

## Europe, Asie, Inde

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### Foreign Legions: Exoticism and Empire in Jules Claretie's City of Light

Jules Claretie (1840-1913), the prolific late 19<sup>th</sup>-century man of letters—he authored fiction, plays, libretti and volumes of history—was elected to the French Academy in 1888. For over forty years Claretie also practiced journalism, his major accomplishment being a series of articles, written from 1880 until his death in 1913, for one of the most respected newspapers of the day, *Le Temps*. Entitled “*La Vie à Paris*,” these descriptions of—and commentary upon—daily life in the capital were subsequently published in eponymous volumes.

I propose to examine the image of the foreign “other” that Claretie presented to his readers in essays appearing between 1896 and 1913. Sometimes it is news of foreign events which inspire his essays, such as was the case in 1904. Seeing only through an aesthetic lense, Parisian *japonisants*, Claretie writes, happily collected ivory netsukes, scroll paintings, woodblock prints and decorated screens, thereby helping create the popular image of Japan as a little paradise where precious bibelots were its citizens primary preoccupation. This picture was shattered by the Russo-Japanese war where the “*violence savamment calculée du barbare éclairé à l'électricité*” portended, he predicts, a future duel between Europe and Asia.

On other occasions it is the world which came to Paris, as was the case in 1896 when the Chinese statesman Li Hung-chang visited. Exoticism and empire arrived front and center in Parisian life during the 1900 Exposition Universelle and the 1907 Exposition coloniale. Claretie accompanies his readers through the many exhibitions depicting foreign cultures and while he describes their exotic decor, costumes and customs he also questions the validity of France's “civilizing mission.” Claretie uses the exhibitions to explore France's problematic relationship with her colonies, in particular those in the Islamic world. The cancellation in Paris of a play entitled “Mahomet,” motivated by a fear that newspaper reviews of it would inflame the Muslim world, suggests to Claretie the coming of a “Holy War.” While he admits that exoticism was indeed a passion of the Parisians of his day, Claretie, in the end, appears uncertain as to whether the “*la France d'outre-mer*” should be more appropriately named “*la France d'outre-tombe*.”

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### Derrière l'image, aux sources de la conquête indochinoise (1850-1900)

Cette présentation se propose de suivre, au travers de récits de voyage et de photographies de la deuxième moitié du XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle, le parcours d'hommes, à la fois acteurs et spectateurs d'un monde colonial inachevé : la future Indochine française.

Les trajectoires variées des auteurs choisis permettent d'en dresser un tableau intéressant. Mais il faut bien mesurer la différence entre Mouhot, l'explorateur solitaire qui périt au cœur de la jungle laotienne, Hocquard le médecin-militaire, photographe qui analyse avec une finesse incroyable la culture vietnamienne, et Auguste Pavie par exemple, qui relate pour la postérité la

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manière dont il a pacifié le Nord de l'Indochine, ou encore Gsell, le portraitiste talentueux dont l'œuvre prête à confusion.

Etant donnée la double nature textuelle et visuelle des regards étudiés qui portent sur la mosaïque ethnique et culturelle de cet Orient extrême, la présentation s'inscrit dans une perspective à la fois sémiotique (rapports texte-image) et anthropologique (exotisme et altérité).

Le dialogue entre le texte et l'image du référentiel indochinois implique un point de vue à la fois rhétorique et culturel. D'une part il suggère l'écart qui peut exister a priori entre un narrateur qui nécessairement se met en scène et un photographe souvent anonyme qui lui s'efface derrière son image. D'autre part il interroge l'élaboration du stéréotype : nos auteurs, qui ont un rapport direct à l'objet, en sont-ils les instigateurs et médiateurs, ou au contraire, échappent-ils aux clichés ?

Andrew Watts

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### Inverting the Provincial Exotic: Dai Sijie's *Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse chinoise*

The aim of this paper is to examine the perceived exoticism of nineteenth-century provincial France in Dai Sijie's *Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse chinoise* (2000). This multi-award-winning novel offers a unique perspective on French provincial literature as viewed through the prism of 1970s China and Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution. For the fictional protagonists, two middle-class adolescents and the beautiful but uneducated seamstress, the experience of reading banned Western novels serves as an awakening to freedom and creative possibility. The work of Balzac, furthermore, is endowed with 'une saveur exotique [...] comme le parfum envoûtant d'un alcool conservé depuis des siècles dans une cave'.<sup>1</sup> The nature of this exoticism is, however, problematic, not least because it is the boredom of provincial life, and the petty jealousies of small-town Nemours in Balzac's *Ursule Mirouët* (1842), that capture the imagination of three readers already trapped in a world of near-insufferable mediocrity. This realisation forms the basis of a paper in which I argue that multiple inversions of the Exotic can be seen to operate in Dai Sijie's work, where the somber provinces of Western literature are called upon to satisfy the demand of Far Eastern readers for their own means of exotic escape. More importantly, I demonstrate that such a reversal of literary expectations encourages us to re-evaluate the status of Balzac in present-day China, where the capitalist dreams of Dai Sijie's seamstress, who follows the example of her hero, Rastignac, by migrating to the city, have provided readers with a new, and politically subversive, role model.

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<sup>1</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse chinoise* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), p. 71 ['an exotic fragrance [like] the perfume wreathing a wine stored for centuries in a cellar', *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, trans. by Ina Rilke (London: Vintage, 2003), p. 52].

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### Women Authors, Political Propaganda and the Salon: Arbiters of Cultural Exchange and Liberty during the Napoleonic Wars

During the Napoleonic Wars an important group of women authors and salon hostesses emerged. They were educated in the Enlightenment and appreciated the new Romantic style in art and literature. Their activities represent a new political activism for women who took a stand on the issue of democracy in contrast with the imperialism of Napoleon. They used literature and art as a means of patriotic social propaganda that reinforced their goals of liberty and the defeat of Napoleonic hegemony. Members of the aristocracy, or closely associated with them through the forum of the salon, their contribution is all the more remarkable in creating a new orientation for social and political change. Some of them were identified as subversive elements by Napoleon, and forced to live in exile. There they actively advocated an end to the empire, and promoted literary archetypes in art and the novel as contemporary social role models that reinforced their goal. In addition, these literary archetypes, having their origins in Neoclassical role models and children's literature, and following the example of instruction in Rousseau's *Emile*, were used to create an iconic semiotic language to address public morals and orchestrate political change through the aesthetic response, and its association with moral values. De Staël's trip to Germany and her survey of German Romantic culture, *On Germany*, created a pivotal link with the German resistance movement behind the Wars of Liberation against Napoleon. She maintained close social ties with leading members of the German nobility and Romantic circle who actively promoted political propaganda in support of the Wars of Liberation using the similar propaganda strategies. In the propaganda of the Napoleonic Wars, culture became the medium of exchange as Napoleon's troops moved into Italy and Germany, and sought to appropriate cultural hegemony in support of Imperial ambitions. Neoclassicism, Romanticism and Imperialism drew on Classical and Medieval culture, and its heroes and heroines became actors on a social stage that reinforced the goals of patriotism in Republican or Imperial Rome, and feudal medieval Germany, serving as role models for contemporary political propaganda.

The women in France include Germaine de Staël, author of *Corinne* (1807) and *On Germany* (1810), whose politically active salon was forced to move from Paris to Coppet, Switzerland, and Stephanie Genlis, governess of the future Louis-Philippe and author of *Athenais* set at de Staël's chateau Coppet, and children's literature like *Adele and Theodore*, as well as the famous beauty and salon hostess Juliette Récamier. All three were intimately acquainted and frequented de Staël's Paris and Coppet salons together with leading intellectuals and politicians, such as Chateaubriand and Benjamin Constant. In Berlin, Germany, Jewish women including Dorothea Schlegel, wife of Friedrich Schlegel, a leading Romantic critic, and Rebecca Friedländer (Regina Froberg) were closely associated with the politically active Romantic Berlin salons of Rahel Levin and Henrietta Herz. Dorothea Schlegel, author of *Florentin* (1801), was acquainted with de Staël through her brother-in-law August Wilhelm Schlegel, who moved to de Staël's Coppet estate as a tutor for her children. Regina Froberg, the former wife of David Friedländer, was the author of numerous novels including *Schmerz der Liebe* (1810) about a woman artist commissioned to paint the portrait of a nobleman. Finally, in Italy, Louis Stolberg, the former wife of the last Stuart Pretender to the English throne, maintained an active anti-Napoleonic salon in Florence with the Italian Neoclassical author and Medici historian Vittorio Alfieri that included André Chénier and Francois-Xavier Fabre, a pupil of the Neoclassical

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painter David. Stolberg also maintained close contacts with members of de Staël's literary Coppet salon, author Charles Bonstettan and Italian historian J.C.L. Sismondi. When de Staël researched her novel *Corinne*, she stayed with Stolberg, and included her heroine's dramatic visit to the Medici tombs at San Lorenzo in Florence in the final chapters of her novel where Corinne dies.

By focusing on the forum of the salon as a political entity in which contact was facilitated between French, German and Italian salons, the common goals of political freedom and liberty emerge in its participants. My scholarship is new in that it emphasizes the common goals held by these women, and examines their literary activism in the context of the political transition from the Revolution to Empire, and resulting Wars of Liberation, and the styles of Neoclassicism and Romanticism. My research emphasizes those styles as form of political propaganda that draws on literary archetypes of heroes and heroines as contemporary role models for social change, and implements propaganda through existing models of aesthetics and semiotics, and makes their joint contribution as politically active women the focus of scholarship for the first time. My semiotic interpretation builds on the research of the French Revolution by Lynn Hunt and Joan Landes, and identifies a systematic semiotic approach among literary heroic archetypes as a propaganda program designed to rally support for the Wars of Liberation in Germany.