

Exhibiting Culture

Chair: Virginia Scott, Vanderbilt University

Elizabeth Erbeznik
University of Texas at Austin

“Foreign, after a Fashion: Dressing the French Body in Balzac’s *La Cousine Bette* and Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*”

While fashion and the production of apparel have long been viewed as Parisian industries *par excellence*, the garment trades have, since the early nineteenth century, relied on the influx of foreign and provincial workers to meet the demands of the busy high seasons. By the end of the century, however, these workers (Jews and Eastern Europeans, as opposed to the earlier Germans and Belgians) were no longer leaving Paris at the end of the high season, and social observers expressed concern and indignation about the impact of immigrants on the French fashion industry. Looking at two mid-century texts, Balzac’s *La Cousine Bette* (1847) and Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1857), I intend to read the characters of Lisbeth Fischer and Lheureux as early embodiments of this “foreign threat” to French fashion and womanhood. Exploring the ways in which their status as Alsatian *ouvrière en passementerie* and Gascon *marchand d’ étoffes* initially set the terms for their inclusion within the larger social body, I will show how their behavior, constantly coded as foreign or, more problematically, Jewish by Balzac and Flaubert, marked them as outsiders and therefore dangerous to the French (social and physical) body. While commentators decried the multitude of immigrant workers dressing the nation, Balzac and Flaubert showed that a single foreign worker could corrupt women and families through false appearances and a willingness to “guide” the naïve housewife. Focusing on the alien attributes of Bette and Lheureux, I hope to illustrate the extent to which the fear of the foreign textile worker quickly went beyond questions of economics or aesthetics to become a far more pressing issue concerning the very stability and integrity of the mothers and families of France.

June K. Laval
Kennesaw State University

The Exotic *Indiennes*: Textile Rage of 19th Century France

The first painted and printed cottons or *Indiennes*, originated from India, are believed to have been unloaded in France in the 16th century, in Marseilles. Before the arrival of the printed goods, the wealthy had dressed exclusively in silks, damasks, and brocades. The other classes wore clothes fashioned from wool, linen and homespun. The new colorful printed cottons were a huge hit with all social classes. In fact, they were so popular that the silk, linen and woolen merchants convinced Louis XIV in 1686 to prohibit the importation and production in France of printed cottons. When it was finally lifted in 1759, new factories were established all over France, notably in Mulhouse, Rouen, Orange, Jouy-en-Josas, Nantes and Bordeaux. Subsequent French rulers were much more supportive of this new textile industry, in particular Napoléon Bonaparte, as this paper will discuss.

There were two basic kinds of toiles. One was the small floral design or “calico” type, produced before and after the ban. The other type was the famous figural design which depicted

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current events, literary and mythological themes, and country scenes. These were produced after the ban was lifted. During the time of their production, these textiles were original and exotic and became instantly popular.

In my presentation, I will show textile examples of 18th and 19th century indiennes and will also examine in detail period textile examples of toiles showing Paul et Virginie (1785), the life and death of Joan of Arc (1815), Telemachus in Calypso's cave (1785), and finally episodes in the life of Napoléon Bonaparte (1840), which documents important highlights of Napoléon Bonaparte's career. These period textile examples show artistic creation of popular themes of the day appealing to the public's desire for unusual, new designs for clothing and decoration.

Geneviève Sicotte
Université Concordia

Les bibelots exotiques chez quelques écrivains de la fin de siècle

Les œuvres de la fin de siècle sont remplies de bibelots précieux, de vêtements aux tissus inestimables, de fleurs rares et troublantes, de bijoux et d'ornements. Chez Edmond de Goncourt, J.-K. Huysmans ou Jean Lorrain, cette matérialité décorative joue un rôle très important. La communication s'intéressera à cette attention quasi obsessionnelle portée aux objets en analysant le cas des artefacts exotiques, qu'il s'agisse des « japonaiseries » de Goncourt, des plantes maldives de Huysmans ou des fétiches de Lorrain. Les bibelots exotiques décrits dans les textes de ces écrivains sont thématiques comme des parcelles de l'ailleurs, uniques et irremplaçables, foncièrement inutiles, et parfois dotées de pouvoirs mystérieux. Ces objets apparaissent porteurs de sens, à la fois au point de vue idéologique et esthétique. Au point de vue idéologique, les bibelots exotiques s'opposent aux objets manufacturés par l'industrie. Alors que les objets industriels sont caractérisés par leur banalité, leur reproductibilité et leur statut de marchandise, les artefacts exotiques se démarquent par leur inutilité et leur caractère unique qui semblent les faire échapper à l'économie de marché. Au point de vue esthétique, le déplacement spatial dont ils sont investis, et qu'ils peuvent continuer à communiquer même lorsqu'ils sont « hors-contexte », les rend aptes à véhiculer la défamiliarisation devenue essentielle à l'avant-garde littéraire de l'époque. Dans un monde banal, ils sont des points de cristallisation de cette valeur moderne par excellence : le bizarre. Les objets exotiques des décors fin de siècle ne traduisent donc pas qu'une préoccupation bourgeoise pour la matérialité, mais participent véritablement au positionnement des œuvres.

Jeremy Worth
The University of Windsor, Canada

“Un vrai tableau dans un cadre”: The Recolonization of the Second-Empire Subject and the Specificity of the Domestic Object in Zola

As Janell Watson asserts in *Literature and Material Culture from Balzac to Proust*, “[d]escriptions of the nineteenth-century interior tend to be composed such that the physical structures of the house (layout and furnishings) parallel family structures, social structures, and

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[...] psychological structures”¹. In this paper, I will explore how the “recolonisation” of the Second-Empire subject, the consolidation of the hegemonic regime’s determining social and psychological influence, is symbolically expressed in the forms and functions of particular symmetrical domestic objects and structures in Zola’s *Rougon-Macquart* series. I will demonstrate how specific representations and narrative uses of these objects (notably bedsteads, picture frames, door frames, armoires and other wooden or metal constructions) serve to create, in the manner described by Claude Duchet in “Roman et Objets”, significant paradigmatic relationships between scenes in various novels: “Il s’agit en somme de séries paradigmatiques dont l’objet serait l’invariant. Un mot signal peut suffire à substituer une séquence à une autre, à les plonger dans une même atmosphère [...]. Certains objets, d’abord innocents en apparence, peuvent ainsi être entraînés dans une série qui en force le sens”². These objects, then, will be read in all their “épaisseur symbolique”³ as loci of psychic capture, linking them also to more obvious symbols of “colonization” such as the famous bell jar image of *La Curée*, and all prefiguring the ultimate “framing” and identity-fixing, the final immobilization of the “captured” subject, that is to be read in images of laying-out and of the coffin-encased corpse: “un vrai tableau dans un cadre”⁴.

¹ Janell Watson, *Literature and Material Culture from Balzac to Proust*. Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp.143-144.

² Claude Duchet, “Roman et objets” in *Travail de Flaubert*, ed. R. Debray-Genette et al. Paris: Seuil, coll. Points, 1983, pp. 11-43, p.37.

³ *Ibid.*, p.20.

⁴ Emile Zola, *Les Rougon-Macquart*, Paris: Gallimard (La Pléiade), 1960 – 1967, II, p.666.