

Pierre Loti's Autobiographical Novel *Madame Chrysanthème* (1885): A Mirror of 'Almost Colonised' 1880s Meiji-Japan from the Late-Imperialist French Traveller

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Toute ma vie m'est apparue sous d'étranges couleurs; elle s'est déroulée avec ses personnages, ses situations, ses décors empruntés à tous les pays de la terre.

Bruno Vercier, *Un jeune officier pauvre*¹

Julien Viaud ; c'était un petit monsieur qui, sur la fin de sa vie, se faisait photographe dans sa maison d'Hendaye, habillé à l'originale et entouré d'un bazar surchargé d'objets folkloriques (il avait au moins un goût commun avec son héros : le transvestisme).

Roland Barthes, *Le Degré Zéro de l'Écriture. Suivi de Nouveaux Essais Critiques*²

This discussion of Pierre Loti's novel *Madame Chrysanthème*³ regards exoticism as a "more versatile"⁴ concept of Orientalism, as articulated in the genre of the novel for his travel writing. The conquest of late-nineteenth-century Japan represents another form of the discovery of the New World, given that Meiji Japan, while integrating French and especially German reforms, mostly still adapted to the norms and modern standards of the English-speaking world, as has been theorised by Komori Yōichi.⁵ Revolutionary France in late eighteenth century played a significant role in American Independence and competed not only with its ennemis héréditaires but also with the rising modern nation of Germany. France expanded its own colonial Empire in South-East Asia in the nineteenth century, and as such, its relationship with Japan is of major importance. Even within Loti's œuvre, *Madame Chrysanthème*'s form and nar-

1 *Un jeune officier pauvre*, as quoted in: Bruno Vercier, *Pierre Loti Portraits. Les Fantaisies changeantes*, Paris: Flammarion, Série Plume Vent d'Ouestes, 2002, p.5. My translation: "My whole life appeared to me in strange colours: it took place with its personalities, its situations and its *décors* taken from all the countries of the earth."

2 Roland Barthes, *Le Degré Zéro de l'Écriture. Suivi de Nouveaux Essais Critiques*, 1973 [1953], Paris: Editions du Seuil, p.171. The collection of essays is said to be the first poetic conceptualisation of the Nouveau Roman. My translation of the quotation: "Julien Viaud; he was a small man who, at the end of his life, let himself be photographed in his house in Hendaye, dressed in traditional costume and surrounded by a bazaar of folkloric objects."

3 Pierre Loti, *Madame Chrysanthème*, Paris: Flammarion, 1990 [1887].

4 See introduction to: Jennifer Yee, *Exotic Subversions in Nineteenth-Century French Fiction*, *Legenda Research Monographs in French Studies 25*, Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2008.

5 See: Yōichi Komori, *Posutokolonialu*, Tokyo: Iwabata-shoten, 2001; Yōichi Komori, *Sōseki-ron. 21 seiki wo ikinuku tameni* (Sōseki-discourse. To survive the 21st century), Tokyo: Iwabata-shoten, 2009.

ration are highly documentary and essayistic. We could hence ask, following Hélène de Burgh,⁶ whether this disturbance of the Western gaze in Japan foreshadows the *nouveau roman*⁷, in offering a deconstruction of the modern subjective novel, lacking an omniscient or even a sovereign homodiegetic narrator. Roland Barthes, the conceptual father of the New Novel, chose Pierre Loti's most famous title, *Aziyadé*, as an example of a 'novel without meaning', when circulating around the veritable notion of 'nothing': "Donc, il se passe: rien. Ce rien, cependant, il faut le dire."⁸ He characterized it as foreshadowing the generic innovations of the 1960s in an essay with the same title from 1974: „L(sic)'homme n'est pas sûr. Ce vertige de l'irréel est peut-être la rançon de toutes les entreprises de démystification, en sorte qu'à la plus grande lucidité correspond souvent la plus grande irréalité."⁹ John Sturrock turns this relocation of the plot to "take place in the reflective consciousness of the novelist"¹⁰, to accord the New Novel an "extent(ion) of our creative freedom without any attendant illusions"¹¹. In 19th century, Henry James also wrote about Pierre Loti and France as harbours of a mind and a nation to the audience of a world stage:

We seem to be studying not simply the genius of an individual, but, in a living manifestation, that of a nation or of a conscious group becomes a great figure operating on a great scale, and the drama of its literary production... a kind of world-drama, lighted by the universal sun, with Europe and America for the public, and the arena of races, the battlefield of their inevitable contrasts and competitors, for the stage. It is not the entertainment, moreover, a particularly good bill, as they say at the theatre, when it is a question of the performances of France?¹²

In this way, Pierre Loti / Julien Viaud's earth-encompassing travels in the Middle East, and his preference for Turkey, form the background of his novel *Madame Chrysanthème*. Owing to Luther de Long's adaptation of the theme for Puccini's opera, it is one of the most famous literary works on early Meiji Japan.

It thus had a significant impact on the West's image of Japan. This article will ask in how far the novel goes beyond classic *japonisme*, or exoticism of Japan, and to what extent this relates to the New World-experience of the narrator in the 'Far-East'. Japan is the first modern nation born out of US-American imperialist and mercantilist expansion in the Pacific.¹³ This precedent on the border of French travel writing and the historical autobiographical novel finds expression in an essayistic, documentary form, that is anticipating the 'new novel'. This multidimensional analysis will discuss in how far Loti's depiction of Japan in the novel reflects the impact of France on Japan,

6 Hélène de Burgh, *Sex, Sailors and Colonies. Narratives of Ambiguity in the Works of Pierre Loti*, Bern: Peter Lang European University Publishers, 2005.

7 John Sturrock, *The French New Novel. Claude Simon, Michel Butor, Alain Robbe-Grillet*, London: Oxford University Press, 1969. Henry James also wrote about the New Novels as related to the literature in the United States of America at the time of Pierre Loti, in: Henry James, "New Novels (1875)", in: *Literary Criticism*, New York: Library of America, 1984.

8 Roland Barthes, "Aziyadé" in: *Le Degré Zéro de l'écriture. Nouveaux Essais Critiques*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1974, pp.170 - 187, p.173. The similarity between novel and journal, and the seeming arbitrariness and indifference of the narration is described in a way that it would also suit *Madame Chrysanthème*, see p.174: "On comprend alors la complicité qui s'établit entre ces notations infimes et le genre même du journal intime ...: n'ayant pour dessein que de dire le rien de ma vie..., le journal use de ce corps spécial dont le 'sujet' n'est que le contact de mon corps et de son enveloppe et qu'on appelle le temps qu'il fait."

9 Roland Barthes, "Réflexions ou Sentences et Maximes", in: *Le Degré Zéro de l'écriture. Nouveaux Essais Critiques*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1974, pp.69 - 89, pp.84 - 85.

10 John Sturrock, *The French New Novel. Claude Simon, Michel Butor, Alain Robbe-Grillet*, London: Oxford University Press, 1969, p.19.

11 John Sturrock, p.41.

12 Henry James, "Fortnightly Review (May 1888); Essays in London and Elsewhere (1893)", in: *French Writers*, New York: Library of America, 1984, p. 483.

13 See: Yōichi Komori, *Posutokoroniaru*, Tokyo: Iwabata-shoten, 2001.

as well as the effect of Japan's preference for Germany, rather than France, as a model for modernization following France's defeat against Germany in 1871 and the global resonance of this minor turning point in late 19th century European history. Last but not least, Loti's representation of Japan reflects the French view that the antagonism of Orient and Occident is subverted at the level of autobiographical narration and at the level of genre – that is to say, at the level of the novel as the primary expression of the sovereign subject of West-European modernity, as defined by Lucien Goldmann.¹⁴

I will first introduce the writer and his pioneering work on Japan. My methodology is based on nationalising discussion of perception as associated to the question of genre and the experimental novelistic narration, possibly foreshadowing the 'nouveau roman' with the 'nouveau monde'-experience of a French itinerary to early Meiji-Japan. Pierre Loti's journey brought him to the Southern island Kyushu and the harbour city of Nagasaki, the traditional port of Western inclusion. This colonialist encounter makes it a piece of travel writing and explains its affinity to Orientalism. The *nouveau roman* in turn only emerged in post-war France, when the atrocities of World War II and the traumatic experience of France's Nazi-occupation led to the literary current of the absurd and the philosophy of existentialism, with Roland Barthes and Jean-Paul Sartre as its first theoreticians.¹⁵ This paper therefore represents an experimental association of the, otherwise disparate, 'new world' and 'new novel'-discussion.

The French military's perception of the Orient is based on the established binary opposition in Romanticism of Self/Other, East/West, colonizer and colonized. This perception and its literary representation has been pre-shaped from his travels to French or British colonies in North Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia, such as India and Indochina, but is destabilised in Japan because of its predisposition for another modernity. The insecurity of Loti's autofictional narrator with 1880s Japan then finds expression in a deconstruction of the genre of the novel and the subversion of the hermeneutic sovereignty of the narrator. The latter shifts from an omniscient narrator or a classic hermeneutic subject, in clear distinction from the Oriental Other, presenting his view with a mastery of the depicted world, to an almost "diary-like", as developed by Bruno Vercier,¹⁶ autofictional depiction of the frightening experience of foreign Japanese culture, depicted in a simple succession of incidents from the narrator's life.

The protagonist's condescension towards Japan as a whole and to his wife Okikusan as its national allegory, in an understanding of Frederic Jameson¹⁷, becomes evident in the portrayal of her picturesque animalistic appearance, her Shinto-Buddhist religious customs and seemingly barbaric food. It transposes an intercultural experience of the mutually sober, unromantic marriage between her and the narrator (Loti's alter ego), who is both her husband and suitor. Loti's pioneer work of a literary French report from the unknown archipelago from afar, is both criticised in secondary literature for its chauvinistic tone and recognised for its pioneer work in the literary framing of modern Japan. The transmission of a so-far unknown historical reality is mediated through this experimental, disseminating version of the autobiographical novel.

I intend to give an overview of three elements – culture, religion and love – as

14 Lucien Goldmann, *Towards a Sociology of the Novel*, London: Tavistock Publications, 1978.

15 John Sturrock, *The French New Novel*. Claude Simon, Michel Butor, Alain Robbe-Grillet, London: Oxford University Press, 1969.

16 Bruno Vercier, appendix with chart comparing dates of the novel and the journal, to: Pierre Loti, *Madame Chrysanthème*, Paris: Flammarion, 1990 (1887), p250.

17 Frederic Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Age of Multinational Capitalism", in: *Social Text*, No.15 (Autumn 1986), 65 – 88.

related to the specific Franco–Japanese “new world, new novel” experience. Theoretically, this work relies on the notion of exoticism by Margaret Topping and Jennifer Yee, which playfully extends the classic representation of colonizer and colonized in major writings of French Romanticism, previously discussed as postcolonialism and Orientalism. Furthermore, it examines the global dimension of the French Empire’s cultural memory in an understanding of Jan Assmann¹⁸. More importantly, I will also employ the poststructural analysis by Hélène de Burgh and Matt K. Matsuda’s Franco-German nationalised historical reading of *Madame Chrysanthème*, as well as a number of secondary texts on the correlation of aestheticism and globalization.

Reception in French and English circles

Elwood Hartman points out the discrepancy between Loti’s contemporary fame, his entry into the Académie française marking its peak, and his current unpopularity. Hartman explains: “Some consider him shallow, others old-fashioned.”¹⁹ He refers to Clive Wake’s interpretation of *Madame Chrysanthème*, saying that the fin-de-siècle mood in Loti’s books does not suit the age of modern nation states, and highlights its inherent dichotomy: “Most readers remember the book as a light-hearted, delightful exotic romance, whereas what really emerges is Loti’s contempt for the Japanese, a people without any real physical beauty nor any potential for poetry (as he understands these concepts).”²⁰ Throughout the secondary literature, we find an emphasis on the ambivalence of Loti as an orientalist writer because of the formal and tonal insecurity that his writings bring from the exoticised Orient to urban readership.²¹ Hartmann makes clear that there is no doubt about its affiliation to the genre of travel writing: “Loti, of course, was the travel writer par excellence, so he, too, is a special case, yet even he was not known particularly for his North African writings. He is remembered more for his portrayal of France – le pays Basque ou la Bretagne – of Japan or Turkey, his country of adoption.”²² In the case of the chosen novel, its opening about the sea journey to Japan, leaves no doubt about this generic affiliation, as also seen by Clive Wake’s estimation of the novel’s opening scene of the ship’s arrival to Japan: “The opening description of the *Triomphante*’s arrival in Nagasaki harbour is one of his finest pieces, and elsewhere in the book, his ability to evoke the atmosphere of Japan as he saw it explains much of the popularity he enjoyed as a writer.”²³

While Karen Laura Thornber describes *Madame Chrysanthème* as “racist and sexist,”²⁴ Margaret Topping states: “[T]he work of Pierre Loti, which straddles the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is often interpreted as embodying the desire for an uncorrupted, unchanging and primitive East.”²⁵ Topping also points out the desta-

18 Cultural memory as pre-condition for the format of a modern subjectivity in a globalised world order. see: Jan Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory”, in: Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, *Media and Cultural Memory*, Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008, pp.110 – 118.

19 Elwood Hartman, *Three Nineteenth-Century French Writers / Artists and the Maghreb. The Literary and Artistic Depictions of North Africa by Théophile Gautier, Eugène Fromentin, and Pierre Loti*, Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1994, p.57.

20 Clive Wake, *The Novels of Pierre Loti*, The Hague: Mouton, 1974, p.144.

21 De Burgh draws analogies between the intellectual fathers of postcolonialism, Said and Fanon, to more innovative voices by Petr, Alloula, Hughes and Ian Buruma to the writing of Pierre Loti.

22 Hartman, *Three Nineteenth-Century French Writers*, p.80.

23 Clive Wake, *The Novels of Pierre Loti*, The Hague: Mouton, 1974, p.144.

24 Karen Laura Thornber, *Empire of Texts in Motion. Chinese, Korean and Taiwanese Transculturations of Japanese Literature*, Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009, p.221.

25 Margaret Topping (ed.), *Eastern Voyages, Western Visions. French Writing and Painting of the Orient*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2004, p.4.

bilisation of established positions in the postcolonial debate:

In the synthesis of discourses of writing the Self and writing the Other, of autobiography and fiction, the binary opposition between Self and Other at the heart of the orientalist discourse identified by Said is blurred. As such, recognition of this hybridity challenges both the Saidian condemnation of a writer like Loti and the supposedly dominant cultural ideologies of the colonialist and post-colonialist writer. A focus on generic transgression thus opens up a new critical space for the post-colonialist, post-Orientalist critic.²⁶

Despite severely criticising his talents, Setsuko Ōno names Pierre Loti the “‘first literary observer of talent’ to visit Japan.”²⁷ Her doctoral thesis, ‘A Western Image of Japan: What did the West see through the Eyes of Loti and Hearn?’, gives an authentic and convincing ‘Japanese’ view of these two authors and interprets their portrayal of Meiji Japan as having had an impact on the international relations of their time and beyond. She describes Loti as having shaped the imagination of his entire generation in France – that is, the generation who were young between 1880 and 1900, and whom he made dream of colonial adventures in the ‘Far East.’ Ōno even accords Loti’s voice some influence until the Second World War, notably in terms of the resonance of his negative view on Japan, when Americans “‘thought of the Japanese as good little people, happy, childish, interested in endless detail for detail’s sake and at the same time [...] as tricky, treacherous, power-mad, devilish, ‘morally not better than the Nazis’, living in a totalitarian state.’”²⁸ She also terms *Madame Chrysanthème* his most important work on Japan, especially in consideration of his reception in the United States and in England, and of the fact that it inspired Puccini’s opera *Madama Butterfly*.²⁹ Ōno gives the numbers that show the success of Loti’s novel: “*Madame Chrysanthème* was first published in the *Figaro*, the ... [sic] by Calmann-Lévy and had reached 222 editions by 1924. It was translated into seven European languages.”³⁰ In terms of genre, Elwood Hartmann also refers to Clive Wake for his consideration of Loti’s writings from the Orient, including East Asia, as travel writing: “Wake, as mentioned before, points out that Loti’s morbidity was the catalyst propelling him into escapism – into travel and writing and the combination of the two, travel-writing.”³¹ The perception of Pierre Loti’s writings as an authentic but unconventional counter-discourse to Orientalism is partly also due to his inclination to masquerade as an Arab or other exotic himself – as documented by Julien Viaud’s / Pierre Loti’s (to emphasize his passion for transvestism) second artistic talent of photography, and as we can see, this perception is continuously present throughout secondary literature. To correlate this destabilising exoticism with French history, especially the Second French Empire and its legacy, is both a daring and hazardous enterprise. The late nineteenth century, when France lived through a period of bourgeois calm following the cataclysms of the French Revolution and the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars and regime changes, veiled the unexpected defeat against Prussian Germany in a form of false comfort. The novel *Madame Chrysanthème* about the Frenchman’s

26 Margaret Topping, “Writing the Self, Writing the Other in Pierre Loti’s *Madame Chrysanthème* and Arthur Golden’s *Memoirs of a Geisha*”, in: *Comparative Critical Studies* I, BCLA 2004, pp.309–322, p.319.

27 Setsuko Ōno, ‘A Western Image of Japan. What did the West See through the Eyes of Loti and Hearn?’, thesis in Political Science presented to the University of Geneva, 1973, (microfiche), p.6.

28 *Ibid.*, p.3.

29 One wonders whether the change of her name bears a secret reference to the Greek meaning of butterfly *psyche*, or is merely the outcome of an aesthetic choice.

30 *Ibid.*

31 Elwood Hartman, *Three Nineteenth-Century French Writers*, p.66. Hartman even goes so far as to say: “Loti, of course, was the travel writer par excellence, so he, too, is a special case, yet even he was not known particularly for his North African writings. He is remembered more for his portrayal of France – le pays Basque ou la Bretagne – of Japan or Turkey, his country of adoption.” *Ibid.*, p.80.

arrival in Nagasaki plays at the very turning point of lived realities, when France had nonetheless secured Indochina and others parts of Asia. It opens and closes a literary and therefore more philosophical reflection of the artistic movement of *japonisme* in France that had overwhelmed artists with the fantasy of the foreign at the border of the Eurasian continent. It also nourished the illusion of Japanese civilization as an enigma beyond one's imagination and at the same time stifled it via sober descriptions.

The political dimension of the writing, its documentary character mediated through autobiographical narration, and its autobiographical, diary-like narrative form are apparent in *Madame Chrysanthème* at the very beginning of the novel, with its dedication to a French duchess. This beginning already opens paths for viewing the fictional récit, the biographical reality of the author and the political-historical situation of the time in parallel, given that Loti was there on a military mission and makes his fictional report in the name of the French nation. Already the opening of the novel, with the narrator's dedication of the writing to a French Duchess, the Duchesse de Richelieu, symbolically places the entire récit in the framework of the French nation state, faithful to French etiquette: "Madame la Duchesse, Veuillez agréer ce livre comme un hommage de très respectueuse amitié. J'hésitais à vous l'offrir, parce que la donnée n'en est pas bien correcte; mais j'ai veillé à ce que l'expression ne fût jamais de mauvais aloi, et j'espère y être parvenu." He openly characterizes his narration as documentary: "C'est le journal d'un été de ma vie, auquel je n'ai rien changé, pas même les dates." However, he adds: "je trouve que, quand on arrange les choses, on les dérange toujours beaucoup." Despite the title and the apparent prominent standing of his Japanese wife, he insists that "les trois principaux personnages sont Moi, le Japon et l'Effet que ce pays m'a produit." The fictional layer of the narration is so thin that Loti even asks the Duchess if she remembers a photograph of his friend Yves, a Japanese woman and himself, and modestly characterizes his novel as a report from the 'Far East' – symbolically in the service of the Second Empire, just like ceramics. The book is "rapporté pour vous de cette étonnante patrie de toutes les saugrenuités [...]." In his cover note, which could have been written from any Oriental colony, he also asks her not to question his morality and, as in an autobiographical novel, places his real (pen) name at the end: "Avec un grand respect, madame la duchesse, votre affectionné, PIERRE LOTI."³²

Thus, the dedication of the novel already hints at its semi-documentary, semi-fictional character and shows the narrator's perception as embedded in the framework of the French nation state. In this opening dedication, Loti recapitulates his personal experiences, which figured as the main social material for the novel, which in turn is astonishingly close to his journal. The openly-stated proximity to the author's journal and the dedication to a symbolic entity of the French Empire (the duchess was a descendent of Louis XIII's first minister) give the novel representative status for Franco-Japanese relations of that time, in accordance with its reception. This explains why

32 Pierre Loti, *Madame Chrysanthème*, Paris: Flammarion, 1990 (1887), p.43. English translation: "Madame La Duchesse, Allow me to crave your acceptance of the following work, as a respectful tribute of my attachment. I felt some hesitation in offering it, for its main incident cannot be deemed altogether proper; but I have striven that in its expression at least, it should not sin against good taste, and I trust that my endeavours have been successful. It is the diary of a summer of my life, in which I have changed nothing, not even the dates, thinking as I do, that in our efforts to arrange matters we often only succeed in disarranging them ... the three principal personages are myself, Japan, and the effect produced on me by that country." "... brought back for you from this singular fatherland of all preposterousness. ... Believe me with the deepest respect, Madame la Duchesse, Your affectionate, Pierre Loti." Pierre Loti, *Japan. Madame Chrysanthemum*, London: Kegan Paul, 2002, pp.4-5. The translator of this English edition is not named, the preface is written by Kaori O'Connor.

it figures as a French literary version of *japonisme* and its changes after the initial celebration of Japanese culture at the World Exhibition in 1867. It tells in a loose diary form how a French soldier debarks in the port of Nagasaki on the southern island of Japan (Kyushu), which used to be the only port open to Western traders during the Edo era. There, he buys as his temporary bride one of the young women who were given to brothels by their poor families³³. Their short marriage remains unromantic, since the narrator is revolted by her looks, her religious customs and her food. Bruno Vercier states in his introduction to the novel: “Madame Chrysanthème est resté, dans nos memoires incertaines, comme le livre sur le Japon.”³⁴ Here, he refers to the passage about the popularity and wide reach of the novel at Loti’s time. His opinion therefore also supports comparing the novel with the historical reality of the Franco-Japanese encounter. The 56 loose-formed chapters with diary-like dates tell of his arrival in Japan and of the marriage to Okane / Okiku-san. He chooses her out of many but is constantly annoyed by her personality and religious customs, which he perceives as simple-minded and superficial. Margaret Topping characterizes form and content of Loti’s text in the following way:

For instance, whilst Loti’s text is a form of writing the Self, it certainly does not resemble ‘conventional’ autobiography. It covers a period of just six weeks, does not chart any psychological or emotional development, and is fragmentary in form: many chapters are a page or less. What narrative thread there is is loosely constructed, the main components being Loti’s arrival, ‘marriage’, and departure. The rest is composed of largely negative impressions of Chrysanthème and Japan.³⁵

This quotation opens the floor for a re-discussion of the “new world, new novel”-correlation present in the book. Despite its composition in the 1880s, its loose formal construction, which mediates an unfiltered, decontextualized subjectivity, foreshadows the postmodern dissolution of genre rules and correlates this with the confrontation with a foreign civilization. Topping also points to the inversion of the Western view of the Orient, which in turn tells a lot about Loti’s cultural background: “The Westerner becomes the dupe of his own gaze, the symbol of western power and the Western appropriation of the East [...]”³⁶ How, then, does this relate to the generic category of ‘fictionalized autobiography’? If we accept the view of those critics who assume a direct identification between Loti the author and Loti the protagonist / narrator, then the author has simply produced a stylized fragment of autobiography. Clive Wake, in *The Novels of Pierre Loti* (1974), clearly says that the novel has an auto-fictional dimension, and goes so far as to deny its adherence to the key-genre of individual subjective narration on the level of the characters’ naming and notably its incoherence:

33 About the legacy of traditionalised prostitution, see a.o.: Sabine Frühstück, *Colonizing Sex: Sexology and Social Control in Modern Japan*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

34 Preface by Bruno Vercier to: Pierre Loti, *Madame Chrysanthème*, Paris: Flammarion, 1990 (1887), p.31.

35 Margaret Topping, ‘Writing the Self, Writing the Other in Pierre Loti’s *Madame Chrysanthème* and Arthur Golden’s *Memoirs of a Geisha*’, p.311.

36 *Ibid.*

Madame Chrysanthème (1887) is less a novel than an interlude. Loti takes little or no care to give it the appearance of one. In some respects it resembles *Aziyadé* and *Le Mariage de Loti*, in that it is the account of a temporary liaison with a woman of another race in an exotic environment. But whereas in the two earlier works, the author tried to turn his experiences into a novel by disguising the real names of the characters and even sometimes inventing some of the things that happen to them, in his work he does not even do this. The book gives an account of Loti's temporary 'marriage' to a Japanese girl when his ship, *La Triomphante*, was based in Nagasaki harbour in the summer of 1885. The ship's name is not even changed. Only Yves and Loti retain their literary names since it is by them that they are better known to Loti's reading public. In his dedicatory preface to the Duchesse de Richelieu, Loti admits frankly that his work is not really a novel.³⁷

Narrating the Nation, Narrating the Self

We can hence speak freely of *Madame Chrysanthème* as a fictionalised narration of Pierre Loti's real experiences and thoughts.³⁸ The autobiographical dimension of Loti's récits, as underlined by Hélène de Burgh, experiments with the norms of conventional autobiographical literature: the identity of his artistic name, linked to his real life, and the identity of the narrator can be widely assumed. This tells that Loti uses autobiographical conventions, also in saying that his writing is a memoir, "but then destabilises those conventions."³⁹ This has already been seen by Roland Barthes, when speaking about *Aziyadé*: "Ce n'est pas le pseudonym qui est intéressant..., c'est l'autre Loti, celui qui est et n'est pas son personnage, celui qui est et n'est pas l'auteur du livre: je ne pense pas qu'il existe de semblables dans la littérature,... son invention."⁴⁰

In her analysis of *Madame Chrysanthème*, de Burgh refers to the postmodern critique of the 'autobiographical pact' as defined by Philippe Lejeune. The deconstruction of hermeneutic autobiographical was pioneered by Paul de Man,⁴¹ who developed the idea that every narration, even an autobiographical one, remains a fiction): "If we start with the notion that 'autobiography' is fiction and fiction is autobiography; both are narrative arrangements of reality,' we can access and comprehend the inherent contradictions and tensions that persist in Loti's re-creations of his life experience."⁴² This dual reflection of fictional récit and the récit of reality on the level of autobiographical theory leads to a confusion of the identity of 'real' and 'literary' perception: "This confusion between Viaud the sailor, Loti the author and Loti the novel's protagonist in works such as *Le Mariage de Loti*, *Aziyadé*, and *Madame Chrysanthème*, constructs a three-way tension concerning the 'author' and the formation of a tangible identity."⁴³

37 Clive Wake, *The Novels of Pierre Loti*, The Hague: Mouton, 1974, p.143.

38 This corresponds to Shimazaki's point about the identity of the duchess as an addressee of his dedication and as a real historical person, see Eiji Shimazaki, 'Figuration de l'Orient à travers les Romans de Pierre Loti et le Discours colonial de son époque – Turquie, Inde, Japon' (doctoral thesis presented at the university of Paris-Est Créteil, 2012), p.215: "Le livre est dédié à une grande amie de l'écrivain, la duchesse de Richelieu, nièce d'Henri Heine et épouse du prince Albert de Monaco. Il semble en effet que cette dédicace, précédant la lecture, fonctionne comme 'mode d'emploi' de l'ouvrage. S'adressant à son amie, l'auteur y introduit une photographie prise au moment de son premier séjour à Nagasaki." On Pierre Loti's pioneering artistic work as a photographer and oho-to-model, see: Caroline Ferraris-Besso, "'Dans le passé mort': Pierre Loti, Images, and Time », in: *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 43 :1-2 (2017).

39 Hélène De Burgh, *Sex, Sailors and Colonies. Narratives of Ambiguity in the Works of Pierre Loti*, Bern: Peter Lang European University Publishers, 2005, p.219.

40 Roland Barthes, "Aziyadé" in: *Le Degré Zéro de l'écriture. Nouveaux Essais Critiques*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1974, pp.170 – 187, p.171.

41 See: Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement", in: *MLN*, 1979, Vol. 94 (5), pp.919 – 930.

42 Clive Wake, *The Novels of Pierre Loti*, The Hague: Mouton, 1974, p.143.

43 Hélène De Burgh, *Sex, Sailors and Colonies. Narratives of Ambiguity in the Works of Pierre Loti*,

Does the almost embarrassing similarity between Loti's novel on Japan and his diary not discredit the 'autobiographical pact' for his French readers? The autobiographical novel promises to tell the reader a story based on the real life of the author, in the coherent narration of a first-person-narrator who has the same name as the author. Still, the narration lacks any self-reflection or strategic means. The layer that makes this self-declared 'diary-like' novel still a novel is remarkably thin, but the autobiographical narration still justifies drawing parallels between the literary narration and historical reality. This is ambiguity on the level of form and subjectivity all adds to the transmission of a profound insecurity: "For Loti, the colonial encounter engenders a significant challenge to European identity. Colonialism erodes the identity of the colonised and troubles the coloniser, frequently destabilising rather than affirming European identity."⁴⁴ The attribute 'postcolonial' knows a particular ambivalence as regards to Japan, where Komori established that Japan is a 'self-colonized' country because it modernised itself under the pressure of Western imperialism. This resonates with to the most recent turn in postcolonialism, which acknowledges a mutual destabilization on the side of the colonizers as well as the colonized, as evident in this French novel. This questioning of postcolonialism adheres to Margaret Topping and Jennifer Yee, as well as in Christian Petr's recent reception of Edward Said,⁴⁵ and generally in the recent discussion of Pratt, Spivak and Bhabha. The following statement by the Dutch journalist and publicist Ian Buruma opens the discussion of exoticism at its most sensitive point, in accordance to the subversion of classic dichotomies such as colonizers and colonized in post-war existentialism and French theory:

Exoticism has acquired a bad odor. Once redolent of perfumed gardens, Arab souks, Asiatic wise men, and pagodas set in lotus ponds, the word 'exotic' now smacks of colonial condescension and an ignorant refusal to see common humanity in the Other [...] The question is whether this relationship between exoticism and imperialism is always the case. Can exoticism not also be a form of tribute to difference and diversity?⁴⁶

In this way, Loti can be drawn out of simplistic categories like deed and victim, to grasp his advantageous literature beyond the simple categories of 'Occident' and 'Orient'. Buruma detaches the cultural from the historical experience. In turn, William Leonard Schwartz, in *The Far East in Modern French Literature 1800-1925*, to name a critic before postmodern theory, accords the novel a central politico-historical relevance in its shaping of the image of Japan in France and the West. He further suggests that Pierre Loti's novel had an impact as a xenophobic discourse about the animistic – and intellectually and morally inferior – character of the Japanese race. By contrast, de Burgh claims that Loti enchants the notion of race, as "a source for unexplainable enchantment."⁴⁷ The Asian-American scholar Matt K. Matsuda goes so far as to say that the novel had a real political impact on the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War because it was read by the Russian court: "I believe that the contempt for the Japanese expressed in Loti's books in some measure influenced the Russians to refuse Japan's requests and led to the war of 1904." Thus, while De Burgh relies on the poststructu-

p.221.

44 *Ibid.*, p.227.

45 Christian Petr, "Towards Modern Exotic Literature", in: *Journal of European Studies*, 29,1 (1999). As quoted in H el ene de Burgh, p.34.

46 Ian Buruma, "Two Cheers for Orientalism", in: *The New Republic*, January 4 1999, p.29. As quoted in H el ene de Burgh, p.233.

47 H el ene De Burgh, *Sex, Sailors and Colonies. Narratives of Ambiguity in the Works of Pierre Loti*, p.267. She discusses Pierre Loti's novel *Roman d'un Spahi*, like *Aziyad e*, about much more obviously violent racialized power structures in a North African French colony.

ral aversion to binary oppositions in localizing Loti's oeuvre, "revealed to be an excursion into self-confrontation for the coloniser and the colonised alike,"⁴⁸ Matsuda analyses his novel more deeply in terms of the classic colonialist identity-formations of Self and Other:

Why is it that Loti's writings about Japan are unsatisfactory as interpretations of Japanese civilization? In the first place, Loti has little insight, he appears too self-centered to enter sympathetically into the thoughts and feelings of the Japanese. For instance, he never seems to realize that if the small Japanese appear comical to him, he must appear ridiculously large to them. Again, if Loti had possessed a deep appreciation of Japanese art, this would have helped him to respect their civilization.⁴⁹

There are a number of sections that illustrate how much Loti's perception is embedded in the traditions of French nationalism and how his understanding of Japan follows the preformed framework of West European nation-states. One example is, the narrator's description of the celebration of the fourteenth of July by French nationals in Nagasaki. Another is the following scene, where Loti's semi-autobiographical narrator is having tea outside in a tea-house in the mountains, contemplating the honour of the French nation: "Sur le vert foncé, qui est la nuance dominante des choses, se détachent éclatants emblèmes de nations, - tous dehors, tous déployés en l'honneur de la France lointaine."⁵⁰

The representation of nations in symbolic terms is present in the novel throughout in the descriptions of Japan: "Le plus répandu dans cet ensemble multicolore est celui qui est blanc à boule rouge : il représente cet *Empire du Soleil Levant* où nous sommes."⁵¹ The way in which West-European modern nation states are referred to illustrates their major contribution to 'Western modernity' in the Japanese-European intercultural exchange. England, for instance, seems to represent the industrial revolution, as the autofictional narrator's wife has a metallic box produced in England with the image of a factory from London: "Parmi les affaires de Chrysanthème, ce qui m'amuse à regarder, c'est la boîte consacrée aux lettres et aux souvenirs: elle est en fer-blanc, de fabrication anglaise, et porte sur son couvercle l'image coloriée d'une usine des environs de Londres."⁵² This quotation again illustrates the way Japan's imagined community is clearly secondary built after the Western precedent of a globalised modernity, Meiji-Japan portrayed accordingly as an inter-space like a kaleidoscope of West European and Edo-Japanese as well as ancient Japanese (which means originally Chinese) culture. Its relevance here is not just clear from the absence of the harem, also consists in the absence of the harem, as analysed by Emily Apter⁵³ and previously by Frantz Fanon⁵⁴ and Albert Memmi⁵⁵ as a *locus sexualis* and central Orientalist topos, that seems to be represented by the more ambivalent scene of prostitution districts like the Yoshiwara. Unlike the harem, the interracial intercourse there has to be paid for, and the materialist gendered depiction of the Japanese woman in the role of Okiku-san gives the impression of a 'fair' deal instead of the exclusively phallogocentric pleasure in the Maghreb.⁵⁶ Even more, de Burgh underlines the absence of the melodrama with Okiku-san's son and her suicide because of his adoption by

48 Ibid., p.283.

49 Matt K. Matsuda, "The tears of Madame Chrysanthème", in : FCS, xi, 2000, pp.31-51, p.35.

50 Pierre Loti, *Madame Chrysanthème*, Paris: Flammarion, 1990 (1887), p.91.

51 Ibid., p.91.

52 Ibid., p.126.

53 Emily Apter, *Continental Drift*, London: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

54 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990.

55 Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, London: Souvenir Press, 1975.

56 As reflected in the observation by Clive Wake: "Loti returned to Turkey in the guise of a pilgrim visiting an important shrine. He returned to Japan as a mildly curious, but bored tourist." Wake, p.146.

the American soldier and his American wife, in the opera-version *Madam Butterfly* by Puccini. This obvious lack of Orientalism in the French original by Loti emphasizes even more the obvious difference from clear narratives of female subjection as in the classic French Orientalist writings of Gustave Flaubert, Alphonse de Lamartine or Gérard de Nerval⁵⁷. Further references to the Western European cultural canon show that Loti perceives Japan's modernization as an entry into a system of nations, with the French nation state functioning as a framework for Loti's understanding of Japan. The celebration of the fourteenth of July reveals how much Japan of the 1880s was a free 'contact zone', a space for cultural encounters in unequal power constellations, as conceptualised by Mary Louise Pratt.⁵⁸ It was a meeting space for Western colonial travellers in the tradition of travel writing, probably similar to those in the French and British colonies in continental Asia: "Jour de la fête nationale de France. Sur rade de Nagasaki, grand pavois en notre honneur et salves d'artillerie. Hélas ! je songe beaucoup, toute la journée, à ce 14 juillet de l'an dernier [...]"⁵⁹ Loti goes on to narrate about his friend Yves's actions on the day of the celebration :

La nuit venue et Chrysanthème remontée à Diou-djen-dji, nous traversons, Yves et moi, la concession européenne, pour rentrer à bord et reprendre la garde jusqu'à demain. Dans ce quartier cosmopolite exhalant une odeur d'absinthe, tout est pavoisé et on tire des pétards en l'honneur de la France. Des fils de djins passent, trainant, de toute la vitesse de leurs jambes nues, nos matelots de la Triomphante qui jouent de l'éventail et qui poussent des cris. On entend notre pauvre 'Marseillaise' partout ; des marins anglais la chantent durement du gosier, sur un mouvement trainant et funèbre comme leur 'God Save'. Dans tous les bars américains, les pianos mécaniques la jouent aussi pour attirer nos hommes, avec des variations et des ritournelles odieuses [...].⁶⁰

The multicultural district of Nagasaki is perceived as a meeting point of Oriental culture and the symbolic representatives of the French and British nations, as expressed in "l'honneur de la France" and the singing of the "Marseillaise" and the British national anthem. French culture remains Loti's principal reference throughout the novel, as he speaks of France's honour and adapts the perceived reality to the worldview of his French readers, linguistically and aesthetically. For instance, he refers to the system of European nations as it was established in the Peace of Westphalia, but in the same time documents the unbroken nationalism of French and British settlers on their journey in Japan. In the moments when he portrays different nations – that is, when he portrays 1880s Meiji Japan as a playground for the missionaries, traders and statesmen from different Western countries – Loti still figures as a credible reporter from the Orient for the audience in France. As Yōichi Komori writes in *Posutokoroniaru*, Japan's formation as a new modern nation and as an actor on the international scene of nation-states emerged from the struggle with the American delegation and their pressure from outside. The Americans were in turn motivated by their competition for petrol with other 'unequal contractors' – England and France – and by their quest to find a transportation route for cotton materials from China to America.⁶¹ Furthermore, this new transcultural space is subverted in its heteronormativity either by the interracial union with Okiku-san or or queer affinity to Yves also in the

57 De Burgh writes: "If we read Loti against Ann Laura Stoler's comment that 'the discursive management of the sexual practices of colonizer and colonized was fundamental to the colonial order of things', we can comprehend the significance of Loti's divergence from orientalist (and colonialist) norms." Ibid., p.86 - 87.

58 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

59 Pierre Loti, *Madame Chrysanthème*, Paris: Flammarion, 1990 [1887], p.88.

60 Pierre Loti, *Madame Chrysanthème*, p.93.

61 See: Yōichi Komori, *Posutokoroniaru*, Tokyo: Iwabata-shoten, 2001, p.4.

moments of double jealousy in the moments of proximity between Yves and Chrysanthemum.

Japonistic Exoticism of Okiku-san

Loti's wife figures as the incarnation of Japan and in this way she mirrors his contempt for the new culture of the country. Animalistic metaphors abound in the narration of his perception of Japan, where women are like cats, butterflies or fruits, and children are compared to apes: "D'ailleurs je reconnais le charme des petits enfants japonais; il y en a d'adorables. – Mais, ce charme qu'ils ont, comment passe-t-il si vite pour devenir la grimace vieillotte, la laideur souriante, l'air singe ?"⁶² The flower motif for the depiction of his wife and East Asian women in general, and "the djin", seem to be an integral part of the stereotype surrounding East-Asian cultures, through conflagration with Chinese culture. His words therefore create 'race' as a social space, in an understanding of Ian F. Haney Lopez⁶³, in addition to the misogynist gendered view on his surroundings. Madame Prune is an elderly woman who introduces Loti to his future wife in a sort of brothel for the colonial forces, where he is encouraged to choose from a range of young women, daughters from impoverished families, as was already the custom for geishas in Edo Japan. Throughout the text, one finds the Japanese are characterized as either small and cute, and therefore not to be taken seriously, or as ugly and primitive and therefore inferior to West-European culture. From the very beginning, women are portrayed as doll-like figures, and Loti's ironic, repetitive expressions of condescension for his wife have a dehumanizing tone. The encounter with Japanese culture is portrayed as an encounter with the picturesque and belittled version of early modern Japan, with teahouses and kimono-clad women. Loti's new wife merely reminds him of the images of the dolls he knew before his arrival :

Elles s'asseyaient pourtant, en un cercle cérémonieux et souriant à la fois, nous deux restant debout, les yeux fixés sur l'escalier. Et enfin émerge à son tour le petit paquet de fleurs d'argent, le chignon d'ébène, la robe gris perle et la ceinture mauve... de mademoiselle Jasmin ma fiancée !! ... Ah ! mon Dieu, mais je la connaissais déjà ! Bien avant de venir au Japon, je l'avais vue, sur tous les éventails, au fond de toutes les tasses à thé – avec son air bête, son minois bouffi, – ses petits yeux percés à la vrille au-dessus de ces deux solitudes, blanches et roses jusqu'à la plus extrême invraisemblance, qui sont ses joues.⁶⁴

The figure of the narrator's wife mirrors his ambivalent and self-contradictory feelings towards Japan. She is perceived as attractive, but at the same time the narrator states: "L'envie de rire me quitte tout à fait et je me sens au cœur un froid plus profond. Partager une heure de ma vie avec cette petite créature, jamais!"⁶⁵

There are a number of moments in the novel when Pierre Loti's narrator adopts racist tones when describing Japan and his wife, who, according to Hélène de Burgh, is typical of Loti's allegorical female figures. His depiction of her shifts between a fascination for exoticism and a lack of exoticism, in the sense that Japan is

⁶² Pierre Loti, *Madame Chrysanthème*, p.155.

⁶³ Ian F. Haney Lopez, "The Social Construction of Race", in: *Literary Theory. An Anthology*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008, pp.964 – 974, p.966: "Race is neither an essence nor an illusion, but rather an ongoing, contradictory, self-reinforcing, plastic process subject to the macro forces of social and political struggle and the micro effects of daily decisions."

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.71 – 72.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.73.

perceived already as too modern, which gives it its special standing between East and West and its simultaneously enigmatic and threatening impression. Religious components play an important role in the association of the Buddhist religion with the ontological core of Japan. This depiction is connoted by Loti's characterization of the Japanese people as materialist and simple-minded :

Il y a, dans cette maison ainsi calfeutrée (Diou-djen-dji), une étrange odeur mêlée à celle du musc et des lotus; une intime odeur de Japon, de race jaune, qui est montée du sol ou qui est sortie des boiseries antiques ; presque une fétidité de fauve... Le Bouddha doré sourit toujours devant ses veilleuses qui brûlent ; quelque phalène habituée du logis, qui dormait dans le jour collée à notre plafond, tournoie maintenant sous le nez du dieu, autour des deux petites flammes grêles.⁶⁶

The association of the big and round Buddha figure, self-satisfied, with the yellow skin colour and the smells of this nebulous religious cult, as well as the insects in the heat, creates a holistic image of non-monotheistic religiosity, the aesthetics of the Asian ethnicity and an opportunistic or materialist mentality. The association of his wife with Shinto-Buddhism reinforces her as the representative of the non-Christian non-Western Other, which also reflects Meiji-Japan's auto-exoticism as based in the Shinto-Restoration of the Imperial House's authority as the core of Japanese nationalism.⁶⁷ We could see the transcription of Japanese words like 'Diou-djen-dji' as an exoticizing stylistic means and the naming of the Japanese characters as Madame Sucre, Madame Prune and Monsieur Kangourou (the rickshaw driver), as well as the servants as djins, as another orientalisating technique. These tell us of Loti's incapacity to memorize the Japanese language and people's names and reflect how, despite the documentary autofictional nature of this 'new' novel, he shapes his report from Japan to fit the literary tastes of his readers back in France.

André Dedet, in his article 'Pierre Loti in Japan: Impossible exoticism'⁶⁸, likewise highlights the double layer of exoticism and contempt for Japan in Loti's novel. His condescension towards Japanese culture, in combination with the allegory of his wife, is accompanied by animalistic metaphors, showing that he infantilizes Japan, but also gives expression to the de-humanizing cultural shock of the confrontation with a culture perceived as primitive.⁶⁹ Loti's narrator misses the exoticism he has known in other Oriental countries, especially in the Middle East, and insists nonetheless on his wife's distinctness: "Elle est bien jeune, dis-je – et puis trop blanche; elle est comme nos femmes françaises, et moi j'en désirais une jaune pour changer. – Mais c'est la peinture qu'on lui a mise, monsieur ! En dessous, je vous assure qu'elle est jaune..."⁷⁰ This distinctness is based on race, as he repeatedly refers her yellow skin colour. One striking example of Loti's literary exoticism is his transcription of Japanese words into Roman letters, such as: "Nidzoumi! (les souris !), dit Chrysanthème."⁷¹ This accompanies his nostalgia for his journey to Turkey and the Middle East: "'Setchan!...' Une de nos premières nuits passées à Stamboul, sous le toit mystérieux d'Eyoub ... un bruit sur les marches de l'escalier noir nous avait fait trembler, et elle aussi, la

66 Pierre Loti, *Madame Chrysanthème*, p.119.

67 Brian Bocking, *A Popular Dictionary of Shinto*, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1995. There, he clearly distinguishes ancient and modern (State-)Shinto, in its eclectic combination with "Taoism, Yin-Yang-philosophy, Confucianism, folk religion and European-style nationalism since Meiji-modernization in 1868", in its association with and replacement of Buddhism, "soon to be moulded into a mythological and ritual expression of the new Japanese nationalism founded on devotion to the Meiji descendant of Amaterasu." *Ibid.*, p.9.

68 André Dedet, "Pierre Loti in Japan: Impossible exoticism", in : *European Studies*, 1999, pp.21-25.

69 *Ibid.*, p.108.

70 *Ibid.*, p.73.

71 *Ibid.*, p.86.

chère petite Turque, m'avait dit dans sa langue aimée: 'Setchan!'"⁷² The transcription of Japanese words into Roman letters emphasizes Loti's distance from the culture surrounding him, and how far he is alienated from the environment that he tries to grasp artistically.

As stated before, Loti's negative opinion of Japan is to be read within two historical frames. These derive from his standing as a national of the late French Empire, when France both consolidated its imperialist expansion and saw England and Germany continuously succeed.⁷³ First, there is the historical background of Japan's reaction to France's defeat against Prussia, and of the foundation of the German Empire at Versailles – that is, Japan's shift from France to Prussia as a model for modernization. Secondly, there is Loti's nostalgia for the Islamic Oriental cultures in Turkey and the Middle East, whose deep Muslim faith – and the chastity of their women, even in the harem – contrast with the naturalist understanding of sexuality in pre-modern Japan, which celebrated sexual pleasure for men and for women equally,⁷⁴ an attitude probably being rooted in Shinto and Buddhism. The contrast to the Middle East that Loti experienced is pointed out by Hélène de Burgh when she questions his standing as an Orientalist writer:

Loti is known in the first instance as a writer of the Orient: as a chronicler of Turkey, Africa, Japan, Indochina, Tahiti and the Middle East. During his day and in posthumous study, Loti is known as an orientalist writer. Can he then be seen to correspond to the Saidian framework of 'orientalist discourse'? ... Certainly, the postcolonial interrogation and de-stabilisation of the centralised Western subject has meant that most nineteenth-century 'orientalist' writers have been dismissed as imposing a discursive regime of oppression on the colonised subject.⁷⁵

Furthermore, de Burgh invokes Puccini's opera and its re-Orientalisation of Loti's theme as the main reason for her view of Loti as a writer who died not belonging to any nation or major cultural movement; rather, he expressed his own solitary view. As said before, the Japanese-American scholar Matt K. Matsuda sees Loti's wounded pride *vis-à-vis* Japan's shift from France to Germany as the main cause of his view of Japan. France was replaced by Germany as a principal modernizing model for Japan following France's defeat against Prussia in 1871 and the foundation of the first united German nation state in 1872. This was a major German-Japanese historical turning point :

The year 1868 saw the Meiji Restoration in Japan. In France, 1870 saw disastrous war with Prussia and the confederation of the German Empire. Before 1868, Frenchmen were prominent military and commercial advisers of the Shogun. With the restoration of the Japanese Emperor and France's own loss to the Prussians, French advice fell out of favor. The French found themselves judged wanting by their erstwhile protégés, as Germany became a new model for Japanese policy.⁷⁶

⁷² Ibid., p.86. English translation: "'Setchan!' a word heard elsewhere, a word that has likewise been whispered in my ear by a woman's voice, under similar circumstances, in a moment of nocturnal terror - 'Setchan!' It was during one of our nights at Stamboul spent under the mysterious roof of Eyoub, when danger surrounded us on all sides; a noise on the steps of the black staircase had made us tremble, and she also, my dear little Turkish companion, had said to me in her beloved language, 'Setchan!' ('the mice!')." Pierre Loti, *Japan. Madame Chrysanthemum* p.80.

⁷³ For an overview of 19th-century France, see (a.o.): Antoine de Baecque and Françoise Melonio, *Histoire Culturelle de la France*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2005.

⁷⁴ This culture was celebrated in the *shunga* exhibition in the British Museum in 2013-14 in London, while the national museums in Japan first did not show it. Their initial reaction reflects that there is still a strong tendency to consider the erotic culture of the Edo period as a 'backward shame'.

⁷⁵ De Burgh, *Sex, Sailors and Colonies. Narratives of Ambiguity in the Works of Pierre Loti*, p.33.

⁷⁶ Matt K. Matsuda, "The tears of Madame Chrysanthème", p.33. / Matt K. Matsuda, "Japan : The Tears of Madame Chrysanthème", in: *Empire of Love: Histories of France and the Pacific*, University Press Scholarship Online / Oxford Scholarship Online, 2005.

The self-modernization of the Meiji era illustrates its 'secondary' modern constitution – secondary in the sense of being built after the Western model. It also shows the strong inner dividedness of Western European nations throughout the nineteenth century within European power struggles, in their internal and external fights to lead 'modernity', finding a peak in the *fin-de-siècle* of modernist narratives.

Matsuda proposes that 'love' as the incarnation of humanistic values is the main pillar of Loti's differentiation of East and West – of Orient and Occident, Japan and France – and that it is something that Japan aims for, but France already has. This recalls France's (nationalist) claim to be the 'exception culturelle', morally superior to the more pragmatic, materialist and rationalist culture of countries with a strong Protestant culture. Matsuda retraces how the notion of 'love' figured as the mutual antagonism for the opposition between France, with its *mission civilisatrice*, and Prussian Germany. Both conceived of themselves as nations following the humanistic paradigms of art and culture. As Matsuda points out, the main purpose of this self-definition of France as a country based on 'love' – the key term of France's humanistic culture, rooted in the emancipatory potential of the French Revolution – was its presumed discursive opposition to Germany, seen as a sober place without culture and refined erotic customs. This humanistic and nationalist discourse, also against Prussia, integrated Japan in a way that was very much the contrary of its tender sweet image in Japonism: "(B)y the Sino-Japanese War of 1894, 95, French newspapers loudly warned of East Asia's new 'yellow Prussians'."⁷⁷

With the victory of Germany in 1871 and Japan's shift to Germany as a principal model for modernization, Japan was rhetorically integrated on the side of prosaic, uncultivated, militaristic countries. Loti significantly contributed to this discourse:

What follows is an examination of the particular ways in which love – as sentiment, passion and noble emotion – became political discourse at the end of the century – not for self-characterization, but to be used geopolitically against a Prussianized, rigidified Europe (or as a counter-narrative of decadence) or as a hedge against arid political economy. As such love was also central to French readings of the Japanese, who at this time began industrializing and developing a formidable military challenge to Euro-American domination in East Asia. By the turn of the century, not only novelists, but policy makers needed to somehow renegotiate and narrate the meanings of Japan's claim to forward place among nations.⁷⁸

As Matsuda suggests, the analogy between Germany and Japan – in the sense that they were anti-democratic nations, late in attaining modernity – was established at the very beginning of modern Japan, and in a certain way too of modern Germany. France, in Loti's semi-documentary, semi-literary narration, reflects the power constellation of modern nations at that time and figures as the (self-)romanticized counterpart to Prussia, propagating its national character in its arts and its beauty. At the same time, French *japonisme*, with its strongly aestheticist vision of Japan, resonates throughout Loti's description, as well as in his later books, which have a milder view on Japan, *Japoneries d'Automne* (1889) and *La Troisième Jeunesse de Madame Prune* (1905).

As a consequence of the unequal but not obviously post-colonial power structure, Loti's marriage to a young Japanese prostitute is doomed to fail. Matsuda highlights this in his comparison with later reinterpretations of the theme in cultural history:

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.33 - 34.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Chrysanthème was also part of a 'historiographical operation'. This created a double narrative: a widely-held view that Japan was a devious and heartless land, somewhat like Germany, yet also a sympathetic 'romance' of Japan, clinging, like France, to its refinement and dignity in an age of social and political shocks. In each case, the capacity for love – or not – would be a marker of that country's civilization. ... Favourable or unflattering, these views were ideologically linked to making love and the possibility of a woman's tears the measure of Meiji Japan's – and France's – place in history.⁷⁹

Post-Japonisme: Beyond mere Aestheticization, Apprehension of Japan's Future Rise to Industrialisation and Imperialism

Dedet and others have claimed that, in contrast to the work of French japonistic painters like Régamey, Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème* is a marginal work of literary *japonisme*. Rather, it is post-*japonisme* and therefore involved in a nationalist deconstruction of the whimsical image created by the earlier *japonisme* of fine arts. This reveals the collective psychology of the French nation that is mediated through Loti's individual fictional literary voice, and hence challenges the assumption of a unilateral Othering of Japan:

Loti's story is one of disappointment and disillusion. He captures in literary images the Japan of tea-houses and geishas, the land of musumés (young women), yet the tone which suffuses his temporary marriage is that of weariness, of boredom and incomprehension. The tale is unsettling in its relentless anti-romantic tone, in its insistent portrayal of a Japan of spurious charms, of idiocies and self-interested principles – both Oriental and Occidental.⁸⁰

In Matsuda's interpretation of Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème*, Meiji Japan was made out of a combination of British industry and economy, French administration, and German medical, military and educational systems: "What Loti saw, I suggest, was a Japan framed within a version of what the French enemy, Bismarck, had in another context called a 'struggle for civilization'. Within a generation Japan astonished Europe with an industrializing economy, rational administration, and medical and educational advances."⁸¹ Matsuda's analysis of the Meiji modernization can be summarised via the idea that Japanese modernity was not intrinsically postcolonial, unlike 'hybrid' India as conceptualised by Homi Bhabha⁸², but constituted itself via a selective integration of different West European reforms, chosen based on its own old Japanese culture, which was culturally highly developed during the 'locked-in' Edo-period (1640–1860). Matsuda adds: "By the 1880s, Japanese development not only impressed, but challenged the West. In *Chrysanthème*, the industriousness of an artisan's workshop causes a concerned Loti to warn of the new Japan 'qui tend à nous envahir en France.'⁸³ The imaginative figure or allegory for this transnational view of the modernization of Meiji Japan was the 'Mikado' – the word for either a play with

⁷⁹ Matt K. Matsuda, "The tears of Madame Chrysanthème", p.35-36. For a full deployment of his nationalised reading, see: Matt K. Matsuda, "Japan: The Tears of Madame Chrysanthème", in: *Empire of Love: Histories of France and the Pacific*, Oxford Scholarship Online, 2005. The paper-abstract "examines the rise of Japan to global visibility during the Meiji Restoration after 1868, and the ways that the almost simultaneous collapse of the French in the Franco-Prussian war of 1871 leads to a re-ordering of civilizations in the late 19th century..."

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.36.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* p.39.

⁸² Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, New York / Sydney: Routledge, 2010 [1994].

⁸³ *Ibid.* p.40.

different wooden sticks or the famous British satiric opera about early modern Japan. Speaking of the 'imitative' secondary modernization of Japan and the enigmatic image of the Mikado that became so popular in Europe both as a play and as an opera, during the Meiji-era (1868 – 1912), Matsuda refers to a French journalist:

As imitators, the Japanese could never truly threaten the cultural hegemony of French civilization. Journalist and critic Victor Bérard commented, 'Le Japon, ce n'est pas le peuple comme le peuple français est la France; c'est le Mikado, la chaîne des dieux et des esprits qui relie la nation japonaise aux puissances éternelles.'⁸⁴

Concerning the question as to whether Loti's novel was part of the *japonisme* movement or not, Matsuda says that it marks the very end of *japonisme* in France:

The dialectic of Chrysanthème's tears is that of Japan written into history through its affective and emotional capacities within a shifting, unstable historical landscape of geopolitical competition on the European continent and in East Asia. Loti's judgement reflects not only his solitary individualist personality but also his national background say the threat and vexed pride of the French Empire in Indochina and by Japan's return from France to Germany as a principal model. Loti's novel as moment of first disillusionment of the japonisme-dream.⁸⁵

Religiosity and Love as Key Notions of Japan's 'Self-Colonial' Ambivalence

Matt K. Matsuda's contextualisation of Loti's narrator's feelings and perceptions is in accordance with the first-person-description of the peaceful Buddhist smile and the catlike body of his Japanese wife next to him. It is preceded by his memory of Istanbul: "Au milieu de ce calme et de ce silence du milieu de la nuit, je cherchais à ressaisir encore mes impressions poignantes de Stamboul. – Hélas! Non, elles ne revenaient plus, dans ce milieu trop lointain et trop étrange..."⁸⁶ The belittling of Japanese culture is an important tool of narration throughout the novel and the following episode extends the racialized social reality to the level of smells: "Il y a, dans cette maison ainsi calfeutrée, une étrange odeur mêlée à celle du musc et des lotus; une intime odeur de Japon, de race jaune, qui est montée du sol ou qui est sortie des boiseries antiques; – Presque une fétidité de fauve."⁸⁷ The portrayal of unique food culture plays an important role in the narrative as well and, indeed, food culture is an integral part of Japanese culture: "Les repas de Chrysanthème sont une invraisemblable chose. Cela commence le matin, au réveil, par deux petits pruneaux verts des haies, confits dans du vinaigre et roulés dans de la poudre de sucre. Une tasse de thé complète ce déjeuner presque traditionnel au Japon..." Loti concludes the description of his wife's culinary tastes with the dessert saying: "après tant de petits plats pour rire, on apporte une cuve en bois cerclée de cuivre, une cuve énorme, comme pour Gargantua."⁸⁸ It is interesting that the narrator refers to Gargantua, the novel of the French Renaissance author Jean-François Rabelais, which generally figures as a rath-

⁸⁴ Ibid. p.41.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.50.

⁸⁶ Pierre Loti, *Madame Chrysanthème* p.119.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.113. Curiously, this description resonates with the Pierre Loti House in La Rochelle, which is now a public museum and lets the observer see the full Orientalist, almost fantastic, world Pierre Loti used to live in in South-Western France, so as always to have the climate and colour of his colonial travels with him.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.113.

er extreme carnivalesque subversion of early modernity in Europe, with Gargantua as an emblem of greed and gluttony – these are also the attributes of his wife.

The question that emerges is: can Loti be seen as a typical ignorant Western imperialist who wants to meet his French readers' expectations, or is he expressing the honest individual impression of a solitary traveller? Jean-Pierre Montier explains Loti's aversion to Japan via its lack of exoticism: "Le Japon n'est pas trop loin de l'univers de Loti, c'est plutôt l'exote qui, par le Japon, est pris à son propre piège, à son propre système consistant à n'apprécier rien tant que ce qui est le plus loin possible dans l'espace et le temps."⁸⁹

Loti's novel has a transgressive character, showing 1880s Meiji Japan to be a cultural contact-zone. This begins with the name of its eponymous heroine, Madame Chrysanthème. The name(s) of Loti's wife, Okané-san, seems to be both a homonym and an patronym, for money (jap.: 金 *kané*), because she is so materialist, or to refer to the bell in Buddhist temples (jap. 鐘 *kané*), standing for her religion, or both, in the combination that Loti's narrator rejects so strongly. The Japanese signification is already mentioned by Akane Kawakami's analysis of the naming of the protagonist's wife:

By calling her 'Kihou' and his wife in the same breath, Loti restores both name and status to her, making her into a legitimate being on the same level as himself. She still conforms to the *japoniste* image of the pretty Japanese woman ('elle s'assied dans la pose des images'), but in spite of this Loti here appreciates her as a human being worthy of being listened to ('je t'écouterai'), rather than a living *japoniste* fantasy, or a non-human specimen in a glass cabinet.⁹⁰

The key moment of their intercultural incompatibility is expressed through the patronym of her name and its oxymoronesque ambivalence. Throughout the narration, the inherent inner homogenizing force of the modern nation state becomes apparent, leading to economic and ethico-moral competition not only between France and Germany, but between France and Japan. The homogenizing pattern of the nation-state becomes evident, where one can see similar discourses of Self and Other for differentiation of the modern nation state in competition with others. Within the discourse of exoticism that allows to integrate Japan as an 'other' but similarly modern nation, André Dedet analyses the essence of exoticism as disgust. Disgust has been analysed as the reaction to the uncivilized that falls outside the norm,⁹¹ and Dedet writes: "[P]leasure and exoticism can only be found in an aesthetic evaluation [...] [that otherwise] provokes rejection."⁹² The source of this rejection is the discrepancy to the subordination of Oriental women in the Middle East or Turkey. It is the self-reliance of his wife, this foreign creature, that resembles France's view on Prussia as a province from afar, and therefore its vulnerability. It is Japan's future potential to industrialise, that shines through the insecurity of the narrator's description of the country in its still almost colonised state of the 1880s.

Loti's autofictional narrator, faced with the pragmatic understanding of sexuality of the young prostitute Okané-san in their mutually unromantic liaison, is nostalgic for the chastity of Muslim women in the Middle East. Only in marrying

⁸⁹ Jean-Pierre Montier, "Traces et restes du Japon, ou le grenier de Pierre Loti", in: *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 2014, Nr:18:4, 428–437, p.432.

⁹⁰ Akane Kawakami, *Travellers' Visions. French Literary Encounters with Japan, 1881 / 2004*, Contemporary French and Francophone Cultures 4, Liverpool University Press, 2005, p.42.

⁹¹ Winfried Menninghaus gives a philosophico-historical account of the rationalization of 'disgust.' His notion could potentially be applied in a postcolonial or non-Western context, partly in reliance on psychoanalysis or Norbert Elias, see: Winfried Menninghaus, *Disgust. The Theory and History of a Strong Sensation*, New York State University Press, 2003.

⁹² André Dedet, "Pierre Loti in Japan: Impossible exoticism", in: *European Studies*, 1999, pp.21-25, p.25.

him, Okané-san becomes Okiku-san 菊 (jap.: *kiku* for chrysanthemum, synonymous with the nation's emblem), illustrating the auto-exoticist pattern of modern Japan's self-construction, in accordance with Yōichi Komori's notion of 'self-colonization.'⁹³ Overall, Loti's autofictional narration is so close to reality that we can in turn draw a parallel between the fictional and the real, which allows us to read the novel both as an individual literary expression and as a voice of history. On the other hand, Kawakami, in speaking of a certain 'generosity', also analyses the strong aversion that Loti's narrator experiences as a reaction to his cultural destabilisation through his confrontation with Japanese culture:

It is crucial that Loti's communion with Chrysanthème, her music and her country comes in a moment of linguistic generosity – that is, when Loti decides to allow Japanese words into his French texts. This generosity, however, is fraught with dangers. Opening oneself up to the other may result in the fragmentation, or even the loss, of the self.⁹⁴

The heroine's new name, giving the novel its title, figures as a strong japonistic theme, since the *japonisme* of his récit already begins with the title, *Madame Chrysanthème*, which combines the female address and the flower of the chrysanthemum that has become, since Meiji, the symbol for the Japanese nation. The multilayered aptronym is an amalgam of French Orientalism of Meiji Japan, with Loti's own form of exoticism, "that is neither stagnant nor rigid and does not fit with the theoretical formulation of orientalism to date."⁹⁵ This final judgement by Hélène de Burgh praises Loti's authentic embracement of non-Western pleasure and excitement within and beyond the political power frameworks or Realism and Romanticism: "Loti's desire truly is, as Barthes suggests, a floating bet set adrift in the night."⁹⁶ Nonetheless, the novel delivers a fictional historical récit within the era of Western colonial expansion from Europe to Africa, Asia and the Americas, when Japan – which only opened up under US-American pressure, as conceptualised by Yōichi Komori – was on the verge of becoming an imperialist nation of its own. Japan in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is possibly an 'exception to the rule,' in the sense of being the only non-white industrial nation, whose literary portrayal reflects its ambivalent standing on the thin border between a semi-postcolonial place and a fully established nation. Okiku-san as its allegory was compared by Henry James in his essay on Loti's Oriental explorations with the industrial metropole of Northern England:

I have been assured that *Madame Chrysanthème* is a preposterous, as benighted a picture of Japan as if a stranger, disembarked at Liverpool, had confined his acquaintance with England to a few weeks spent in disreputable female society in a vulgar suburb of that city.⁹⁷

The civilizational miracle of the industrial and political Meiji-modernization that continues to be perceived as enigmatic from afar, if reflected in the insecurity of

93 Yōichi Komori, *Posutokoroniaru*. This characterisation in fact corresponds to Komori Yoichi's reading of Meiji Japan's foremost thinker, Yukichi Fukuzawa. *Ibid.*, 16: "[...] it was Yukichi Fukuzawa who read on the side of 'civilized countries'" and said that "the 'cultured countries' were among the countries that justified their own colonization in adapting to the logic of the allied Western powers, and it was Fukuzawa who said this turn by Japan was convenient (note: if not opportunistic) [my translation]".

94 Kawakami, *Travellers' Visions*, p.42.

95 De Burgh, *Sex, Sailors and Colonies*, p.283

96 *Ibid.*, p.284.

97 Henry James, "Introduction to Impressions by Pierre Loti (1898)", in: *French Writers*, New York: Library of America, 1984, p.516.

the novel's form and narration, which makes it a precious work for France's literary history and, moreover for world literature – a fusion of literary canons from the 'old' and the 'new' worlds⁹⁸. It is the transcription of the experience of self-alienation in the radically foreign, embodied in the animistic but civilised figure of his temporary bride that gives Loti its peripheral but continuous place in French literature.

98 World literature in an understanding of Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen / Karen-Margrethe Simonsen (ed.), *World Literature World Culture. History, Theory, Analysis*, Aarhus University Press, 2008, p.10: "A renewed engagement with the 'old' concept of world literature, in a markedly changed, multi-directional and networked global age, is one way in which literary and cultural studies may contribute to a fruitful understanding of how the globalisation of literary expression, production and reception has taken place in the past, how it is shaping our world today and what directions it may possibly take in the future."