

ZOLA'S *UNE PAGE D'AMOUR*: THE NOVELIST AS JAPANESE ARTIST

Abstract

In the 1860s and 1870s Japanese art inspired great enthusiasm in France, both in fashionable Parisian circles and among artists. A dual response to this art underlies Émile Zola's novel *Une page d'amour* (1878). The novel shows us *japonaiserie* — the fashionable collection and imitation of Japanese objects for their exotic appeal — in the Japanese pavilion decorated by a society hostess, and in fancy dress costume worn by the heroine Hélène's daughter. This *japonaiserie* is portrayed through ekphrasis, the verbal representation of visual representation. Japanese art also influences description in *Une page d'amour*, and most of all the five great cityscapes that show Paris seen from Hélène's apartment at different times of day. Here however Zola is demonstrating that a true artist responds to the revelation of Japanese art not through mere exoticism, but through a deeper transformation of our way of seeing the world: *japonisme*. These descriptions use pictorialism, in which verbal art recreates the effects of visual art. Zola's contrast of *japonaiserie* and *japonisme* via ekphrasis and pictorialism respectively is a means to assert the superiority of his own verbal art.

Résumé

Les années 1860–70 virent un vrai engouement pour l'art japonais en France, à la fois dans le Paris mondain et dans le monde de l'art. Le roman d'Émile Zola, *Une page d'amour* (1878), reflète une réaction double à cet art. Il met en scène la *japonaiserie* — la mode exotique pour la collection et l'imitation des objets japonais — sous la forme du pavillon japonais décoré par une bourgeoise mondaine, et dans le déguisement porté par la fille de l'héroïne, Hélène.

C'est par le moyen de l'ekphrasis, la représentation verbale de la représentation visuelle, que cette *japonaiserie* est dépeinte. L'art japonais influence aussi la description dans *Une page d'amour*, et surtout les cinq grands paysages urbains qui montrent Paris vu de l'appartement d'Hélène à des heures différentes. Là Zola démontre qu'un artiste véritable répond à la révélation de l'art japonais non pas par exotisme simple, mais par le biais d'une transformation profonde de notre manière de voir le monde : *le japonisme*. Ces descriptions déploient du pictorialisme, où l'art verbal recrée les effets de l'art visuel. Ce contraste entre *japonaiserie* et *japonisme*, par le biais de l'ekphrasis et du pictorialisme, est un moyen pour Zola d'affirmer la supériorité de son propre art verbal.

Émile Zola's 1878 novel *Une page d'amour* is not set in the artistic circles of Paris and might thus seem an unlikely space for him to engage with debates on Japanese art. Nevertheless, the novel must be understood in the context of the excited response to Japanese aesthetics in France in the 1860s and 1870s. Invaluable critical work has already conclusively demonstrated the influence of Japanese aesthetics on Zola's pictorial style.¹ Here, however, I will argue that in *Une page d'amour* he goes further. By engaging directly with specific debates about the dual nature of the reception of Japanese art he intervenes in a long tradition of inter-art rivalry. Setting his own writing up as the true response to Japanese art, he contrasts superficial exoticism with a profound transformation of the gaze.

Zola was an avid collector of Japanese objects and woodblock prints. Although much of this Asian art only entered his collection after the publication of *Une page d'amour*, in the 1880s and 1890s, his passion dates back decades earlier, and he had been among the first customers of the shop *La Porte chinoise* which opened in 1862, showing an early taste for

¹ See, most notably: Susan Barrow, 'Zola's Images of the Parisian "Floating World": the Japoniste Landscape of *Une page d'amour*', *Excavatio*, 13 (2000), 199–208 and 'Zola and the Art of Japan: Aspects of *Japonisme* in *Au Bonheur des Dames*', *Excavatio*, 11 (1998), 91–98; Sophie Basch, *Le Japonisme, un art français* (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2023); Patricia Carles and Béatrice Desgranges, 'Le Japonisme dans Les Rougon-Macquart', in *Regards et discours européens sur le Japon et l'Inde au XIXe siècle*, ed. by Bernadette Lemoine (Limoges: Université de Limoges, 2000), pp. 137–156; Pamela A. Genova, *Writing Japonisme: Aesthetic Translation in Nineteenth-Century French Prose* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2016); Jan Walsh Hokenson, *Japan, France, and East-West Aesthetics: French Literature, 1867–2000* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004); Lucie Riou, *Les Arts visuels dans les œuvres critiques, les romans et la correspondance d'Émile Zola* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2020). There have been studies of references to Japanese art and art objects in *La Curée* (1872) and *Au bonheur des dames* (1883), and the role of *japoniste* aesthetics in *L'Œuvre* (1885).

East Asian culture.² His purchase of a house in Médan in 1878, the year *Une page d'amour* was published, gave him space to (over)fill with Japanese art.³ As we shall see, he also discusses the influence of Japan in his art theory. Famously, his interest in Japanese art is reflected in Édouard Manet's portrait of him from 1868. The portrait does this most obviously through intertextual references to a Japanese screen and a woodblock print (*The Wrestler Onaruto Nadaemon of Awa Province* by Utagawa Kuniaki II, 1860), but also stylistically, through the flat planes that structure the painting and the absence of the linear perspective that had dominated Western art since the Renaissance.⁴ This portrait has sometimes been seen as portraying the painter rather than the writer who was sitting for him, thanks to details that upstage the ostensible subject, but in his own account of the portrait, written with no mention of himself as its subject, Zola emphasizes that the viewer forgets the many different still-life elements, including the 'charmant paravent japonais', in favour of the harmonious effect of the whole.⁵ In his 1867 essay on Manet Zola had compared the artist's

² See Robert Lethbridge, 'Introduction' in Émile Zola, *Critique littéraire et artistique*, vol. 1, *Écrits sur l'art*, ed. by Robert Lethbridge (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2021), p. 27 and Genova, p. 156. On the Chinese and Japanese objects in Zola's own, later collection see Riou, *Les Arts visuels*, pp. 141-2 and 'Le Cabinet de travail comme musée ou Zola collectionneur', *Cahiers naturalistes*, 93 (2019), 229-46 (particularly pp. 244-45).

³ On the possibly excessive nature of Zola's collections in his house at Médan see Genova, pp. 152-3. His contemporaries mocked the eclectic jumble of his collection, and he himself admired the better taste of the Goncourts' house. Zola's house was by some accounts an 'overstuffed horror' (Hokenson, p. 70).

⁴ On the portrait's use of Japanese motifs, and its tongue-in-cheek word-play see for example Alexandra K. Wettlaufer, 'Metaphors of Power and the Power of Metaphor: Zola, Manet and the Art of Portraiture', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 21.3 (1999), 437-63 (pp. 453-6) and Lethbridge, 'Introduction', *Écrits sur l'art*, pp. 17-22.

⁵ 'Le Salon de 1868', *Écrits sur l'art*, p. 181.

work to the ‘*élégance étrange*’ and flat tones of Japanese prints.⁶ A decade later, when he was writing *Une page d’amour*, critics were beginning to suggest that Japanese art was a key inspiration of the new Impressionist art of which Zola, at that point, was a great admirer. Notably, his friend the art critic Théodore Duret had travelled to Japan in 1871–72, and in 1878 he brought out a short essay in which he made explicit the formative role of Japanese art in the origins of Impressionist painting, which had adopted both its realism and ‘*les procédés si neufs et si hardis du coloris japonais*’.⁷ This influence of Japanese art on Impressionism and, earlier, on Manet, is now widely acknowledged, and that is not the focus of the present article.

Published in 1878, the same year as Duret’s essay, *Une page d’amour* strikes a deliberate contrast with *L’Assommoir*, Zola’s bleak, gritty novel of the Parisian working class which immediately preceded it. The (limited) action occurs among characters of the respectable middle class. Hélène Grandjean (née Mouret), a young provincial woman, recently widowed and isolated in Paris, falls in love with her married neighbour Henri Deberle, a doctor called in to look after her fragile daughter Jeanne. Jeanne’s condition is aggravated by the jealousy caused by their brief passionate affair, and her death terminates their love. The novel is now best known for an aspect that was seen by some readers of the time as a failing: five long set-piece descriptions of the view of Paris from the window of Hélène’s apartment at different seasons and times of day, which punctuate each of the five parts of the novel.

⁶ ‘Édouard Manet’, *Écrits sur l’art*, p. 480.

⁷ Théodore Duret, *Les Peintres impressionnistes. Claude Monet – Sisley, - C. Pissarro – Renoir – Berthe Morisot* (Paris, Librairie Parisienne, 1878), p. 15. For details of the relationship between Zola and Duret, see Joy Newton, ‘Zola and Théodore Duret: Portrait of an Art Critic (Part I)’, *Nottingham French Studies* 27: 1 (1988), 13–23 and ‘Zola and Théodore Duret: Portrait of an Art Critic (Part II)’, *Nottingham French Studies* 27: 2 (1988), 13–24.

These long descriptions sit uneasily with the claims Zola went on to make, shortly afterwards, about the role of description in the naturalist novel. In 1880 he defines description as ‘un état du milieu qui détermine et complète l’homme’, and asserts that he absolutely condemns any description, in a novel, that does not meet this definition.⁸ In theory he thus accords a scientific role to description, which is justified only if it tells us about a milieu that has a deterministic relationship to the individual or ‘completes’ him or her. I understand ‘completes’ in a Balzacian sense, in which description, notably of objects or milieu, is necessary to reach a full understanding of the individual. This firm statement of a narrow, scientific function for description in the naturalist novel was written defensively, at a time when Zola was still stinging from criticism about *Une page d’amour*. As he was well aware, the five long descriptions of Paris did not fulfil the diktats he was now expressing, though his long-term attachment to the notion of the series appears in his disavowal: ‘J’ai pu me tromper, et je me suis trompé certainement, puisque personne ne m’a compris; mais la vérité est que j’ai eu toutes sortes de belles intentions, lorsque je me suis entêté à ces cinq tableaux du même décor, vu à des heures et dans des saisons différentes.’⁹

During his writing process, however, it was the descriptions of Paris of which Zola was most proud, in a novel that he worried was otherwise going to be relatively bland in

⁸ ‘De la description’, first published in *Le Voltaire*, 8 June 1880, then in *Le Roman expérimental*, 1880 (Émile Zola, *Le Roman expérimental*, ed. by François-Marie Mourad (Paris: Flammarion, 2006), p. 224.

⁹ ‘De la description’, p. 226. This is repeated in his ‘Lettre-Préface’ to the illustrated edition of 1884: *Une page d’amour*, in Émile Zola, *Les Rougon-Macquart: Histoire naturelle et sociale d’une famille sous le second empire*, ed. by Armand Lanoux and Henri Mitterand (Paris: Gallimard ‘Pléiade’, 5 vols, 1960–67), vol. 2, p. 1607. References to *Une page d’amour* will be included in the text henceforth.

comparison to the shocking subject matter for which he had come to be known.¹⁰ So what was he trying to achieve with those five set-piece descriptions? In order to answer, we need to distinguish between two modes of response by the verbal arts to the visual arts: on the one hand what is sometimes called pictorialism and on the other what is, broadly speaking, known as ekphrasis. I am using ‘pictorialism’ in the loose sense given by James Heffernan: ‘Pictorialism generates in language effects similar to those created by pictures’. He uses the term mainly to contrast it with ekphrasis, which he defines as ‘*the verbal representation of visual representation*’.¹¹ The term ‘painterly style’ is sometimes used instead of ‘pictorialism’, but it presents the disadvantage of excluding art forms other than painting, notably (for my current purposes) embroidery, lacquer work and woodblock printing.

In *Une page d’amour* the distinction between ekphrasis and pictorialism maps over a distinction between two responses to Japanese art (and thus two contrasting attitudes towards a foreign culture). Zola carefully contrasts the fad for collecting Japanese-style objects and clothing — *japonaiserie* — on the one hand, and Japanese-inspired aesthetics — *japonisme* — on the other. This distinction between *japonaiserie* and *japonisme* was current in debates at the time, and it remains present in today’s discussions. For Sophie Basch, whose recent

¹⁰ He writes to Marguerite Charpentier, his publisher’s wife (and, incidentally, a collector of *japonaiserie*), that he is proud of ‘une grande description de Paris, un matin de printemps, à vol d’oiseau, qui est un des morceaux les plus brillants que j’aie encore écrits.’ Émile Zola, *Correspondance*, ed. by B.H. Bakker (Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 1995), 10 vols, vol. 3, 21 August 1877, pp. 101–3 (p. 101). See also vol. 3, letter to Joris-Karl Huysmans, 3 August 1877, pp. 84–86 (p. 85).

¹¹ James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: the Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 3, his emphasis. ‘Pictorialist poetics’ are taken in a looser sense, and applied in relation to poetry, by David Scott in his important contribution to the study of inter-art relations in the period, *Pictorialist Poetics: Poetry and the Visual Arts in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge University Press, 1988).

work *Le Japonisme, un art français* is a milestone in the field, French *japonisme* cannot be reduced to ‘un répertoire iconographique’, as had been the case of the *turquerie* and *chinoiserie* of the eighteenth century: ‘Purgé des japonaiseries, le japonisme, changement de paradigme inscrit dans une réaction contre l’académisme, n’est pas un orientalisme.’¹² As she argues in an earlier catalogue entry, in *Une page d’amour* Zola underlines the distinction between *japonaiserie* and *japonisme*.¹³ In this he was at the forefront of the art debates of the 1870s. His novel shows us two different modes of response to a foreign art: on the one hand the exoticist urge to collect (rendered through ekphrasis); and on the other, an aspiration towards a fundamental change in the European gaze itself (reflected in Zola’s pictorialism). Or, to take up Basch’s expression, he sets up a contrast between reductive orientalism and a transformative encounter with another way of seeing the world.

Zola’s defensive 1880 account of description within the naturalist project appears to exclude both ekphrasis and pictorialism. It also renders drawing on a foreign visual tradition particularly problematic. If the purpose of the novel is to portray a universe that is determinist in naturalist terms, how can a non-French artistic tradition serve to determine and complete a character whose origins and milieu are French? In answering this question, I will return to the double role played by Japanese art in *Une Page d’amour*: in one case it *does* contribute to evoking a milieu, while in the other it offers a new form of naturalist gaze, a form that is not adequately accounted for in Zola’s rather reductive theoretical writings.

Satirical ekphrasis: japonaiserie (or ‘japoniaserie’) is not japonisme

¹² Basch, *Le Japonisme*, 2023, p. 68.

¹³ Sophie Basch, ‘Japonisme, impressionnismes, et littérature: l’œil des écrivains’, in *Japonismes/Impressionnismes*, ed. by Marina Ferretti-Bocquillon and Geneviève Aitken (Paris, Gallimard: 2018), pp. 54–65.

Japonaiserie in *Une page d'amour* can be understood in the context of the new literary interest in 'low-brow' art objects in the second half of the nineteenth century, which gives rise to what I call satirical ekphrasis. Of course, the distinction between the low-brow and the high-brow, the over-used and the original, is a highly mobile one. This mobility can help us to understand a transition in the reception of Japanese art in France, and the coexistence of two sets of attitudes towards it. After centuries of almost complete closure Japan's isolationist *sakoku* policy came to an end in the years following 1853, when the 'black ships' under Commander Perry forced an entry into Japanese ports for American trade. Japanese art was thus a fashionable novelty in Paris, as well as being the subject of wide cultural enthusiasm, in the 1860s–70s: that is, the period leading up to Zola's writing of *Une page d'amour* in 1877. The Expositions universelles saw a landmark display of Japanese decorative arts in 1867¹⁴ and a triumph of Japanese art in 1878; in between there was a major display of the Cernuschi collection at the Palais de l'industrie in 1873–74;¹⁵ and in 1876 was held the second Impressionist exhibition, in which Claude Monet (one of the earliest to develop stylistic traits inspired by Japanese art) exhibited his painting *La Japonerie*.¹⁶ The term

¹⁴ The 1867 World Fair 'acheva de mettre le Japon à la mode' according to Ernest Chesneau ('Exposition universelle. Le Japon à Paris', *Gazette des beaux-arts*, 1 September 1878, 385–397 (p. 386)).

¹⁵ In the first description of Paris in *Une page d'amour* the Palais de l'industrie is one of the striking buildings that Hélène is unable to identify: is it a station, she wonders, or a theatre? (p. 854) In fact the vast white building that she sees is the Palais de l'industrie where the 1873–4 Cernuschi exhibition of Japanese art was held, although it was not built until 1855. Zola's preface to the first illustrated edition acknowledges some of the anachronisms of his cityscapes (p. 1608). See also William J. Berg, *The Visual Novel: Emile Zola and the Art of his Times* (Pennsylvania State University Press: 1992), pp. 138–39 and pp. 155–56.

¹⁶ Monet's interest in Japanese art is well documented, though mostly for the 1890s; it is likely that he owned a more modest collection of Japanese prints decades earlier. See Dominique Lobstein, 'Utagawa Hiroshige and Claude Monet's Japanese Collection' in *Monet the Collector*, ed. by Dominique Lobstein and Marianne Mathieu, trans. by Charles Penwarden, David Radzinowicz, and Sandra Reid (Vanves: Hazan/Paris: Musée Marmottan, 2017), pp. 52–59.

japonisme itself was coined by the art critic Philippe Burty in 1872, largely to distinguish the artistic interest in Japanese aesthetics from mere collection.¹⁷ There was also a body of theoretical writing that increasingly saw the influence of Japanese art on Impressionist painting as decisive, and the Impressionists had been called ‘les Japonais de la peinture’ as early as 1866.¹⁸ In 1876, however, the influential critic Louis Edmond Duranty, avoids affirming any imitation of Japanese art and opts simply to pose the question, seeking no doubt to emphasize the originality and observation of the new school.¹⁹

French fashion moved very quickly: the relatively rare Japanese objects and prints that were seen as elegant and refined in the 1860s and early 1870s came rapidly to be associated with cheap imports (and local imitations) that flooded the market.²⁰ In contrast to *japonisme*, the term *japonaiserie* (on the model of the earlier *chinoiserie*, but also sometimes rendered *japonerie* or *japonnerie*, notably in Zola’s usage) suggested the exoticist impulse to collect objects. The volatile nature of French fashion is reflected in the parodic portmanteau word ‘japoniaiserie’, coined by Champfleury as early as 1868.²¹ This pejorative term reflects the intensity of the French fad for Japanese objects in the 1860s but also an increasing denunciation of cheap, often inauthentic art, or kitsch, in the second half of the century.

By the time Guy de Maupassant published *Bel-Ami* in 1885, *japonaiserie* suggests cheap art used to patch up cracks:

¹⁷ Basch p. 235, Hokenson p. 29.

¹⁸ By the art critic Jules-Antoine Castagnary. See Hokenson, p. 43.

¹⁹ Louis Edmond Duranty, *La Nouvelle Peinture. À propos du groupe d’artistes qui expose dans les galeries Durant-Ruel* (Paris, E. Dentu: 1876), pp. 21–22.

²⁰ In 1878, the year Zola published *Une page d’amour*, Chesneau was already writing of fake exotic objects sold by hands ‘Orientalisées au jus de réglisse’ (pp. 389–90).

²¹ C.-Y. [Champfleury, real name Jules Husson], ‘La Mode des Japoniaiseries’, *La Vie Parisienne*, 21 November 1868, pp. 862–3, my emphasis.

Il eut l'idée d'épingler sur les murs de menus bibelots japonais, et il acheta pour cinq francs toute une collection de crépons, de petits éventails et de petits écrans, dont il cacha les taches trop visibles du papier. Il appliqua sur les vitres de la fenêtre des images transparentes représentant des bateaux sur des rivières, des vols d'oiseaux à travers des ciels rouges, des dames multicolores sur des balcons et des processions de petits bonshommes noirs dans les plaines remplies de neige.²²

This is satirical ekphrasis: what was elegant and refined has come to stand for a tawdry exoticist cover-up, part of a broader narrative of inauthenticity and hypocrisy. It does not, however, reflect a straightforward transition over time: the two distinct attitudes to Japanese art co-exist. In 1876 Edmond de Goncourt already defends his (never accomplished) dream of spending a year in Japan as being distinct from mere '*bric-à-bracomanie*'.²³ Later, in 1884, he complains that when he writes about *japonisme* journalists only imagine 'quelques bibelots ridicules' in a shop window. 'Ils ne se sont pas aperçus à l'heure qu'il est que tout l'*impressionnisme* — la mort du *bitume*, etc. — est fait par la contemplation et l'imitation des *impressions claires* du Japon.' Goncourt sees the death of 'bitumen' — shorthand for academic paintings that made use of dark shadows to create the illusion of depth — as resulting from the imitation by the Impressionist painters of brightly coloured Japanese 'impressions'. *Japonisme*, he continues, is in the process of 'révolutionner l'optique des peuples occidentaux'.²⁴

In 1880, Zola himself wrote about Japanese art in a way that also identifies two different levels in the French response to it. Zola acknowledges the debt of Impressionist

²² *Bel-Ami*, in Guy de Maupssant, *Romans*, ed. by Louis Forestier (Paris: Gallimard 'Pléiade', 1987), p. 263.

²³ Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, *Journal. Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, ed by Robert Ricatte (Paris, Robert Laffont: 1956), 3 volumes, vol. 2, p. 717 (17 November 1876), emphasis in original.

²⁴ Goncourt, *Journal*, vol. 2, p. 1065 (19 April 1884), emphasis in original.

painting to Japanese prints, especially in their limpidity and bright colours. ‘Il est certain que notre peinture noire, notre peinture d’école au bitume, est restée surprise et s’est remise à l’étude devant ces horizons limpides, ces belles taches vibrantes des aquarellistes japonais.’ Note that the term ‘bitume’ is already used by Zola here (and had been used earlier by Duret, in 1878²⁵). He admires the Japanese ‘simplicité de moyens’ and ‘intensité d’effet’,²⁶ as well as their exquisite attention to naturalist, observed detail. But he then goes on to make a statement that is considerably more ambivalent.

J’ajouterai pourtant que, si l’influence du japonisme a été excellente pour nous tirer de la tradition du bitume et nous faire voir les gaietés blondes de la nature, une imitation voulue d’un art qui n’est ni de notre race ni de notre milieu, finirait par n’être plus qu’une mode insupportable. Le japonisme a du bon, mais il ne faut pas en mettre partout; autrement, l’art tournerait au bibelot. Notre puissance n’est pas là. Nous ne pouvons accepter comme le dernier mot de notre création, cette simplification par trop naïve, cette curiosité des teintes plates, ce raffinement du trait et de la tache colorée. Tout cela ne fait pas de la vie, et nous devons faire de la vie.²⁷

Critics who have studied the Japanese influence on Zola’s descriptions have tended to neglect the negative side of this comment.²⁸ Of course, Zola was not alone in warning of the dangers of too slavish an adherence to Japanese influence. The art historian Ernest Chesneau warned in 1878 that imitation is death in the arts, though he finds the Japanese influence on painting

²⁵ Duret, *Peintres impressionnistes*, p. 12.

²⁶ ‘Le Salon de 1880. Le naturalisme au salon’ in *Écrits sur l’art*, p. 375.

²⁷ ‘Le Salon de 1880. Le naturalisme au salon’ in *Écrits sur l’art*, pp. 375–6.

²⁸ Genova notes the reservations, but sees them as being only about the speed with which Japanese influence has spread (p. 170). Hokenson refers to Zola’s ‘fervent endorsement’ of the Impressionists’ *japonisme* (p. 70).

more positive (because the response has been more creative and original) than its influence on the decorative arts.²⁹ One of the earliest French critics to write about Japanese art, Zacharie Astruc, had in 1867 emphasized the deeply national sense of identity that it reflected, thus situating it within notions of national schools that dominated French art-historical thinking at the time according to Michael Fried.³⁰ Zola's double position, recognizing the stimulus introduced by Japanese art, but also expressing concerns about staying true to 'notre race' and 'notre milieu', are to be understood in this context. Zola's attitude to Impressionism itself was similarly mixed.³¹

This combination of admiration and disapprobation is the context for the double response to Japanese art that we find in *Une page d'amour*. Zola demonstrates a response to Japanese art that avoids the risk of 'tourn[er] au bibelot': his novel effectively contrasts 'false' *japonaiserie* with his own 'true' 'translation' of Japanese aesthetics.

Une page d'amour, japonaiserie, and the Parisian artworld

The most obvious reference to Japan in *Une page d'amour* is in the repeated descriptions of a Japanese garden pavilion. Hélène, the widowed heroine of the novel, is welcomed into her wealthy neighbours' garden with her fragile daughter Jeanne:³²

²⁹ Chesnau, p. 394 and p. 396.

³⁰ Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism: or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 161-2.

³¹ Philippe Hamon argues that while Zola's writing reflects the influence of impressionism in its descriptive details, he saw the limits of such an approach and his novels are highly structured, even architectural. 'A propos de l'impressionnisme de Zola', *Les Cahiers naturalistes* 34 (1967), 139-147.

³² Zola's earliest plans for *Une page d'amour* give a key role to the descriptions of Paris, and also to the garden (see *La Fabrique des Rougon-Macquart: édition des dossiers préparatoires*, ed. by Colette Becker and Véronique Lavielle (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2003-17), 8 vols, vol. 3 (2006), pp. 30-32 (fo. 418-419). The

[Hélène] examina le pavillon japonais. Les murs et le plafond étaient tendus d'étoffes brochées d'or, avec des vols de grues qui s'envolaient, des papillons et des fleurs éclatantes, des paysages où des barques bleues nageaient sur des fleuves jaunes. Il y avait des sièges et des jardinières de bois de fer, sur le sol des nattes fines, et, encomrant des meubles de laque, tout un monde de bibelots, petits bronzes, petites potiches, jouets étranges bariolés de couleurs vives. Au fond, un grand magot en porcelaine de Saxe, les jambes pliées, le ventre nu et débordant, éclatait d'une gaieté énorme en branlant furieusement la tête, à la moindre poussée. (pp. 836–7)

Here we have a collection of Japanese objects that evoke upper middle-class consumerism, with more ostentatious exoticism than good taste. *Une Page d'amour* is set in 1853–4, so this is in fact one of the anachronisms of the novel: the fad for *japonaiserie* is more typical of the late 1860s or 1870s. In any case, this Japanese décor and assemblage of objects, brought together by the shallow, fashionable society hostess Mme Deberle, suggests an unthinking fashion for *japonaiserie*.³³ Zola emphasizes exoticism and accumulation: the use of terms such as 'encomrant', 'potiches', 'magot' and 'bariolé', and the piling up of different images and objects in lists, suggest a lack of true artistic appreciation. This is precisely what he would later warn of as the risk of art turning into knick-knacks. Within the novel itself a disparaging opinion of the exotic collection is expressed, albeit one that is voiced by two characters whose judgement is discredited elsewhere, Mme Deberle's callow and pretentious lover Malignon and her over-excited younger sister Pauline:

Japanese pavilion appears in fo. 426 (p. 38); it was originally a salon, perhaps in a hothouse (see also fo. 449, p. 66).

³³ This interpretation is not shared by all experts. Notably, in her important study of Zola and the visual arts, Riou sees the pavilion as simply introducing 'des motifs typiques de l'esthétique japonaise' and makes no distinction between the décor of the pavilion and the influence of Japanese aesthetics on what is seen outside it (*Les Arts visuels*, p. 496).

“Hein ? est-il assez laid? s’écria Pauline qui avait suivi les regards d’Hélène. Dis donc, sœur, tu sais que c’est de la camelote, tout ce que tu as acheté? Le beau Malignon appelle ta japonnerie “le bazar à treize sous”. (pp. 837)

The assertion that the Japanese décor of the pavilion is a form of cheap kitsch is thus simultaneously made and discredited. Meanwhile, the description itself emphasizes crude contrasts and motifs that are devalued (the grotesque figurine with its wobbling head, of which most of the surviving nineteenth-century examples seem to be *chinoiserie* fabricated by Meissen in Germany and not Japanese at all) or over-used (the cranes). The display of garish exotic knick-knacks in a collection uninformed by any understanding of Japanese art suggests the owner’s social pretensions and desire to follow fashion, and indirectly the artificiality of the bourgeois society that is portrayed in the novel.

These Japanese objects are examples of ekphrasis, that is, Zola’s prose represents works of visual representation. While this is satirical ekphrasis, with Mme Deberle’s far-Eastern art collection, her ‘bazar à treize sous’, representing a form of objectifying exoticism, that does not mean that Zola’s satire is not, in part at least, directed at himself and his own tastes. After all, collecting *japonnerie* is a trait that he shared with Mme Deberle, as is evident from photographs and the inventory of sale after his death. This satirical ekphrasis is also defensible in terms of Zola’s later theorisation of naturalist description: it can be understood as contributing to the portrayal of a milieu (the bourgeoisie) and a character (fashionable society hostess). I will however come back to the Japanese pavilion shortly, to show that there is more going on than this.

Mme Deberle's Japanese collection has been seen by some as representing a form of 'avant-garde' art not understood by her ignorant guests.³⁴ It would, however, be a mistake to think of Mme Deberle as being more sophisticated than her guests, and her *japonaiserie* collection does not include any original exemplars of Japanese art (or any of the woodblock prints that fascinated more artistic collectors). Conversely, the pavilion has been seen by others as underlining the association of Japanese art with nature, and thus as 'a sanctuary from civilization, where characters are subject to the elemental forces of the universe' or as symbolising 'humankind's integration with the natural world'.³⁵ Neither the pavilion nor the garden are, however, places in which nature has free reign: rather, they could be seen as spaces of contained temptation. Hélène does sometimes glimpse Henri there, but more often it is a space where she observes social niceties with his wife, and the latter receives her own lover in public; there too an arranged marriage for his sister-in-law is planned.

Alongside the pavilion, the other example of explicit *japonaiserie* — and of the containment of nature — is the costume worn by Hélène's pre-pubescent daughter Jeanne at the children's fancy dress ball. It is, ironically, at this event, surrounded by children imitating grown-ups, that Henri makes explicit his passion for Hélène.³⁶ Jeanne's costume is a key expression of the themes of imitation and artificiality:

L'enfant portait un costume de Japonaise, d'une singularité magnifique. La robe, brodée de fleurs et d'oiseaux bizarres, tombait jusqu'à ses petits pieds, qu'elle couvrait; tandis que, au-dessous de la large ceinture, les pans écartés laissaient voir

³⁴ Claire Meyrat-Vol, 'Une vision littéraire du Japon: l'"écriture-exposition" des Goncourt et de Zola', in *Regards et discours européens sur le Japon et l'Inde au XIXe siècle*, ed. by Bernadette Lemoine (Limoges: Université de Limoges, 2000), pp. 119–136 (p. 126).

³⁵ Barrow, 'Floating World', p. 201, p. 206.

³⁶ Véronique Cnockaert, Introduction, in Émile Zola, *Une page d'amour* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2021), p. 21.

un jupon de soie verdâtre, moirée de jaune. Rien n'était d'un charme plus étrange que son visage fin, sous le haut chignon traversé de longues épingles, avec son menton et ses yeux de chèvre, minces et luisants, qui lui donnait l'air d'une véritable fille d'Yeddo, marchant dans un parfum de benjoin et de thé. (pp. 891–2)

This costume — perhaps that of a *geisha* — transforms Jeanne into an object of *japonaiserie* and makes this description, too, a form of ekphrasis. As an ekphrasis it sets out, perhaps, to rival Claude Monet's painting, a great popular success at the impressionist exhibition of 1876, the year before Zola wrote *Une page d'amour*.³⁷ In his account of the exhibition Zola describes it, briefly, as a large painting 'intitulé *Japonerie*, une femme vêtue d'une longue robe rouge du Japon', and which is 'prodigieux de couleur et d'étrangeté.'³⁸ The painting is now known as *La Japonaise*, though one should note the earlier title's suggestion of a focus on the performance of a certain style, or a collectible object, rather than on the (European) woman herself.

The artificiality and objectification of Jeanne's costume further underline her unnatural repression as a demure young girl. Jeanne knows to keep her dress clean and dry in the garden, turning off a tap that the neighbour's little son Lucien Deberle has opened and which is flooding the path, in a metaphor of her own repressed sexuality (implicitly the source of her illness), a gesture that also foreshadows her turning off the tap of her mother's sexual passion. And the Japanese costume makes her seem a neat, unnatural little doll. The pins in her hair and gown suggest the tight control of her body and the threat of danger which will be materialised in her illness and death, since like the *belle au bois dormant* she is in danger of pricking herself (or someone else) on the phallic object that stands for repressed sexuality. Jeanne is a doll, and the theme of dolls — broken, dismembered and repaired,

³⁷ Riou sees the passage as a possible response to Monet's painting (*Les Arts visuels*, p. 153 and p. 496).

³⁸ Zola is discussing the Durand-Ruel exhibition of 1876, in *Le Sémaphore de Marseille* 30 April–1st May 1876, reproduced in *Écrits sur l'art*, p. 585. The painting, now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, dates to 1875.

buried and disinterred, staring, floppy and soaked, mechanical or cardboard — recurs throughout the novel. Hers is not however the only costume that is suggestive of a knick-knack. Jeanne, dressed as a Japanese *geisha*, is paired with her little friend Lucien, dressed as a Louis XV marquis:

ils étaient l'un et l'autre si délicats, si tendres, le petit marquis avec son habit à bouquets, la Japonaise avec sa robe brodée de pourpre, qu'on aurait dit deux statuettes de Saxe, finement peintes et dorées, tout d'un coup vivantes. (p. 892)

and again:

Et l'habit de satin blanc broché de bouquets se mêlait à la robe brodée de fleurs et d'oiseaux bizarres, les deux figurines de vieux saxe prenaient la grâce et l'étrangeté d'un bibelot d'étagère. (p. 899)

As Barrow has suggested, this exquisite comic pairing introduces an image of Edmond de Goncourt's double obsession with Japonaiserie and eighteenth-century art.³⁹ This is a less than flattering reference to Goncourt's focus on art forms that do not look to the present day. Whereas the Goncourt brothers had led the way towards naturalism with their *Germinie Lacerteux* (1864), these two painted porcelain dolls suggest Edmond has taken a wrong turn. And yet Zola's use of description for the purposes of a coded commentary on art or literature takes us rather far from the naturalist aim to determine and complete characters within the novel. Nor is this an isolated instance in *Une page d'amour*.

In what I argue is another implicit inter-art commentary, the Japanese pavilion and its objects are also reminiscent of paintings by the artist James Tissot that showed fashionable women interacting with Japanese objects in the 1860s. In the years 1869–70 Tissot produced

³⁹ Barrow, 'Zola's Images', p. 201.

various paintings with the title *Jeunes femmes regardant des objets japonais* which show two exquisitely dressed young ladies absorbed in the contemplation of collectible objects: one of these seems to be set in a Japanese-decorated pavilion or hot-house (Figure 1);⁴⁰ in others a gold-lacquered Japanese screen plays an important role.⁴¹ In the 1870s other paintings by Tissot similarly combine fashionable young women and Japanese objects.⁴² Tissot was a prolific and commercially savvy painter whose images of modern life and fashionable women, with luscious fabrics and exotic touches, sold well. He exhibited in the Paris Salon every year between 1861 and 1870, winning a medal in 1866.⁴³ While Zola's writings do not often refer to him explicitly, it is worth noting the changes in Edmond de Goncourt's attitude. In 1874 Goncourt describes Tissot as 'ce peintre plagiaire' and in 1882 he is 'un illogique et un loquace';⁴⁴ but in the 1890s, following Tissot's production of a realistically rendered series of watercolours on the life of Christ, Goncourt writes of him with admiration. In the same period Zola says that it is thanks to Tissot that he has come to understand Christ.⁴⁵ These positive opinions of the 1890s do not, however, mean that Tissot was in such high esteem

⁴⁰ 1869, Cincinnati Art Museum.

⁴¹ 1869, private collection.

⁴² For example *The Japanese vase*, c. 1870, private collection; *The Japanese Scroll*, 1872–3, private collection; *The Fan*, 1875, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. See Melissa Buron (with Krystyna Matyjaszkiewicz), *James Tissot* (Munich/London/New York: Delmonico Books/Prestel, 2019), pp. 118–126.

⁴³ Tissot's success with American and British markets was such that in 1871, distancing himself from the traumatic events of that year, he moved to England; his prestige then declined in France until the 1890s (Buron and Matyjaszkiewicz, pp. 38–40).

⁴⁴ Goncourts, *Journal*, vol. 2, p. 596 (3 November 1874); p. 942 (28 May 1882).

⁴⁵ See Charles Morice, 'Zola et l'inconnu', *Le Journal* (20 August 1894), p. 2, and Robert Lethbridge, *Zola's Painters* (Legenda, 2022), p. 17 and p. 33 n.29.

among his French peers during the 1860s and '70s when he was producing his Japanese-inspired works. In 1868 Champfleury, in his article on 'japonaiseries', had mocked, without naming them, an American painter fascinated by Japanese objects (Whistler), and a young painter rich enough to have an 'atelier japonais' on the Champs-Élysées (Tissot had just built a house and atelier avenue de l'Impératrice (now avenue Foch) in 1867⁴⁶). Champfleury mocks the fad for Japan, adding that 'de prétendus peintres de la vie élégante nous fatiguent de leurs cabinets japonais, de leurs fleurs japonaises, de leurs laques et de leurs bronzes japonais qui prennent la place principale sur la toile et jouent un rôle bien autrement considérable que les personnages', a reference clearly targeting Tissot's multiple *japonaiserie* works.⁴⁷

One might defend Tissot's paintings on the grounds that they do not simply copy *japonaiserie* but also show us the European (mainly feminine) gaze on Japanese objects. My argument is, however, that Zola makes indirect references to him in *Une page d'amour* in order to distinguish his own procedures from the society painter of *japonaiserie*. As so often in his novels where there is a confrontation of a painter and a writer, he implicitly positions himself as the truer artist. This case is a more subtle affirmation of superiority than the contrast between Sandoz the successful writer and Claude Lantier the unhinged painter in *L'Œuvre*. In *Une page d'amour*, one of the faceless society ladies repeating meaningless gossip in Mme Deberle's salon is called Madame Tissot. She declares Balzac 'illisible',⁴⁸ a sure sign of profound cultural ignorance. Her small daughter, Marguerite Tissot, stains her

⁴⁶ See Buron and Matyjaskiewicz, p. 254.

⁴⁷ Champfleury, p. 863

⁴⁸ During the same boring evening party, one gets a sense of the level of conversation (and the sophistication of the guests' knowledge of East Asia: 'On entourait un monsieur qui connaissait un Chinois et qui donnait des détails.' (p. 982)

fancy-dress milkmaid costume with jam; later she is the child chosen by Lucien Deberle to replace Jeanne as his mini-wife when the latter dies (Tissot's early success at the 1861 Paris Salon had been partly due to a series of medievalist paintings showing Faust and Marguerite, the latter in traditional German costumes with aprons). The shallow, flirtatious Pauline Deberle finds *le fils* Tissot handsome and declares it loudly. These are elements of a side-swipe by Zola against Tissot as the painter of commercially viable, bourgeois portrayals of women, though they could be a winking homage to a confrère rather than straight satire. Tissot was seen by some as a realist, and later was even likened to Zola in the British press.⁴⁹ But in *Une page d'amour* where Zola himself is, uncharacteristically, depicting the same sector of society as Tissot — ladies of the respectable middle classes — he seeks to demonstrate that he is doing something quite different, deliberately distancing himself from the aesthetics of commercial *japonaiserie* while nodding to it at the same time. This satirical gesture towards the society painter Tissot serves, along with the satirical ekphrasis that I have already evoked, to establish a contrast between shallow *japonaiserie* and the profound revolution of the gaze that is effected through *japonisme*.

Japonisme: the 'true' transposition of Japanese aesthetics

As we have seen, in 1880 Zola declared that French painters must subordinate their *japonisme* to portraying the real life before them. In the same article he regrets the absence of a true master who would fulfil the discoveries of the impressionists and their inspiration from Japanese art:

⁴⁹ Buron and Matyjaszkiewicz, p. 45.

Le grand malheur, c'est que pas un artiste de ce groupe n'a réalisé puissamment et définitivement la formule nouvelle qu'ils apportent tous, éparse dans leurs œuvres. La formule est là, divisée à l'infini; mais nulle part, dans aucun d'eux, on ne la trouve appliquée par un maître. Ce sont tous des précurseurs, l'homme de génie n'est pas né.⁵⁰

Zola leaves us free to imagine that this missing master could be a writer, not a painter, so that he himself could be the one to identify, and apply, the 'new formula'. And this is precisely what he had tried to demonstrate in *Une page d'amour*. Japanese aesthetics should be translated to portray European, contemporary subjects, to capture transience, and to serve a truly naturalist focus on the outside world. Zola's exploration of responses to Japanese art in *Une page d'amour* is, as we have seen, double, and his contrast of *japonaiserie* and *japonisme* revisits the venerable tradition of rivalry between the verbal and visual arts. He asserts the superiority of the verbal over the visual, and the ability of the writer to take on the creative mantle of the painter — a recurrent feature in many of his works.⁵¹ The writer of genius — Zola himself — is an artist: as Lucie Riou observes, '[l]'emploi incessant du métalangage artistique [...] dévoile l'idéal zolien de l'écrivain-artiste et du texte-œuvre d'art.'⁵² In this case, more specifically, Zola is celebrating the revolution wrought by the defamiliarizing gaze of *japonisme* rendered in words, over the merely objectifying habit of collecting the visual bibelot.

Barrow, Carles and Desgranges have analysed the influence of Japanese aesthetics on Zola's cityscapes and other descriptions in *Une page d'amour*. This includes woodblock

⁵⁰ 'Le Salon de 1880. Le naturalisme au salon' in *Écrits sur l'art*, p. 376.

⁵¹ Most notably, of course, in his *Künstlerroman*, *L'Œuvre* (1886), in which the flawed painter Claude Lantier is contrasted with the successful and well-balanced writer Sandoz.

⁵² Riou, *Les Arts visuels*, p. 221.

printing, with the dominance of a dramatic, striking colour scheme (notably blue and yellow), but also lacquer work, which Zola knew well from the objects he himself collected. It is however important to build on Basch's contrast of *japonisme* and *japonaiserie* to register the divorce between Zola's pictorialism (the use of Japanese aesthetics in his writing practice) and his ekphrasis (descriptions of objects or collections of *japonaiserie*). It is not the collection of exotic objects *inside* the pavilion, but the view *through* the pavilion's glass panes, that shows us the true influence of Japanese art in the observation of humble, everyday, changing nature.

The ladies, sitting in the pavilion in winter, see the garden through the windows:

Les larges glaces étaient fermées, on apercevait l'étroit jardin en toilette d'hiver, pareil à une grande sépia traitée avec un fini merveilleux, détachant sur la terre brune les petites branches noires des arbres. (p. 1051)

This sepia view of branches is reminiscent of a Japanese ink painting, *sumi-e* or *suibokuga*, with its focus on nature subject to seasonal changes. The frame of the pavilion's glass panes suggests the narrow vertical forms used in Japanese art, which fascinated French artists: the *kakemono* (hanging scroll) or the long, thin *hashira-e* (pillar-print) woodblock print format.⁵³ So too, the emphasis on framing of the middle ground, or distant objects, by an arrangement of foreground objects that create a frame within the actual edges of the picture, is typical of the Japanese depiction of distance without using perspective or illusionism.⁵⁴ And Zola's

⁵³ Siegfried Wichmann, *Japonisme: the Japanese influence on Western art since 1858* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999 [1981]), p. 170. Zola's preparatory notes indicate the link of the pavillion to the seasons: 'Une scene dans le pavilion. [le jardin d'hiver] (Voir le temps qu'il fera, de la neige ou du soleil.' *La Fabrique*, vol. 3, p. 74, fo. 455.

⁵⁴ Wichmann, p. 10.

word-painting of austere black branches gives us a view *from* the pavilion that is more true to the Japanese attention to natural detail and seasonal change than the exotic objects *inside* the pavilion. He had used a similar contrast in *La Curée* (1871), when Renée and her lover/stepson see, through the panes of the tropical greenhouse, the winter landscape of the Parc Monceau whose delicate ‘teintes claires et unies rappelaient des coins de gravures japonaises’,⁵⁵ but in *Une page d’amour* the model of Japanese art is entirely subsumed into the pictorialist description.

The influence of Japanese aesthetics, and particularly the woodblock prints that are remarkable for their absence from Mme Deberle’s collection, is most striking in the series of five views of Paris.⁵⁶ As we have seen Zola was defensive, retrospectively, about these descriptions, although they were present in his earliest plans for the novel: ‘cinq ou six grands effets de paysage, revenant comme un chant’.⁵⁷ His introduction of a series is reminiscent of Japanese *ukiyo-e* or ‘floating world’ images, and in particular of nineteenth-century woodblock collections, notably Katsushika Hokusai’s *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* (1830–32) and *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji* (1834–35) and Utagawa Hiroshige’s *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* (1852 and 1858). These series focus on the shifting effects of changing climatic and seasonal conditions. Zola’s descriptions are directly inspired by these Japanese prints, so fashionable since the 1860s: his pictorialism borrows their use of asymmetry,

⁵⁵ *La Curée*, in Émile Zola, *Les Rougon-Macquart: Histoire naturelle et sociale d’une famille sous le second empire*, ed. by Armand Lanoux and Henri Mitterand (Paris: Gallimard ‘Pléiade’, 5 vols, 1960–67), vol. 1, p. 485.

⁵⁶ It must however be said that some critics have read these descriptions without any reference to the influence of Japanese art. For Jean-Pierre Leduc-Adine, for example, the descriptions of Paris in *Une page d’amour* simply mark it out as the space of modernity (‘Roman de l’art et art du roman: à propos des descriptions de Paris dans *Une page d’amour*’, in *Zola and the Craft of Fiction*, ed. by Robert Lethbridge and Terry Keefe (Leicester University Press, 1990), pp. 89–97).

⁵⁷ *La Fabrique*, vol. 3, p. 114, fo. 491.

interrupted views, vertical and diagonal lines, bands of colour, juxtaposed contrasting colours, and the stylisation of ephemeral atmospheric effects.⁵⁸ His own pictorialist series may also reflect the influence that Japanese art was having on early Impressionist painting, which he admired at the time he was working on *Une page d'amour* in 1877. This was a new aspect in the painting of Monet, another devotee of Japanese prints, who produced a series of views of the bridge at Argenteuil in 1874 and the Gare St Lazare in 1877 (his more overtly Japanese-inspired series included subjects such as the famous waterlilies and the Japanese-style bridge in his own garden at Giverny, but these were produced much later than *Une page d'amour*, from the 1890s onwards). Painting a series of views (in oils or via literary pictorialism) draws the attention towards contingency, with the changing and ephemeral effects of light, season and weather.⁵⁹

Whereas the long-standing tradition of rivalry between the visual and verbal arts had sometimes included assertions of the latter's superiority because of its ability to portray change over time, the use of a series allows visual art to do the same. Zola, however, enters this terrain to reassert the superiority of the verbal. The contrast of his pictorialism and the earlier ekphrasis is one means of doing so. The five cityscapes include *internal* echoes of Zola's own earlier descriptions of the pavilion. These echoes are a means of demonstrating how a true artist — a writer — can transcend the banal fashionable collection of exotic knick-knacks. The earlier description of the encumbered space within the pavilion, we recall, was a multi-sided ekphrasis of gold-embroidered cloth showing cranes, butterflies, flowers, boats and rivers, with primary colours (yellow and blue), as well as lacquered furniture and

⁵⁸ On the influence of Japanese woodblock series on these five descriptions see for example Barrow, 'Zola's Images', pp. 201–4, Genova, pp. 148–9, and Carles and Desgranges, p. 149.

⁵⁹ Zola continued to make use of the series of views in later novels, albeit with more brevity. On Angélique's changing view onto the cathedral in *Le Rêve* (1888) see Berg, pp. 87–88, and more generally on Zola's use of serial views, pp. 176–77.

brightly-coloured figurines. The terms of this description are picked up by the pictorialism of the great set-piece descriptions of Paris. Through the play of brilliant colours (gold, blue, yellow and white recur) and the use of the same vocabulary, Zola creates an internal parallel, a contrast that showcases his own art as a true engagement with Japanese art.

Hélène, looking out of her window in Passy towards the city, sees a mobile picture of river, sky and bridges. The gaze is both focalized — we see what she sees and experience the emotions that she projects onto the landscape — and not, since we are told the names of buildings and monuments that she is incapable of identifying.⁶⁰ In the first description, of Paris waking up just as Hélène's sensuality begins to awake, her gaze focuses above all on the Seine, 'nappe resplendissante sur laquelle des barques passaient, pareilles à des oiseaux couleur d'encre', recalling the landscape with boats and the gold-embroidered cloth but also bringing in the more restrained aesthetics of ink painting. While the simile refers to 'oiseaux' in general rather than cranes per se, Zola does include a punning reference to the ultra-modern 'grues à vapeur', steam-driven cranes elegantly seen in profile (p. 851). In the second cityscape, after Henri's passionate declaration of love, Hélène flees to her apartment and, looking out over Paris, sees 'dans l'air pur, d'un bleu intense [...] des vols légers de nuées blanches, nageant avec lenteur' (p. 904). The 'vol léger' of the white clouds, against the blue, reminds us not only of nineteenth-century Japanese woodblock prints with their dramatic contrasts and typical blue tints, but also of the 'vols de grues qui s'envolaient', silhouetted in a more stylised way against the gold-embroidered cloth in the pavilion. That gold cloth also showed 'des paysages où des barques bleues nageaient sur des fleuves jaunes', whereas what Hélène sees, in the sky above the Seine at sunset, when '[u]ne gloire enflamma l'azur', is a 'flottille de petites nuées nageant lentement dans le bleu' (p. 907). The dramatic colours

⁶⁰ See Berg, p. 109 on the elevated viewpoint in relation to both Hélène's aloofness from Paris and as a screen for the projection of her passions.

rework the non-naturalistic colour contrasts of the draped pavilion (blue boat on yellow river), so that we have white on blue and then, in a further nod to the gold embroidered cloth, the clouds appear like ‘une ganse d’or’ above ‘la ville toute jaune’ (pp. 907–8). The everyday (sky, river, boats, clouds) is transformed, stylized, but now through virtuoso pictorialism rather than codified exoticism. Zola also brings in touches of red lacquer alongside the gold: ‘Au fond de l’horizon [...] des blocs de carmin bordés de laque vive’ (p. 907), in a nod to the ‘meubles de laque’ in the pavilion.

Although the dominant colours remain blue, yellow, white and gold, Zola’s word-painting is above all intensely multi-coloured:

La Seine, entre ses berges que les rayons obliques enfilent, roulait des flots dansants où le bleu, le jaune et le vert se brisaient en un éparpillement bariolé; mais, en remontant le fleuve, ce peinturlurage de mer orientale prenait un seul ton d’or de plus en plus éblouissant... (p. 908)

Here we are explicitly reminded of the Oriental context, and the word ‘bariolé’, with all these brilliant, contrasting colours set alongside the dominance of gold, reminds us of the ‘jouets étranges bariolés de couleurs vives’ in the gold-draped pavilion, now transformed and transcended by Zola’s own art.⁶¹

While Japanese woodblock prints are absent from Mme Deberle’s collection, Zola’s cityscapes often call on their aesthetic codes. He makes marked use of shaded nuances of colour, most often blue, which is one of the traits of woodblocks by Hiroshige, by far the most well-known Japanese woodblock artist in France at the time. In fact Hiroshige used

⁶¹ A little earlier, a party in the Deberle household includes surprises that are wrapped in papers which are ‘dorés et peinturlurés’ and which contain hats, birds and butterflies made of paper (p. 896), a childish version of art that sets up a base line above which Zola’s cityscapes rise superbly.

Prussian blue, the first synthetic dye, which was new in Japan, along with an older technique for producing shaded rather than block colours (the *bokashi* technique).⁶² In the first cityscape Hélène sees the *rive gauche* ‘d’un bleu tendre, lentement foncé, violâtre au fond, du côté du Jardin des Plantes’, while the other side of Paris is like embers, ‘du carmin flambant dans de l’or’ darkening towards brick-like tones over the working-class suburbs which, over time, fades into the blue-grey of slate (p. 849). This shading across space also changes over time, a means for Zola to assert the superior ability of word-painting to do what a single image (unlike a series) cannot.

There are other echoes of Japanese art in these views of Paris. One striking example is the giant bird that first makes an appearance in the second description of Paris:

Par instants, des pans de fumée jaune se détachaient avec le coup d’aile lourd d’un oiseau géant, puis se fondaient dans l’air qui semblait les boire. (p. 846)

Later, in the fourth description, Jeanne, alone, looks out over Paris while her mother is with her lover. The storm that will kill her is looming.

Une ombre, peu à peu étendue sur l’horizon, lui fit lever la tête. Elle avait, au-dessus d’elle, la sensation d’un oiseau géant, les ailes élargies. [...] une tache sombre se montra à l’angle de la toiture, déborda, envahit le ciel. (p. 1027)

Carles and Desgranges argue convincingly that this threatening, bird-like shadow is directly inspired by Hiroshige’s famous print *Fukagawa Susaki and Jumantsubo*, or ‘Eagle Flying above Fukagawa’, No. 107 in *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*, which shows an

⁶² The Japanese prints that most impressed and influenced Western artists were themselves influenced by Western art and techniques. See Ellis Tinios, *Japanese Prints: Ukiyo-e in Edo, 1700–1900* (London: The British Museum Press, 2010), p. 97, p. 101.

eagle about to dive on its prey (see Figure 2).⁶³ The approach of the bird or shadow at an angle is typical of the asymmetrical aesthetics of Japanese art, which were to be such a source of inspiration for European artists. The same passage goes on to describe the rain in its different forms which ‘sabrait’, with drops that ‘fil[aient] comme des traits d’acier, minces et drus dans le soleil’ (p. 1029), like so many Japanese prints where the narrow lines of the rain cut obliquely across the framed space. Jeanne, exposed to the storm at the open window of the bedroom where she is waiting for her mother’s return, is neglected by the maid Rosalie whose lover has brought his collection of cheap images to show her (p. 1036). Facile imagery in the kitchen is all too dangerous a distraction from the true drama, which is played out via verbal pictorialist art in the room next door.

The series of views from H el ene’s window, and the garden seen through the panes of the pavilion, might also remind us of the theory of literary movements put forward by Zola in his youth. In this view, the world is portrayed through the various ‘screens’ of classicism, romanticism, and realism with differing degrees of distortion and opacity.⁶⁴ Framing the gaze is a way of reminding us that any description, however finely-tuned its naturalistic observation of the outside world, is nevertheless seen through the screen of a specific temperament. Indeed, while the novel’s Parisian cityscapes might appear to be the product of objective observation of the outside world, Zola wrote most of them in the south of France at L’Estaque, in a house with sea views. In fact these cityscapes are more than a reflection on the outside world: they comment on art and the writer’s relationship to visual art. In her work exploring Zola as a colourist artist, Susan Harrow points out that ‘colour is expressive [...] of

⁶³ Carles and Desgranges, pp. 142–3, p. 150.

⁶⁴  mile Zola, *Correspondance*, ed. by B.H Bakker (Presses de l’Universit  de Montr al, 1995), 10 vols, vol. 1, Letter to Antony Valabr gue, 18 August 1864, pp. 373–382.

referents outside the literary work but also of referents inside the novel'.⁶⁵ *Une page d'amour* is a striking instance of this, since the bright colours of the Parisian cityscape offer a verbal reminiscence of the colours of the Japanese pavilion. Zola's colour usage is thus naturalistic (in the sense that it does offer a reflection of the outside world as it is perceived by a character at a specific moment) but also a commentary on art and the nature of representation itself. Here Zola's practice strays very far from any claims about the scientific functions of description: this is literature commenting on the visual arts, which is a means for the writer to stake his place in the world of art more generally. Zola asserts his mastery by portraying *japonaiserie* reduced to mere kitsch collectibles and, at the same time, demonstrating that he himself has absorbed the true lessons of *japonisme* to produce a form of Impressionist art that makes him more, and not less, original.

Zola's satirical ekphrasis directed at *japonaiserie* gives us an example of what Heffernan calls the 'antagonism — the commonly gendered antagonism — between verbal and visual representation'. He emphasizes the 'fusion of iconophilia and iconophobia, of veneration and anxiety' in ekphrasis.⁶⁶ Zola's double attitude to Japanese art in *Une page d'amour* neatly separates these two sides, presenting satirical ekphrasis of *japonaiserie* alongside a pictorialism that is profoundly influenced by *japonisme*. In this case the antagonism is indeed gendered: Mme Deberle's collection is an extension of her fashionable dress and conversation, whereas true *japoniste* aesthetics are fulfilled by the male author. This rather divisive use of Japanese aesthetics for a competition between the visual and verbal arts was perhaps unusual, since *japonisme* united radical writers and artists in shared admiration. It was pitted against academic art as part of an aspiration to social and artistic

⁶⁵ 'Zola coloriste, abstractionist', *Romanic Review*, 102.3–4 (2011), 465–484, p. 468.

⁶⁶ Heffernan, *Museum*, p. 7.

change in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁶⁷ As Hokenson puts it, in a discussion of *L'Œuvre*, '[b]y withholding the immense gift of japonisme from the artist while applying a literary japonisme to the text, [Zola] sought to guarantee the victory of the avant-garde japoniste writing.'⁶⁸

I have argued that there is not necessarily a contradiction between Zola's (later) declaration of the aims of the naturalist novel and the presence of *japonaiserie*, since the satirical description of the latter informs us about characters' social pretention. Zola's *japoniste* aesthetics present a rather different case. Japanese art offers a whole new way of seeing the everyday world that is essentially naturalistic in the broader sense, but the five scenes of Paris in *Une page d'amour* could be seen as betraying the naturalist 'mission' of the novel. And in so far as this transformation of the gaze inspired by *japonisme*, alongside ekphrastic *japonaiserie*, comments on debates in the world of art, both diverge radically from the narrowly defined scientific functions of naturalist description. They also suggest that we should question the view that the Goncourt brothers were prescient in seeing *japonisme* as introducing a radically new form of art in 1884:⁶⁹ Zola, along with others, held this view, and attempted to demonstrate it, as early as *Une page d'amour* in 1878.

Mme Deberle's display of *japonaiserie* in her pavilion is a classic example of exoticism, with all the pejorative weight normally associated with that term. In contrast Zola — arguably like Tissot — shows us the collection in a way that frames, and asks us to observe, the exoticist gesture itself. This is not first-degree exoticism, the reduction of art to a mere 'bibelot', which Zola had deplored. However, moving from *collecting* exotic objects to

⁶⁷ Basch, p. 20, p. 9; Hokenson, pp. 49–52.

⁶⁸ Hokenson, pp. 91–92.

⁶⁹ See for example Hokenson, p. 59.

observing the act of collection is only the first step: it is a much greater leap to learn, from these objects, a fundamentally new way of seeing the world.⁷⁰ In this sense what we have here is an anti-exoticism, if we understand exoticism to be the superficial and ill-informed appreciation of a culture simply because it is not our own. Or it might be seen as a different form of exoticism, if it were possible to reclaim that term: an encounter that would be a transformative experience leading to an understanding of the world from a different perspective, without losing one's own identity. This remains, however, a secondary effect of Zola's engagement with Japanese art in *Une page d'amour*. His dual response to *japonisme* and *japonaiserie* is, above all, a means of staking out his own territory in the traditional rivalry between the verbal and visual arts.

⁷⁰ On the eruption of Japanese art in French culture as an encounter with 'radical aesthetic difference' and the relativity of cultural norms see Hokenson, p. 18.