’s a cherry blossom world in which only money matters.” The title had to be modified twice to deal with its remarkable popularity, changing the “cherry blossom” into “fall leaves” and then abandoning the allusion to season entirely when the play’s durability far outstripped original predictions.

² Minami Ryuta, Ian Caruthers, and John Gillies, edited *Performing Shakespeare in Japan*, a collection of essays discussing the vibrancy of Japanese Shakespeare starting in the Meiji era and holding steady, despite the odds, during the Twentieth Century (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³ The entirety of the first chapter of *Pride and Prejudice* was quoted in Natsume Soseki’s *Theory of Literature* to illustrate Austen’s position as, according to Soseki, “the leading authority in the world of realism.” *Theory of Literature and Other Critical Writings*. Michael Bourdaghs, Atsuko Ueda, and Joseph Murphy, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 106. He also insists that, “Anyone who is unable to appreciate Austen will be unable to understand the beauty of realism.” Soseki held literary salons in

An interesting glimpse can be caught of Meiji Japan's concern about the Western perception of their nation in the prologue to the popular kabuki adaptation of *Merchant of Venice* I referred to. In a prologue to the play, three students debate the question of Japan's relation to the West and its allegiance to "traditional" (in this case, Confucian or Chinese) morality. Two of the students stand in for extreme positions on either side of the debate whether to adopt Western customs or to refuse all foreign influence. Nakamura, the representative of conservatism, argues that Japanese and Chinese native literature is more entertaining than the new Western imports. Wada, the opposition and representative of modernity, disagrees, claiming that, "Asians seek only savage and superstitious entertainment from their novels. So for us Japanese, who are *han-kai* [half-civilized]⁴, Western novels seem to be less entertaining."⁵ The two sides are interesting parallels to the conception of Japan in Japonisme discourse in the West through which Japan is perceived as valuable specifically for its aesthetic value as, in a sense, entertainment. These roles for Japan's literary output and Western canonical equivalents are re-enacted by these students. Both Nakamura and Wada agree that Japan produces cultural material with more immediate appeal; they also agree that the West is dry, but intellectually superior.

Meiji Japanese Tokyo in which he discussed a wide variety, but his respect for Austen would later inspire Nogami Yaeko to undertake a serialized adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* in 1926. Subsequent references will be by page number in the body of the discussion.

⁴ The significance of the term "half-civilized" can be drawn to Augustus Mitchell's textbook, *The New Primary Geography* (1845-57), as Yukari argues that "Japan is 'half-civilized,'" mimicking the textbooks categorization of nations as savage, barbarous, half-civilized, civilized, or enlightened. The textbook was introduced in 1872 to Japan and used widely as a primer.

⁵ Minami Ryuta, Ian Carruthers, and John Gillies, ed. *Performing Shakespeare in Japan*, (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 25.

Thus, the impulse of the Meiji government to train a new crop of Japanese students in Western areas of expertise becomes a solution to this perceived inequality. It is not a coincidence that this discussion is being placed in the mouths of Japanese students: those students, after all, were crucial to Japan's future place on a global stage. Indeed, a substantial portion of the Meiji era's rapid growth and the increasing importance of Japan in a global context over the next fifty years was due to the generation of "ryuugakusei," or "students sent to study abroad."⁶ While the early portion of the Meiji era was devoted to translating Western texts and hiring Western teachers to implement Western lessons in classrooms across the country, the second half of the era shows Japan's determination to take hold of its own intellectual experience. In the first half of the Meiji era, Japan was thirsty for foreign influence in an attempt to curb the inequality inherent in their early trade negotiations and to prevent the sort of warfare they had witnessed between China and Britain during the Opium Wars. In the second half of the era, Japan focused on replacing the foreign nationals they had gathered with fully trained Japanese authorities, trained abroad to the same level of experience as the Westerners they replaced. Thus, even in that early period when Meiji Japan was so apparently open to Western influence and manipulation, the government made efforts to prepare a Japanese workforce to eventually return Japanese government and culture to Japanese control. The expense to the Meiji government of sending so many Japanese nationals abroad for their education was substantial, but the amount spent to employ Westerners in their pedagogical positions was even more impressive. In 1873, the

⁶ See James Thomas Conte's *Overseas Study in the Meiji Period: Japanese Students in America, 1867-1902*, (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977). See also Noburo Koyama and Ian Ruxton's *Japanese Students at Cambridge University in the Meiji Era, 1868-1912*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Japanese Ministry of Education was spending one-third of its entire budget in employing foreign teachers and funding “ryuugakusei.”⁷

Natsume Soseki⁸ was one of those students and was charged by the Japanese government with the task of moving to London and acquiring mastery of “English.” While Soseki is remembered today as one of the premier architects of a renaissance in Japanese literature starting in the Meiji era and one of the rare literary figures whose reputation is both popularly and critically acclaimed, he began in humbler circumstances. Born in 1867 as Natsume Kinnosuke, Soseki graduated from Tokyo University in 1893 and then taught high school English. He was the eighth child born into a formerly prosperous merchant family and was therefore fostered by a family that, his older sister eventually discovered, neglected him and then fostered again by a second family before eventually returning to his birth family. Later he claimed that he did not know which members of his birth family were actually his parents when he finally returned to them and mistakenly assumed his grandparents were in fact his parents.

In 1900, the Japanese government ordered him to become one of the generation of “ryuugakusei” and to leave his home for England to pursue an expertise in English.

⁷ James Thomas Conte’s *Overseas Study in the Meiji Period: Japanese Students in America, 1867-1902*, (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977)

⁸ I use the Japanese convention of having the given name follow the family name here. In Japanese convention, manners dictate that a speaker use only the family name when referring to a person deserving of respect before intimacy is established. This convention is flouted in Soseki’s case. There is a presumed familiarity between Soseki and the public in which the public commonly refers to Soseki by his given name. The name itself is a nom de plume. He was born Natsume Kinnosuke but, as the eighth child in a crowded family, he was adopted into the Shiobara family and thus renamed Shiobara Kinnosuke. The family name of his nom de plume drew from that earliest family name and the one he legally

Whether it was the language or the literature they intended, it was unclear.⁹ However the dictum may have been intended, it was interpreted (willfully) by Soseki as regarding English literature specifically. As Soseki explains in the preface to his 1907 *Theory of Literature*, “The reason I chose not to devote my two years wholly to the study of language was not that I look down on linguistic ability or think it unworthy of study. Rather, it was the result of my taking it all too seriously. Two years was hardly sufficient time for acquiring proficiency even in one branch of language training—be it pronunciation, conversation, or written expression—much less to attempt to master the whole discipline!” (41).¹⁰ Thus, without having studied the language in which the literature was written, Soseki set himself to the task of learning English literature at the cheapest possible price.¹¹ The result—written upon his return to Japan while employed as a professor of British Literature at Tokyo Imperial University—is the ten-year project that he never finished, the *Theory of Literature* (1901). In it, Soseki seeks to establish with pinpoint precision all of the various factors, emotional or intellectual, that are at play

⁹ Soseki’s journal and letters from his stay in London have been compiled and translated by Damian Flanagan in 2005. *The Tower of London: Tales of Victorian London*, (Charlottesville, VA: The University of Virginia Press, 1997). He discusses the explicit order there as well as in subsequent lectures and texts. He always characterizes the order as being clearly about English as a whole and his decision to ignore that valence as a conscious decision to misinterpret.

¹⁰ The edition I use for the translations of Soseki’s text into English, originally called *Bungakuron*, is the edition translated by Michael Bourdaghs, Atsuko Ueda, and Joseph Murphy by Columbia University Press in 2012. This translation is the first English edition of the work and, though expurgated, is the most complete translation of any of Soseki’s theoretical work available in a Western language.

¹¹ I say “cheapest” because the stipend allotted by the Meiji government was minimal and Soseki spent the majority of his time in London impoverished. His economic deprivation absolutely played a part in his conflicted feelings towards London and English literature in general.

in British literature.¹² By organizing the chaos into a scientific system, Soseki hoped to overcome the trauma of culture shock that he endured while impoverished in London.¹³

The Theory of Literature has at its heart the impulse to cohesively organize the chaotic multiplicity of experience with which the reader of English (though he is happy to expand his theory to universality) literature is confronted. The tracks of Soseki's pain from being isolated and infuriated as a foreign scholar of English literature in London are evident throughout the text. Indeed, even in the very unfinished quality of the book and the fact that Soseki later referred to it as a "deformed corpse" and "the ruins of a city street that has been destroyed by an earthquake in the midst of its construction," it is evident that pain and frustration remain at the core of this enterprise (252). For the rest of his career as a Japanese author of Japanese novels (rather than as a Japanese scholar of English literature), Soseki would speak deprecatingly about the ambitiousness of this project. In *My Individualism*, a celebrated philosophical lecture given in 1914, he humbly referred back to this earlier project of theorizing all of literature in a single text as "showing off borrowed clothes," and "preening with glued-on peacock feathers" (250).¹⁴

¹² The text is a cross between what a Western scholar would recognize as literary scholarship and something altogether more scientific in generic construction. Soseki later described the project as an imitation of English literary scholarship, but the end result is definitively more experimental than he gave it credit for.

¹³ Unlike many other Japanese visitors to Western nations, including the 1860 delegation to the United States that I have previously mentioned, Soseki's stay was beleaguered by insufficient funds. He had to move to cheaper lodgings multiple times, each time sacrificing any sense of stability or security he had struggled to achieve. Besides the financial difficulties, Soseki was never suited to metropolitan settings (even Japanese metropolitan Tokyo) so well as he was suited to rural life. He was anxious and melancholy to begin with and the isolation of his existence in London only amplified these qualities.

¹⁴ "Individualism" in this case refers to an independent, self-contained figure. Soseki's speech as philosophical more than it was technical and deals primarily with urging Japanese young men to assert their worth as individuals rather than allowing dogmatic

His attitude toward the presumptuous ambition of this earliest of his texts was always apologetic after he made the transition from scholar to author.

The fact that *Theory* is a failure is undeniable. Even beyond the fact that it peters out uncompleted, the cohesion of the pseudo-scientific formula breaks down very early on. His literary theory is an elaborate explanation of a misleadingly simple formula: it is expressed as $(F+f)$ in which F represents “impressions or ideas at the focal point of consciousness” and f represents “the emotions that attend them” (52).¹⁵ What the significances of these two axes are changes as the text continues. As the project begins, f is clearly distinguished as being sensory in nature and emotional by extension. Bodily sensations can be grouped in this category, but so too can affective emotions. When Soseki turns his attention to F , however, the differentiation becomes murky to the point of obscurity. Soseki tries to isolate cognition and rationality from all affective and experiential sensation. His classifications and subsection headings become increasingly erratic and eventually disintegrate entirely.

Soseki draws from both traditional Confucian poetry and from Western literature in this text. His focus on the overall formulaic structure prevents an abundance of focused

rhetoric to force them to conform to previously accepted standards. Pre-Meiji, Japanese society followed a strict Confucian caste system. There were predetermined qualities and duties expected of every Japanese citizen. Though the system allowed for a wide variety unfamiliar to a Western understanding of feudal distinctions, it was still far more rigid than the Meiji era.

¹⁵ Joseph Murphy, “Separation of Cognition and Affect in *Bungakuron*,” *Japan Forum* (20.1: 2008), 103-26. The scientific distinction between cognition and consciousness, the poles of Soseki’s formula, is still being debated. The editors of *Theory of Literature* justify their use of the word “cognition” thus: “While Soseki does not use the word himself, part of the collective point of this volume is that he was trying to express things for which a vocabulary had not been invented. Hence the use of the word ‘cognition’ in this volume is intentionally anachronistic at times and is meant to mark Soseki’s use of psychology as distinct from the behaviorism that soon follows and is dominant in the twentieth century” (266).

literary analysis. The brevity of his direct analysis of foreign (especially Western) literature can be explained by his later description of the project as “showing off borrowed clothes.” He discusses the problem of his position as a foreigner reading English literature at one point: “Somewhere in the back of their minds, Japanese people believe that the English people’s evaluation of the work is correct because they are taking up a work produced in England and offering a native evaluation of a native product” (233). He counters this assumption with a metaphorical rebuttal: “It is like believing, without giving it a second thought, the words of a kimono shop clerk because one knows nothing about kimonos.” The metaphor is a complex rebuttal because it redistributes the racial territory of “native” knowledge of a “native product.” The Japanese audience is positioned as the customer in a kimono shop who lacks expertise in the nuances of kimono aesthetics. This kimono amateur is confronted with the expert on the “native product” in the form of a Japanese shop clerk. Unlike the parallel this metaphor is intended to address (i.e., the Japanese reader of English literature), the Japanese purchaser of a kimono shares his “native” status with the Japanese shop clerk but not his “native” knowledge. This “native product” is, thus, foreign to its native consumer. Yet, despite the fact that the Japanese reader/consumer is clearly positioned as having no authority on the subject of kimono aesthetics, Soseki’s syllogism relies on the reader/consumer not depending on the kimono shop clerk either. The kimono shop clerk has clear acquired expertise, but Soseki assumes his readers will understand that another quality—unrelated to technical knowledge of the subject—must determine taste. The kimono clerk’s expertise is unhelpful and should be dismissed. The reader, unassisted by

any “native” insider information, will still make a superior decision without the clerk’s assistance.

The parallel between clothing and literary analysis continues when Soseki addresses the very real discomfort his Japanese students (and, one assumes, he also felt during his student days) feel when handling English: “[The text] seems fuzzy, as if you’re looking at someone else’s face through a silk cloth.” The kimono allegory is thus broken down further into the component fabric, just as Soseki swapped “English” for “English literature” in his studies in London. The silk cloth is the linguistic barrier: neither entirely transparent for the Japanese reader, but also not entirely opaque. The face on the other side of this silky barrier is “someone else’s” in that it “belongs” to the English native, but the Japanese reader is still fully equipped to observe it. In fact, Soseki goes farther. Not only is the Japanese reader equally equipped to “see” the face beyond the fabric, “you [the Japanese reader] would actually be a step ahead if you had feelings about it.” The fabric barrier provides the Japanese reader with a better emotional perspective on the face than an entirely transparent view of the face would offer a native English reader. Soseki thus defines his formulation of Japanese emotive superiority as a counter to Western technological and intellectual prowess. The worst mistake a Japanese reader can make, according to Soseki, is to allow “your own feelings [to] disappear and only those of the foreign critic remain.” What Soseki proposes is a perpetual negotiation between the intellectual and the affective responses of the Japanese reader. Soseki’s relationship to English—as a language and as a racial group—is always present in his academic project.

Where Soseki’s literary analysis breaks down—by attempting to create a clear demarcation between intellectual and affective responses to a text—his subsequent career

as a novelist was born. Between 1905 and his death in 1916, he wrote twenty-three works of literature, many littered with a character type called “高等遊民” (literally: “high class nomads”): Japanese students of English literature struggling to define their Japanese identity against the pages of the English texts they read. In this way he continues to re-imagine his struggle between the two poles of the slogan, “Japanese spirit, Western learning,” or, if articulated through his former literary formula, between a Western *F* and a Japanese *f*.¹⁶ By aligning the two halves of his formula with racial identities here, Soseki indirectly addresses the underlying racial tensions that haunt his work. One of Soseki’s popular novels, *Sanshirō* (1908),¹⁷ follows the career of a university student whose school is living through a humorously reversed version of Soseki’s professorial experience as the students lead an initiative to hire a Japanese teacher in place of the famous Westerner who formerly held the position. In probably his most celebrated novel, *Kokoro* (1914),¹⁸ the text is divided between a student of Western dogma and his traditionalist mentor who committed suicide and left the second half of the novel as his note. In one of the darker versions of Soseki’s perspective on the division between emotive Japanese tradition and anesthetized Western intellect, *Kokoro* provides no compromise and leaves both narrators desolated. Soseki anticipates a dark conclusion to

¹⁶ Soseki discusses a series of political slogans popular from the Meiji era, including “Japanese spirit, Western learning,” in Book I of *Theory*. The larger purpose of his discussion is to investigate the lack of *f* inherent in political slogans and to insist on the efficacy of engaging both *f* and *F*. Though the reference is fleeting and the racial demarcation I assign through his theory is overly simplistic, it does play an important role in a larger view of Soseki’s relationship to Western perceptions of Japan and how his own texts embody and complicate that relationship.

¹⁷ Natsume Soseki, *Sanshiro*, Jay Rubin, trans. (New York: Penguin, 2010). Subsequent references will be by page number in the body of the discussion.

¹⁸ Natsume Soseki, *Kokoro*, Meredith McKinney, trans. (New York: Penguin, 2010). Subsequent references will be by page number in the body of the discussion.

the perpetuation of the systems already at play between Japanese and Western cultures. He embodies a Japanese condemnation of the Japonisme discourse so prevalent in Western culture.

Sanshiro (1908) is the story of the twenty-three year old titular protagonist and his experience of moving from rural Japan to Tokyo to attend university. He begins the novel on the train between his rural home and his new identity as a student at Tokyo University. He has two encounters on the train, one with “the woman” and the second with Professor Hirota, a disillusioned intellectual. The nameless woman cuttingly identifies and accuses Sanshiro of sexual cowardice; the Professor also cuttingly predicts that, “Japan is going to perish” (16). Sanshiro’s sexual identity, his intellectual identity, and his patriotic belief in Meiji ideology are all tied together in this initial train ride. These are the three strands that Soseki weaves together through the novel, leaving each resolved only in the privacy of Sanshiro’s mind and in the faith that the tenuous balance he reaches—the “things [that] happen to be in balance for the moment,” as Murakami said—is actually a kind of stability. These three strands are also the inheritance of Soseki’s *Theory*. The *F* becomes Sanshiro’s sense of his intellectual identity, the *f* becomes his sexuality and his sensory experiences, and then the underlying, essential issue of Soseki’s racial identity as a scholar of foreign work becomes Sanshiro’s complicated patriotic attachment to Meiji ideology. Hirota tells Sanshiro: “Tokyo is bigger than Kumamoto. And Japan is bigger than Tokyo. And even bigger than Japan Even bigger than Japan is the inside of your head” (16). In *Theory*, Soseki stumbled in his explanation of the Japanese scholar of foreign texts. He created a metaphor of kimono taste arbiters, but the metaphor was hampered by a complex network of where racial identity fit into his paradigm and how

taste could be translated. Here, Sanshiro's racial identity is expanded into a more comprehensive individual identity. The scope "inside [his] head" eclipses the largest geographical scale Sanshiro has aligned himself with, beyond the boundaries of national ideology.

Since it is the scope of the interior of his head that dictates the terms of this novel—and the evolution between Soseki's literary theory and his literary practice—the text is centered on Sanshiro's academic and intellectual life. This experience is a culture clash narrated in both excruciating detail, but also lacking specificity. He initially attends three lectures. The emotional experience of each is painstakingly enumerated, but very little of the content of the lectures makes it into the final text.¹⁹ The first lecture is taught by a native English-speaker, an old man who lectures entirely in English. Sanshiro dutifully records the results of this pedagogical experience in his notebook: he has learned the Anglo-Saxon origins of the word "answer" and the names of the village and grammar school Sir Walter Scott had attended.²⁰ Next, he moves to a class on literary theory where the professor ominously erases the German words "Geschehen" ("to happen") and "Nachbild" ("afterimage," and sometimes "reproduction," an echo of George Meredith's discussion of the perpetuation of patterns) proceeds to enumerate twenty definitions of literature, all of which Sanshiro again dutifully records in his

¹⁹ All the lectures of the day are glossed over, some even dozed through by the titular character. Soseki describes Sanshiro's sensory experiences and his reflected understanding of the lectures without presenting the experience in the primary sense, as something the reader experiences *with* the character. This is a stark contrast to Soseki's previous blurring between the literary experience and the primary experience in *Theory*.

²⁰ These are humorous notations of the lecture by Sanshiro/Soseki. Since neither village names nor grammar school are noted by Sanshiro, the only practical function of the lecture has been to emphasize for Sanshiro how little of Western culture he understands or knows.

notebook (but none of which make it into the body of the novel).²¹ The third class is delivered by a theatrical speaker on the subject of Japan's opening to the West, but Sanshiro is distracted from the task of his note-taking by a carefully etched message in the top of his desk: "Flunk out" (31).²² The end result? A student—who turns into the most important connection Sanshiro forms on that first day—leaving the last lecture at the same time as Sanshiro companionably grouses, "These university lectures are so damned boring" (31). Sanshiro, completely at sea, had been unable to tell whether the lectures were boring or not. He decides to take the other student's word on the subject and thus they begin a new friendship that impacts the course of the plot of the novel far more than the notes Sanshiro has been recording.

Soseki clearly evokes his own days as a university professor in the second of those three lectures, the one in which the professor erased the German verb "to happen" and the noun "afterimage." Like the unnamed professor, he too had sought to categorize all of literature into a list that could be recited for his students and transcribed by them in neat notes. The effort was spectacularly futile in his real experience and again here in the fictionalization. It is futile for the same reasons that Soseki saw his own *Theory of Literature* as a failure: it lacks of the spark of passion, the emotional component to

²¹ Again, the primary experience and the literary representation are more divided than Soseki allowed for in *Theory*. What is reproduced in the novel is the experience without the details, the *f* without the *F*. Indeed, perhaps we could describe it as the *F* in terms of the *f*.

²² The first of the three to have immediate significance to Sanshiro by pertaining to Japan, Sanshiro is allegorically distracted by the message to "flunk out." Soseki here allegorizes the international position of Japan in the Meiji era. Unequal treaties, political inequalities, and divisiveness were all preventing Japan from making progress toward the goal of empire-building. The rhetoric of the "opening" of Japan becomes the desk Sanshiro sits uncomfortably at and the unspoken message is to tell him—Japan—not to reach quite so high as to be an imperial power of its own.

buttress the intellectual impulse to categorize. As Sanshiro's new friend explains how the three lectures failed later, "You've heard their lectures. Not one of them knows how to talk" (33).²³ The university faculty might be able to lecture—formal, dry, intellectual affairs—but they all lack the ability to converse with each other. They are all conversant in *F*, but none of them has valid experience with *f*.

Soseki pushes the issue of Western pedagogy in a Japanese context further. Sanshiro finds a book in the library with a long diatribe written by a former reader. Since this rant is layered with critique, parody, and honest crisis, I shall quote it in its entirety:

When Hegel lectured on philosophy at the University of Berlin, he had not the slightest intention of selling his philosophy. His were not lectures that simply expounded the Truth, they were lectures of a man who embodied the Truth, lectures not of the tongue but of the heart. When Truth and the individual are joined together in perfect union, that which the man expounds, that which he speaks, is not a lecture for the sake of lecturing, but a lecture for the sake of the Way. Only when it attains to this is a philosophical lecture worth hearing. He who plays with the Truth on the tip of his tongue leaves nothing but an empty record on dead paper in dead ink, a thing without significance ... Swallowing my anger, swallowing my tears, I read this book now for the sake of an examination—for my daily bread. You must never forget how I clutch my throbbing head and curse the examination system for all eternity! (37).

²³ Note that "talking" is conflated with "lecturing" just as Soseki conflated the English literature he studied and "Bedge Pardon's" spoken English.

This note begins by geographically and racially locating itself outside of Japan and Japanese people. Hegel is prioritized and his German-speaking, racially European listeners are similarly privileged over the Japanese context. His lectures perform that perfect balance of emotional and intellectual axes that Soseki described in his *Theory*. “Truth” is compounded by essential, heart-based authenticity. Thus, the content of the lectures can be married to the unique genius of the individual, the wide-open space Hirota spoke of that exists within Sanshiro’s mind. The frustrated student writing the note then moves from the broad complaint to the more specific: the lectures he attends are qualitatively less than the lectures he imagines Hegel conducting. The function of his university education is not the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, but the pursuit of equality for Japanese culture with a Western-dominated world. This underlying racial conflict is unseen by the frustrated student. Instead, he only recognizes his own desolation in the system he operates in, just as Soseki had not quite recognized the inherent racial conflict in his *Theory*. For all that the anonymous author of the note in the library book is the mouthpiece for Soseki’s very real critique of university pedagogical doxa, there is also an edge of mockery to this depiction. This is, after all, merely an angry note scribbled into a library book by a student whose larger point is partially subsumed in anger about grades and a childish unhappiness about being set a specific task. The hyperbole of his anger and his tears detract from the efficacy of his critique of the pedagogical system. Thus the anonymous author of the note is justified in his critique but the effort expended is ultimately a futile (and laughable) gesture. Sanshiro himself feels “enlightened” by the rant, but also finds himself smiling.

The note-writer functions in a similar way here to how Ito functioned in Isabella Bird's narrative of her travels in Japan. His text is subordinate to the larger text and his viewpoint is unflatteringly contextualized in a larger discussion. The idealistic nature of his complaint points not to a racial difference between himself and the original audience, but instead claims a deficiency of his Japanese context without recognizing the racial aspect of his complaint. He imagines a comparison in which the fact that Hegel is German and he is Japanese is irrelevant to the fact that he, if it was possible, could have been every bit as dedicated a listener as he imagines Hegel's audience to have been. By absolutely skirting the issue of the racial difference, Soseki avoids the convoluted position he found himself making in *Theory*. Instead of negotiating the underlying racial component of the student's dissatisfaction with his Japanese context, Soseki skips over the discussion altogether. Where he paused to at least make the attempt in *Theory*, he re-focuses the racial component here in more idealized, less realistic terms.

On the next page, the rant continues and Sanshiro's mood changes as he reads it. He stops smiling and begins to feel solemnly contemplative:

The students who flocked to Berlin to hear Hegel's lectures...were not driven by ambition. They did not intend to exploit the lectures to qualify themselves for making a living. No, they came because their hearts were pure. They knew only that a philosopher called Hegel transmitted from his lectern the ultimate universal Truth and, their quest for Truth a pressing need, they sought at his feet to resolve their disquieting doubts. And when they listened to Hegel with pure hearts, they were able to determine their future, to remake their destiny. What magnificent

conceit it is for you, a Japanese University student, to equate yourself with them, you and your kind who go to lectures with empty heads! You are nothing but typewriters, greedy typewriters. Whatever you do or think or say is finally unrelated to the urgent life force of a changing society. And that is how you will always be: empty-headed until death!

Empty-headed until death! (38)

The second note shifts the focus of the anonymous author's anger from the systemic enforcement of his dull reading to the "empty-headed" students who have the presumption to equate themselves with the original listeners of Hegel's lectures. While the first rant demands sympathy for a unifying grief, that of their mutual plight as students forced to slough through texts and lectures that lack the spark of genius, this second rant breaks apart that bond and turns on the sympathetic reader. The author of the note knows—rightly—that his reader will be another Japanese University student; another student who has been sent to this book to do exactly the same task of harvesting information that the first rant claimed inspired his heartbreak and his tears. Now, the author looks down on the Japanese student, aggrandizing himself at the expense of the rest of his classmates.

The author of the note claims intellectual grounds for his superiority. He, his rant implies, is not one of the empty-headed students he condemns. He was the one who noted the tragedy of this emptied pedagogical process. He must, therefore, be the exception to the crowd of "empty-headed" Japanese students. Yet for all that the author despises the crowd of Japanese students who cannot measure up to that original audience of Hegel's lectures, the author is by necessity included in that category. This is the source for the

sadness Sanshiro feels as he reads the two notes. It is the inherent paradox of a Japanese student who feels capable of elevating himself (at the expense of his fellow students) to an equal standing with Western producers and receivers of “true” content, but simultaneously must also feel racialized shame for being a non-Western reader of Western content. It is a stark contrast to Hirota’s promise that the inside of Sanshiro’s head was wider than all of Japan; here, the Japanese student’s head is entirely evacuated. Rather than stretching toward infinity, it contains nothing.

The contempt and anger of the note-writer is remarkable, especially considering the fact that the three lectures Sanshiro narrated seemed to be pointing towards a characterization of academic life as passionless and dry. Yojiro—the student who Sanshiro made friends with as he left the lectures—supports this reading of academic life as evacuated of emotional or sensory content and returns to the central question of what exactly is the scope of Sanshiro’s head: “Your head is alive, but if you seal it up inside dead classes, you’re lost” (34). Soseki’s authorial voice offers even more support later when he steps in to explain that a particularly insensitive comment made by a scientist that shocks Sanshiro was only a shock because Sanshiro was “youthfully unaware that a man who experiments on the pressure of light reveals that characteristic attitude in all situations” (46). The sister of the same scientist offers even more confirmation and this time draws implicitly back to Soseki’s literary formula: “Academics, she said, look at everything as objects of study, and so their emotions dry up. But if you look at things with feeling, you never want to study them because everything comes down to love or hate” (88). Notice that she draws out an *f* to counter the value of the *F* of academic life. Yet, before all these claims of academic distance from emotion, Soseki had already

primed his readers to disagree by presenting them with the highly emotional note-writer. Thus, Sanshiro leaves the scientist's sister with the impression that "her argument was perfectly reasonable, [but] at the same time, it was missing something" (88).

Hirota, the disillusioned professor from Sanshiro's train ride, also provides an alternative articulation of the question of academic material's implicit problems for Japanese students. Like the note-writer, Hirota's central conflict seems to be between anxiety as a Japanese national studying Western material and a frustrated emotional life as a Japanese citizen. Hirota's problem is that his study of Western literature and culture always positions Japan as its inferior. Yojiro describes Hirota's academic work as the study of the West without any actual lived experience of the West. When Sanshiro asks if Hirota has ever been abroad, Yojiro answers: "Are you kidding? Professor Hirota? He's [so disdainful of Tokyo] because his mind is more developed than anything in the actual world. One thing he does do is study the West in photographs. He's got tons of them—the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, the Houses of Parliament in London—and he measures Japan against them! Of *course* Japan looks bad in comparison" (63). Hirota, like the angry note-writer in the library book, assumes the hypothetical West (never experienced) is superior to everything Japanese but likewise assumes his awareness of this fact sets him above the rest of Japan as well. Hirota's experience with the West is idealistic and unreal. He collects vestiges of "authentic" Western-ness as totems of the West's superiority. This process is an ironically inverted version of the popular Japonisme merchandise being discussed by Wilde as representative of the "real" Japan. In miming this malformed version of Japonisme, Hirota again badly reflects Western culture and values and this failure of mimesis results in his permanently emotionally stunted state.

Hirota reflects Soseki's own anxieties in those early days of his fiction writing. Like Hirota, Soseki was more reclusive academic than public figure. Also like Hirota and the angry note-writer, his experiences with Western culture had left him with the vague impression that he was both debased and exalted by his expertise in foreign literature. Thankfully, it is not Hirota who needs a resolution in the novel. It is the titular protagonist who must find some kind of resolution for his academic studies, his emotional life, and a sense that his era will need to assert Japan's worth in a global context. Sanshiro fails in this respect, just as Murakami warned in his introduction. No resolution is offered, but a tenuous balance is always maintained. In effect, Hirota's experience with foreign cultures may have maimed him psychologically, but Sanshiro seems able to find an always-tenuous balance between debasement at the Western altar of knowledge and exaltation in his own glory as an expert on foreign literature. Ultimately, he simply continues forward, living his life from one incidental encounter to the next.

Kokoro (1914), Soseki's last novel, presents a far less forgiving picture of the conflict between emotional bonds and intellectual endeavor. The novel has two heroes and each narrates half of the story. The plot first follows a young student who forms a close friendship with an older man and tries to solve the mystery of the older man's apparent self-loathing and hermit lifestyle. As he does so, he also negotiates the claims of his family on him as his father becomes seriously ill. Halfway through the novel, however, this narrator receives a massive letter from the older man and, in skimming the final pages, realizes he has committed ritual suicide. The rest of the novel is devoted to that letter, which the first narrator reads on the train as he rushes back to Tokyo. The young man's narrative is thus never resolved. Chronologically, the novel ends halfway

through.²⁴ In the final half, the older man narrates the story of his youth and the time when he and his best friend both fell in the love with the same woman. The friend confesses his love to the new narrator and the narrator rushes to propose marriage to the young woman before his friend has a chance. The friend commits suicide days later and the narrator is haunted by guilt for his part in the friend's desolation. The novel finally ends with the narrator choosing to commit suicide after reading about General Nogi's ritual suicide following the Emperor Meiji's death. He writes the narrative—which our first narrator received at the end of his narrative—as the fulfillment of his promise to tell the first narrator his life story so that the younger man might gain some insight and wisdom from the recitation.

No character is given a stable name in this novel. The narrator of the first portion—one of the many “high class nomads” of Soseki's fiction—remains completely anonymous. Scholars have traditionally referred to him as “Watakushi,” the formal version of the word “I” that he uses to refer to himself.²⁵ The other narrator, the older man chronologically in synch with Soseki himself, is only referred to as “Sensei,” a word that is traditionally used by pupils for teachers but also for any individual a speaker

²⁴ The odd narrative structure is part of the reason that *Kokoro* remains one of the most revered of Soseki's novels. One of the presentations during a symposium dedicated entirely to *Kokoro* in 1994, “Natsume Soseki's *Kokoro*: The Malady of Being Two” by Ikeda Mikiko sees the bifurcated narrative structure as the ultimate culmination of Soseki's progress through his later novels to try to reconcile seemingly irreconcilable halves. I would go further and place the origin as far back as Soseki's divided literary formula in *Theory*.

²⁵ In Japanese, the word “I” or “myself” is typically translated as 私 (watashi). Japanese has many valences that can accentuate status and using the pronunciation of “watakushi” for this particular character emphasizes the humility of the speaker. An alternative reading of this kanji is “hisoka,” meaning “secret.”

wishes to honor as a mentor figure.²⁶ Sensei's wife moves through various names as well and is only "Ojosan" (or "young woman") in Sensei's own narrative. The friend whose suicide is the true origin of both Watakushi's mystery and Sensei's explanation is only referred to as "K." Thus, identity is destabilized in this novel. Characters are precluded from even the tenuous balance of stability that Sanshiro achieves in his novel. Yet for all that identity is so unstable in *Kokoro*, identity itself—and specifically the naming of characters—is the focus of the first line. Watakushi opens the novel with an answer to the question of why he chose to refer to Sensei by that title and a defense for choosing to retain that tradition in his narrative: "I always called him Sensei, and so I shall do in these pages, rather than reveal his name. It is not that I wish to shield him from public scrutiny—simply that it feels more natural" (3). This explanation essentially lacks an explanation, however. The logic is circuitous: Watakushi "always" called him Sensei and thus he must always *be* Sensei.

Sensei offers no such explanation for choosing to leave Watakushi entirely nameless nor for using only the abbreviated "K" to refer to his friend. It is characteristic of Sensei to miss the validity of such a question. His attention is always directed inwards, towards his own loneliness and shame. He pays no attention to his reader's motivation in following his narrative nor in characterizing his reader as anything other than "you," a fitting match to Watakushi's "I" in his own narrative. This novel joins Sensei in his focus on his own internal struggles, but at the same time offers numerous alternative readings

²⁶ The Japanese transliteration is "先生." The word has its origins in the Middle Chinese term for "first" and "birth order." It is colloquially used in Japanese to refer to all doctors, teachers, and masters. Watakushi uses it with its pedagogical valence.

(and readers) of the events as they unfold. Sensei is literally the central figure of the story, but he is always also the unknowable figure that even he himself cannot explain.

Often, this novel is described in terms of generational conflict. Meiji's death marks the literal end of an era and means vastly different things to the two narrators. In Japanese, even the chronological year in the date is referred to in reference to the reign of the emperor. Thus, when Meiji dies, even time itself must realign and reset. The next emperor essentially resets the clock back to zero. While much has been made of the phrase "the king is dead, long live the king" in a Western context, the Japanese version makes the division between the two halves of that statement a chasm. Meiji is dead and thus the Meiji era is immediately and irrevocably over. Sensei even at one points ponders whether to "die a loyal follower's death;" not for the emperor himself but for "the spirit of the Meiji era itself" (232). His generation, "who felt Meiji's influence most deeply, were doomed to linger on simply as anachronisms as long as we remained alive" (231). Aligning himself so strongly with the era of Meiji to the point that Sensei does in fact commit a "loyal follower's death" for the spirit of the age, Sensei builds a strong case for the allegorical reading of the novel as the end of Meiji era and the beginning of Watakushi's Taisho era. I feel compelled to ask, however: can we take the character's word on his own allegorical significance?

For Watakushi's narrative—the half of the novel that happily shines the spotlight on Sensei's withheld history rather than on himself as an allegorical signifier of *anything*—the end of the Meiji era is tied far more strongly with his father's sickness than with Sensei's upcoming suicide. His role in relation to Sensei is not that of the heir of significance; rather, he is content to undermine his own significance at every turn in

favor of focusing all the more on Sensei. If he is the allegorical Taisho age, that era is predicted to be entirely obsessed with looking backward at its own recent history.

Sensei's position as the central character of the novel has made it compelling for many readers to comply with his reading of the relationship between him and Watakushi as allegorical representatives of their respective eras. Yet, on closer examination of anything outside Sensei's self-declared narrow perspective, this reading is unfounded.

Instead, I argue that we should look back to *Theory* for the significance of the tension between the two narratives and their narrators. Watakushi's explanation for his fixation on Sensei is hard to pin down as he himself is partially mystified by its intensity. Yet, despite the ambiguity, there are moments of clarity. Look, for instance, at this characterization of Sensei from Watakushi's narrative: "His conviction struck me as more than just a lifeless theory, or the cold ruins from some long-dead fire. Sensei was indeed a philosopher, it seemed to me, but a potent reality seemed woven into the fabric of his philosophy" (31). Notice how Watakushi emphasizes the collaboration between Sensei's lived experience, his "potent reality," with his theory and his philosophy. The implicit significance of this is that Sensei has managed to unite the vibrant *f*, the quality that has been hitherto associated with a specifically Japanese spirit, with the cold intellectual material that constituted the *F*. Somehow, Sensei's constitutional moroseness combined with, as he described it, his hobby of consuming books has ended with him achieving the culmination of Soseki's long abandoned theoretical project. He has united *F* and *f* in perfect harmony.

Yet, this is the character whose death is central to the narrative, more so even than K's mysterious death that superficially functions as the center. Sensei's suicide strikes a

chord with the common trope of literary Japonisme and its focus on the ritualistic deaths of beautiful porcelain Japanese women. To that end, I want to compare the ritual suicides of *Kokoro* (1914) with *Madame Butterfly* (1898). Still, while I want to narrow our focus, it is important to remember that neither of these works stands entirely alone. *Kokoro* revolves around a theme that haunted its author throughout his career(s) and *Madame Butterfly* is hardly the only Butterfly to claim that name, nor is there a solid iteration of her to which we can point as the canonical, unchangeable prototype. Butterfly is another Chrysantheme or Musume or any number of other porcelain heroines of Literary Japonisme, as I demonstrated in my third chapter. Watakushi and Sensei could either one of them be the reincarnation of Sanshiro or another of Soseki's "high class nomads." Therefore, for me to speak of these two solitary works, I must put these ritual suicides in this fractured context.

Sensei's suicide has always been a point of fascination for scholars of Soseki's work. In a 1994 symposium dedicated to *Kokoro* in Singapore, nearly all the speakers expressed some sort of confusion or frustration with Soseki's narrative conclusion. Indeed, Makoto Ueda's contribution to the proceedings, "The Problem of Ending in *Kokoro*," summarized every species of objection critics and readers have had to Soseki's decision. Ueda goes as far as to propose alternative endings according to various critiques and ends with a claim that Soseki did not choose to leave Sensei alive (and still perpetually desolate) because he was unaware that the possibility of such an "open" ending existed: "Of course, Soseki had no way of knowing that this type of ending [i.e., "open"] was going to be seen more and more frequently among novels written in the years to come" (138). Ueda's conclusion strips Soseki of the narrative and literary

pro prowess that he so clearly has: this is a writer on whom Japanese Modernism has (rightfully) depended, one who was definitely aware of the possibility of an ambiguous ending and had put that tool to use in other novels, especially in *Sanshiro*. No, I don't think we can rely on Ueda's tidy conclusion.

For Japanese scholars, many options present themselves for consideration when contemplating *why* Soseki made the decision he did, but the clear favorite has always been the explanation Sensei gives for himself: to “die a loyal follower's death” for the sake of the “spirit of the Meiji era itself” (232). There are cracks in this explanation, however. First, there is the presence of Watakushi's father on his deathbed, clearly another totem of the Meiji spirit also dying a “follower's” death. Watakushi's relationship with his father is a much better narratological parallel between allegorical eras than Watakushi and Sensei's. It is between these two, the actual father and son pair, that all the discussions about the cultural shifts between the Meiji and Taisho generations take place. Watakushi's father is, in fact, the first in the course of the novel to learn of the Emperor's death and immediately draws the connection between his own death and the news of the other: “The day word of the emperor's death arrived, my father groaned aloud, newspaper in hand. ‘His Majesty has passed away! And I too...’ He said no more” (88). For all that Sensei sees himself as the last bastion of Meiji ideology, Watakushi's father is presented as a clear alternative, even according to Watakushi himself: “Since Sensei and my father seemed exactly opposite types, they came easily to mind as a pair through both association and comparison” (94). Indeed, Watakushi's father's presumed death is a far closer tie to the Imperial death. Sensei's self-inflicted death bears a far closer resemblance to General Nogi's suicide.

General Nogi's suicide had significant impact on Japanese culture of the time, in part specifically because it was out of synch with Meiji culture. As Doris G. Bargaen puts it, "Nogi had committed an act [...] anachronistic for the new Japan."²⁷ Like Sensei's suicide, Nogi's was shocking for the fact that it harkened back to a pre-Meiji, feudal ideology. In both cases, there is a sense of a deeply personal attachment to a dead figure that allegorically typified an ideal. For Nogi—at least in common cultural perception—that ideal was a feudal tie to his Emperor. For Sensei, the tie was to K, a character who is consistently described as being out of touch with "modern" Japan (though this "modern" is, in turn, antiquated in comparison to Watakushi's "modern"). Yet, in both cases there is also a contributory shame that dictates the suicide. For Nogi, it was the failure of allowing enemy forces to capture his colors in the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877. For Sensei, it is a moment in which he pushed K towards self-loathing to save himself a competitor for Ojosan's affection. Clearly, these moments are not equivalent in terms of their relative guilt or the quality of the resultant self-loathing. While Sensei's death superficially resembles and rearticulates Nogi's real suicide, it is something more complicated than a mere echo.

Nogi's sense of shame over his role in the Satsuma Rebellion *is* deeply anachronistic to modern sensibilities, but Sensei's is less so. Sensei's confrontation with K is undeniably cruel. K approaches Sensei in a moment of vulnerability, trusting his friend to help him find a solution to the internal struggle of having fallen in love with Ojosan. Sensei recognizes him as "utterly vulnerable" (202). He attacks K in the manner

²⁷ Doris J. Bargaen, *Suicidal Honor: General Nogi and the Writings of Mori Ōgai and Natsume Sōseki*, (New York: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 159.

he knows will be the most cutting: “It was part of my strategy...I began by tossing back at him the statement ‘anyone without spiritual aspirations is a fool,’ the words he had used against me...I confess I had a crueler aim in mind than mere revenge. I wanted with these words to block K’s way to love” (202). Sensei’s cruelty is so potent as a weapon against K because of its double-edged intellectual assessment of K’s character and the intensity of his personal need for a victory. It is not a traditionalist’s reasoning in the way that Nogi’s reasoning clearly harkens back to a feudal, traditional sense of the shame of failure in his assigned task. Instead, Sensei’s source of shame is cruel and personal.

In the same scene, Sensei makes a revelatory statement about K’s state of mind: “I understood that he had lost his way in a labyrinth between his ideals and reality” (202). If we use Soseki’s literary formula to parse this, Sensei has recognized that K has completely divorced the *F* (intellectual) and the *f* (emotional) portions of experience and has thus become “lost” between the two. Sensei takes advantage of this break by trying to ensure that K’s *f* remains un-lived. He permanently ruptures K’s ability to resolve the two into a productive whole. Sensei is victorious over K specifically because he is aware of his doubled experience and utilizes both; K, according to the formula set out by his author, must necessarily be the loser for being so unwilling to fully allow himself an *f* experience. By the time Sensei gets around to his own suicide, he has followed in the steps towards the same imbalanced experience. Sensei, the mysterious “teacher” of our original narrator, lives an entirely intellectual life. He is isolated from people, experience, and emotion. He too has abandoned the *f* in favor of an *F*. Even while he sees his own life as being overrun with the emotional trauma of his act of violence against his friend, what has in fact occurred is the absolute avoidance of feeling in favor of pure intellectual

activity. Both K and Sensei assiduously remove all emotional ties and avenues for emotional discourse, choosing instead to exist solely in the company of their books.

Thus, while it is tempting to see both Nogi's and Sensei's suicides as the final act of submission of an "old" anachronistic ideology to the "new" (and presumably better) alternative, it hardly lines up with the internal evidence of the novel. Sensei's suicide is a conceptual fulfillment of Soseki's literary formula as expressed by a character from within that structure. Yet, Soseki has a purpose in framing Sensei's suicide as a marker of the end of an era and connecting it to Nogi's anachronistic suicide. To see his motivation more clearly, we must turn now to *Madame Butterfly*.

The scene of Butterfly's death is the most iconic moment in any iteration of the story. The one-act play adapted from the original novella removes nearly everything *except* that cataclysmic moment. One of the more recent adaptations changes every other particular of the plot—its location (now Vietnam), its time period (now during the Vietnam War), Butterfly's name (now the modern-sounding "Kim"), and the weapon she uses to kill herself (the old family heirloom is replaced with a gun). Yet the essential element—somehow—is unchanged. Butterfly still kills herself after a cruel Caucasian man has abandoned her, leaving her child to presumably be raised in a better, more Western life. Yet, if we go back to Long's novella, none of this is there. The most important disjunction is this: Long's Cho-cho-san *doesn't die*. She doesn't die because her best friend, Suzuki, binds up her wound and they run away with the half-American child named "Trouble" to presumably live happily ever after. When Cho-cho-san tries to kill herself, it's not for love of Pinkerton or to free her son up for Pinkerton's new

Western wife to adopt—it is disillusionment. The fantasy is fatal to her—and the moral lesson is hers to learn, not his.

Later adaptations of the story have slowly leached Cho-cho-san's agency away from her. David Belasco's theatrical adaptation in 1900 re-stages Suzuki's attempt at a rescue, but this time Cho-cho-san rejects her help, rejects her child, and dies while waving an American flag. Pinkerton is no longer unabashedly a villain, he's just tragically forgetful—but thankfully he and his wife are there to take in the newly motherless child. Puccini's opera in 1904 follows this trend, but goes a step further: Pinkerton is not just tragically neglectful; Puccini fills in the passionate love story that was missing from both earlier versions. After various adaptations over the following decades, too numerous to list here, the Broadway musical, *Miss Saigon*, goes even further in 1989: the new Pinkerton and Butterfly are forcibly separated by circumstance—removing all responsibility from the Pinkerton character—and the Butterfly character's suicide is a misguided attempt to force Pinkerton to take in their son. By this last adaptation, the role of the suicide has been completely reversed: instead of allegorically warning the Asian woman about the fatal inevitability of the “yellow fever” fantasy, as it does in Long's version, it has become the ultimate declaration of submission to the imperialist fantasy. What becomes apparent in this history of re-telling is that the original story has been overwhelmed and over-written by the racist fantasy of female Asian submission. Or, as David Henry Hwang had *his* “Butterfly” explain to a courtroom in *M. Butterfly* (1988): “As soon as a Western man comes into contact with the East—he's already confused. The West has a sort of international rape mentality towards the East....

The West believes the East, deep down, *wants* to be dominated—because a woman can't think for herself.”²⁸

Thus both *Butterfly's* suicide and Sensei's must balance the weight of an unmoored narrative—one that is bigger than the particular work it is located in—and the specific, modest claims of the text itself. What differentiates them is that Soseki's novel is a conscious construction of this tension while Long's novella is simply lost in the shadow of more famous adaptations. Soseki's novel consciously creates a suicide that will have the sort of broad significance and cult fascination that *Butterfly's* does and simultaneously lays the groundwork for the unraveling of that overarching narrative. He has Sensei describe himself as a martyr to grand ideals, but he gives evidence that Sensei is still only a man who is haunted by an all-too-human moment of weakness. What Soseki has done through this layering is to refract the Western discourse of Japonisme back through his own Japanese lens.

The larger discourse of Japonisme is at its most dangerous when it forgets the subjective realities of the Japanese people it engages with. Soseki's final novel articulates the true danger and the intellectual contradictions of this strand of Japonisme. In one sense, Soseki's career slowly built to this final moment in which his narrative content could rebut an entire cultural discourse. I began this dissertation by saying that the “-national” of transnationalism was necessary for me because of the highly specific context of Japan's nationalist identity. Here, Soseki stands as the representative of this highly specified context, speaking back to a discourse that occurs across many disciplines, media, and genres. He responds through literature, but accesses something larger. If

²⁸ David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly*, (New York: Penguin, 1989), 82.

Sanshiro's mind can be expanded to a scale larger even than Japan, Soseki's novel speaks back to an even larger scale, to a discourse that crosses national boundaries and generic convention. Truly, the inside of his novel is bigger all of Japan and, yes, it is a land of pure invention.

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