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## Between the Picturesque and the Political: Judith Gautier and Pierre Loti's Play *La Fille du Ciel*

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### ABSTRACT

In *La Fille du Ciel* (1911), a play co-authored by Pierre Loti and Judith Gautier, allusions to ethnic equality between the Manchu and the Han celebrate the political thinking of Kang Youwei (1858–1927), a Chinese reformer who figures in the play as Puits-des-bois, the emperor's minister. In this article, I use the picturesque and the political to show how the play combines Orientalist fantasy and late-Qing politics. Conceived as a French melodrama, the play makes the rift between imaginary narrative and political debate narrower than one might expect, but the picturesque tendency of its performance eventually submerges the political subtext.

### KEYWORDS

Judith Gautier; Pierre Loti;  
*La Fille du Ciel*; Belle Époque;  
Orientalist theatre; China;  
Orientalism

### Introduction

In the late 1890s, China was in political upheaval. The contact with Western powers brought about attempts at reforming the country. A host of political questions were under debate, and some of them appear as background in *La Fille du Ciel* (1911), a play co-authored by Judith Gautier and Pierre Loti. The play has received less attention than their other works such as Gautier's *Livre de Jade* (1867) or Loti's *Les derniers jours de Pékin* (1902), probably because its premiere in New York, with American actors, was regarded as a fiasco. It can be easily cited as an example of the defects of Gautier and Loti's exoticism, since the former never set foot in China despite her interest in the Chinese language and Chinese culture, and the latter possessed little knowledge of the Chinese language and its culture despite the fact that he sojourned in Beijing as a military envoy after the Boxer uprising in 1900. I will argue, however, that *La Fille du Ciel* is not simply the product of Orientalist exoticism. It celebrates the political thinking of Kang Youwei (1858–1927), a late-Qing reformer whom Gautier admired and represents as the emperor's righthand man in the play. The romantic encounter between the Manchu emperor and the Han empress extols the cultural nationalism upheld by Kang, but this egalitarian vision of China as a modern nation-state is muddled by the histrionics of melodrama.

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To support this claim and examine how dramatic style and stage adaptation adumbrate political allusions in *La Fille du Ciel*, I analyse how the play oscillates between the picturesque and the political, contrasting modes that characterise China's hold on the French literary imagination, and how its performance tilted toward the picturesque. At the most basic level, this will account for how the political subtext of *La Fille du Ciel* gets overdetermined and stifled by the attention-grabbing Orientalist mystique. To go deeper into the matter, the conceptual framework is linked to France's ambivalence towards things Chinese, which can be productively summarised as sinophilia and sinophobia.<sup>1</sup> The picturesque and the political also partake in the Belle Époque cult for larger-than-life female character-types 'as a theatrical conceit' in the performance of gender identities (Apter 1999, 131). In what follows, I will present the cultural exchange between France and China, characterised by the double influence of sinophilia and sinophobia, as the necessary context of the creation of *La Fille du Ciel*. Then, I will demonstrate how the play attempts to offer itself as an Orientalist entertainment while still alluding to real-world Chinese politics through a genre in which one would not normally expect to encounter issues of actual political reform. However, the play invokes Kang's political ideas through amorous terms which obfuscate the meaning of those ideas. As a result, and given the commercial nature of *La Fille du Ciel*, the learned assimilation of reformist ideas give way to the hypertrophy of the picturesque, which overrides the political. I will show how this bears the stamp of local colour, a notion complicit in the prevalence of the picturesque in theatrical practice. Finally, I will identify this complicity with aspects of the celebrity culture of Belle Époque France.

### **At the Crossroads of Sinophilia and Sinophobia: *La Fille du Ciel* in Context**

In the nineteenth century, the admiration of Chinese culture and chinoiserie prominent in the eighteenth century subsided,<sup>2</sup> gradually giving way to japonisme.<sup>3</sup> Perceived as an empire in decline, China opened up several treaty ports and saw the plunder of the Old Summer Palace during the Second Opium War (1856–1860).<sup>4</sup> From 1881 to 1885, the campaign led by the French Third Republic supplanted China's authority over Indochina, which turned from a Chinese tribute state into a French protectorate. In 1900, anti-Western sentiments in China culminated in the Boxer Uprising, which involved attacks against Westerners and triggered retaliation by an alliance of eight nations including France. In this period, reports of Chinese atrocities associated China with cruelty and the mastery of torture, exemplified by Octave Mirbeau's *Le Jardin des Supplices* (1899). In a sinophobic mood, Loti regards the Chinese as innately cruel masters 'd'atroces raffinements chinois pour prolonger des paroxysmes de souffrance' (2018, 1058). Meanwhile, French scholarship about China flourished in the same period. In 1814, the first European professorship in Chinese was established at the Collège de France (Will 2015). The foundation of the Musée Guimet (1879) and the Musée Cernuschi (1898), whose collections of Chinese artefacts were considerable, testified to the French interest in Chinese culture. In short, the representation of China in turn-of-the-century France is inseparable from imperialist advancement, academic appraisal, and mass-culture appreciation. It is at these crossroads of sinophilia and sinophobia that *La Fille du Ciel* was conceived.

*La Fille du Ciel* is set in an imaginary period in which China is divided between the Manchu-led Qing and a Han Chinese regime occupying Nanjing, a situation reminiscent of the Taiping rebellion which occurred from 1851 to 1864. The protagonist is the Manchu emperor Guangxu, whose righthand man is Puits-des-bois, a rendering of the real-life minister Kang who launched a series of abortive reforms in 1898, which were blocked by other factions of the Court headed by the empress dowager Cixi. In the play, the emperor visits the rebel capital Nanjing in disguise as a regional lord, in the company of Puits-des-bois, to pay tribute to the Han empress, la Fille du Ciel. He falls in love with her, but his identity is revealed when the Qing army is about to seize Nanjing. A captive brought to Beijing, the empress refuses the emperor's proposal of marriage, presented as a reform for the empire's benefit. Though she loved the emperor as long as he kept his Chinese disguise, she prefers to take poison conserved in a golden caddy tied to his belt. Heartbroken, the emperor kneels in front of the empress's body and bids the crowd to prostrate themselves.

Before *La Fille du Ciel*, most of Loti's theatrical projects were adaptations of his own work such as *Pêcheur d'Islande* (1893), *Le Roman d'un spahi* (1897), and *Ramuntcho* (1908) (Genet and Hervé 1988, 417–432). *La Fille du Ciel* was one of his rare attempts at an *ad hoc* piece for theatre. Gautier was a more experienced playwright than Loti, as well as having written Chinese-inspired novels, translations, and articles on the cultures of China and Japan. She had had plays produced in playhouses including the Mathurins, the Vaudeville, and the Odéon before collaborating with Loti (Noblet 1985, 174). They had known each other in shared social circles, notably at a masquerade held by Juliette Adam in 1887. Judith attended dressed as Cleopatra and Loti as Osiris (Quella-Villéger 2005, 187).

What brought them together to write *La Fille du Ciel*? In spring 1903, Sarah Bernhardt asked Loti to write a 'pièce chinoise' (Daniel 2012).<sup>5</sup> Loti obtained Gautier's agreement to collaborate with him and Bernhardt was initially happy with the arrangement. The actress specified that there should be 'une impératrice dans le genre de la vôtre [Gautier's], galante, glorieuse et sanguinaire'.<sup>6</sup> To characterise the play in broad brushstrokes, Loti indicated that 'ce sera bien enfantin, bien mélo; mais elle le veut. Les temps futurs sauveront un peu tout cela du ridicule, et puis vous y mettez votre connaissance de la vieille Chine réveillée' (Daniel 2012). One can infer from their correspondence that Gautier produced substantial parts of the play, including most of the prose and verse in the script, while Loti was responsible for the décors i.e. the 'Tableaux' in the script and stage production, which draw on passages from *Les derniers jours de Pékin*. In August 1903, Gautier expressed her concern about time pressure given the ongoing revolutionary movements in China: 'des événements peuvent surgir qui nous rendraient plus opportuns ou peut-être moins' (Daniel 2012). This shows that Gautier wished to 'keep abreast of' ongoing events through certain allusions in the play. To the detriment of the play's progress, however, Loti's itinerant life spent in Paris, Rochefort, and Istanbul made his communication with Gautier difficult, as did his disapproval of some of her ideas.<sup>7</sup> Dissatisfied with a draft shown to her in May 1904, Bernhardt declined to star in the play that she had commissioned and, ironically, accepted a play by Catulle Mendès, Gautier's ex-husband, in 1906 (Richardson 1986, 182). The actress sent a telegram to Loti explaining that the play 'a un premier acte très bien, un deuxième acte injouable, un autre acte où la reine a quatre monologues et le dernier acte beau, mais trois fois

trop long' (Evrard 1926). The play was offered to a number of theatre managers from the Comédie Française to the Vaudeville and the Théâtre de la Porte-Saint-Martin, but none of them showed interest in staging it (Richardson 1986, 181). Gautier and Loti eventually completed *La Fille du Ciel* without Bernhardt, for whom the play had been conceived. Having been left in abeyance for several years, it was first published serially in the *Revue des deux mondes* from March to May 1911. It premiered not in France, but at the Century Theatre, New York in October 1912, in an English translation by George Egerton, starring Viola Allen. It stayed on the programme for about eight months (Richardson 1986, 182).

### **'Galante, glorieuse et sanguinaire': Invoking Chinese Cultural Nationalism through Melodrama**

In her biography of Judith Gautier, Joanna Richardson rightly surmises that *La Fille du Ciel* is conceived to follow the footsteps of dramatist Victorien Sardou, who composed *Cléopâtre* starring Bernhardt in 1890, as the play 'has the grandiose melodrama of Sardou, the visual magnificence of the Yellow Empire' and it was 'written as a vehicle for Sarah Bernhardt, who moved strong men to tears when she died on stage; but—at least in France—only Sarah could perform it' (Richardson 1986, 182). However, this point of departure does not exclude the play's absorption of ideas drawn from actual debates on politics in China. *La Fille du Ciel* alludes to real-world politics through melodrama. Indeed, the play fulfils the formal requirements and emotional appeal of melodrama. According to Anne Vincent-Buffault, melodrama features spectacular stage effects, the use of music to enhance emotional intensity, and moralised feelings (1986, 315). *La Fille du Ciel* takes place in the courts of Nanjing and Beijing, revolving around royal ceremony, gallant conversations, brutal battles, a failed proposal, sacrifice, and the protagonist's suicide. Oriental music, the banter of Puits-des-bois, and other minor characters provide comic mediation. Emotionally provocative scenes range from the empress's choice of poison conserved under the emperor's belt to her final fall, followed by mass prostration including the emperor himself. The text promises terror, pity, and tenderness aplenty.

Yet, in the play's preface, Gautier indicates that Kang's advice represents 'une réconciliation pacifique et sincère entre les deux races ennemies' (Gautier and Loti 1911, iv). Implicitly, this refers to Kang's conception of China as a modern nation-state based on equality among different ethnic/religious groups during the Hundred Days' Reform (June-September 1898). In the play, the minister Puits-des-bois accompanies the emperor to visit Nanjing incognito and provides him with confidential assistance. With this storyline, Gautier celebrates the advice offered by Kang in reality. To probe into the political allusions in *La Fille du Ciel*, it is necessary to traverse the melodramatic surface to understand how the play invokes Kang's political thinking in amorous terms.

*La Fille du Ciel* enacts a form of political discussion softened by the accoutrements of melodrama, given the play's use of a love story to propound an unfulfilled idea for China's political reform, and to piggyback on political convulsions ranging from the Taiping uprising to revolutionary movements that came to overthrow the Qing dynasty in 1911. The play's political allusions and resonance with headline stories from China reflect the breadth of Gautier's interest in China, which goes beyond literary

studies and reaches contemporary politics. Having identified the play's pacifist position regarding the Manchu-Han tension in China, Michael Lerner (1998, 65) is right in surmising that 'the analysis of the real issues at stake and fuller characterisation have been subordinated to the interests of sensational theatrical presentation, whether spectacular, emotional or horrific', but dismissing the play as 'shallow melodrama' overlooks the very way in which the play interprets the political argument at stake, that is, representing ethnic reconciliation and national unification in terms of romance. I read the play as a clash of contradictory interests, represented by the picturesque and the political, in which exoticism and political discourse are understood in uneven terms. Had it not been for Bernhardt's withdrawal, could *La Fille du Ciel* have used her fame and the popularity of melodrama as a springboard to discuss Chinese politics? What are we to make of the relationship between melodrama and the political import of the play?

Melodramatic elements are fleshed out in *La Fille du Ciel* to such an extent that one critic complained that its men and women 'indulge in too much gallantry' (Schwartz 1927, 57). Gallantry characterises the Manchu emperor's devotion to the Han empress. In a revealing conversation, the disguised emperor declares that he would rather be the Tartare emperor (that is, his real self) so that he could consign the whole realm to her:

- L'empereur: Ah! Que je souhaiterais être l'Empereur tartare qui règne à Pékin! ...  
 L'impératrice: Quelle sombre et étrange idée! Vous souhaiteriez être mon plus mortel ennemi? Pourquoi donc?  
 L'empereur: Pour tenter de mettre la Chine entière à vos pieds, vous rendre votre bien, et devenir, après, votre sujet le plus fidèle. (Gautier and Loti 1911, 85)

Earlier in the play, Puits-des-bois observes that his master is 'comme la lyre sacrée dont les cordes frémissent au moindre souffle' (Gautier and Loti 1911, 33). He devotes himself to the empress as much as the empress refuses any reconciliation with Manchus. This is demonstrated through how their definition of 'noble' differs. For the emperor, their marriage will become 'l'unique gloire de mon règne, de restaurer la noble tradition chinoise, en fusionnant nos deux peuples pour jamais' (41). The 'noble tradition' probably refers to the marriage alliance as an appeasement strategy adopted by various dynasties with neighbouring peoples (often nomadic as was the case of Han dynasty). He also defines their union as their 'missions surhumaines', a destiny hinging on the empress's consent (208). Finally, he suggests that their union will engender a new China, which will gain vitality and dominate the world (209). So, the consummation of his love will bring about a revitalised national destiny.

If appeals to nobility facilitate the emperor's gallant pursuit, nobility means patriotic zeal for the Fille du Ciel, intent on doing honour to the Han nation. As the Manchu army storms the palace, the empress is cast as an indestructible warrior who rejects the act of prostration and commits her life to defending the Han nation. She declares that 'nous voici tous égaux. Il n'y a plus qu'une seule et même grandeur, celle que nous donne, pareillement et à tous, la noblesse du sacrifice' (Gautier and Loti 1911, 118). The 'indéracinable haine de race' that founds her desire to vindicate the Han nation remains consistent throughout the play, despite her feelings for the emperor (127). This is not to suggest that she is completely unresponsive to the emperor's love. Her share of the play's romance lies in her acknowledgement of their feelings for each other: 'nous étions comme deux astres, séparés par l'incommensurable abîme, mais qui se jetaient éperdument leur lumière'

(221). Her passion, courage, and suicide tick all the boxes for ‘galante, glorieuse et sanguinaire’. Moreover, it has already been pointed out that *La Fille du Ciel* plays out the tradition of *dilemme cornélien* in French theatre, a plot device that introduces two conflicting interests impossible to resolve, such as love and honour, or desire and duty (Daniel and Lavaud 2020, 97–108, 135–150). There is a sense in which Gautier and Loti try to juggle with the degree of otherness and familiarity by mixing themes central to the play. Mapping the romance between the sovereigns of two nations warring against each other onto this dilemma seems to be a strategic move to familiarise the audience with the play’s core tension.

Consonant with this is the resemblance between the *Fille du Ciel* and Joan of Arc in intertextual characterisation. Since the play was conceived to be performed by Sarah Bernhardt, it makes sense to seek forms of continuity with her interpretations of Joan of Arc in plays by Jules Barbier (1890) and Émile Moreau (1909). In the *La Fille du Ciel*, the empress is portrayed in the same way as the ‘filles-fétiches’ of the Boxers in Loti’s *Les derniers jours de Pékin* and women revolutionaries in ‘L’Âme chinoise’, a political commentary written by Gautier in 1919. Both Loti and Gautier compare these figures to Joan of Arc and the *Fille du Ciel* is represented in the same terms. When the Manchu emperor meets the empress as a prisoner in Beijing, he alludes to her valour in the battlefield:

Dites que vous avez été héroïne sublime, la grande impératrice guerrière, la déesse des combats qui défait les flèches et la mitraille, celle qui revivra éternellement dans les poèmes et l’histoire! (Gautier and Loti 1911, 114)

In Act IV Scene 1, commoners at an execution site in Beijing also recall that ‘les balles, la mitraille, tout cela passait au travers d’elle, comme au travers d’une ombre’ (Gautier and Loti 1911, 166). This echoes the image of Joan of Arc, used by Loti to describe the ‘filles-fétiches’ of the Boxers in *Les derniers jours de Pékin* and by Gautier to describe women revolutionaries in 1911 in ‘L’Âme chinoise’ (1919). In ‘Les deux déesses des Boxers’, Loti records his visit to a hall where two women shamans are detained. Seated in a room strewn with ‘leurs atours de guerrières et de déesses’, they collapse into a state of consternation and are described as follows:

elles étaient des espèces de Jeanne d’Arc [...] elles étaient des filles-fétiches que l’on posait dans les pagodes criblées d’obus pour en protéger les autels, des inspirées qui marchaient au feu avec des cris pour entraîner les soldats. Elles étaient les *déeses* de ces incompréhensibles Boxers, à la fois atroces et admirables, grands [*sic*] hystériques de la patrie chinoise. (Loti [1901] 2018, 1042)

It was believed that the martial arts and magic practiced by the Boxers could protect the human body from weapons of all sorts, including European guns. Depicting the empress as imperishable in the hail of bullets makes a clear reference to this. In her later article ‘L’Âme chinoise’, a political commentary about the Hundred Days’ Reform and the 1911 revolution, Gautier writes that Chinese women want to sacrifice their life for the Republic and she compares them to ‘des Jeanne d’Arc, sans mysticisme, [qui] ont plusieurs fois sauvé des villes et des provinces’ (1919, 170). In nineteenth-century France, Joan of Arc was a heroine and symbol of national unification in the social climate bearing the brunt of the Franco-Prussian War and the Dreyfus Affair.



Playing this role was essential to Bernhardt's rise to a national icon. The intertextual connections between *La Fille du Ciel* and Joan of Arc can be understood as primed and ready, but never activated because Bernhardt stopped short of giving the performance that would have materialised them. But the message seems clear enough: just as the Fille du Ciel sacrifices herself for her nation, women revolutionaries die for the Republic and the detained shamans are ready to receive divine inspiration overcoming the fear of death—are they not all, in a way, daughters of heaven whose images are mapped onto Joan of Arc by French writers to make sense of Chinese patriotism? Some broader implications of this use of a figure from France's own nation-building narrative can be teased out, gesturing towards a transcultural and strategic rapprochement to make it easier to sympathise with the Fille du Ciel.

Melodrama goes as far as obfuscating the link between Puits-des-bois himself and reformist ideas at the first glance. In the play, he often reminds the emperor to behave decorously (like a subject) in Nanjing and to diminish ethnic antipathy through instigating Han-Manchu intermarriage. He prioritises the emperor's bloodline over his own influence in the hope of promoting Han-Manchu union: 'Moi, je construis l'avenir dans des écrits, prophétiques peut-être, mais je laisse aux générations prochaines le soin d'accomplir l'œuvre. Tandis que vous, c'est votre propre sang que vous offrez en sacrifice, pour fléchir la haine invincible' (Gautier and Loti 1911, 25). As a result, Puits-des-bois is less the political visionary presented in 'L'Âme chinoise', and more the facilitator of gallantry. If the play can be summarised as 'Guangxu fails to woo the Fille du Ciel after she finds out who he really is', romance seems to outweigh the celebration of Kang's agenda. In her writing on Chinese politics, Gautier seems keen on teaching the French public about the geopolitical events in China, but the message becomes less straightforward and loses ground to the efforts to please the audience.

Gautier acknowledges Kang's significance, but the superimposition of different temporalities to which the play refers buries his significance in entangled historical references. Yvan Daniel (2012) has indicated that *La Fille du Ciel* confounds or superimposes three periods of Chinese history i.e. the Taiping Rebellion under the reign of emperor Xianfeng (1831–1861), the Hundred Days' Reform (1898) under Guangxu's reign, and the Boxer uprising in 1900. In the same article, Daniel also notes that the play's 'fausse historicité' echoes international news items over recent decades. However, this view essentially says historical allusions ring a bell with the audience familiar with what is on the news, but it does not explain how the mixture of periods works in the play. In *Le Dragon impérial* (1869), Gautier had already imagined a Chinese insurrection against the Manchu reign by transferring an uprising reminiscent of the Taiping Rebellion to an earlier period of the Qing Dynasty in the novel, but the uprising provides not so much a means of introducing allusions to real-world political thinking as a background for the development of feuilleton-style adventures.<sup>8</sup> In *La Fille du Ciel*, the Taiping Rebellion sets out the political conditions for a Han regime to co-exist with the Qing. In reality, Kang's advocacy for Han-Manchu equality came to prominence during the Hundred Days' Reform, but this reference is mediated through Gautier's interpretation of Kang's proposal. Finally, the imperial palace in Beijing, as Loti experienced it in 1900, serves as a model for the play's tableaux and layout.

Gautier interprets the Taiping Rebellion and the Revolution as a consistent Han antipathy against the Manchu. Such a view oversimplifies the matter. Projecting Kang's



egalitarian ideal into an uprising half a century earlier, and proposing ethnic union through a reshuffled historical framework, does little to clarify the matter. Thus, it is necessary to consider Kang's political thinking in relation to the Hundred Days' Reform. The Hundred Days' Reform was an initiative to modernise China's education system, economy, political system, and army. Before it ended, some of the goals had been put in place while some had not. Among those that remained un-realised were constitutional monarchism and ethnic equality between the Manchu in power, Han, Mongols, Tibetans, Muslims, and other peoples. This was a period in which intellectuals started to conceive of China as a nation instead of the possession of imperial dynasties. They realised that the Chinese nation did not really have a name and a defined body of members except the names of dynasties. China, as Kang regrets, 'assumes the order under Heaven but only has names for its dynasties and no name for its nation' ([1907] 1981, I, 611–612).<sup>9</sup> The absence of a nation points to the fact that 'China' has long been the private possession of ruling families instead of a country, a public and national concept.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, to reform China is to reach a new conception of what China consists of as a modern nation-state. This is not just about finding a name to baptise the nation, but a renewal of historiography and discursive strategies for the self-representation of an imagined community, whose identity, as Benedict Anderson (1983, 6) argues, is 'to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined'. Among the eminent thinkers in China's nationalistic debate were Kang and Zhang Taiyen (章太炎, 1869–1936), who respectively put forward a proposal to name the country and define the Chinese nation. For Kang (1981, 611–612), both Manchu and Han are natural members of China thanks to the acculturation of Confucianism, so there is no need to maintain the distinction within the concept of Chinese nationhood. He suggested that ethnic categories should be eliminated so that China can 'unify as one and eradicate suspicion and rancour for good' and 'become strong together and empower China' (Shen 1997, 1–77).<sup>11</sup> In contrast, Zhang believes the Han nation is the only legitimate subject of China and both concepts are pretty much synonyms designating the same group of people. In this sense, the boundaries of the 'Republic of China' should be delineated along lines of ethnicity. For Zhang, this is because identical culture is a result of identical ethnicity; if peoples other than Han accept Han assimilation, they must adopt Han language and culture altogether (Zhang 1907, 1–17). Based on these formulations, Kang supports constitutional monarchism while Zhang advocates revolution fuelled by anti-Manchu sentiments. In a study on the construction of Chinese nationhood, Shen Sung-chiao identifies Kang's political thinking as 'cultural nationalism' which uses cultural identity as the source of nationalistic alignment, and Zhang's version of Chinese nationhood is regarded as a form of 'racial nationalism', which draws on racial distinction as a source of identity.<sup>12</sup> Although Zhang's thought is Han supremacist and influenced by social Darwinism, his ideological position should be contextualised within the practical concerns of the revolution, which needed to pitch its causes to maximise mass support.

The essays in Gautier's *Les Parfums de la pagode* (1919) articulate her view of political events in China and show that her sources of information exceeded reading knowledge, private lessons given by Ting Tungling, and Orientalist rêverie.<sup>13</sup> In 'L'Âme chinoise', Gautier (1919, 165) on the one hand sympathises with the Han Chinese as being dispossessed of their sovereignty over three centuries, and, on the other hand, she extols Kang

as ‘l’illustre réformateur’ who brings the country ‘un léger espoir d’un rapprochement pacifique’. The article displays ambivalence toward the potential conflict between the revolution’s use of anti-Manchu ideology and Kang’s monarchist, moderate approach to political reform and pacifism. This ambivalence is characterised by Gautier’s profession of sympathy: ‘J’éprouvai toujours un sentiment pénible quand je voyais traiter de rebelles les partisans de tout un peuple qui voulait reconquérir son autonomie et reprendre ses droits usurpés’ (164). She sees the dispossessed Han as undergoing ‘crises héroïques’ that Europe deliberately ignores, and seems to interpret Kang’s reform as an alternative that can avoid bloodshed. For Gautier, Kang’s cultural nationalism can ‘effacer l’antique rancune, réconcilier Chinois et Mandchous’ (165). Consequently, without compromising her admiration for both Kang and revolutionary fervour, Gautier’s ambivalence allows her to cheerlead both Kang’s political ideal and the ‘enthousiasme extraordinaire’ dominating Republican China. ‘L’Âme chinoise’, written after the 1911 Revolution, nods knowingly to the Republic by affirming that ‘la volonté du peuple, c’est la voix du ciel’, whereas *La Fille du Ciel* transposes the febrile politics of late-Qing China into a picturesque realm where romance, grandeur, and sacrifice are means of exploring concepts of national unification (169).

### The Hypertrophy of the Picturesque

Although performing Orientalist characters largely affirmed existing power relations of gender and colonisation in Belle Époque Paris, it also gave license to unconventional sexuality and expressions of femininity as an artistic channel. This constituted the cultural habitat in which *La Fille du Ciel* was conceived. Removed from this habitat, its adaptation (translated as *The Daughter of Heaven*) in New York was considered by *The New York Times* (13 October 1912) to be ‘rich in spectacle, but dramatically deficient’. Even if ‘effective scenic pictures’, ‘gorgeousness of dress’, and ‘the swish of many coloured silks’ seem to praise the sensual aspect of the performance, the play fared less well ‘with acting that failed to convey any special sense of color—an overplus of mechanical noise called music’. Lamenting the weak dramatic pulse, the critic concludes that ‘if the play has any special merit as literature the fact is not apparent in the theatre’ (17). I would like to suggest this is symptomatic of the picturesque, whose excessive use in a culturally and linguistically displaced context becomes the seed of the play’s failure, because had it been staged in the way it was originally conceived, the political subtext could have remained intelligible because the intertextual references were easier to access for certain spectators. The French public may not have had first-hand experience of China, but the allusions would have been recognised by those who stayed in the loop of international news.<sup>14</sup> Counting on this, Gautier’s interpretation of late-Qing political struggle is welded together with an entertaining form for the French audience, but fell flat for its American audience.

Nevertheless, this is not to say that the play’s made-and-staged-in-France version could absolutely overcome the internal conflict between the picturesque and the political. Just like the genre of historical novels, *La Fille du Ciel* falls prey to what Claudie Bernard (1996, 70–71) calls the ‘tentations romanesques’ which arise in the combination of fact and fiction. As is discussed in the last section, the play’s melodramatic elements consist of romance, equivalent to the ‘sentimental’ and love in Bernard’s appraisal.

Love can illustrate socio-political conflicts, but it can also drown them in lyric or melodramatic intoxication (71). Another pitfall is the picturesque, which Bernard equates to *couleur locale*. A corollary of the quest for geographical, cultural, and human otherness, the French term *pittoresque* is bound up with this notion of *couleur locale*,<sup>15</sup> both terms being associated with discourses on the aesthetic effects of painting. *Couleur locale* originally designated the colour proper to an object independent of the influence of its surroundings. Through centuries of metaphoric transfer, *couleur locale* comes to signify the distinctive features characteristic of a given time or place in visual, musical, and verbal representations.<sup>16</sup>

If local colour can be understood as what makes an object of representation distinctive, the picturesque emphasises the detail and the effect of vividness achieved through the use of local colour. For instance, Gautier (1919, 158–162) considers the ceremonial reception of a Manchu prince she attended in Paris in 1905 to be ‘très pittoresque’ as the outfit of Qing artillery officers mixes European apparel, embroidered dragons, and Manchu braids. Something about the pomp impressed Gautier by its power to invoke China through metonymy. However, such a belief in ‘distinct’ features is impregnated with what Vladimir Kapor (2009, 76–77) identifies as the ‘relativist trap’ and ‘referential fallacy’. In the ‘relativist trap’, the object in question does not possess any distinctness per se; rather, its distinctness comes from the essentialising gaze of a group which authenticates their own perception and judgement through consensual practices. The ‘referential fallacy’ assumes ‘there is such a thing as a distinguishing set of features intrinsic to any one place, a belief that has frequently led both writers and literary critics to think that local colour might best be seized empirically’ (Kapor 2009, 77). The concept of *couleur locale* came to prominence in the aesthetic debates of literary circles in nineteenth-century France, replacing the Classicist norm of unities in theatrical representation with the Romantic pursuit of the *vérité*, advocated by Victor Hugo in *La Préface de ‘Cromwell’* (1827) and Benjamin Constant in ‘À l’occasion d’une tragédie allemande de M. Robert intitulée *Du pouvoir des préjugées*’ (1830) (Kapor 2009, 102–105).

Local colour became a sought-after quality embodying culturally conditioned otherness in painting, music, literature, and theatre. *L’Art de la mise en scène* by Louis Becq de Fouquières provides a pertinent example:

La couleur locale n’a de prix que lorsque c’est celle-là même que peut imaginer le spectateur. Si on s’ingéniait à monter un drame chinois, se déroulant par exemple à Pékin, il est clair que ce qu’il y aurait de plus simple serait de nous montrer des kiosques, des arbres, des Chinois et des Chinoises de paravent, car ce sont ceux-là seulement que nous connaissons et qui ont à nos yeux le plus pur caractère chinois. Or, tout ce qui nous est étranger est, à un degré quelconque, un peu chinois pour nous. (Becq de Fouquières 1884, 99–100)

Bearing the pretension to accuracy and authenticity, local colour is the open-sesame for exotic enchantment in theatre, but it can be illusory and self-excusing by giving too much leeway to picturesque representations. It also shapes the expectation of the general public. In her analysis of the reception of Gautier’s *L’Usurpateur: Épisode de l’Histoire japonaise* (1615) published in 1875, Elizabeth Emery is right in acknowledging that writers like Gautier are able to situate their stories in carefully arranged frameworks of history, but if the reader does not recognise the intertexts in question, the particular references will be taken as local colour (Emery 2022, 49).

Effectively, the reception of *L'Usurpateur* is analogous to *La Fille du Ciel*. Unfamiliar with the 'real' figures and events in the history of Japan and its culture depicted in the novel, the French reader is led to focus on what they can recognise, that is, the vividly painted literary 'tableaux' that recall the *ukiyo-e* prints fashionable in the 1880s (Emery 2022, 49). Even if Gautier underlined the 'Histoire' at stake, her contemporaries interpreted the novel in terms of the feminised aesthetics associated with *japonisme*. In the case of *La Fille du Ciel*, the analogous insensitivity to culture-specific referents like the Hundred Days Reform and the involvement of Guangxu Emperor and Kang merges these figures with the picturesque, instead of signalling the historical specificity presented through intertextuality. In 1887, Gautier renamed *L'Usurpateur* as *La Sœur du Soleil*, veering away from the aura of *Histoire* to an ostensibly more profitable profile. Also denoting a female figure belonging to the celestial, *La Fille du Ciel* presents another of Gautier's attempt at a 'version romanesque alternative' (Emery 2022, 58).

Furthermore, the complicity of local colour in the picturesque hypertrophy is not confined to the stage; it goes beyond aesthetic debates by bordering on life practices (Kapor 2009, 135). In his analysis of references to local architecture and culinary specialties in Théophile Gautier's *Voyage en Espagne* (1843), Kapor shows that the quest for local colour leads to 'the materialised picturesque which can be eaten or stepped into' (137). It is not enough to contemplate a painting or a play which confirm the stereotypical collective imaginary conjured up by the subject matter. The picturesque engages lifestyle and behavioural simulation. The *fête chinoise* organised by Pierre Loti very much symptomises 'the materialised picturesque' which lies at the heart of *La Fille du Ciel*'s poetics. Taking place in Rochefort, 11 May 1903, it was a house party that involved a procession featuring an Annamese impersonation of Wu Zetian (Genet and Hervé 1988, 359), a seventh-century empress, tea tasting, opium smoking, and a visit to the illuminated gardens, respecting a dress code deemed to be Chinese. Among the guests were Judith Gautier, local officials, the chief doctor of the French navy, and two Chinese attachés from the Qing embassy. Gautier and Loti met in person for the first time since their agreement to co-author the play in April 1903. Gautier's 'Une Fête chinoise chez Pierre Loti', collected in *Les Parfums de la pagode*, was first published as an article in *Fémina* on 15 June 1903.<sup>17</sup> In the article, Gautier congratulates the attendees for their cultural fluency, identifying them as 'des gens avertis qui ont couru le monde et pour qui l'Extrême-Orient n'est pas un mythe', whereas the actual Chinese envoys 'ont presque l'air moins chinois que les autres' and Japanese costume was admitted as Chinese (1919, 143).<sup>18</sup> Acting as an instance of the 'playful European mimicry' (Mesch 2013, 91), the materialised picturesque realised by the *fête chinoise* underlies the gestation of *La Fille du Ciel* as a participative quest for human alterity. Preceding the writing of *La Fille du Ciel*, this Chinese-themed cosplay party fosters a vision in which boundaries between fact and fiction, and life and art, are blurred.

The materialised picturesque conforms to the Belle Époque model of celebrity that revolves around what Mesch calls 'the performance of otherness' (2013, 86). The exoticism of Loti and Gautier shares some of the authorial performativity of women writers such as Myriam Harry and Lucie Delarue-Mardrus, famous for their Orientalist photographic poses for women's magazines including *Fémina*. In this respect, Mesch indicates that the East functions as 'a shared landscape for uninhibited exploration and orientalis-ing mimicry that always inevitably reinforce existing power structures' (91). Performers

such as Sarah Bernhardt, Cléo de Mérode, Ida-Rubenstein, and Sara Yacco impressed French popular culture with roles or gender identities marked by behaviour deemed too masculine or unbecoming of a lady as well as the character of dominatrix mapped onto a will to power. According to Emily Apter (1999, 153), the parade of personalities performed by these actresses fabricates portmanteau identities that conflated feminist, exotic, and queer profiles in Parisian identity politics. Though techniques other than local colour have been employed to make their work interesting, it cannot be denied that Gautier and Loti looked to capitalise on Bernhardt's stardom and mass publicity for the success of *La Fille du Ciel*, whose heroine seemed likely to join the rank of Cleopatra, Thais, and Salome.<sup>19</sup> Gautier and Loti's own participation in the *fête chinoise* confirms the influence of Orientalist femininity on turn-of-the-century society as a theatrical conceit reproducible in real life. The party as a mass-media spectacle presents a foretaste of what *La Fille du Ciel* could have contributed to the Belle Époque imaginary of otherness, and it also reveals the motivation of Loti's gesture, aptly surmised by Mesch (2013, 137) as 'trying to "be" Sarah, by "being" Sarah Bernhardt "being" Cleopatra' in search of his version of Orientalism.

If Judith Gautier's performance of otherness is caught between solid engagement with the Orient and romanticisation which led to the melodramatic muddling of political subtexts in *La Fille du Ciel*, Loti's wavers between his contrasting feelings towards China, recorded in *Les derniers jours de Pékin*. The contrast feeds into the play to oppose the picturesque Han capital of Nanjing to the brutality of Beijing under the Manchu rule. In *La Fille du Ciel*, elements borrowed from *Les derniers jours de Pékin* conjure up the imperial garden of Nanjing, the throne room in both capitals, and perhaps most importantly, scenes of execution and battlefields. Loti's book documents Beijing and its surroundings when an international coalition retaliated against the Boxer uprising and xenophobic attacks in 1900. Loti describes his activities from his arrival in September 1900 to the last night he spent in the Forbidden City (May 1901). As aide-de-camp to Vice-Admiral Pottier, Loti carried dispatches to the French Legation in Beijing, met Li Hongzhang in a delegation, and represented Pottier at the funeral of a German officer. In Beijing, Loti displays a host of emotions ranging from amusement, and bewilderment to disturbance, melancholy, horror, and guilt. In a sinophilic mood, Loti describes the human aspect of the Chinese as victims of both the Boxers and the foreign invaders, contemplating his own out-of-place-ness with irony and humour in the splendid palace whose art and architecture inspire admiration. As he turns sinophobic, he sees buildings that used to represent ancient grandeur as grotesque and monstrous (Loti [1901] 2018, 1042).

In *La Fille du Ciel*, signs of monstrosity pervade the descriptions of Beijing, reflecting the sinophobic input from *Les derniers jours de Pékin*, whereas Nanjing appears to be a product of sinophilic idealisation. The Manchu army's triumph over Nanjing obliterates the citadel of sinophilic dreams. Both the throne rooms, in Nanjing and Beijing, contain dragons as the imperial sigil, but monsters only appear in the Manchu throne room (technically left by the Ming dynasty in reality).<sup>20</sup> There, the feet of a carillon are moulded into monstrous, gilt figures, and the carpets are lined with porcelain monsters as well. For a seasoned naval officer like Loti, it is easy to transfer scenes of fighting and brutality to theatrical description. Reporting to the empress about the Manchu invasion at the west of the citadel, a messenger says 'Quelques milliers de femmes ont réussi à se

jeter dans le fleuve ... Les autres, on les viole, en même temps qu'on les étrangle ... Le sang coule sur les pavés, autant que l'eau du ciel après l'orage ...' (Gautier and Loti 1911, 116). This echoes vividly a passage in 'Vers Pékin': as Loti sails upstream to reach Beijing, he traverses 'l'eau vaseuse et infecte où flottent des immondices de toute sorte, des carcasses le ventre gonflé, des cadavres humains et des cadavres de bêtes' ([1901] 2018, 1037). Aside from being one of the two major colours (along with gold) of the throne room in Beijing, red is regularly identified with blood in *Les derniers jours de Pékin*: the ramparts encircling the Imperial City are 'couleur de sang' and the Forbidden City is painted 'couleur de sang qui a séché' (1068, 1114). The Manchu take-over alters the semantic sense of 'blood', shifting it from a pacifist romantic union to slaughter.

Before Nanjing falls, references to blood involve the potential union of Han and Manchu. Afterwards, blood is associated with atrocity, death, and torture. Just as Nanjing suffers from carnage, the tableau of Beijing presents an abattoir of rebels. Act IV opens in an execution site where executioners, passers-by, and fruit merchants rub shoulders in front of heads on spikes and decapitated bodies. In the tableau, some executioners are wiping down the blood on their blades at the front of the stage, and the first scene begins with one executioner's complaint of sore arms to onlookers (Gautier and Loti 1911, 162). This is reminiscent of the encounter with an executioner in Octave Mirbeau's 1899 novel *Le Jardin des supplices*. As the narrator and Clara meet the executioner during his break, the man is cleaning 'de fins instruments d'acier avec des chiffons de soie; sa robe était couverte d'éclaboussures de sang; ses mains semblaient gantées de rouge' (Mirbeau [1899] 2021, 202). Although the executioners in the play are not figures carefully crafted to criticise bourgeois mediocrity in nineteenth-century France,<sup>21</sup> they share with Mirbeau's a debonair matter-of-factness, giving the impression that torture is as everyday and artisanal as brewing in China.

Nevertheless, Loti's contribution to *La Fille du Ciel* should not be reduced to an uncritical outlet of Orientalist sadism and personal feelings. Aware of the gravity of the play's political allusions, Loti feels indebted to the extraordinary experience he had in the Forbidden City, which propels him towards literary production. In an interview with François Tessan, Loti admits:

J'ai vécu le roman le plus romanesque qui se puisse imaginer. Concevez-vous un officier en tenue de campagne, tout botté et en armes, oubliant, parmi les soies dorées, les étoffes rares, les bouddhas grimaçants, les chimères et les dragons, qu'il est un simple mortel occidental! Comment ces heures uniques n'auraient-elles pas éveillé en moi la pensée de symboliser en un drame typique les crises qui déchirèrent l'Empire Céleste? (Tessan 1924, 185–186)

Like Gautier, Loti invests personal emotion into the writing of *La Fille du Ciel* to address his place in the internal crisis and foreign invasion of late-Qing China. Like Gautier, Loti understands the Taiping Rebellion as a recent episode of the 'formidable querelle des Chinois et des Tartares' (Tessan 1924, 186). It should, however, be underlined that the Taiping regime follows a form of Christianity established by its founder Hong Xiuquan (1814–1864), so it does not represent the 'Chinese' identified with Confucianist cultural tradition.

The hypertrophied picturesque had its last episode in America. Foregrounding exotic sights and sounds, the production received devastating criticism, and the audience 'ne



s'intéressèrent qu'au côté purement pittoresque de l'ouvrage, aux défilés éclatants, aux robes et aux bijoux des protagonistes du drame' (Tessan 1924, 186). In Tessan's evaluation, the picturesque becomes purely pejorative and loses the sense of playful mimicry linked to the identity politics in theatre and mass culture in Belle Époque Paris. For Loti, the picturesque is mostly identified with his literary reputation as 'Loti l'enchanteur', a producer of atmospheric landscapes which transfer the reader from reality to a 'décor de féerie' (Loti 1990, 80). In New York, Loti lost his composure because of linguistic and cultural alienation, documented in his 'New York entrevu par un Oriental très vieux jeu' (1917). To describe his alienation from the play's English version, Loti compares translation to the reverse side of an embroidery. In switching to 'l'envers d'une broderie', one still perceives a recognisable relationship to the recto, but the surface is blurred and rough, with stitches that form a puzzling intertwinement. Loti (1917, 230) qualifies the statement by adding that what he and Gautier wrote is not intrinsically brilliant, but it is noticeable that 'l'envers en a été recoloré avec une habileté consommée; mais, quand même, c'est toujours un envers'.<sup>22</sup> What was previously compromising the manifestation of political subtexts in *La Fille du Ciel* was compromised by translation and cultural displacement.

To come to terms with his dispossession in the American adaptation of *La Fille du Ciel*, Loti reasserts his performative identity as an Oriental ill at ease in New York whose skyscrapers stand for the Anglosphere that estranges him from the ownership to which he is entitled as author (1917, 212–223). He went to New York to appear as the French play's author, yet he proclaims to be an anguished Oriental who finds the city devilish (223). Praised as a 'magician au charme oriental' (Tessan 1924, 175), Loti finds himself in an unfamiliar place attempting to work his familiar magic. In his account, frequent use of the word 'dérouter' shows that complicity with French literary and popular culture underlying the play is profoundly interrupted. In fact, Loti is more pragmatic than nonplused by this situation. Once the performance is over, Loti declares that 'ce théâtre ne m'intéresse plus. Une pièce qui a été jouée, un livre qui a été publié, deviennent soudain, en moins d'une seconde, des choses mortes [...] et je m'en détache' (1917, 246). Letting the play go and leaving it behind indicate his gesture of disowning and the will to move on. For him, what matters is the 'matérialisation d'un rêve chinois', the process of recollection and representation (246).

## Conclusion

The political subtext of *La Fille du Ciel* offers cues not obvious to the Belle Époque French public. It taps into Chinese political thought and engages with debates about China's national identity. The text of the play was meant to open a window onto the creative possibilities of exoticism, drawing on political allusions with a touch of seriousness that is not often associated with melodrama. Its emotional intensity earned the sympathy of the novelist Claude Farrère, who met Loti in Constantinople and was given a draft of the play in 1904. Although he disliked the ending, the second and the fourth acts 'sont d'une inexprimable émotion' for him (Evrard 1926). By invoking a new and egalitarian China set out in amorous terms, the play acts as a go-between negotiating melodrama, political thinking, and cultural perception. It is a work that deals with indigenous politics in a synthetic and sympathetic way. It blends Chinese reformist thinking and French



melodrama, incorporating allusions to Kang's ideas for reform to balance the love story with a nation-building blueprint. However, the subtext gets buried under a gauchely orchestrated live embodiment of the Chinese picturesque, not to mention the melodramatic turn that romanticises the meaning of ethnic unity. It is stranded among other nuances as part of the jetsam of its journey across the Atlantic, from French into English. Removed from its intended cultural milieu, the original thematic recipe was downplayed by the stage production. Despite this, the internal conflict between the political and the picturesque is not an easy one to reconcile, as it tinges historicist pursuits with romanesque temptations imbued with local colour and sentimentality. As an instance of China in turn-of-the-century French theatre,<sup>23</sup> *La Fille du Ciel* could have joined the array of female character-types driving the model for novel femininity if its original design had panned out. In the end, what remains is a script where the play of intertextuality calls for a decipherment that would reconcile Eastern politics with Orientalist exoticism. Responsible for the play's thematic setup, Judith Gautier seems less of an armchair traveller than a writer who walks the tightrope between fiction and History.

## Notes

1. Valuable scholarship on sinophilia and sinophobia include Étienne 1989; Cartier 1998; Hsieh 1996, 11; Détrie 1998, 403–429; Lo 2015, 6.
2. For example, China was thought of as a model for France to reform its method of census (Étienne 1989, 321–325). Another useful document for the representation of China in eighteenth-century France is Cordier 1910.
3. Schwartz 1927 and Basch 2023 chart the history of japonisme.
4. Scott 2008 offers further historical accounts.
5. Subsequent references to Daniel's article on the play all come from this source, which is an online publication without pagination.
6. Letter from Loti to Gautier, 21 April 1903, fonds Daniel Halévy, Médiathèque de Rochefort-sur-Mer (DH417), cited by Daniel 2012.
7. For an account of the play's long gestation, fraught with wrangling, see Lerner 1998, 51–66; and Camacho 1939, 158–167.
8. For more detail about the composition of *La Dragon impérial*, see Daniel 2010, 35–43.
9. The quotation 「以天下自居，只有朝號而無國號」 is translated into English by me.
10. This is exemplified by Liang Qichao (梁啟超), Kang's disciple, who writes 'if you ask what the nation's name is, there is no answer. The so-called Tang, Yu, Xia, Shang, Zhou, Qin, Han, Wei, Jin, Song, Qi, Liang, Chen, Sui, Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing are but the name of dynasties. A dynasty is the private possession of a family, whereas a nation is the public belonging of people' (「而問其國之為何名？則無有也。夫所謂唐虞夏商周秦漢魏晉宋齊梁陳隋唐宋元明清者，則皆朝名耳。朝也者，一家之私產也；國也者，人民之公產也。」) in Liang 1900, 2270–2271.
11. These are Kang's statements (「合同而化，永泯猜嫌」 and 「團和大群，以強中國」).
12. In 'The Myth of Huang-ti (Yellow Emperor) and the Construction of Chinese Nationhood in Late Qing', Shen borrows the concept 'cultural nationalism' from John Hutchinson 1987, 12–13, who divides nationalism into political, or civic nationalism and cultural nationalism. Shen also indicates that 'racial nationalism' is a notion put forward by Frank Dikotter 1996, 590–605.
13. Judith Gautier owed her knowledge of Chinese to Ting Tung-ling (also spelt as Ding Dunling), a diasporic Chinese man of letters who was accommodated by Théophile Gautier and acted as tutor to Judith and her sister Estelle. Judith's Chinese connections also involved her friendship with ambassadors sent to Paris by the Qing government. Shi (2020) and Shen Dali (Daniel and Lavaud 2020, 97–108) did useful work on this subject.

14. Eminent commentators include Sir Robert Hart (1835–1911), a British diplomat and official of China’s Imperial Maritime Custom Service, whose ‘La Chine, les réformes et les puissances’ was published in the *Revue de Paris* (1 May 1901), alongside a selection of Chinese poems translated by Judith Gautier titled ‘Poèmes chinois de tous les temps’.
15. The ninth edition of *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* defines couleur locale as ‘détails pittoresques, qui donnent l’image distinctive et vivante d’un pays, d’une région, ou encore d’une époque révolue. URL: <https://www.dictionnaire-academie.fr/article/A9C4539> (accessed 22 September 2023).
16. The inter-artistic shift in meaning of couleur locale is manifest in the term’s entry in the seventh edition of *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (1878), which reads ‘par extension il se dit, en Peinture, dans la Littérature et même dans la Musique, de la fidélité avec laquelle on représente certains détails caractéristiques d’un pays, d’une époque’. URL: <https://www.dictionnaire-academie.fr/article/A7C3132> (accessed 22 September 2023).
17. *Fémina* and *La Vie Heureuse* were two women’s magazines that fashioned and circulated models of French femininity associated with Belle Époque challenges to gender norms (Mesch 2013).
18. Pert maintains a similar position in the reportage for *Gil Blas* (1903).
19. Proust 1987, 74 extols the extraordinary achievement of Bernhardt’s acting and identity-performance. Apter comments on this in relation to Belle Époque media darlings and social phenomenon (1999, 154).
20. Compare the second tableau for Act I (Gautier and Loti 1911, 40) and the second tableau for Act IV (Gautier and Loti 1911, 184). For descriptions of the throne room at the Forbidden City, see Loti (1901) 2018, 1116.
21. The executioner in *Le Jardin des supplices* is an artisan of what he calls the art of ‘savoir tuer’, a ritualised profession whose science, complexity, elegance, and beauty are threatened by uniform administration as a triumph of ‘l’esprit bourgeois’. See Mirbeau (1899) 2021, 207.
22. Ferraris-Besso 2022 explores the issue of translation as a form of dispossession for Loti.
23. For a global vision of China in nineteenth-century French theatre, see Lo 2015.

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