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Compare and Contrast: Rhetorical Strategies in Edmond de Goncourt's *Japonisme*
by Pamela Warner

After the opening of economic and cultural trade between Japan and Europe and the United States in 1854, a predominant view of Japanese art and culture as fundamentally different from their European equivalents began to dominate nineteenth-century European commentaries. For example, in an 1867 article, Zacharie Astruc spoke of "this Orient, so different from us." Japan's difference was exactly what made it so exciting to Astruc, who was enthusiastic about the "new inspiration" that could be drawn from "this far away people."¹ In 1868, Jules Champfleury agreed on the essential difference of Japanese art, but he condemned the growing fascination with its "bizarre use of color," as he described the impact of James McNeil Whistler's enthusiasm for Japanese lacquer-ware and kimonos. He argued that the American artist made paintings "so bizarre that they troubled the eyes of the naive men who sought positions on...exhibition juries."² Champfleury ultimately feared that France was "threatened with a Japanese invasion in painting."³ These positions reflect what Gabriel P. Weisberg has described as a dualism between two quickly emerging camps: those who feared Japanese influence and those who embraced its potentially liberating aesthetic.⁴ Regardless of whether European critics liked or disliked Japanese art, however, their comments presupposed Japanese exoticism and difference.⁵



Fig. 1. Anonymous, Edmond de Goncourt in his garden, c. 1895. Photograph on albumen paper. Paris, coll. Christian Galantaris.

While the common view of Japan was one of exoticism and difference, this outlook was not shared by all. Edmond de Goncourt (fig. 1) stood out among commentators on Japan for repeatedly asserting formal and social similarities between its culture and that of France.⁶ Japan struck him not only by its difference, but also by its sameness. Both France and Japan, in his view, were countries with a waning aristocratic culture that had reached its purest expression in the eighteenth century. He felt strongly that the best artists from both nations were not those who adhered to official schools and lifeless academic formulas, but rather those whose art captured and celebrated the daily lives and vitality of their most refined and beautiful people. Goncourt praised Utamaro and Hokusai for Japan; Watteau, Chardin, and Fragonard for France.

The parallels Goncourt drew between French and Japanese art were almost always qualified however. In spite of Japan's similarities, it could never be completely assimilated into a French model. This essay will examine Goncourt's construction of both similarity and difference. My goal is not to ascertain whether France and Japan "really were" alike or unlike, but rather to question the motivations that inspired assertions of similarity or difference. Relationships of analogy and contrast pepper Edmond de Goncourt's various writings about Japan to such an extent that it becomes difficult to ascertain whether he ultimately agreed with his contemporaries about Japan's exoticism. Given this ambiguity, I will explore how the analogies and contrasts functioned together as new arguments in support of Edmond de Goncourt's long-held (and frequently attacked) aesthetic

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positions, which primarily concerned France and not Japan. In order to fully understand his analogies, we must place them into the context of French aesthetic debates, rather than merely dismiss them as inaccurate, fanciful, or wrong about Japan and its artistic culture.⁷ Goncourt's preferred aesthetic criteria were increasingly being sidelined in both contemporary avant-garde painting and in the art critical and art historical literature of the period. His writing on Japanese art therefore attempted to reinforce the value of aesthetic qualities he felt were neglected or unrecognized by his contemporaries. Far from a simple, uncomplicated "passion for" Japanese art, Edmond de Goncourt's embrace of it reflected a diverse range of personal and socio-cultural interests.⁸



Fig. 2. Fernand Lochar, Vestibule of the Goncourts' house in Auteuil, June, 1886. Photograph on albumen paper. Paris, coll. Frits Lugt, Institut Néerlandais.

Among *Japonisme* scholars, Edmond de Goncourt is most notorious for his repeated and insistent claims that he and his brother Jules were the first Europeans to recognize the artistic interest of Japanese prints in the early 1850s.⁹ While this claim has since been thoroughly debunked,¹⁰ the Goncourt brothers certainly belonged to the earliest group of French men fascinated by Japanese art and culture in the early 1860s. Twenty years later, Edmond's book on his house, *La Maison d'un artiste*, published in 1881, dedicated long passages to descriptions of his collection of Japanese prints, Chinese porcelains, and other East Asian decorative arts, helping to diffuse the taste for Japanese objects as part of an aesthetic interior (fig. 2).¹¹

Goncourt can rightfully claim primacy for other ventures: in 1891, he published the first art historical monograph on Kitagawa Utamaro, followed in 1896 by one on Katsushika Hokusai.¹² At the time of publication, these two books were the only comprehensively researched monographs on any Japanese artist available in any language, and were intended to open a series of twelve more individual studies left incomplete at Edmond's death in 1896.¹³ Goncourt's fame as a *Japoniste*¹⁴ increased posthumously with the highly publicized sale of his collection of Asian and French art, the proceeds of which founded the Académie Goncourt.¹⁵

Since Edmond never traveled to the Far East,¹⁶ his remarks pertain to the works of art he studied and collected, and to the Japanese people that he encountered in Paris. He had many sources for learning about Japanese art, perhaps none more important than Hayashi Tadamasu, a Japanese dealer living in Paris and one of Goncourt's primary interlocutors. Hayashi was a tremendously important figure in the transmission, popularization, and diffusion of Japanese art and culture in Europe. He first came to Paris in 1878 as a salesperson and interpreter for the largest Japanese export company, Kiry? K?sh? Kaisha (Kiry? Crafts & Trading Company), which supplied goods to the Japanese pavilion at that year's World's Fair.¹⁷ He stayed to sell the remaining merchandise once the fair closed, and eventually went on to become, with Siegfried Bing, one of the pre-eminent dealers of Japanese art in Paris.

Goncourt and Hayashi came into contact through the enthusiastic and competitive Parisian milieu of *Japonisants*, meeting for the first time at a dinner at Philippe Burty's house on November 28, 1878.¹⁸ In addition to these social settings, which also had political and commercial overtones, Goncourt regularly frequented Hayashi in his salesroom, eventually befriending him and working closely with him on the preparation of his monographs on Utamaro and Hokusai.¹⁹ Edmond's studied and self-conscious erudition allowed him to display his vast connoisseurial knowledge of art from a range of countries and periods by drawing from a wide field of comparative material. In sense that, going beyond obvious comparisons, he sought to

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surprise and trump even his most aesthetically well-versed readers with witty and unexpected analogies, always keeping the upper hand in a game of visual one-upmanship. The comparisons to eighteenth-century art, his area of expertise, were a way of placing his intellectual signature on the books.

Long before Edmond met Hayashi, however, he and his brother Jules began to make connections between Japanese and French culture.²⁰ Edmond and Jules had the opportunity to see Japanese ink drawings (as opposed to the more common prints) firsthand in the Siebold collection in Leiden in 1861. Comparing the drawings favorably to sketches by Fragonard, the Goncourts first established parallels between these two cultures by claiming that the Japanese drawings “have the wit and picturesque touch of an ink drawing by Fragonard.”²¹ Three years later, they insisted that Japanese prints and paintings by Watteau were both “drawn from the intimate study of nature,” and argued that, in spite of their fanciful appearance to European eyes, Japanese prints were based on observation and rendered “what the Japanese artists saw.”²² Edmond ultimately described Utamaro as the “Watteau of over there,”²³ because both artists exhibited a sustained preference for female subjects. The phrase *le Watteau de là-bas* at once asserted an equivalency that characterized the Japanese artist using a French artist’s name, while at the same time underscoring his geographic distance. Crucial elements of Goncourt’s comparative criteria thus take shape: wit and art based in the direct observation of reality that transcribes life “as it was lived.”



Fig. 3. Kitagawa Utamaro, *Shelter from a Sudden Storm*, c. 1779-80. Polychrome ink and color on paper. Tokyo National Museum, inv. 3538.

These generalizing comparisons sometimes grow particular with comments made about specific works of art. Edmond described a woman running from a sudden rainstorm in an Utamaro print as having, “the pretty momentum of the statue of Atalante in the Tuileries garden (figs. 3 & 4),”²⁴ while he noticed that a Japanese god named Hotei drawn by Hokusai juggles a Japanese boy on his feet “as in the *Gimblette* by Fragonard.”²⁵ Both of these comparisons turn on the coincidental formal similarities of pose and action without asserting anything deeper about Japanese or French character. In both of these examples, natural movement and playfulness united the works as expressions of human vitality. By focusing on shared subjects and formal qualities in Japanese and French art, Goncourt “Frenchified” Japanese artists and their work.

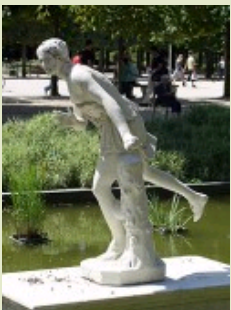


Fig. 4. Pierre Lepautre, *Atalante*, 1704. Marble. Paris, Tuileries Garden. Photo by the author.

Edmond took the French frame of reference for Japanese art to an extreme in *La Maison d'un artiste*, where, in dating a Japanese bronze of 1783 from the Cernuschi collection, he used French historical periods rather than Japanese ones: “And to what period does the bronze statue of Ban Kurobioe by Murata Shosaburo Kunihissa...belong? To late Louis XVI, [or] perhaps from the period of the Directory.”²⁶ The Edo period statue in fact derives from one of the most stable eras in Japanese history,²⁷ the contrary of French upheavals during the same time, and the terms Louis XVI or Directory thus had no validity in relation to the periodization of Japanese art. Seeing Japanese art through eyes deeply familiar with eighteenth-century France caused Edmond to find connections in surprising places, and he clearly situated the Japanese work in a French frame of reference, presumably familiar to his readers.

When Goncourt was not comparing specific works of art to each other, he frequently used the exact same vocabulary to describe

eighteenth-century French and Japanese art. Compare, for example, his description of what he saw as the typical way Hokusai represented the female body around 1804: "a gracious little elongated woman...with cute features...an elegant type of woman, fluid;"²⁸ with this description of a statuette in his collection attributed to Clodion: "a young woman, a little bit lanky, with long thighs, cute thin thighs...in her elongated grace."²⁹ A similar linguistic parallelism marked his characterizations of Hokusai and Chardin,³⁰ in which both artists were praised for their fire and for their genius that expressed itself instinctually from the first brushstroke or drawn line and that captured the life, vitality, and movement of their subjects. In spite of the thirty years that separated the two texts, Edmond returned to the same vocabulary he had used to defend French eighteenth-century art to write about Japanese art. He legitimized the newly discovered art through the weight of his work on the past, and reinforced and confirmed the value of that earlier position by identifying a similar current in another culture. The arts of the two nations seem to play a mutually reinforcing role in Edmond's writing of the 1880s and 90s.

In addition to using a strikingly similar vocabulary to praise eighteenth-century French art and Japanese art, Goncourt also traced the same historical trajectory for the arts of both nations. He located a pure expression of Japanese art in the eighteenth century between an earlier period of Chinese influence on Japan and the later modernization undertaken with the advent of the Meiji empire.³¹ That this period coincided with his sense of French art reaching its purest expression in the eighteenth century only played into his nostalgia for a lost era of French essences, destroyed by the Revolution and the crass taste of the bourgeois governments that replaced the *ancien régime*. Hokusai therefore played a significant role in Goncourt's understanding of the Japanese canon because he was the first artist, in Edmond's mind, to have thrown off the mantle of Chinese influence and express an essentially national Japanese style.³²

This reading of Hokusai's place in Japanese art history resonated with arguments Edmond and Jules had made in the 1860s about eighteenth-century artists. Edmond's discussions of Japanese art in terms borrowed from his earlier analyses of French art participated then in his ongoing campaign to reposition the values of eighteenth-century French art at the center of French art history. Goncourt's vision of the historical arc of that history was marked by a period of lost essences, corresponding to the eighteenth century, that was corrupted by the modernizing forces unleashed by the French Revolution.³³ This position was increasingly at odds with the histories of French art emerging in the second half of the nineteenth century, which placed the French "golden age" either in the seventeenth century or in the Neoclassical school of David and Ingres.³⁴ The art of the early eighteenth century was either overlooked or treated as frivolous, decadent, or both, and was rarely evoked as a model to be followed in the way that Poussin and other academicians were.³⁵ Edmond opened his book on Hokusai with the lament: "In the two hemispheres, then, there is the same injustice for any independent talent from the past!"³⁶ The language he used to contrast Hokusai—lively, passionate, original—with the academic painters of the Tosa school—pompous artificiality, precious conventions, imitators, idealists—took up once again the battle he and his brother had waged against the French academy.³⁷ In both countries, the brothers were drawn to neglected, scorned artists, and used them to critique the very institutions that rejected them.³⁸

The best methodological tool for countering that neglect was the

legitimizing format of the monograph. Goncourt's overall method for interpreting Japanese art thus also extended patterns he established with his brother in their writing on eighteenth-century French art. Edmond's choice to write individual monographs on single "great" artists, rather than a general history of the art of Japan, repeated the formula he had already used twenty years earlier for eighteenth-century French artists.³⁹ His monographs included the juxtaposition of flowery descriptive passages written in what the brothers called their *écriture artiste*⁴⁰ with drier, journalistic reporting on the facts and dates of the artist's life. Given that biography since Vasari remained the predominant mode of art historical writing, the very fact of writing a biographical book on an artist conferred significant status on the subject as worthy of such treatment. Edmond was certainly aware of this connection. In yet another of his East-West comparisons, he called Hokusai's native biographers "Japanese Vasaris."⁴¹

Goncourt's predilection for reading both French and Japanese genre scenes as direct documents of daily life represents another shared methodology in his approach to the arts of the two countries.⁴² In the prefaces to their books *Les Maîtresses de Louis XV* (1860) and *La Femme au dix-huitième siècle* (1862), the Goncourts made a systematic case about images as a documentary source for learning about eighteenth-century French life. There, they argued that written documents were not enough for historians to capture the object of their studies "from life...while it's hot."⁴³ They repeatedly used genre prints as historical evidence, mining their content for information about hairstyles, changes in fashion, and social custom. The same language about "seizing" their subjects from life arose in Edmond's discussion of Japanese artists.⁴⁴ Many times, Goncourt slipped from talking about the art to talking about society, as if the former were a transparent reflection of the latter, and claimed, for example, that Hokusai's illustrations for the novel *Yéhon Tamano Otiho* (String of Pearls Fallen to the Earth) included "a number of important drawings for this history of Japanese customs, drawings of the most absolute reality."⁴⁵ By grounding their defense of eighteenth-century artists in France and Japan in an ideology of transcribed reality, the Goncourts countered what they saw as academic tendencies towards stilted, lifeless, formulaic, and idea-based art.⁴⁶

Edmond de Goncourt's detailed characterization of Utamaro's and Hokusai's talents therefore praised them according to the values he and his brother Jules had already admired in eighteenth-century French art. He prefaced his monograph on Utamaro saying that the eighteenth century was a human century in both Japan and France,⁴⁷ echoing the brothers' desire to write a new, human form of history in the 1860s.⁴⁸ According to Goncourt, the humanity of the eighteenth-century in both Japan and France was communicated in the arts through a vital energy that seemed to bring the works of art to life, and he claimed that artists from both places literally captured life itself in the paper of the print.⁴⁹ In his assessment, both countries shared a highly aestheticized, aristocratic culture that privileged beauty in even the smallest aspects of everyday life. They also shared a refined culture of female prostitution, a range of subjects relating to the intimate lives of women, and an exacting study of nature combined with a high degree of fantasy and imagination. These issues arise as major themes in the monographs that make up the Goncourts' *L'Art du dix-huitième siècle*, and can also be found throughout *Utamaro* and *Hokousai*.⁵⁰ The Goncourts' collection contained both French and Japanese objects that once belonged to nobles or otherwise served as traces of a lost aristocratic way of life, and Goncourt highlighted the fact that French aristocratic collections in the eighteenth century also included

Japanese objects.⁵¹ This interlocking network of analogies, which range from individual works of art to historiographic and methodological questions, deeply bound the arts of the two countries together in Edmond's *Japonisme*. When presenting his work to French readers, Edmond drew on his established reputation as a scholar and lover of eighteenth-century culture to make claims about Japan that would resonate with his audience. The analogies served a variety of goals or functions, to which I now turn.

One way to understand Goncourt's analogies is to see them as a way to introduce the new and unfamiliar by means of the familiar. Goncourt's comparisons presented Japanese art in terms that were known to his French readers, helping them to organize and understand new material. For example, the Frenchman indicated the relative size of some Hokusai drawings from 1794 by saying that they were, "the size of our playing cards."⁵² Scientists who work on cognition have studied how the eye and brain draw rapid conclusions based on comparing incoming stimuli to previous experiences stored in the visual cortex. When looking at a new work of art, for example, David Perkins has described how: "Our eyes and minds reach a cascade of intuitive conclusions by some kind of rapid silent integration of evidence. This experiencing [of a work of art] depends, in turn, on prior experiences."⁵³ In the nineteenth-century, cognition was also understood as a form of comparison to known things. In 1867, Pierre Larousse's *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIX^e siècle* suggested that: "Resemblance and dissemblance are... two aspects through which the nature of objects present themselves to the intellect that observes and compares them."⁵⁴ Larousse further naturalized the comparative reflex as one of the "primary and fundamental operations" of cognitive reasoning. The comparative method informed nineteenth-century scientific discourses of race, ethnicity, and nationalism, which were all based on concepts of likeness and difference, and it also stood at the heart of the emerging discipline of art history.⁵⁵ If we think of comparison as the primary means of processing new sensory input from the world, we might be tempted to conclude that the Goncourts' analogies between French and Japanese art were simply evidence of these mental processes.



Fig. 5. Katsushika Hokusai, *Sumo Wrestlers: Takaneyama Yoichiemon and Sendagawa Kichigur?*, 1788. Polychrome ink and color on paper. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Such a conclusion, however, would only be a partial explanation of what was at stake in the analogies, and would miss their deeper symbolic and rhetorical functions as they related to Edmond's positions in the aesthetic debates of late nineteenth-century France. Whatever else Edmond's motivation, one of the goals of his writing was to train European viewers to see and appreciate the subtle beauty of Japanese art.⁵⁶ In order to explore the way Goncourt's comparisons actively participated in establishing or confirming his aesthetic positions, it is helpful to examine another group of analogies. Goncourt identified a wide variety of formal affinities between Japanese and European art, not all of which had to do with eighteenth-century France.⁵⁷ Of the non-French comparisons, the most interesting in terms of their ideological function are the parallels he constructed with Italian Renaissance art. Hokusai's nudes, he claimed, "have something of a Mantegna,"⁵⁸ (figs. 5 & 6) and Utamaro's nursing mothers evoked images of the Virgin Mary bending towards the infant Christ in Renaissance Madonnas (figs. 7 & 8).⁵⁹ Often, the comparisons took on a surprising, even shocking, allure. The hand of a masturbating woman in a Hokusai print had the



Fig. 6. Andrea Mantegna, *Drunken Silenus*, c. 1470. Engraving. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art (29.44.15).



Fig. 7. Utamaro, *Yumauba and Kitaro Suckling*, 1801-03. Polychrome ink and color on paper. Paris, Musée Guimet.



Fig. 8. Filippo Lippi, *Madonna and Child*, c. 1455. Tempera on wood. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.



Fig. 9. Katsushika Hokusai, *Lovers from Kinoo no kamatsu [Young Pine Saplings]*, 1814. Polychrome ink and color on paper. Cologne, Pulverer Collection, Inv. 187.

“indescribable voluptuousness, [...] the floating elegance of a hand by Primaticcio.”⁶⁰ The “force” and “power” of the linearity of phalluses in Japanese erotic prints “equaled” Michelangelo’s drawing of a hand, owned by the Louvre (figs. 9 & 10).⁶¹ In these comparisons to Italian art⁶²—rarer than the eighteenth-century French references—Goncourt may have taken a certain delight in the quasi-blasphemous surprise generated by his juxtapositions.

The extremism of these examples demonstrates how Edmond borrowed familiar names and established categories, only to undermine them. The most shocking comparisons, such as that of anonymous, pornographic prints to a work by one of the most revered geniuses of the Western canon, called into question the authority of the academic value system that would place Michelangelo at the apogee of the philosophical category “Art.”⁶³ The Goncourt brothers’ rejection of the French academic system and the canon of masterpieces it generated is well known,⁶⁴ but the extent to which Edmond’s later embrace of Japanese art participated in that critique has heretofore gone unexamined. I am arguing here that Edmond mobilized Japanese art as yet another display of that system’s limitations. One symbolic goal of the analogies between Japanese and European art, then, was a critique of academic definitions of high art.

Given this anti-academic stance, it might seem paradoxical that the comparisons nonetheless elevated the newly discovered Japanese work into the category of “Art.” As we have already seen, the monographic format made this claim implicitly, but Edmond also raised the question explicitly in his monograph on Hokusai, writing repeatedly on how his work was not recognized as art, even in his own country.⁶⁵ Edmond even visually stressed the artistic claims he made by italicizing the word in places where he consciously sought to elevate visual forms outside his culture’s accepted category of fine art. Thus, in *Outamaro*, he wrote of the fabric colors of kimonos as “the most *artistic*,” and exclaimed over the beauty and seductive charm of works on paper, calling them “*art prints*.”⁶⁶ Such an emphasis served as a means to defend the aesthetic (as opposed to merely commercial or decorative) value of Japanese art.⁶⁷ On the one hand, Edmond wanted to denigrate what he saw as the stultified academicism that increasingly limited the scope of art. On the other, he borrowed its vocabulary and methods to legitimize his interest in objects that did not appear to many nineteenth-century viewers as belonging to the realm of the fine arts, even if they admired other characteristics about it.⁶⁸

We need to be careful here, however. The art praised by the Goncourts derived from the eighteenth-century artisan traditions wherein, as Debora Silverman has discussed, the word *art* pertained to the skillful execution of talent, applied to a great variety of media—from furniture to decorative paintings, from jewelry to book illustration, from porcelain to prints.⁶⁹ These were not the forms recognized as great by the Academy, which preferred grand history paintings and portraits of noble men. The innovation of the brothers’ earlier defense of eighteenth-century French drawings and applied and decorative arts, which relocated greatness into arenas of cultural production normally shunned by the powerful institutions of the French art world, was to apply the academy’s language of visionary talent and original, independent genius to these products. By identifying another culture with a similar artistic profile to his beloved eighteenth-century France, Edmond not only added credence to his previously established position on the superiority and essential Frenchness of eighteenth-century art, but he also created an aesthetic frame in which Japanese objects could be

appreciated as art.



Fig. 10. Michelangelo Buonarroti (attributed), *Study of one hand drawing another*, 15th/16th cent. Ink on paper. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Cabinet des Arts Graphiques.

We are free, of course, to agree or disagree with both the accuracy and the appropriateness of Edmond's comparisons, but the trend—hardly unique to Goncourt—to see Japanese art through the lens of European art can also be identified in other writers, in spite of the suppositions of exoticism and difference.⁷⁰ Louis Gonse, a specialist in medieval art and author of the first general history of Japanese art, published in 1883, tended to make comparisons between Japanese art and French medieval art.⁷¹ Moreover, Gonse concentrated on older Japanese art, compared to Edmond, who favored the art of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Philippe Burty, Ernest Chesneau, and Zacharie Astruc, all defenders of Impressionism, filtered their discussions of Japanese art through their allegiances to nineteenth-century French art.⁷² Each person, in constructing a version of Japanese art, built a frame informed by his previous training and found the Japanese art that corresponded to a pre-existing taste. Taken as a repeated pattern, the analogies point to a nationalized reading of Japanese art, and ironically in most cases, the nation most at stake was not Japan, but France.

The similarities that Goncourt described did not completely cancel the notion of differences between Japanese and European art. Like many of his contemporaries, Edmond de Goncourt did sometimes characterize Japanese art as exotic and different. But differences, too, can be shown to have taken a part in Edmond's larger goals in writing about Japanese art. Careful study of the grammar he used to create his parallels reveals that he often placed limits on the analogies in such a way as to preserve a sense of distance between Japanese and European art. Many of the comparisons are couched in terms of a Japanese work being "not unlike," or having "something of," "a link to," "a little bit of" the characteristics of a Western work. His comment on an 1804 print by Hokusai is typical of this formulation: "a curious still life recalling a little bit of the simplicity of subjects treated by Chardin."⁷³ Something about the still life called Chardin to mind, but by qualifying the comparison with the limiting phrase "a little bit," Edmond kept the two artists in different realms.

In another instance, writing about Hokusai's 1818 illustrations for *Denshin Gakyo* (Mirror of Pictures Transmitted from the Soul), Goncourt first created a parallel with Michelangelo: "First the title page in a handsome Michelangelesque frame." Hokusai's decorative frame was further described as: "a frame that has the air of the first page of one of our fine books from the sixteenth century."⁷⁴ No specific book is mentioned, no specific example of a frame by Michelangelo is offered as evidence. The analogy turns on Michelangelo and Hokusai having a vague, common "air."⁷⁵ A general similarity is asserted without ever being explained. Vague or limiting qualifiers allowed Edmond to back away from particulars, to suggest similarity and, at the same time, to avoid the suggestion of absolute resemblance. By preferring these imprecise terms, Edmond created a general network of comparisons between Japanese and European art that relied more on feeling and supposition than concrete examples. Thus, by not specifying what drew him to make the comparison, by not specifying an image in which the highlighted feature can be found, Goncourt ultimately left room for differences between Japanese and French art.

Sometimes this difference was discussed openly, rather than being couched in qualified comparisons. The opening chapter of *La Maison d'un artiste* welcomed the reader/visitor into the vestibule decorated with Japanese silk embroideries and other Asian objects, which

Edmond described as “bizarre, unexpected, astonishing in their originality and their exoticism.”⁷⁶ Edmond also described how he used contrasts between Asian and French objects to create visual interest in his rooms.⁷⁷ Often, when looking at a Japanese art object he observed a feature that led him to make a generalizing and stereotypical character assessment of all Japanese people as different from Europeans. For example, when Goncourt looked at Japanese sword-guards (fig. 11), he was struck by the visible attention to minute detail and artistry of the metalwork, and he concluded that: “The Japanese, in their attention to and observation of nature, are amused by smaller incidents than we, we other Europeans.”⁷⁸ The stark simplicity of the “to be” verb (*Japanese...are amused*) lent a timeless universality to the claim, transforming it into an essential “truth” that did not evolve over time.⁷⁹

Difference between European and Japanese artists was stated even more starkly in 1885: “We Europeans only like our plastic arts to represent superior animality: the ferocious, the horse, the dog. Our artists don’t have the sort of tenderness that inspires Asian artists to lovingly draw the animal, and all animals, the most vile, the most humble, the most despised: the toad for example.”⁸⁰ These statements play into a central art historical problem that is more familiar when applied to individuals. What is the relationship between an artwork and its creator? Romantic critics and historians argued that individuals express themselves in works of art, that the object can be a conduit to the artist’s personality. Edmond was not alone in broadening this idea from the particular of the individual to the broader realm of national character.

In this we can see Goncourt operating within the climate of positivism, which encouraged the interpretation of art in nationalistic terms. Whether they established similarities or differences, Edmond de Goncourt’s comparisons derived from nineteenth-century positivist assumptions that works of art were intimately related to the national character of the people who created them. This idea, present already in the thinking of Voltaire, Diderot, and Rousseau, developed in the nineteenth-century work of men such as Arthur Gobineau, a propagandist for the inequality of the races, Ernest Renan, a linguist and archaeologist concerned with race and era, and Hippolyte Taine, who laid out the theoretical principles of this approach to art.⁸¹ In Taine’s theory, national character was formed through a combination of geographic, climactic, and cultural influences, and served as the basis of racial determinism in artistic production. Each nation or race developed a distinct temperament and identity that informed all of its cultural production, and the study of art objects could therefore lead to a profound understanding of the character of a nation because, in Taine’s words, there exists “an exact correspondence between a work and its milieu.”⁸² Taine’s theories of national character and the role it played in artistic production profoundly influenced the nineteenth-century articulation of national schools and styles, and served as the fundamental theoretical framework for the emerging disciplines of art history.⁸³

Like most nineteenth-century writers on art, the Goncourt brothers’ books and essays reflect this bias towards racialized ethnographic theories. The brothers knew Taine personally, first mentioning him in their *Journal* in January 1862.⁸⁴ They dined regularly with him at the Magny dinners—named after the restaurant where men including Sainte-Beuve, Gautier, Taine, the Goncourts, Renan, Flaubert, Turgenev, and others met every two weeks—that took place between 1862 and 1874. They had ample opportunity to discuss art and aesthetics with him and reported frequently on the intellectual debates that took place at the restaurant. Generally suspicious of

university professors, whom they saw as lacking experience in the real world, the Goncourts, at least in the *Journal*, remained critical of Taine's ideas: "Taine claimed that talented men are the products of their milieu. [Théophile] Gautier and we, we claimed the contrary, that they are exceptions."⁸⁵ Given the "Tainean" flavor of the Goncourts' writing on French and Japanese national characteristics, however, these criticisms must be understood as part of a culture of debate and argument. The Goncourts had clearly absorbed the fundamental notion that works of art could reveal national character.⁸⁶

Much of the Goncourt brothers' writing about art attempted to define the essence of Frenchness. The eighteenth century, "the French century *par excellence*,"⁸⁷ according to the brothers, dominated their historical research and publishing for over ten years. As in Taine's theory, the Goncourts attributed the roots of this Frenchness to the soil itself, evident in their essay on Fragonard.⁸⁸ They also remarked in the *Journal* that three great eighteenth-century artists, Watteau, Chardin, and La Tour, never traveled to Italy—intimating that they were free from foreign influence.⁸⁹ The Goncourts were not alone in attempting to locate the essence of Frenchness in an artistic style or period. Their research should be considered in parallel to the work of Viollet-le-Duc, for example, who located a remarkably similar essential Frenchness in the medieval Gothic, or Charles Blanc, whose monumental *Histoire des peintres de toutes les écoles*, published in fourteen volumes between 1861–69, judged artists based on their adherence to national styles.⁹⁰ For all of these authors, a nation expressed something of its essential character through the arts.

Many statements in Goncourt's monographs on Utamaro and Hokusai reflected this tendency to nationalize their artistic production. At times, Goncourt asserted that an artist's work was typical of the way all Japanese artists represented a given subject. Hokusai's caricatural drawing style thus was not "unique to Hokusai, but almost standard in all Japanese painters."⁹¹ Although he never used geographical or climactic arguments in speaking of Japanese art, Goncourt nevertheless made numerous references to "Japanese character," or spoke in an essentializing way about how "the Japanese" thought or acted.⁹² So while Edmond clearly applied positivist thinking to Japanese identity, he never locked it into a straightforward relationship with a similarly essentialized French identity. At times, the two could be made to converge, and at others they could be made to diverge.

The positivist thinking that led nineteenth-century authors to speak confidently of racial or national characteristics was most visible then in Edmond's declarations of difference between Europe and Japan. Beneath them, I again sense his anti-academicism. His comments on the fine detail in the metalwork of sword-guards and the loving tenderness with which Japanese artists depicted even the most humble animals praised qualities opposed to the monumental and the noble advocated by the academy. These aspects of French academic theory and practice repeatedly drew the Goncourts' ridicule. The differences Edmond identified between Europe and Japan participated therefore in his broader goal of delegitimizing academic values. We are left with an unstable picture of Japanese art, both like and unlike French art. What remained constant was the denigration of academic values and the tendency to extrapolate national character from the evidence of artworks.

In their book *Nationalism and French Visual Culture, 1870-1914*, June Hargrove and Neil McWilliam argued that: "Stylistic options...could become heavily freighted with ideological meaning as historians,

critics, and political theorists elaborated cultural genealogies in which supposedly fundamental national characteristics were invested in particular poetic traditions and plastic forms...Both scholarly and popular art-historical texts of the early Third Republic demonstrate a widespread impulse to essentialize cultural remains in the pursuit of an authoritative vision of Frenchness."⁹³ The authors of the various essays in the book focus on French art and the nationalist discourses that surrounded it, exploring tensions between regional differences and their relationship to the nation as a whole. As I have argued here, Edmond de Goncourt's writing on Japanese art and culture participated in this articulation of Frenchness via the analogies and contrasts he identified between Japan and France. But, as we have seen, Goncourt's sense of Frenchness differed from that of his contemporaries. Just as nationalism itself is a diverse, multi-faceted phenomenon, so Edmond de Goncourt's categories of resemblance and difference served a variety of needs, from the cognitive to the symbolic; from the aesthetic to the ideological. Comparison, we might say, cannot exist without contrast, and studying the dialectical movement between the two permits the rhetorical nature of such exercises to rise to the surface.

In his writings, Goncourt presented an unstable vision of Japanese art in support of aesthetic positions in debates taking place in France. The study of Japanese people and art provided him with arguments in his critique of a French system that was moving increasingly away from the values of aristocratic refinement and eroticized elegance that he cherished in the eighteenth century. His articulations of similarity and difference—and indeed, the co-existence of both analogies and contrasts in much *Japoniste* discourse—should alert us to the constructed nature of each, and cause us to question the rhetorical or ideological goals behind their implementation.

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1. Zacharie Astruc, "Beaux-Arts: L'Empire du Soleil-Levant," *L'Etendard*, February 27, 1867: "N'est-ce pas, en définitive, un grand bonheur que les nouvelles inspirations demandées à ce peuple éloigné, à cet Orient si différent de nous."
2. Jules Champfleury, "La mode des japonaiseries," *La Vie Parisienne*, November 21, 1868, 862–63: "des peintures...si bizarres qu'elles troublèrent les yeux des gens assez naïfs pour rechercher les fonctions de jurés aux expositions de peinture." He used the word *bizarre* four times in the article, finishing: "aujourd'hui nous sommes menacés d'une invasion japonaise en peinture."
3. *Ibid.*, 863.
4. Gabriel P. Weisberg, "Philippe Burty and a Critical Assessment of Early Japonisme," in *Japonisme in Art: An International Symposium* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1980), 113. Gabriel P. Weisberg and Yvonne M. L. Weisberg provided a priceless and time-saving study on the history of publications about Japan and Japanese art: *Japonisme: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1990).
5. Alterity has become a dominant theme of interdisciplinary cultural studies for the past thirty years, with psychoanalytic, linguistic, sociological, philosophical, literary, post-colonial and art historical iterations. For a summary of these inquiries and pertinent bibliography, see Pierre Ouellet, *Quel autre? L'autre en question* (Montreal: VLB Editeur, 2007), 7–8.

Surprisingly, little of this body of thought has been used to study the discourses of *Japonisme*. I am currently preparing another article on the relationship between Edmond de Goncourt and Hayashi Tadamasu which explores how post-colonial theory can help us understand the cross-cultural exchanges experienced by these two men.

6. The literature on the Goncourt brothers is vast and growing as the Goncourts undergo a revival, especially in France. The standard biography was written by André Billy, *Les Frères Goncourt: La Vie littéraire à Paris pendant la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1954). For an overview in English of the Goncourts' life and art criticism, see Anita Brookner, *The Genius of the Future: Studies in French Art Criticism* (New York: Phaidon, 1971), 121–44. Recent work addressing the Goncourts and *Japonisme* includes Laurent Houssais's excellent overview, "Les Goncourt et le japonisme," *Cahiers Edmond et Jules de Goncourt* 11 (2004): 59–78, and Bernard Vouilloux's analysis, "Les impressions japonaises d'Edmond de Goncourt," in the same issue, 11–58. Dominique Pety has written about the Goncourts' collection of Japanese art in *Les Goncourt et la collection: De l'objet d'art à l'art d'écrire* (Geneva: Droz, 2003), 344–79. *Japonisme* studies can also be said to be undergoing a renaissance in the work of Chelsea Foxwell, "Kano Hōgai (1828-1888) and the Making of Modern Japanese Painting," (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2008); Hsuan Tsen, "Marketing Cultural Fantasy: Japan's Teahouse at the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition," (paper presented at the College Art Association Conference, Dallas, TX, 2008); and Jordan Sand's excellent article, "Was Meiji Taste in Interiors 'Orientalist'?" *Positions* 8, no. 3 (2000): 637–73. Ting Chang (Carnegie Mellon University) is working on a much-anticipated book called *Collecting Asia: Desire, Travel and Museums of Asian Art in Nineteenth-Century Paris*. She has published "Collecting Asia: Théodore Duret's *Voyage en Asie* and Henri Cernuschi's Museum," *Oxford Art Journal* 25, no.1 (2002): 17–34; and "Disorienting Orient: Duret and Guimet, Anxious Flâneurs in Asia," 65–78 in *The Invisible Flâneuse? Gender, Public Space and Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, ed. Aruna d'Souza and Tom McDonough (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006). Christopher Reed (Penn State University) is also preparing a new translation and critical edition of Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème* and Félix Régamey's response, *Mme Chrysanthème's Pink Notebook*. Alice Tseng has written on *The Imperial Museums of Meiji Japan: Architecture and the Art of the Nation* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008); and Max Put on *Plunder and Pleasure: Japanese Art in the West, 1860-1930* (Leiden: Hotei Publishing, 2001). All of these scholars stress the cross-cultural interaction between Japan and France. Critical accounts of *Japonisme* will also need to consider that the phenomenon was not limited to fine and decorative arts, but had economic, horticultural, spiritual, philosophical, gastronomical, and military implications as well. Nor was it the sole domain of the French: *Japonisme* in its myriad forms can be found to varying degrees in many European countries and the United States both before and after the 1854 arrival of Commodore Perry. See Frank Lequin, *A la recherche du Cabinet Titsingh: Its History, Contents & Dispersal* (Alphen an den Rijn: Repro-Holland, 2003), 29–32; and Keiko Omoto with Francis Macouin, *Quand le Japon s'ouvrit au monde: Emile Guimet et les arts d'Asie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 11–37.

7. The work of correcting the Goncourts' inaccuracies and misunderstandings has been carried out by (among others): Sandy Kita et al., *The Floating World of Ukiyo-e* (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001); Amy Riegel Newland, ed., *The Hotei Encyclopedia of Japanese Woodblock Prints* (Amsterdam: Hotei Publishing, 2005); Gian Carlo Calza, *Hokusai* (Milan: Electa, 1999), and Julie Nelson Davis, *Utamaro and the Spectacle of Beauty* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007).

8. Hélène Bayou surprisingly presented Goncourt's (and other French Japonisants's) interest in Japanese art as an unproblematic and uncontextualized "passion" in the wall-labels and exhibition catalogue for the 2008 exhibition at the Musée Guimet in Paris, *Hokusai 1760-1849, 'l'affolé de son art,' d'Edmond de Goncourt à Norbert Lagane* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2008).

9. Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal: Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, vol. 2 (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1989), 178–79 (October 29, 1868): "Le goût de la chinoiserie de la japonaiserie! Ce goût, nous l'avons eu des premiers."

10. Reservations were expressed as early as 1925; see Weisberg and

Weisberg, *Japonisme: An Annotated Bibliography*, 70–71 and 231–32. More recent scholarship on the question includes Deborah Johnson, "Japanese Prints in Europe Before 1840," *Burlington Magazine* 124 (1982), 343–48; Phyllis Floyd, "Documentary Evidence for the Availability of Japanese Imagery in Europe in Nineteenth-Century Public Collections," *Art Bulletin* 68, no. 1 (March 1986), 105–41; and for the specific case of the Goncourt brothers, Jean-Paul Bouillon's preface to Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, *Art et artistes* (Paris: Hermann, 1997), 26–27 and 183–203.

11. Edmond de Goncourt, *La Maison d'un artiste*, 2 vols. (Paris: Charpentier, 1881). On the display of art in the Goncourt's house, see my article "Framing, Symmetry and Contrast in Edmond de Goncourt's Aesthetic Interior," *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 152 (Spring 2008): 36–64.

12. Edmond de Goncourt, *Outamaro: Le Peintre des Maison Vertes* (Paris: Charpentier, 1891) and Edmond de Goncourt, *Hokusai: L'art japonais du XVIIIè siècle* (Paris: Charpentier, 1896). All references will be to these editions unless otherwise noted.

13. Most studies of Japanese art prior to Edmond's monographs, such as Louis Gonse's *L'art japonais* (Paris: Quantin, 1883) and William Anderson's *The Pictorial Arts of Japan* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1886), sought to encompass a much longer period. Both authors gave broad and detailed overviews of the history of Japanese art across many centuries. In their annotated bibliography, Weisberg and Weisberg counted eighty-six such general studies between 1727 and 1891, when Goncourt's first monographic title appeared. It seems then that Goncourt's monographs were the first to isolate a canonical series of geniuses from the more general national history of art. In this, the monographs on Utamaro and Hokusai reproduced an epistemological move he and his brother Jules had made for eighteenth-century French artists in the 1860s, when many art history books focused on national schools. In spite of its general title, the Goncourt brothers' *L'Art du XVIIIè siècle*, first published in book form in 1873, was in fact a series of monographs on individual artists. I discussed the significance of the monographic format in "Word and Image in the Art Criticism of the Goncourt Brothers" (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 2005), 212–13 and 258–74. Monographic studies were more common in periodicals although, again according to the Weisbergs' bibliography, the first article title including an artist's name was not published until 1882: Théodore Duret's "L'art japonais: Les livres illustrés, les albums imprimés. Hokusai," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 2nd period, 26, no. 2 (August 1, 1882), 113–31. Hokusai's name dominated studies devoted to single artists from the beginning, with occasional pieces on Utamaro and Hiroshige also appearing. Taking into consideration the fact that the auction catalogue of Hayashi Tadamasu's print and drawing collection included work by over 575 different Japanese artists, we can get a better understanding of the selective and repetitive nature of the artists chosen for study. See *Dessins, Estampes, Livres illustrés du Japon réunis par T. Hayashi dont la vente aura lieu du lundi 2 juin au vendredi 6 juin 1902* (Paris: Chez S. Bing, 1902). On Hokusai's rise to fame in the nineteenth century, see Giovanni Peternolli, "La Fortuna critica di Hokusai in Francia nel XIX Secolo," *Paragone Arte* 27, no. 5 (May 1976): 49–72; and Inaga Shigemi, "The Making of Hokusai's Reputation in the Context of Japonisme," *Nichibunken Japan Review* 15 (2003): 77–100.

14. This term was first used by Philippe Burty, who began signing letters and writing inscriptions in books with this word after his name during the Franco-Prussian War, that is, sometime in 1870–71. Weisberg, "Philippe Burty and a Critical Assessment," 116.

15. The Asian objects were sold over six days, from March 8–13, 1897, and the auction was accompanied by a catalogue: *Collection des Goncourt. Arts de l'Extrême Orient. Objets d'art japonais et chinois, peinture, et estampes, dont la vente aura lieu Hôtel Drouot, 8-13 mars, 1897*, preface by Siegfried Bing (Paris: Georges Duchesne, 1897).

16. He did once say that he was tempted by the thought of going: "Depuis deux ou trois jours, je suis hanté par la tentation de faire un voyage au Japon. Et il ne s'agit pas de *bric-à-bracomanie*: il est en moi le rêve de faire un livre qui, sous la forme d'un journal, s'appellerait Un an au Japon, et un livre encore plus senti que peint... Ce livre, je sens que j'en ferais un livre ne ressemblant à aucun autre. Ah! si j'étais de quelques années plus jeune!" *Journal* 2:717 (November 17, 1876). Goncourt may not have been able to afford the trip, in addition to whatever other reasons kept him from going, but he later declared that it was not necessary to travel to Japan to

16. speak intelligently about its art and culture. See *Journal* 3:569 (April 4, 1891).

17. See Segi Shinichi, "Hayashi Tadamasu: Bridge between the Fine Arts of East and West," in *Japonisme in Art: An International Symposium* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1980), 167–72; and Brigitte Koyama-Richard, *Le Japon révélé: Edmond de Goncourt and Hayashi Tadamasu* (Paris: Hermann, 2001). I regretfully do not read or speak Japanese, but Koyama-Richard's book includes pertinent bibliography in Japanese at pages 197–200.

18. Koyama-Richard, 46–47. The Goncourts' *Journal* includes accounts of numerous dinners where Japanese officials were the invited guests of French collectors. See 2:689 (February 17, 1876); 739 (May 3, 1877); 795 (September 22, 1878); 802–3 (Oct 31, 1878); 803 (November 6, 1878, an especially wonderful entry where Edmond recounts eating sushi for the first time); and 806 (November 28, 1878). On these international gatherings more generally, see Geneviève Lacambre, "Les milieux japonisants à Paris, 1860–1880," in *Japonisme in Art: An International Symposium* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1980), 49–50.

19. Edmond de Goncourt worked with another Japanese dealer living in Paris, Wakai Kenzabur?, while writing *La Maison d'un artiste*. See Akiyoshi Watanabe, ed., *Correspondance adressée à Hayashi Tadamasu* (Tokyo: Institut de Tokyo, 2001), 603.

20. When referring to the Goncourt brothers and *Japonisme*, one must contend with the untimely death of Jules de Goncourt in 1870, which interrupted the work they had begun together in the 1850s and 60s. When referring to the earlier period, I will use the plural (Goncourts, Goncourts'), but will primarily refer to Edmond de Goncourt in the singular (Goncourt, Goncourt's) when commenting on his later writing on Japanese art, most of which derives from the 1880s and 90s. Only rarely will I make a reference to something the brothers said together about Japanese art in the 1860s, in which case I will again use the plural.

21. Goncourt, *Journal* 1:730 (September 14, 1861): "Au musée Siebold, des croquades à l'encre d'artistes japonais, qui ont l'esprit et la tache pittoresque d'un bistre de Fragonard." I do not know yet exactly which drawings the Goncourts saw. My e-mail communication of January 8 & 9, 2008 with the curator of the Siebold House, Mr. Hans Kuijpers, revealed that there are few records detailing which of the 5000+ objects in Siebold's collection may have been on display in the 1860s, and their collection database does not distinguish between paintings and drawings. I hope to make a trip to Leiden in June 2009 to work in their archives.

22. Goncourt, *Journal* 1:1103 (September 30, 1864): "L'art chinois et surtout l'art japonais, ces arts qui paraissent aux yeux bourgeois d'une si invraisemblable fantaisie, sont...emprunté[s] à l'observation. Ils rendent ce qu'ils voient...Au fond, ce n'est pas un paradoxe de dire qu'un album japonais et un tableau de Watteau sont tirés de l'intime étude de la nature."

23. Goncourt, *Journal* 3:127 (May 23, 1888): "le Watteau de là-bas." In the same way, Edmond described a Japanese god as "the Japanese Mars" in *La Maison d'un artiste* (1:189) and a Hokusai print depicting the most important Buddhist deities as showing "l'Olympe japonais" in *Hokousai*, 45.

24. Goncourt, *Outamaro*, 14: "la femme dans le joli élancement de l'Atalante du Jardin des Tuileries."

25. Goncourt, *Hokousai*, 151–52: "un gras Hotei renversé sur le dos et riant aux larmes, et qui fait danser au haut de ses pieds levés, ainsi que dans la *Gimblette* de Fragonard, un petit Japonais." I have been unable to locate the image by Hokusai. Goncourt made many more analogies between Japanese art and French eighteenth-century art. A sampling would include: *Outamaro*, 110 (Watteau), *Outamaro*, 157 (Fragonard); *Hokousai*, 30 (Chardin); *Hokousai*, 326 (Watteau); *Journal* 3:1047 (December 14, 1894) (Watteau); *La Maison d'un artiste* 1:209 (Chardin).

26. Goncourt, *La Maison d'un artiste* 2:279: "Et à quelle époque remonte la statue de Ban Kurobioë par Murata Shosaburo Kunihihisa...? À la fin de Louis XVI, peut-être à la période du Directoire."

27. Dossier, "Les collections du musée Cernuschi: La période Edo," from the Cernuschi Museum web site (accessed October 26, 2008).

28. Goncourt, *Hokousai*, 67–68: "la gracieuse petite femme languette...aux traits mignons...un type de femme elegant, fluet."

29. Goncourt, *La Maison d'un artiste* 1:182: "une jeune fille un peu grêle, aux longues cuisses, aux jambes *maigriottes* dans sa grâce *longuette*." (Emphasis in the original.)

30. First, the passage on Chardin: "C'est dans le portrait de sa femme qu'il révèle tout son feu, toute la puissance de sa verve, la force et la fièvre de son exécution inspirée....[Chardin] met on ne sait comment le souffle de la personne sur les lèvres de son portrait, le tressaillement du jour dans le dessin d'une physionomie;" Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Chardin: Etude contenant quatre dessins gravés à l'eau-forte* (Paris: Dentu, 1864), 30–31. Now, on Hokusai: "Cet homme a le génie du dessin de premier jet, le talent unique d'enfermer, dans une ligne tracée en courant, la vie d'un mouvement humain ou animal, la physionomie d'une chose inanimée;" Goncourt, *La Maison d'un artiste* 1:194. A similar tone was struck in Edmond's characterization of Japanese caricature as having: "une verve, un entrain, une furia indicibles; il semble qu'elle soit le produit de la fièvre d'une cervelle et d'une main, et parfois son étrangeté lui donne l'aspect d'une hallucination de fou;" Goncourt, *La Maison d'un artiste* 1:197.

31. This European view was quickly translated into Japanese writing. Chelsea Foxwell argued that Japanese historians had absorbed it when they traced a similar trajectory, wherein the period of the Meiji Restoration and Western influence was often seen as one of decadence and decline, when the Japanese lost an essentialized, authentic, and native form of their culture that flourished prior to contact with the United States and Europe. See her excellent article, "Dekadensu: Ukiyo-e and the Codification of Aesthetic Values in Modern Japan," *Octopus: A Visual Studies Journal* (Fall 2007): 21–41. She pointed out, however, that Edmond did not use the term decadence in his writing on Japanese art, see page 28, note 15.

32. Goncourt, *Hokousai*, 1: "Voici le peintre qui a victorieusement enlevé la peinture de son pays aux influences persanes et chinoises et qui, par une étude pour ainsi dire religieuse de la nature, la rajeunie, l'a renouvelée, l'a faite vraiment toute japonaise." The concern was already evident in *La Maison d'un artiste*, where Goncourt established differences between Japanese and Chinese artistic techniques; see 2:217, 227, 250n1, 276, and 279–83. Before becoming the opening salvo of *Hokousai*, it had already appeared in *Outamaro*, 4n2: "Dans tout l'oeuvre d'Outamaro, je ne trouve qu'une seule planche semblant descendre du *faire* chinois de Sekiyen: c'est une paysage...du recueil de poésies."

33. This attitude was expressed most strongly in Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *La Révolution dans les moeurs* (Paris: Dentu, 1854).

34. For example, Charles Blanc, Théophile Thoré, and Paul Mantz, in their collective work *L'Histoire des peintres de toutes les écoles*, 14 vols. (Paris: Renouard, 1861–69), claimed that reason was the true "patrie" of the French school, which found its truest expression in the paintings of Poussin, Mignard, Bourdon, Coypel, Lesueur, Lebrun, and Lorrain; see vol. 5, "L'école française," (1862), 34.

35. This admittedly simplified narrative is discussed in more detail (and with more nuance) in Warner, "Word and Image," 258–74.

36. Goncourt, *Hokousai*, 1: "Dans les deux hémisphères, c'est donc la même injustice pour tout talent indépendant du passé!"

37. The brothers' anti-academic position can be sensed throughout their oeuvre, with remarks scattered in the *Journal* (see note 44 below). Their history books and salon reviews in the 1850s marked a frontal attack on the academy. For example, they recounted with glee the dissolution of the French Academy during the Revolution in *L'histoire de la société française sous la Révolution* (first published 1854; reprint Paris: Charpentier, 1895), 329–71. In this long passage, they characterized the academicians as first insolent, vengeful, and punishing, then desperate, and finally discredited and impotent. They also described with particular pleasure a period caricature that showed the eighteenth-century *commedia dell'arte* figure Harlequin leading a parade of newly liberated artists out of the ruins of a Greek temple (ibid., 334). In their Salon review of 1852 and their pamphlet on the painting exhibition at the World's Fair of 1855, they routinely attack academic history painters and praise modern landscapists. Ingres took an especially harsh drubbing in the former work, where he is characterized variously as "...le dictateur de la ligne,...laborieux, peiné, muette, froid, mort," who painted with a "déplorable peinture porcelainée" and a "talent avare." See "La Peinture à l'exposition de 1855," reprinted in *Études d'art*

38. This may be related to the Goncourts' sense of themselves as neglected and scorned.

39. Contemporary critics faulted Edmond for what they saw as a fragmentary approach that lacked the big picture: "Un livre méthodique et des chapitres solides sur cette peinture à la fois primitive et raffinée, et sur cette civilisation délicatement et artistiquement corrompue, ce n'est pas à cela qu'Edmond de Goncourt a prétendu. Il est assembleur de jolis petits détails caractéristiques, historien d'épisodes nouveaux, écrivain de pages nerveuses et subtiles." Paul Ginisty, *L'Indépendance* (July 5, 1891). Similar attacks had been launched against the Goncourts' eighteenth-century history books.

40. The grammatically awkward phrase "écriture artiste" (artist writing) was preferred by the Goncourts to the more typical "écriture artistique" (artistic writing), because the very strangeness of its structure calls attention to the special nature of this type of prose. The term was first used by Edmond in the preface to his novel *Les Frères Zemganno* (Paris: Charpentier, 1879). He did not define it there, but said that it could be used to help realism free itself from the representation of lower classes and allow writers to use a realist/naturalist style (for him the two terms appear interchangeable) to describe the milieu and lifestyle of the upper classes. It typically features accumulations of poetic adjectival phrases, nominalized verbs, unusual grammatical constructions, and neologisms that defamiliarize common words and phrases.

41. See his article "Hokousai," *Echo de Paris*, June 7, 1892, 2.

42. Julie Nelson Davis expertly unpacked the problematic documentary status of Japanese prints in *Utamaro and the Spectacle of Beauty*, 22–23 and 123–41.

43. Reprinted in Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Préfaces et manifestes littéraires* (Paris: Charpentier, 1888), 210: "Mais les livres, les lettres, la bibliothèque...ne seront point encore assez pour [l']historien: s'il veut saisir son siècle sur le vif et le peindre tout chaud, il sera nécessaire qu'il pousse au-delà du papier imprimé ou écrit." A passage in their essay on Chardin repeated the argument: "Qu'on feuillette les livres, les histoires de la vie privée, qu'on aille, pour connaître les moeurs bourgeoises du temps, des nouvelles de Challes aux romans de Rétif,...on n'aura point cette lumière que donne un seul tableau du peintre. On ne verra point si bien la bourgeoisie que dans ce fidèle et sincère miroir;" *Chardin*, 18.

44. Goncourt, *Hokousai*, 60: "Hokousai illustre deux volumes consacrés à la femme japonaise et la montrant saisie sur le vif."

45. Goncourt, *Hokousai*, 73: "Un roman illustré par nombre de dessins d'un grand intérêt pour l'histoire des moeurs du Japon, dessins de la réalité la plus absolue."

46. This characterization dominates the *Journal*, which includes numerous attacks on academicians. See for example 1:784, (March 11, 1862), which characterized Ingres's *La Source* as worked over, polished, and not drawn from life; or an entry from October, 1863 (1:1013), in which being academic was a "crime," and 2:149 (6 May 1868), when they described the Academy as being peopled with "idiots or genuinely dishonest men."

47. Goncourt, *Utamaro*, ii: "Ça été si intéressant de faire l'histoire intime des femmes et des choses du dix-huitième siècle que mon goût du nouveau...m'entraîne...à tenter, pour le siècle humain que j'aime, et qui est humain chez les peuples des deux hémisphères, à tenter l'histoire de l'art du Japon."

48. They defined their historical methodology in the prefaces to their history books, including *Les Maîtresses de Louis XV* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1860), viii: "Il s'élève alors, dans le monde asservi et rempli de silence, un historien nouveau et prodigieux qui fait de l'Histoire, non plus la tradition des fables de son temps, non plus la tribune d'une patrie, mais la disposition de l'humanité, la conscience même du genre humain...L'Histoire humaine, voilà l'histoire moderne; l'histoire sociale, voilà la dernière expression de cette histoire."

49. Compare this passage on Augustin de Saint-Aubin's print *Le Bal Paré* (1774) from *La Femme au dix-huitième siècle* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1862), 42: "Le peintre qui nous en a laissé cette image délicieuse semble avoir fait

- leur moment de plein épanouissement;" with this one on Utamaro (p. 31): "Et ce n'est pas tout bonnement sur le papier le ressouvenir, dans un trait spirituel, de l'occupation de la femme, c'est dans sa réalité absolue le retracement d'après nature, de l'attitude, des poses, du geste familier de cette occupation, enfin la surprise de la mimique particulière, qui caractérise toute race d'un pays, toute société d'un temps."
50. The *Journal* also contains a number of comparisons between eighteenth-century French and Japanese art, including (in addition to those already mentioned): 1:876 (November 1, 1862); 2:620 (January 22, 1875); and 2:1249–50 (May 9, 1886).
51. Goncourt, *La Maison d'un artiste* 1:291–95.
52. Goncourt, *Hokousai*, 18: "de la grandeur de nos cartes à jouer."
53. David Perkins, *The Intelligent Eye: Learning to Think by Looking at Art* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 1994), 11.
54. Pierre Larousse, "Caractère," *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXème siècle*, vol. 3 (Paris: Administration du Grand Dictionnaire Universel, 1867), 351: "La ressemblance et la dissemblance sont...deux aspects par lesquelles la nature des objets se présentent à l'intellect qui les observe et les compare."
55. Marc Bayard, ed. *L'histoire de l'art et le comparatisme: Les horizons du détour* (Rome: Académie de France à Rome, 2007).
56. Thus his long discussion that details how to tell the difference between early, high quality impressions and later prints—when the wood had been beaten down somewhat by the press—as well as the varying qualities of ink and paper; Goncourt, *Outamaro*, 155–63.
57. He made occasional references to ancient Greece (*Journal* 1:766 [January 1862]); the Middle Ages (*Journal* 2:12 [March 9, 1866] and *Hokousai*, 233); to Albrecht Dürer (*La Maison d'un artiste* 1:191), and to Rembrandt, whose work Hokusai and other Japanese artists certainly knew thanks to the Dutch presence in the port city of Nagasaki (*Hokousai*, 210 and 251–52). Animals in Japanese art were compared to the tigers and horses of Delacroix and Géricault (*Journal* 3:1047 [December 14, 1894] and *Outamaro*, 259). The immediacy of Hokusai's style recalled Daumier (*Hokousai*, 124 and 137) and Grandville (*La Maison d'un artiste* 1:197), while his modernity was close to that of Paul Gavarni or Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps (*La Maison d'un artiste* 1:194). Utamaro was also related to Daumier in his parodies of master drawings, *Outamaro*, 122. Erotic prints, on which more below, were "dignes d'un Jules Romain," *La Maison d'un artiste* 1:204; repeated in *Outamaro*, 134.
58. Goncourt, *Hokousai*, 150: "du nu qui a quelque chose d'un Mantegna."
59. Goncourt, *Outamaro*, 56: "Rien de comparable dans les images de l'Europe, aux planches d'Outamaro sur l'allaitement. Ce sont les penchements de tête de notre Vierge sur le divin *bambino*." (Italics in the original.) This example is particularly interesting in that it first posits complete dissimilarity (nothing comparable in European art), only to immediately make a comparison.
60. Goncourt, *Hokousai*, 175: "le voluptueux indescriptible...d'une main qui, dans sa courbe, a l'élégance volante d'une main du Primatice."
61. Goncourt, *Outamaro*, 135: "cette force, cette énergie de la linéature qui fait du dessin d'une verge un dessin égal à la main du Musée du Louvre, attribuée à Michel-Ange." The sentiment was first hinted at in 1881 in *La Maison d'un artiste* 1:201: "l'indécence des choses est sauvée...le dirai-je? par le michelangelesque du dessin." It was later expressed in the *Journal* 3:119 (April 28, 1888) as: "cette vulve est dessinée comme ces pénis en érection d'un album d'Hokousai, ces pénis qui n'ont d'équivalent dans l'art européen que la main attribuée à Michel-Ange." It was finally repeated in *Hokousai*, 174, where Goncourt specified Hokusai's erotic series *Kinoye no komatsou* (The Young Pine Saplings). Elsewhere, a drawing of a shrimp by Hokusai was characterized as having "la grandeur d'un dessin de Michel-Ange," see *La Maison d'un artiste*, vol., 1, 196.
62. In addition to the examples just mentioned, see also *La Maison d'un artiste* 1:173 (Lucca della Robbia); and *Hokousai*, 326 (Baccio Bandinelli).

63. Chelsee Maxwell has argued that some *Japonisants* were aware of the paradox that Western collectors' interest in ukiyo-e prints transformed images that would not be recognized as "art" had they been produced in Europe. See "Dekadensu," 22.

64. On this, see Brookner, *Genius of the Future*, 121–44; Debora Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 17–39; and Pierre-Jean Dufief, "Les Goncourt et l'antiquité," *Revue des sciences humaines* 91, no. 259 (July–September 2000): 153–69. Interestingly, for both Goncourt and Viollet-le-Duc, the association of an essential Frenchness with eighteenth century art or Gothic art served as an anti-academic stance, cast as a corrupting foreign incursion.

65. Goncourt, *Hokousai*, 145: "...les adversaires de la *peinture vulgaire* déclaraient que les petites choses que produisait le pinceau d'Hokousai étaient du métier, n'appartenait pas à l'art." (Italics in the original.) See also p. 127.

66. Goncourt, *Outamaro*, 38, "les plus artistes," and 155, "les tirages d'art." (Emphasis in the original.)

67. See also the dissertation written by Gonse's great-nephew, François Gonse, "L'art japonais publié par Louis Gonse en 1883: Enjeux et impacts," vol. 2 (Paris: Université de Paris IV—La Sorbonne, 1996), 296.

68. Chesneau, for example, struggled with whether or not the Japanese had an ideal of beauty as the West did in "Beaux-Arts: L'Art japonais," *Le Constitutionnel*, January 14, 1868, 1–2. Weisberg and Weisberg suggested that the British John Leighton went the farthest in suggesting that the Japanese, while picturesque, never actually produced a "true picture;" see *Japonisme: An Annotated Bibliography*, xvi and 136–37.

69. Silverman, *Art nouveau*, 24.

70. A certain "E." Pottier found similarities between Japanese and Greek art in his article "Grèce et Japon," published in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 3rd. period, 4, no. 2 (August 1, 1890), 105–32. In her article "Les milieux japonisants à Paris, 1860–1880," 50, Geneviève Lacambre detailed some of the comparisons that were made at the time. Hélène Bayou also discussed Burty's early comparisons of Hokusai to a suite of European artists, including Watteau, Daumier, Goya, and Delacroix. See *Hokusai, 1760-1849*, 17.

71. See François Gonse, "L'art japonais publié," 2: 303–12. On the trend to assimilate Japan and the European Middle Ages, see Max Put, *Plunder and Pleasure: Japanese Art in the West* (Leiden: Hotei Publishing, 2000), 12–13.

72. See Phyllis Floyd, *Japonisme in Context: Documentation, Criticism, Aesthetic Reactions* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), 193–94 and 200. Gabriel P. Weisberg also argued that Burty appreciated Japanese art because of his allegiance to French Romanticism and Delacroix in particular. See "Philippe Burty and a Critical Assessment of Early Japonisme," 111–12.

73. Goncourt, *Hokousai*, 30: "une curieuse nature morte *rappelant un peu* la simplicité des sujets traités par Chardin." Additional examples include *Outamaro*, 122: "une scène *qui n'est pas sans rapport* avec les scènes de l'Histoire ancienne interprétées par le crayon puissamment bouffe de Daumier;" or in the same book, 136: "les dessins *ont une certaine parenté* avec les livres des écrivains à l'imagination dérégées." (Emphases added.)

74. Goncourt, *Hokousai*, 150: "D'abord le titre dans un bel encadrement michelangesque...un encadrement qui a l'air de la première page d'un de nos beaux livres du XVI^e siècle."

75. Jean-Louis Cabanès has argued that vagueness and blurriness were central features of the Goncourts' aesthetic. See his articles "Matière, nuage, détail: Les Goncourt et le jugement de goût," *Figures de l'art: Revue d'esthétique* (1994–1996), 135–42; and "Brouillage et effacement des limites dans l'œuvre des Goncourt," in Jean-Louis Cabanès, ed., *Les Frères Goncourt: Art et écriture* (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 1997), 443–58.

76. Goncourt, *La Maison d'un artiste*, 1:4.

77. See *ibid.*, 170.

78. Goncourt, *Journal* 2:713 (October 31, 1876): "L'attention et

l'observation japonaises sont amusées par des événements de la nature plus petits que ceux qui nous intéressent, nous autres Européens."

79. This is a common feature of conceptions of the Other, which tend to ignore historical change and development over time in favor of an eternally unchanging picture. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Routledge, 1978), 72.

80. Goncourt, *Journal* 2:1123 (January 3, 1885): "Nos arts plastiques, à nous Européens, n'aiment à représenter que l'animalité supérieure: les féroces, le cheval, le chien; nos artistes n'ont pas cette espèce de tendresse qui porte les artistes de l'Orient à dessiner amoureusement la bête, et toutes les bêtes, les plus viles, les plus humbles, les plus méprisées: le crapaud par exemple." This characterization of difference has more to do with general inspiration and choice of subject matter; other comments deal more directly with technique, as when Edmond contrasted the velvety blacks of European prints to the light colors of Japanese prints. See *Journal* 3:222 (February 1, 1889). *La Maison d'un artiste* contains several discussions of differences between European and Asian artists. See for example, 1:190–91; 2:210–211; 2:242; 2:248.

81. See the excellent articles of Dominique Jarrassé, "Mythes raciaux et quête de scientificité dans la construction de l'histoire de l'art en France, 1840-1870," *Revue de l'art* 4 (2004), 61–72; and by the same author, "De la rupture comme résurgence du caractère national," in Richard Leeman, ed. *Les Ruptures, figures du discours historique: Actes de la 5e journée d'études d'histoire de l'art moderne et contemporain* (Bordeaux: Université Michel de Montaigne Bordeaux III, 2005), 27–39.

82. See Hippolyte Taine, *Philosophie de l'art: Leçons professées à l'École des Beaux-Arts* (first published Paris: G. Ballière, 1865; this quote taken from 13th edition, Paris: Hachette, 1909) 110.

83. Taine is by far the most famous advocate of the theory of national character and artistic production, but Jarrassé has demonstrated how Taine derived his theory from an intellectual inquiry that dates back to the seventeenth century. Hippolyte Fortoul, for example, articulated the basic principle in 1845 when he wrote: "Chaque peuple est doué d'un certain génie qui est attaché à sa race, et qui préside à sa destinée...il se révèle surtout par les oeuvres des arts. C'est lui qui décide des arts où chaque nation porte son effort particulier," in *Essai sur la théorie et sur l'histoire de la peinture chez les anciens et les modernes* (Paris: Imprimerie de Bourgogne et Martinet, 1845), 4. Jarrassé also reported on conflicts Taine had with his contemporaries, such as Alfred Michiels, who accused Taine of stealing and over-simplifying his theories. See Jarrassé, "Mythes raciaux," 64.

84. On the Goncourts' relationship with Taine, see Enzo Caramaschi, "Au dîner Magny: Les Goncourt regardent Taine," *Cahiers Edmond et Jules de Goncourt* 4 (1995–96): 267–70.

85. Goncourt, *Journal* 2:3 (January 15, 1866): "Taine soutient que tous les hommes sont des produits de leur milieu. Gautier et nous, soutenons le contraire, qu'ils sont des exceptions." On suspicions about bookish university professors, see Goncourt, *Journal* 1:1170 (June 7, 1865).

86. In fact, an interesting tension exists in all of their writing that needs to be explored further. While the brothers have clear tendencies to interpret artworks as expressions of national essences, they also take great interest in individual genius and exceptional rather than typical artists. These competing discourses can be found in both *L'Art du dix-huitième siècle* and the monographs on Japanese artists.

87. Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, from the preface to *La Femme au dix-huitième siècle* (1862); reprinted in Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Préfaces et manifestes littéraires* (Paris: Charpentier, 1888), 187.

88. Thus Fragonard "naît là [à Grasse], et il naît de là. Il puise à cette terre, dont il sort, sa nature, son tempérament...Peint-il une scène de nature? il y jette sa patrie;" Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Fragonard: Etude contenant quatre dessins gravés à l'eau-forte* (Paris: Dentu, 1865), 3–4.

89. Goncourt, *Journal* 2:36 (September 9, 1866).

90. On Viollet-le-Duc and the general nationalist and ethnographic trend of art history in the 1860s and 1870s, see Jarrassé, "De la rupture comme résurgence du caractère national," 27–39. On Charles Blanc, see Song Mi-

Sook, *The Art Theories of Charles Blanc* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984).

91. Goncourt, *Hokousai*, 154: "cette mimique du dessin, parfois un peu caricaturale, mais qui n'est pas absolument particulière à Hokousai, mais presque générale chez tous les peintres japonais." Similar formulas can be found in *Outamaro*, 28: "avec la délicatesse maigre de leur corps sous leur épaisse chevelure noire mouillée, [les femmes] ont dans l'eau quelque chose de la fluidité vague des apparitions chevelues, sous lesquelles les Japonais représentent les âmes mortes."

92. See for example, *Hokousai*, 71, 104, 117, 138, and 204.

93. June Hargrove and Neil McWilliam, *Nationalism and French Visual Culture, 1870-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 12–13.