

Effects of Japanese Art on French and German Literature in the Nineteenth Century

After 1850, the Japanese began to send talented young men to Europe and the USA to study the technical and cultural achievements of the West. In 1868, Japan finally opened its doors to diplomats and merchants from abroad: even western advisors were invited. In Europe, the interest in Japan (and China), which dated back to the eighteenth century, reached new heights: for the first time reliable reports could be published and Japanese *objets d'art* appeared on the European markets; they became one of the main attractions at the World Exhibitions of 1862 (London), 1867 (Paris), and 1878 (Paris).

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Paris was the centre of artistic life on the continent. Writers and painters everywhere received decisive impulses from the French metropolis. It is, therefore, only natural, that Japanese art was 'discovered' in Paris. Among its first and most ardent admirers were Jules (1830–70) and Edmond (1822–96) de Goncourt. As early as 1862 they noted in their *Journal*: 'L'art japonais est un art aussi grand que l'art grec.'¹ Many friends of the Goncourts shared the brothers' special liking for Japan. Even 'dîners des Japonisants' were organized, at which many aspects of Japanese culture were discussed. Especially admired – by painters and writers alike – were Japanese picture scrolls (*kakemono*), screens (*byōbu*), and woodblock prints (*ukiyo-e*). Degas, Gauguin, Manet, Matisse, Monet, Toulouse-Lautrec, van Gogh, Baudelaire, Flaubert, Zola: all were enthusiastic about the Japanese way of painting – so different from techniques known in Europe. The Japanese used neither shadows nor perspective in the Western sense. The scene is not depicted as if illuminated from one side or one point – it seems suffused with light. If there are any shadows, they are 'mere deepenings of tone, like those fugitive halfglooms which run before a summer cloud.'² The paintings give the impression of

1 Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, *Journal. Mémoires de la vie littéraire*. Avant-propos de l'Académie Goncourt. Texte intégral établi et annoté par Robert Ricatte (Paris: Fasquelle et Flammarion 1956–8) v p 47

2 Lafcadio Hearn, *Out of the East* (Rutland and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company 1972) p 161

openness, of space, of the infinite. The artist achieves this effect by using a few bold lines which capture the 'true' form – the essence – of the depicted object or landscape, or by breaking up the rigid contours, softening the lines by putting on colours in light short strokes. Sometimes the background fades into mist or clouds.

It is well known that many painters of that period, under the effect of Japanese art, tried out new 'impressionist' techniques. In this paper I want to show to what extent European writers, influenced by Japanese art, were encouraged to develop new 'impressionist' techniques of description. Like the painters, some writers tried to convey a new mode of 'seeing things' – showing things in a new light. The reader should react spontaneously, he should experience in a 'direct' way what was pointed out to him. To achieve this purpose, sentences were shortened and the 'proper' structures of phrases were broken – comparable to the new brush technique in painting. Often verbs were left out; only meaningful, colourful nouns were placed before the reader. Rather than presenting a description, the writer wanted to create an 'impression.' Suddenly ordinary things, details of daily life, were shown in a new, often humorous and satirical, way.

How does this development relate to the growing 'naturalism' in French literature? Obviously, no sharp distinction was made between literary 'impressionism' and 'naturalism': both were meant to show 'the truth' – the true state of the world, the true character of men and things. In the *Journal* of the brothers Goncourt we read:

L'art chinois et surtout l'art japonais, ces arts qui paraissent aux yeux bourgeois d'une si invraisemblable fantaisie, sont puisés à la nature même. Tout ce qu'ils font est emprunté à l'observation. Ils rendent ce qu'ils voient: les effets incroyables du ciel, les zébrures du champignon, les transparences de la méduse. Leur art copie la nature, comme l'art gothique.³

Lafcadio Hearn, one of the outstanding interpreters of Japanese life and art, stated in 1895, that a Japanese artist 'sees in Nature much that for thousands of years has remained invisible to us,' and that 'we are now learning from him aspects of life and beauties of form to which we were utterly blind before.'⁴ Hearn was aware of the artistic development in Paris: 'The French alone, among Western art critics, seem fully to understand these features of Japanese art; and among all Western artists it is the Parisian alone who approaches the Oriental in his methods.'⁵

In literature, the Goncourts considered themselves to be the intellectual

3 Goncourt, vi p 245

4 Hearn, 116

5 Ibid., 119

fathers of the new style. They described its essence in much the same words that Hearn had used to characterize Japanese art:

A l'heure qu'il est, en littérature ... le tout est d'inventer une lorgnette nouvelle, avec laquelle vous faites voir les choses et les êtres à travers des verres qui n'ont point encore servi, vous montrez des tableaux sous un angle de jour inconnu jusqu'alors, vous créez une optique nouvelle ... Cette lorgnette, nous l'avions inventée...⁶

Painting and literature in Japan are closely connected. This does not only apply to illustrations of literary works – quite often a painting receives its finishing touch by calligraphy. Even if taken separately, Japanese literature and art of an epoch share many characteristics. For example, woodblock prints often depict scenes from daily life: the life of merchants, the work of various labourers, the world of the theatre and of the gay quarters in cities. The same themes are treated in the popular novels of the period (1603–1868), in the works of Ihara Saikaku or Shikitei Samba, for instance. In colourful detail, with some humour and irony, we are shown how people struggle or enjoy themselves in this 'floating world' (*ukiyo*). On the other hand, writings belonging to the genre of *zuihitsu* (literally: following one's ink brush, i.e. noting down one's observations and thoughts spontaneously) can be compared to casual drawings in ink. In both cases we find spontaneity, naturalness, artlessness – an artistic artlessness, however. From *zuihitsu* the mind turns to *haiku*. In the compact poetic form of three lines and seventeen syllables, *haiku* poems describe the mood of a special moment. Their counterpart in pictorial art would be 'artless' paintings, sketches consisting of a very few lines. However, serious *haiku* poems (in contrast to playful *senryū*) as well as 'simple' Zen-paintings can only be fully understood against their philosophical background.

Considering the closeness of Japanese art and literature, it is not surprising that one of Edmond de Goncourt's Japanese friends immediately recognized a 'Japanese' quality in the style of the Goncourts. On 6 April 1889, Edmond quoted in his *Journal* a note given him by Hayashi: 'Shitei Samba, romancier et critique japonais (1800), ayant une certaine parenté avec la forme du *Journal des Goncourt*.'⁷ Shitei (or Shikitei) Samba has been mentioned above; in addition, the *Journal* contains 'snapshots' and aphorisms which remind us of *haiku*: 'Un chat qui se frotte contre les épines d'un rosier.'⁸ The Japanese poet Issa wrote the following *haiku*:

6 Goncourt, x p 172ff

7 Ibid., xvi p 55

8 Ibid., viii p 207

Sleeping, then waking
and giving a great yawn, the cat
goes out love-making.⁹

When writing down their observation about the cat, the Goncourts were not imitating Japanese poetry, however. They were thinking of Japanese drawings. Their next sentence in the *Journal* reads: 'il aurait fallu là le pinceau d'un Japonais.'¹⁰ The following passage also lends itself to comparison:

Voici le bruit des cloches de l'église.
Il faut songer à des choses de la vie
courante, à mes remerciements à envoyer,
à des lettres à écrire.¹¹

Bashō's *haiku* is less explicit and more compact; the mood, however, is the same:

As bell tones fade,
blossom scents take up the ringing –
evening shade!¹²

Not only the *Journal* shows ways of writing which are comparable to Japanese techniques. Edmond de Goncourt's books on Japanese art are exemplary in their harmony of content and form. (In 1891, Edmond published *Outamaro*, in 1893, *L'art Japonais*, in 1896, *Hokousai*.) During their whole adult life, the Goncourts admired and collected Japanese art. It seems only natural that they – and especially Edmond – adopted certain techniques and 'ways of seeing.' 'Le beau en littérature est peut-être d'être un écrivain sans qu'on sente l'écriture...'¹³

The Goncourts' enthusiasm for Japanese art was by no means exceptional among European authors of the time. However, they were among the first enthusiasts, and they *did* create a new style. In 1874, Edmond complained:

Cette lorgnette (through which to see things in a new light), nous l'avions inventée; aujourd'hui, je vois tous les jeunes s'en servir, avec la candeur désarmante des gens qui en auraient, dans leur poche, le brevet d'invention.¹⁴

9 Harold G. Henderson, *An Introduction to Haiku* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1958) 148

10 Goncourt, VIII p 207

11 *Ibid.*, IX p 10

12 Henderson, 48

13 Goncourt, XV p 116ff

14 *Ibid.*, X p 172ff

One of the Goncourts' disciples (at least in spirit) was Jules Renard. Edmond de Goncourt had praised 'cette espèce de tendresse,' with which Japanese artists depict lowly animals – 'les plus viles, les plus humbles, les plus méprisées: le crapaud par exemple.'¹⁵ In 1896, Jules Renard published his *Histoires naturelles*, illustrated by Grandville (another edition by Toulouse-Lautrec). In Renard's book, other 'lowly' animals are characterized and, at the same time, put in relation to the human world. For instance:

Le Serpent.

I

Trop long.

II

La dix-millionième partie du quart du méridien terrestre.¹⁶

Or:

Le Ver Luisant

I

Que se passe-t-il? Neuf heures du soir et il y a encore de la lumière chez lui.

II

Cette goutte de lune dans l'herbe!¹⁷

And:

Le Papillon

Ce billet doux plié en deux cherche une adresse de fleur.¹⁸

It is significant that a contemporary critic, Marc Legrand, interpreted these aphorisms at once as 'Japanese paintings': 'Jules Renard a, en effet, la vision aussi aiguë, le trait aussi incisif, la couleur aussi éclatante, l'ingéniosité aussi exercée, que les peintres de Kakémonos. Jules Renard est un Japonais, mais il est mieux encore, il est un Japonais *ému*.'¹⁹ Renard's aphorisms might be read as poems in prose and compared to *haiku*. Renard's 'Le Papillon' is very much like a butterfly poem by Arakida Moritake (1452–1549):

Un pétale tombé

Remonte à sa branche:

Ah, c'est un papillon!²⁰

15 Ibid., XIII p 186

16 Jules Renard, *Les Œuvres complètes* (Paris: François Bernouard 1925–7) XIII 2 p 37

17 Ibid., 41

18 Ibid., 45

19 Quoted in Renard, XIII 2 p 81

20 Quoted by R.M. Rilke in his 'Lettre à Mademoiselle Sophy Giauque,' in *Rilke en Valais*. Numéro spécial de la *Revue Suisse Romande*, 3rd ser no 4 (1939) 198. Rilke's source was probably Paul-Louis Couchoud, *Sages et Poètes d'Asie* (Paris 1923).

Interesting in this context is a letter from Rainer Maria Rilke, written in 1925. Rilke had, at that time, some paintings of Sophy Giauque at his home and wrote to her about them:

autant d'images complètes, chacune une pensée des yeux ... ce qui confère à vos petites images cette force de contenter et de remplir une lente attention, n'est-ce point votre puissance d'avoir pu placer ces détails dans un espace tout intérieur et imaginaire sans faire aucun emprunt auprès de l'espace réel qu'imitent toutes les peintures (et d'ailleurs aussi tous les poèmes) incapables à se créer cet espace transposé, profond et intrinsèque ... cette réussite rare et exquise qui consiste à placer une chose imaginaire dans un espace approprié, c'est-à-dire tout aussi intérieur, telle que vous la réalisez, me fait penser aux Hai-Kai...²¹

In order to illustrate what he meant, he quoted a long list of Japanese *haiku* to her. The last he cited, however, he called a 'modern' one – 'Le Papillon' by Jules Renard! Instinctively Rilke had recognized a common denominator in Japanese poetry, Japanese-inspired aphorisms and a certain kind of painting.

One might ask whether the Goncourts, Renard, and possibly others were not impressed by Japanese literature rather than by Japanese art. But there were very few translations in French, German, and English at that time. The Goncourts, who commented on almost everything in their *Journal*, mention not a single one. The few existing translations were mostly written in an artificial, stilted language – anything but inspiring. Oral translations provided by Japanese friends can hardly have had a great effect. At this stage, only the Japanese visual arts were able to affect European art and literature. In about 1890, the so-called 'Japonism' reached Germany. The Germans were much less enthusiastic than the French. In 1899, Ernst Schur wrote:

Als man sich in Frankreich der neu entdeckten Kunst Japans mit einem Enthusiasmus in die Arme warf, dessen nur dieses Volk in Europa fähig war, da dachte wohl niemand daran, daß dieser leuchtende Stern so bald schwinden würde. . . . Hatte man wirklich ausgekostet, was auszukosten war? Es war wohl nur wie ein Vorübergang, der eine nahm dies, der andere jenes von der neuen Kunst . . . Der sogenannte Japonismus – das Schlagwort ist bezeichnend – war nur eine Mode.²²

In Germany, to be sure, Japanese drawings and colour-prints were also collected, but painters and designers learned more from French artists who had reacted to the Japanese stimulus than from the Japanese themselves. (Emil Orlik is an exception.) George Grosz writes in his memoirs: 'Merkwürdig,

²¹ Rilke, 'Lettre à Mademoiselle Sophy Giauque,' p 193ff

²² Ernst Schur, 'Der Geist der japanischen Kunst' *Ver Sacrum* 2 no 4 (1899) 5

merkwürdig: wenn ich auch Daumier, Lautrec, Forain und die japanischen Holzschnneider und Zeichner von ferne kennengelernt hatte, so trat ich doch nicht direkt in ihre Fußstapfen, sondern auf Umwegen in die ihrer kleineren Nachtreter.²³ No wonder that in Germany the result of the contact with Japanese pictorial art was not as impressive as in France. For one, the so-called 'Flächenkunst,' closely related to 'Jugendstil,' features certain Japanese elements. Cynically, Hanns von Gumpfenberg wrote in 1903: '... *Jugendstil* heißt jede Tapete, jeder Krawattenstoff, jeder Kattun, dessen Muster halb scheußlich, halb japanisch ist...'²⁴

In the field of literature, the effects of Japanese art were even less obvious. At the beginning of the nineties, one of the two intellectual centres in Germany was Berlin. There one could meet Ernst Schur, Arno Holz, Johannes Schlaf, Gerhart Hauptmann, Richard Dehmel, Otto Julius Bierbaum, the brothers Hart, Paul Ernst, Otto Erich Hartleben, Ola Hanson, August Strindberg, Edvard Munch, and Stanislaus Przybyszewski.

Among all these authors only Arno Holz and Ernst Schur were really interested in Japan. Holz was enthusiastic about Japanese colour-prints and collected them, as far as his modest means permitted. In July 1894, he wrote to Dehmel: 'Du mußt mich quam celerrimest mal wieder besuchen. Ich habe eine derartige Masse herrlichster japanischer Buntdrucke momentan zu Hause, daß Du Deine hellste Freude dran haben wirst!'²⁵ Ernst Schur had written: 'Die Bilder, die unsere Maler geben, sind so starr, so konzentriert, so schwer, so voll von Schwere; bei den Japanern ist alles Luft, Licht, Bewegung, Weite, Vorübergang.'²⁶ Holz seems to have felt the same; his friend Reinhard Piper mentions that Holz preferred the 'Völkerkunde-Museum' to the 'Altes Museum' by far: 'Aus der Kunst der großen europäischen Meister machte er sich nicht viel – die Japaner mit ihren geistreichen Bildausschnitten und den reizvoll zusammengestimmten Farben, ihrem technischen Geschick und ihren witzigen Einfällen bereiteten ihm viel mehr Vergnügen.'²⁷

Holz was a dedicated 'Naturalist.' With his collection of stories, *Papa Hamlet* (1889) and his play, *Familie Selicke* (1890), both written in collaboration with Johannes Schlaf, he had introduced a new prose style in German literature. He wanted to reform German poetry as well. From 1891 on he wrote poems without metre or rhyme, published in 1898 under the title *Phantasia*. Like some Japanese painters, Holz considered 'letzte Einfachheit' as the 'höchste Gesetz' and 'möglichste Natürlichkeit' as the 'intensivste

23 George Grosz, *Ein kleines Ja und ein großes Nein. Sein Leben von ihm selbst erzählt* (Hamburg: Rowohlt 1955) 89

24 *Jugend* 1903, nr 35

25 Arno Holz, *Briefe*, ed. Anita Holz und Max Wagner (München: Piper 1948) 97

26 Schur, 20

27 Reinhard Piper, *Vormittag. Erinnerungen eines Verlegers* (München: Piper 1947) 329

Kunstform.²⁸ His early *Phantasia*-poems are little reproductions of nature or daily life, caught in a special mood; a few must be interpreted as dreams in an exotic setting (Japan, for example). The first *Phantasia*-poem appeared in *Magazin für die Literatur des In- und Auslandes*, the next ones in *Moderner Musenalmanach auf das Jahr 1893*. One of these is quoted here:

Alter Garten.

Kein Laut.
Nur die Pappeln flüstern...

Der alte Tümpel vor mir schwarz wie Tinte,
Um mich, über mir, von allen Seiten,
Auf Fledermausflügeln,
Die Nacht,
Und nur drüben noch,
Zwischen den beiden Weidenstümpfen,
Die sich im Dunkel wie Drachen dehnen,
Matt, fahl, verröchelnd,
Ein letzter Schwefelstreif.

Auf ihm, scharf, ein Schattenbild:
Ein Faun, der die Flöte bläst.

Ich sehe deutlich seine Finger,
Zierlich alle gespreizt
Und die beiden kleinsten höchst kokett aufwärts gehoben.
Das graziöse Röhrchen quer in ihrer Mitte
Schwebt fast waagerecht über der linken Schulter.
Auf die rechte seh ich,
Nur den Kopf nicht.
Der fehlt.
Der ist runtergekollert.
Der liegt seit hundert Jahren schon
Unten im Tümpel.

Plitsch! – ?
Ein Frosch.

Ich bin zusammengeschocken,
Der Streif drüben erlischt,
Ich fühle, wie das Wasser Kreise treibt,

Und die uralte Steinbank,
 Auf der ich sitze,
 Schauert plötzlich ihre Kälte
 Bis ins Genick hinauf.

Still!! Schritte?

Nein. Nichts.
 Nur die Pappeln...²⁹

Holz painted a picture with words. It is not a 'Stilleben,' however, because it contains quietness as well as tension and movement. In a review, Hugo von Hofmannsthal called Holz' poems in *Moderner Musenalmanach auf das Jahr 1893* 'Bildchen.' About 'Alter Garten' he wrote:

Da ist keine Farbe, kein Strich zu viel: jeder Strich charakterisiert, begrenzt, schafft plastische, springende Gestalt. Das reine Zustandsbild ... ein alter Garten, in feuchtkalter Dämmerung, ein schwarzer Tümpel und daneben ein schwarzer Faun, scharf wie ein Schattenbild, flöte blasend, ohne Kopf – das macht ihm keiner nach, keiner in dieser absichtslosen, reinlichen, an die Japaner gemahnenden Manier.³⁰

It is significant again that the poem reminded Hofmannsthal of Japanese *paintings*. Obviously everybody in literary circles knew what the 'Manier' of Japanese painters was like. On the other hand, not one word is ever said about Japanese literature. As in France, only an exclusive little group of specialists worked on or read translations from the Japanese. Had Hofmannsthal been familiar with Japanese poetry at the time, he could not have failed to notice the similarity between the early *Phantasia*-poems and Japanese *waka* or *haiku*. Content and mood of 'Alter Garten' remind one of Japanese poems.

In Holz' poem, a man finds himself in an old garden. The trees whisper and take on intimidating shapes; light and warmth are fading. Loneliness and old age are suggested. Slowly the man becomes frightened. He realizes that human beings do not rule here anymore; the garden has been neglected for a long time. The sculpture without a head seems to tell him mockingly and warningly that the laws of nature have taken over. The head is lying in the pond, lost. The frog, however, jumps into the water gladly; it is not alienated from nature. In vain the man listens for the footsteps of a fellow human being. Karl Florenz wrote:

29 *Moderner Musenalmanach auf das Jahr 1893*, ed. Otto Julius Bierbaum (München: E. Albert & Co. 1893) 78ff. Holz did not use his 'Mittelachsentechnik' until 1897
 30 *Gesammelte Werke in Einzelausgaben*, ed. Herbert Steiner. *Prosa I* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer 1950) 133

Man muß sich etwa vorstellen, daß der Dichter an einem einsamen, verödeten Teich bei einem alten ... Tempel steht, ringsumher hohe Bäume, und tiefstes, feierliches Schweigen herrscht an der Stätte. Da plötzlich wird die träumerische Stille durch das Hineinpringen eines Frosches ins Wasser unterbrochen: die Natur hat gleichsam einen Laut ausgestossen.³¹

Karl Florenz's explanation was not written as an interpretation of Holz' 'Alter Garten,' but as an introduction to Bashō's famous *haiku* 'Old Pond' :

The old pond, ah!
A frog jumps in:
The water's sound!³²

In their content, in their meaning and mood, and even in their diction, the poems of Holz and Bashō resemble each other to such an extent that one can hardly believe that this similarity should be a coincidence. Was it one of his Japanese prints that inspired Holz to write 'Alter Garten'? Or did Holz know some Japanese poetry? Did this knowledge help him to develop his new techniques?

When the first part of *Phantasia* was published in book form in 1898, German critics tried to trace foreign 'influences.' Walt Whitman and Chinese poets of the T'ang period were mentioned. Nobody thought of Japanese poetry. Holz denied that Walt Whitman or the Chinese had influenced him. Again and again, he referred critics to the earliest poems of *Phantasia*, published before he had had any knowledge of Chinese poetry. However, the first *Phantasia*-poem had appeared in *Magazin für die Literatur des In- und Auslandes*, the same periodical where between 1870 and 1890 several articles on Japanese literature as well as translations from the Japanese had been published. Maybe Holz had read F.A. von Langeegg's review of Chamberlain's *Classical Poetry of the Japanese*? There Langeegg described some characteristics of the *uta* (*waka*): no rhyme, no metre. Each 'verse' has to have a certain number of syllables (5/7/5/7/7 = 31). The *naga-uta* was also explained: lines of five and seven syllables alternate until two lines of seven syllables conclude the poem.³³ But neither Bashō's *haiku* nor any *haiku* is mentioned in any issue of that periodical between 1870 and 1892.

We cannot establish what had really induced Holz to write his 'Alter Garten' the way he did. The fact remains that he has created a poem that can be interpreted, even in its metaphysical aspects, exactly like Bashō's 'Old

31 Karl Florenz, *Geschichte der japanischen Litteratur* (Leipzig: C.F. Amelang 1909) 451

32 Quoted by Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1971) 227

33 F.A. von Langeegg, 'Die klassische Dichtkunst der Japanen' *Das Magazin für die Literatur des In- und Auslandes* 50 (1881) 87-92

Pond,' which owes much of its depth to Zen. On the surface, Jules Renard's *Histoires naturelles* may resemble real *haiku* more closely. But it was Holz who has written the first poem in German or French which embodies the Zen spirit: a poem which captures a specific moment and at the same time opens insights into the timeless interplay between man and the universe.

In the case of Ernst Schur, the relation between his writing in the 'Japanese style' and Japanese art is quite obvious. Schur can serve as an example of how Japanese pictures can be 'translated' into poetic language. Between 1896 and 1898, he wrote his *Buch der dreizehn Erzählungen*. In the form of impressionist sketches he described scenes and landscapes he had actually seen on Japanese paintings. In most of the stories there is no plot at all, hardly even movement. Schur wanted to paint with words: 'seine Worte sollten sich für den Leser in Bilder zurückverwandeln ...'³⁴ One of his 'Erzählungen' is called 'Das Theefest am Hakone-See.' We are told about a festival at night, on the shore of a lake in Japan: boats, a high bridge with many people on it, the light playing on the water, colours:

Auf dem Wasser, soweit es sich dem Ausschnitt bietet, liegen lange Streifen vibrierenden, zuckenden Lichts. Striche, wie mit einem flotten, zügellosen Pinsel in Willkür hingesezt. Schwarz, weiß und violett blinkt das Wasser und tanzt und funkelt in Glätte. ... All die tausend Farben gleiten blitzend und aufleuchtend in das dunkle, tiefe Wasser, und versinken. Das plätschert dazu im gleichen, leisen Tonfall, um die Boote. Fernhin spannt sich über das Wasser in leichtem Bogen eine hohe Holzbrücke. Ueber die Brücke ergiesst sich der Strom der Menschen in langen, nicht unterbrochenen Zügen...³⁵

This description fits several Japanese colour-prints. In his essay 'Der Geist der japanischen Kunst,' Schur named his model: 'Ich erinnere an einzelne Bilder. "Das Theefest." Unzählige Nachen bedecken den Strom; am gegenüberliegenden Ufer leuchtende Theehäuser, auf jedem Kahn leuchtet ein Lampion mit jenem zarten weichen Licht. Es ist Nacht. Eine unübersehbare Menschenmenge strömt über die hohe Brücke. Es ist unendlich still – trotz der Fülle...'³⁶ Schur's interpretation of such pictures is noteworthy: 'Die Farben, die Formen, die Kompositionen wirken wie Ahnungen eines höheren Lebens. ... Die Unendlichkeit, die unabgeschlossene Weite des Horizonts ist das Wesen dieser Kunst.'³⁷ In order to penetrate so far into a foreign way of thinking and feeling, one has to have a certain inner predisposition, a natural affinity. Among the writers in Germany before the turn

³⁴ Ernst Schur *Gedächtnisbuch*, ed. Monty Jacobs (Berlin 1913) iii

³⁵ Ernst Schur, *Das Buch der dreizehn Erzählungen* (Leipzig: Seemann 1902) 85, 89

³⁶ Schur, 'Der Geist der japanischen Kunst,' 6

³⁷ Ibid.

of the century, only Arno Holz and Ernst Schur seem to have had a deep understanding of Japanese art: *'Die japanische Kunst trägt in sich eine Weltanschauung. Es ist etwas Pantheistisches darin, der Mensch verschwindet vollkommen; keine Kunst lehrt so wie die japanische die Kleinheit des Daseins, die Größe dieser Kleinheit und die Hingebung an etwas, das ausser mir ist...'*³⁸

In France, the interest in Japanese art was kept alive after 1900. There were more translations of Japanese literature, and soon French writers began to compose real *haiku*. Pierre Loti's Japanese travel sketches and his 'Japanese' novels reached the height of their popularity. In Germany, the victory of Japan over Russia in 1905 made a tremendous impression. Japan became 'salonfähig'; everybody wanted to know about Japan. Most of Lafcadio Hearn's many books were translated into German; Max Dauthendey travelled to Japan in 1906, Bernhard Kellermann in 1909. Their travelogues in book form were bestsellers. For the average European, Japan became the country of little geisha girls, of cherry blossoms, and of the Fujiyama. In Japan, the natives spent their lives happily, looking at flowers and at the moon, dancing, and composing strange little poems. They also produced the fashionable colour-prints. In the first edition of *Phantasia* (1898-9), Holz had depicted Japan as a dream land. In the 1916 edition, he makes fun of his former love for Japanese paintings:

Menschen, die Goya,
den Dom von Pistoja, den Pass von Maloja, die Ruinen von Troja,
Masanobu, Motonobu, Moronobu,
Morikuni,
Yeitoku, Sanraku, Utanosuke und Utamaro lieben,
seltne,
ganz ausgefallne,
verdrehte Exemplare und Hühner...³⁹

Holz also parodies the romantic image of Japan. With pungent humour he destroys the cliché of the charming country with its dainty little geisha girls. We meet 'ein zierlichstes, niedlichstes Geishageschöpfchen' on 'kleinen klappernden Klickklackpantöffelchen,' wearing a 'starrgürtlig breitärmlich faltigen Brokatkimono.' Suddenly, however, the lovely lady transforms herself into a grotesque 'Dame Bötterflai,' into a monster with a 'schlenkernden Schlangenhals,' 'gelben stoßspitz krummen Raffzähnen und grünen,

³⁸ Ibid., 11

³⁹ Arno Holz, *Phantasia* (Leipzig: Insel 1916) 264

schleimig ... gestielten Schneckenaugen.' In English and Japanese (the Japanese language has, in fact, taken over many English words) she asks for a kiss: 'Aru kissu!! Aru kissu!! Aru chisai kissu!! ... A little kiss!! ... Koibito, amai! My darling! Sweetheart...'⁴⁰ Holz also ridicules the enthusiasm about *uta*-poems which had meanwhile (1916) developed in Germany. We are assured that, to praise this 'Geishageschöpfchen,' there have 'gewiss schon einunddreissig Yeddodichter zu ihren einunddreissig feinen, drolligst, nuttigst, putzigst kleinen, naturseligst klangfröhlichst gefühl-süberschwänglichst schnadahüpfelnden Einunddreissigsilbengedichtchen einunddreissig Samisen gezupft!'⁴¹

By 1916, popular enthusiasm for Japan had finally taken root in Germany; not even the First World War could alter that. The reasons behind this enthusiasm have changed several times since then, but it is still strongly alive today.

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⁴⁰ Ibid., 177ff

⁴¹ Ibid., 177