ECHOES OF SLAVERY: AN ANALYSIS OF AIMÉ HUMBERT'S DEPICTION OF COURTESANS IN *LE JAPON ILLUSTRÉ* (1870) AND HIS ARTISTIC APPROACH

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Folks today seem more exposed than ever.
They are, in reality, under-exposed because of
censorship or over-exposed in the artificial light of their
spectacularisation. The result is equivalent invisibility.
In short, they are, as too often, exposed to disappear.
(Didi-Huberman 2012, 15)

Aimé Humbert was a prominent political figure in Switzerland whose account of his trip to Japan awakened renewed academic interest following the 2005 reissue of his monograph *Le Japon illustré*. Tales of his travels, along with illustrations of Japan, were published in 1870, providing one of the very few Swiss testimonies of the remarkable wave of illustrated works produced in the 19th century. This paper centers on an analysis of a select group of engravings related to sex work in Japanese society. Following the chronology of the narrative, this paper aims to deconstruct Humbert's rhetoric, highlighting his creativity on a visual and textual basis. With a methodology derived from both art history and literary analysis, this analytical essay reveals the subtlety of Humbert's critique on prostitution in Japan, where he expresses singular concerns regarding Westerners' behavior as well as his more general position on Human Rights.

Keywords: Aimé Humbert, Edo period, illustration, prostitution, travel book

1. Introduction

On February 6, 1875, a conference was held in the city of Neuchâtel, Switzerland with Josephine Butler (1828–1906) as the guest of honor, in order to introduce her campaign against the establishment of a regulatory system of prostitution known as the Contagious Diseases Acts.[1] The organizer behind this conference was Aimé Humbert (1819–1900), a professor and leading political figure in the canton of Neuchâtel.[2] Humbert had received a letter from Butler in 1874, corresponded with her, and in less than a year they had planned her trip to Neuchâtel (Stead 1888, 52–53, 63). Humbert (1875, 8) was very receptive to Butler's call and welcomed her fight as "providential." Indeed, it might have been his destiny to find himself once again confronted with the issue of prostitution. A decade prior to the conference, during a stay in Japan, Humbert was able to observe what he considered to be the social damage resulting from a legal system that allowed and regulated women's sex work. In 1870, the tale of his travels and his impressions of Japan were published in an illustrated monograph titled *Le Japon illustré* (*The Illustrated Japan*).[3] The two thick volumes were enhanced by 476 illustrations, in which the reader can appreciate Humbert's verve through the many opportunities he seized to subtly reveal his critique of prostitution in Japanese society.

1 For the content of the conference, see Humbert (1875). For Josephine Butler's campaign, see, for instance, Summers (2006, 2008).

2 Born in Bulles (Prussia, now Switzerland) to a modest family of watchmakers, Aimé Humbert became a literature teacher. He actively supported the revolutionary movement when the Neuchâtel canton was under Prussian domination and participated in the Neuchâtel's revolution on March 1, 1848. Humbert received the position of secretary in the provisional government of Alexis-Marie Piaget (1802–1870). He helped to write the first draft of the Constitution of the Neuchâtel Republic and was subsequently elected to various key positions in the Grand Council and the cantonal chancellery. In 1859, he ceased his political activity to devote himself to one of the main industries of his canton – watchmaking – as President of the Watch Union (Union Horlogère). He undertook a journey to Japan to open a new economic outlet for watchmakers. On his return, he accepted a position as director of the new academy of Neuchâtel, worked for the Neuchâtel City Council, and became Grand Master of the Masonic Grand Lodge Alpina of Switzerland. He died of illness in the city of Neuchâtel in 1900. For more information about Aimé Humbert's life, see Quartier-la-tente (1900); Henry (2001); Barrelet (2005).

3 The 2005 publication is a facsimile of the original version published in 1870 (Humbert [1870] 2005). Since this 2005 reissue, Humbert's life and testimony have sparked renewed of academic interest and studies focusing on the preparation of his diplomatic mission to Japan (Alimann 2009), the identification of the visual material he collected there (Gonseth et al. 2015), the history of his collection (Dallais 2005), and the impact of this collection on the perception of Japan in Switzerland (Dallais 2006; Tissot 2006) have flourished. An 1874 English translation features almost 200 illustrations and includes additional chapters on the Revolution of 1868 and its aftermath (Humbert [1874] 2015). Adaptations in Russian and in Spanish were also published in 1870 and 1875 (respectively: Humbert 1870; Mayor and Akiyoshi 2018, 9).

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In 1862, the author of *Le Japon illustré* was sent to Japan by the Helvetic Confederation with the title of Minister Plenipotentiary to sign a commercial treaty with the local Japanese authority. The goal of his mission was, through direct negotiations, to bind Switzerland to Japan through legal trade and secure a flat import-export rate like that obtained by a few of other nations in previous years.[4] Although Humbert arrived to Japan on April 6, 1863, the authorities refused to start negotiations, and the Minister found himself with no other choice but to wait for an advantageous moment to perform his task. Only after ten months of delay did his operation come to fruition – with the help of the Netherlands[5] – and the first Treaty of Commerce and Friendship between Switzerland and Japan was signed on February 6, 1864.[6]

Before embarking on his journey to the Far East, the Swiss Minister seems to have reached an agreement with the French publishing firm Hachette to publish an article upon his return in the magazine *Le Tour du Monde* (*Around the World*) about his travel in Japan.[7] The delay in the Treaty's negotiations from April 1863 to January 1864 turned out to be favorable for Humbert's article project, giving him time to discover the archipelago and its inhabitants, as well as to collect an impressive number of native visual materials.[8] Prints and other artwork, which represented all of Japanese society "in a language accessible to everyone" (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 1, i), were a veritable treasure trove of information. Humbert collected at least 3,668 pieces, of which 2,634 are currently kept at the

4 In 1864, Switzerland joined the United States of America, the Netherlands, France, Great Britain, and Prussia, which had already obtained similar commercial treaties with Japan. For further information about the Swiss diplomatic mission to Japan, see Barrelet (1986, 2005); Tissot (2006, 150); Alimann (2009); Hoya (2015).

5 In January 1864, when the Japanese made known their intention to send a mission to Europe, the Dutch – and Dirk de Graeff van Polsbroek (1833–1916; General Consul of the Netherlands and government representative in Japan) in particular – took the opportunity to blackmail the Japanese authorities: they refused to help them in their preparations or to officially welcome the Japanese emissaries to the Netherlands as long as Switzerland did not benefit from trade relations with Japan. It is due to the support of the Dutch that on February 6, 1864, a treaty was signed with three Japanese emissaries in the Choji temple in the city of Edo (Barrelet 2005, xx).

6 The original treaty in French can be found in the Swiss Federal Archives (Traité d'Amitié et de Commerce, Swiss Federal Archives).

7 See, for instance, Aimé Humbert from Japan to his wife Marie, April 18, 1863, folder 12, *Aimé Humbert Papers*, Archives of the State of Neuchâtel, Neuchâtel.

8 The material is mostly Japanese, but it also contains drawings and watercolors by Charles Wirgman (1832–1891) and Alfred-Victor Roussin (1839–1919), both of whom lived in Yokohama and created them *in situ*, as well as photographs by Felice Beato (1832–1909), who accompanied Humbert on some excursions (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 1, ii; Tissot 2012, 15).

Museum of Ethnography Neuchâtel (MEN).[9] His prolonged stay in Japan, as well as his vast collection, became a rich source for his articles – published in *Le Tour du Monde* between 1866 and 1869[10] – and an even more ambitious luxurious illustrated monograph with the same publishing firm.

Issued in 1870, *Le Japon illustré* is promoted as a nonfictional travelogue attesting to the troubled period that preceded the fall of the Tokugawa clan (Gordon 2002; Souyri 2010). This clan had ruled for more than two and a half centuries (1603–1867), bringing a period of stabilization and pacification to the country. When Humbert was in Japan, the Tokugawa regime was in crisis, rapidly losing its hegemony, and Humbert ([1870] 2005, vol. 2, 141–146, 369–375) recounts some personal events that attest to this predicament.

In general, the author chose to organize his book by geographic region, successively presenting Benten,[11] Kyoto, Kamakura, Edo, and finally Yokohama. The spatial grid he established shows his determination to achieve as complete as possible a global archiving of a still largely unknown society. More generally, *Le Japon illustré* is a remarkable example of the wave of illustrated works produced in the second half of the 19th century.[12] Unlike other travelers of his time, Humbert not only relates a succession of events backed by illustrations, but paints a compelling portrait of his surroundings using both engravings and text.[13] His role in the print production has been highlighted in a major exhibition, *Imagine Japan*, which was held at the MEN in 2015.[14] This exhibition, along with its catalogue (Gonseth et al. 2015), traces the main sources of many of the illustrations in the book. Together, they demonstrate how Humbert used his visual collection from Japan as a kind

9 For the history of the Aimé Humbert's collection, see Dallais (2005, 38; 2006, 73–78), Doyen, Lorrain, and Mayor (2015, 204), Gonseth (2015, 8). For the content of the collection, see Fujiwara (2015, 156–172); Mayor and Akiyoshi (2018).

10 Humbert (1866, 1–66, 305–337; 1867a, 289–336; 1867b, 369–416; 1868a, 65–112; 1869a, 353–416; 1869b, 193–224).

11 Benten (弁天) is a district in central Yokohama where Benten Dōri (弁天通り, Benten Street) and a temple dedicated to the Goddess Benten are located.

12 The second half of the 19th century saw the influence of wood engraving in Europe. The technique is a relief form of printmaking that offers the possibility of extremely fine details. This process made such an impact on the society of the time that Rémi Blanchon (2001) named it the "pictural engraving."

13 Hachette publishing house, which issued *Le Japon illustré*, had already printed travel stories to Japan by Marquis Alfred de Moges (1860, 161–176), Rodolphe Lindau (1864), and Alfred Roussin (1866). These books and articles about Japan did not feature such diverse, detailed, and numerous illustrations as Humbert's monograph did.

14 In particular, the exhibition *Imagine Japan*, under the direction of Marc-Oliver Gonseth, was open to the public from June 20, 2014, to April 19, 2015, in the temporary rooms of the MEN, in Neuchâtel, Switzerland.

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of portfolio to capture scenes and poses.[15] By adding, removing, or switching figures, as well as including shadow or Western perspectives,[16] Humbert modified the source Japanese images to create new scenes for his book. Various pieces conserved in the MEN include annotations attesting to traces of a classification system and a manuscript of *Le Japon illustré* (Humbert 1868) conserved in the city of La Chaux-de-Fond, which contains instructions in the margin intended for print workshop technicians who were in charge of applying Humbert's instruction to the engraving process. Hence, the exhibition and catalogue teams at the MEN have made significant strides in their effort to confirm the role played by Humbert in the selection of the source materials and in his oversight of the creation of the illustrations, as well as of their layout within the book. However, this information has not been used for an in-depth study of *Le Japon illustré* as an intertwined discourse produced by the author based on images and texts. On the contrary, and prior to the exhibition, some pejorative comments have been raised against Humbert's interventionist approach to the images he collected.

In 2005, the Swiss historian Jean-Marc Barrelet was invited to write the preface of a facsimile reissue of *Le Japon illustré* (Humbert [1870] 2005). In this context, the alteration of the source images undertaken by Humbert for the illustrations and the resulting printed monograph did not escape his attention. The historian openly condemns Humbert's practice and the "lack of respect for the original iconography," which he seriously qualifies as "faking" (Barrelet 2005, xxii). Then, a decade later, in the exhibition catalogue of *Imagine Japan*, Audrey Doyen, Samia Lorrain, and Grégoire Mayor (2015, 206) noted a renewal of "the initial intention of the images." The curatorial team made no pejorative statement regarding his practice, and it seems that their project aimed to present Humbert's editing practice as a remarkable act, although they may have failed to identify it as an artistic act.

As an alternative view, I propose to reassess Humbert's role as a creative intermediary in the creation of the prints in order to analyze the *Le Japon illustré* monograph in its entirety, without privileging one form of expression over the other. Using a methodology that draws on approaches utilized in art history and

[15] The exhibition catalogue is filled with examples that show how the illustrations of *Le Japon illustré* were created from various images identified in the MEN's collection. The source images were from Humbert's mission in Japan. For example, the print *Mountebanks and sword-swallowers* (*Saltimbanques et avaleurs de sabres*) (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 167) created by the workshop in Paris has taken elements from at least eleven visual works of Humbert's collection (Gonseth 2015, 148–155).

[16] Shadow effect made by light and dark areas and Western perspective were techniques borrowed from imported European prints that were disseminated originally by Japanese scholars studying *rangaku* (蘭学, "Dutch learning"). Japanese artists would get familiar with those techniques during the late Tokugawa period (late 18th century–19th century) and implemented them in autochthone production.

in literary analysis, this paper aims to explore the subtlety of Humbert's critique of Japanese society. I will examine a specific theme: the position of the author on the female condition in Japan, more specifically, with respect to sex work. This paper considers the following questions: How does the author materialize the various forms of prostitution that he stands against in *Le Japon illustré*? What strategies does he use to convey his message and convince his readers?

For my purposes, I propose to start a descriptive approach to underline the importance of Humbert's image selection process. Thus, I will endeavor to identify Humbert as a creative man who acted as an image hunter, assembler, and manager of the general aesthetics of *Le Japon illustré*. Then, using the illustrated monograph, I aim to investigate the construction of a pointed critique of the trade of women's bodies, following the narrative chronology of the book. This assessment will serve to specify the similarities and divergences of content in the selection of images and outline the major steps in the maturation of Humbert's global thought on "involuntary servitude."[17] A particular focus will be placed on the written text, in order to examine the main lines of Humbert's rhetoric. Nonetheless, this close analysis of the text will not lead me to adopt a comparative approach by cross-referencing Humbert's information about prostitution with other historical documents on the sex trade in 19th century Japan and the surrounding society. The purpose of this study is to define the contours of one man's graphic and textual discourse on the female sex trade in Japan through an empirical method. The close link he perceives between religion, institutions, and prostitution will be discerned as the discourse unfolds. In the process, the development of a global and more general thought on Human Rights can be found, grounded in Humbert's book, and I will briefly mention how these issues were proactively addressed in his later life.

2. From Edo to Paris, Humbert's transversal and creative role

Whether in Japan or Paris, several favorable stages can be determined to affect the development of Humbert's visual discourse as displayed in *Le Japon illustré*.

Upon his arrival in Japan, the Swiss diplomat immediately launched his image prospection. In a letter addressed to his wife, he commented that on the third day of his stay in Japan, he went to Nagasaki and stopped by the print shops.[18] He

[17] Humbert textually mentions "voluntary servitude" (*servitude volontaire*), but the content of the sentence and the previous paragraphs clearly indicate that he means the opposite and that, according to him, the courtesans are under "involuntary servitude" (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 287).

[18] Aimé Humbert from Japan to his wife Marie, April 11, 1863, folder 12, *Aimé Humbert Papers*, Archives of the State of Neuchâtel, Neuchâtel. On Humbert's tenth day in Japan, he returned to the city of Nagasaki during the afternoon. He did not lose sight of his objective and wrote to Marie: "I did not find anything special in the print shops. They are provincial images that

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finally stayed for 347 days in Japan, which allowed him to become familiar with Japanese print production and trade and acquire a very wide range of artwork.

At the end of the Edo period, images were very accessible both in terms of price and distribution. The expansion of book culture arising from the democratization of illustration in the 17th century allowed a large number of images to circulate and be distributed and sold (Kornicki 1998; Marquet 2006; Moretti 2020). In Japanese art, and in engraving in particular, Humbert discovered a fertile ground for illustrating his articles and for his subsequent monograph project. The vast collection of at least 3,668 pieces he brought back in his luggage corresponds to a sample of the richness of Japanese print culture.[19]

Humbert then benefited from a similar context in Paris, which boasted an illustrated press of great vitality (Grandjean 1997; Blanchon 2001; Bacot 2006). The introduction of the British wood engraving technique a few decades earlier had given a new dynamism to the French publishing industry. Workshops were applying an end-grain boxwood cut process concomitantly with the use of fine tools normally favored by metal engravers, achieving delicate results produced in record time, which could also withstand a large-run press. The technique systematized the relationship of text and image at a low cost. The cohabitation of the two modes of discourse (literary and graphic) offered new perspectives of combined expression. The circumstances were therefore favorable to publish an illustrated monograph in this city. *Le Japon illustré* is a great example of the golden age of wood engraving, with such illustrations comprising about a third of the total monograph. Its author proposed a work where the written and pictorial signifiers had equal importance because they operated dialogically and aimed at a common goal.

At the crossroads of two geographical temporalities, *Le Japon illustré* was born from the fusion of the materials offered by two major image societies in both Japan and France. Its author knew how to seize the available opportunities to realize his project. Neither editor nor engraver, Humbert became the mastermind of a design that allowed him to edit the images collected in Japan and managed the print production in Paris by sending instructions remotely from his homeland in Neuchâtel. It was essential for him to carry out an adaptation, a reframing of the source images. Indeed, the illustrations of *Le Japon illustré* do not simply offer

we could compare with the ones from Épinal and Montbéliard, although they are better than those. I have only bought two sketchbooks of aquarium drawings, which will enable me to give new motifs to our engravers" (Aimé Humbert from Japan to his wife Marie, April 18, 1863, folder 12, *Aimé Humbert Papers*, Archives of the State of Neuchâtel, Neuchâtel).

19 The exact number of visual works Humbert collected during his trip is unknown, but it is certain that 3,668 pieces were acquired from Humbert by François Turrettini (1845–1908) in 1871 (Doyen, Lorrain, and Mayor 2015, 204).

facsimile reproductions of the material collected in Japan. On many occasions the optical grid involves modifications under the aegis of perspective or light and shadow added to the depicted scene. According to the author, it was necessary to renew the perceptual paradigm (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 1, ii); however, he did not consider the modifications he oversaw contradicted the testimonial value of his monograph. In *Art and Illusion*, Ernst H. Gombrich ([1960] 1987, 96) admirably demonstrates that the standards of veracity for illustration and documentation vary according to eras. Humbert's point of view was symptomatic of the dominant discourse in Europe during his time. The perspective device, used in a Western context, had the power of representation and conformed to an established canon.[20]

Beyond the perceptual paradigm at play, the Swiss Minister was selecting, cutting,[21] juxtaposing, interweaving, organizing,[22] and assembling images in order to manage the production of the illustrations (Doyen, Lorrain, and Mayor 2015). As was clearly established by the *Imagine Japan* exhibition (Gonseth et al. 2015), Humbert hand-picked several images and sent them with instructions to the Parisian craftsmen in charge of creating the engravings. Humbert's guidelines demonstrate that he was numbering images and giving them titles, associating them with a specific page number where they should appear, selecting reference elements or sources that should be included in the engraving, and providing a more precise description when he deemed it necessary.[23] What is not mentioned by him, in one docu-

[20] The position claimed by the author is indicative of a thought system based on a hegemonic organization of the visual that seeks to obtain a realistic effect, which becomes an increasingly powerful model in the visual world in the 19th century (Crary [1990] 1994, 24–25).

[21] Regarding the cutting of images, Humbert admits that: "I have begun to work bit by bit, my eyes wide open and a pair of scissors in my hand. If I discovered a good sketch, I would cut it out and put it aside. For the albums, I unstitched the binding, organised the engravings in subject order, and put the rest aside" (Aimé Humbert from Japan to his wife Marie, September 24, 1863, folder 11, letter no. 38, *Aimé Humbert Papers*, Archives of the State of Neuchâtel, Neuchâtel).

[22] Regarding the classification of images, the Swiss Minister explains that: "After a few days of very patient, assiduous work, but which always keenly captured my curiosity, I have materially arrived at the following results in terms of classification: First choice pieces, handmade, [pieces] half that of school paper, miscellaneous subjects: [e.g.,] religious painting, genre scenes, animals, trees and flowers [...]. And regarding printed albums, I arranged them in groups, which fell into the following categories: 1. Bamboo studies. 2. Studies of other trees and various flowers. 3. Horses. 4. Storks. 5. Small birds and flowers. 6. Costumes, games, trades. 7. Screen paintings. 8. Chinese style paintings, and finally 9. a large bundle of religious subjects [...]" (Aimé Humbert from Japan to his wife Marie, September 24, 1863, folder 11, letter no. 38, *Aimé Humbert Papers*, Archives of the State of Neuchâtel, Neuchâtel).

[23] The manuscript in La Chaux-de-Fonds contains instructions in the margin intended for the Parisian print workshop technicians. For instance: "N° 70) The norimon of the Mikado, (from the Japanese album by M. Roussin and the Japanese sheets indicating Table page 60. Notice

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ment or another, should be potentially interpreted as the initiative of the Parisian workshop technicians, who had great freedom of execution (Gonseth et al. 2015, 176). The guidelines also uncover the author's vigilance with respect to the general sequence of the prints,[24] suggesting that they have partial autonomy from the text. The illustrations have their own coherent system; the act of turning pages implies a particular temporal perception of the contemplation of images and contributes to widening the field of vision. Even though adjustments might have been made by the publisher – constrained by editorial considerations – it seems that the Swiss diplomat had a significant degree of autonomy. The number of steps and people involved in this project do not affect Humbert's fundamental contribution. His investment in the creative process went beyond the simple selection of visual material; he transformed the iconographic corpus into a creative principle. The handwritten annotations directly penned on the corpus provide less information on the representations themselves than on their subsequent transformations into prints. The indications in red ink on the manuscript and the annotations left directly on the artwork bear witness to a form of montage. According to Daniel Bladet (1978, 125), "the montage is an act (and not a look), an act of interpreting reality." In his own way, Humbert made an act of interpreting the Japanese world he visited by assembling pieces from his own visual art collection. Humbert's contribution is fundamental because associating images is already creating a thought. Through this method, and with the help of the print workshop in Paris, he made an act of deliberate interpretation of the world he had witnessed.

In the section on the making of the images, I have sought to briefly reconstruct Humbert's artistic journey in order to highlight his creative contribution. The engravings of *Le Japon illustré* are analyzed in order below, according to the chapters and their appearance in the book.

3. Chapter 43 – "The *Matsuris*": Public girls, sacred girls

Humbert positions the city of Edo (renamed "Tokyo" in 1868) as the starting point for addressing the first form of prostitution, that of high-ranking courtesans. The whole sequence of prints in the chapter "The *Matsuris*" (*Les Matsouris*) (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 177–189) is dedicated to illustrating the diversity of the *matsuri*

the women next to the doors. Custom indicated in the Roll of Fashion N° 4" (Humbert 1868b, vol. 1, 164). For another example: "N° 82) Hostel girls. Watercolors. N° 25 of shipping N° 9, Roussin collection, b. 61 – good hairstyle and n° 26 [space] ig [space] ig f.191" (Humbert 1868b, vol. 1, 178).

[24] For instance: "Obs.) It does not really matter if the illustrations related to the funeral ceremonies are placed on the pages [I indicated], but rather that they follow each other in the indicated order, which is the order of these ceremonies" (Humbert 1868b, vol. 2, 297).

(祭り, "annual religious festivals") celebrations. The procession of Sannō is the object of a long text description by Humbert ([1870] 2005, 186–189). Indeed, this festival allowed the opportunity to see the seven most beautiful courtesans of the capital parading on the streets of the district. Their parade is introduced in a print titled *Sannoō Matsuri: lobster, courtesans, buffalo, rice* (*Matsouri de Sannoō: la langouste, les courtisanes, le buffle, le riz*; see Figure 1). The title is straightforward and clearly informs the reader about what is depicted. The engraving represents a panoramic view of the procession of these ladies whose presence can be seen at the center of the composition under their respective parasols.

Figure 1: Louis Crépon (?–?) and anonymous, *Sannoō Matsuri: lobster, courtesans, buffalo, rice*, facsimile of a xylograph

(Source: Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 187)

The tailpiece *Procession of courtesans at the feast of the Sannoō temple (Cortège des courtisanes à la fête du temple Sannoō*; see Figure 2) closes the *matsuri* chapter. The tight angle on two of the seven women makes it possible to discover a faithful mirror play between the description of the text and the illustration. The lady with the war fan on the right, followed by the lady with a goldfish, are carefully portrayed by Humbert in the text, with special attention given to the extravagant clothes they wear.

The *matsuri* is an opportunity for Humbert to describe the procession in all its pomp and absurdity. Thus, it is a moment when the author explicitly shows his first disappointment with the local religion.

Due to their profession, courtesans were in the lowest rank of the socio-professional pyramid, under the name *hinin* (非人, "non-human"). In Japan, as in any societal group, a magico-religious cleavage separates soiled beings (穢れ *kegare*) from those that are not (Douglas ([1966] 1981). A relative or total exclusion is organized to avoid contact with the impure. The notion of impurity as it is developed in the context of prostitution was not homogeneous in Japanese society.[25] Since feudal times, the female sex trade has sometimes been linked

[25] As the British anthropologist Mary Douglas ([1966] 1981) pointed out in her famous essay *Purity and Danger*, anything that contravenes the established order of a social group could become a form of impurity.

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Figure 2: Louis Crépon (?–?) and Henry T. Hildibrand (1824–1897), *Procession of courtesans at the feast of the Sannoō temple*, facsimile of a xylograph
(Source: Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 189)

with religious practice; therefore, those who sell their body convey a symbolic ambiguity, with a status oscillating between the sacred and the profane, or even between legality and illegality.[26] Indeed, during the Edo period, the sex trade was authorized under a regulatory system that varied over time and geographic area. In the second half of the Tokugawa reign (1730s–1868), it was a legal activity that prevailed inside the walls of the licensed pleasure quarters (遊客 *yūkaku*) and extended to licensed teahouses outside of it, under certain requirements (Sone 1999). Even though the profession theoretically appears to have been practiced under strict conditions, a lax enforcement seems to have prevailed (Stanley 2012). Illegal activity was nonetheless recorded by the Japanese authorities under the qualifier *kakushi baita* (隠し売女) or "secret prostitution" and could be sanctioned (Sone 1999, 175). This name reflects the clandestine nature of what Sone Hiromi (1999) called "private prostitution," in contrast to the authorized "public prostitution" of licensed girls. Finally, the presence of courtesans at the Sannō *matsuri* illustrates a form of public prostitution and the complex and changeable nature of their symbolic position within society.

[26] For further information about the connections between prostitution and religion, see Pons (1999, 30–106).

4. Chapter 48 – "The Teahouses of Asaksa": The leading figures of the floating world

After this first glimpse into one aspect of the life the most beautiful, high-ranking courtesans of Japan, Humbert comes back to this subject in the chapter "The Teahouses of Asaksa" (*Les maisons de thé d'Asaksa*) (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 243–252). In the description of Asaksa, a district of the city of Edo, the author refers to the different forms of entertainment that could be found there, especially with regard to the pleasure industry of the famous Shin-Yoshiwara quarters. This universe, spatially distant from the city center, was still not isolated from the cultural dynamism of the capital. The *yūkaku* subculture had won the enthusiasm of the crowds, and the depiction of the *yūjo* (遊女, "licensed courtesan") was a popular subject of ukiyo-e (浮世絵, "images of the floating world"), in which she was mainly glorified in idealized existence. Beautiful, graceful, and fashionable, she had become the heroine of this carefree, idle world at the edge of society. In "The Teahouses of Asaksa," Humbert begins by identifying the transversality of the pleasure industry through the figure of the customer. He explains that the more privileged customers could go to aristocratic teahouses whose ceremonial service immediately set them apart from other establishments. Humbert hastens to describe the luxury of these institutions reserved for the nobility.

Figure 3: Louis Crépon (?–?) and F. Pannemaker (?–?), *Aristocratic Teahouse*, facsimile of a xylograph

(Source: Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 245)

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The illustration *Aristocratic Teahouse* (*Maison de thé aristocratique*; see Figure 3) showcases the care dedicated to receiving clients. In the foreground, the action focuses on female figures arranged around a samurai in the narrow passage of a gallery. A *shinzo* (新造, "young female apprentice to a courtesan") in a black furisode (振袖, "long-sleeved kimono") is greeting the man by prostrating herself in front of him, while another woman is kneeling behind him, carrying his sword with gloved hands. The text painstakingly describes the ceremonial codes for receiving a high-status individual. The illustration is, once again, a faithful mirror of the story up to this point. What follows in the description of the image, however, does not appear in the written passage. The engraving represents the moment when a high-ranking courtesan makes her entrance to welcome her client, while the story does not mention it. A hanging scroll is unrolled on the left half of the background and divides the scene in two: on one side is the customer, on the other the *yūjo*. The object seems to establish a cleavage between the socially accepted universe of the samurai who is about to enter the "counter-world" (Pons 1999, 10) of the girl. The French journalist Philippe Pons (1999, 59) underlines the bonds created by courtesans between commoners and the court. Even if discriminated against, prostitutes did not necessarily have homogeneous positions in society, and some of them actively participated in the flow of cultural exchanges between social classes.

Figure 4: Louis Crépon (?–?) and anonymous, *On the Sidewalk of the Northern Road*, facsimile of a xylograph *(Source: Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 248)*

Figure 5: Louis Crépon (?–?) and Antoine V. Bernard (1824–?), *In the Vicinity of Theatres*, facsimile of a xylograph *(Source: Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 249)*

For the first time in his monograph, Humbert discusses in detail where and what kind of pleasures were indulged in by the gallant and libertine society of Japan. His discourse, however, does not linger long on their entertainment and slowly deviates to the status of lower-ranked sex workers with *On the Sidewalk of the Northern Road* (*Sur le trottoir de la route du nord*; see Figure 4), *In the Vicinity of Theatres* (*Dans le voisinage des théâtres*; see Figure 5), *In the Alleys* (*Dans les ruelles*; see Figure 6), *Nearby Bridges* (*Aux abords des ponts*; see Figure 7), and *Hostel Maids* (*Servantes d'auberge*; see Figure 8). The series introduces the established hierarchy of the working women the author kindly named "night walkers" (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 251), in contrast to abovementioned high-raking courtesans who had no need to find their clients outside. All five engravings were illustrated by the same designer, Louis Crépon (?–?), who seems to have deliberately sought to unify the style of those portraits to give a feeling of communitarian harmony.[27] He was most probably inspired by the ukiyo-e albums. For instance, *In the Vicinity of Theatres* presents a girl with a typical serpentine posture.[28] The twist of her body is reminiscent of those found in an ukiyo-e subcategory named *bijinga* (美人画, "images of beautiful people"), whose primary purpose is to highlight the knot of the *obi* (帯, "belt"), as much as the face of the individual represented.

Figure 6: Louis Crépon (?–?) and Antoine V. Bernard (1824–?), *In the Alleys*, facsimile of a xylograph

(Source: Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 250)

Each image of the group illustrates the theme of prostitution by focusing on a "night walker." The group of scenes features full-length portraits in an out-

[27] I am missing information to corroborate who would have had the initiative to harmonize (or to cause to be harmonized) the style of the group of illustrations: Crépon, Humbert, or someone else.

[28] It is difficult to verify which ukiyo-e Humbert would have asked Louis Crépon to draw from, as at least some of the missing objects of the original collection conserved in the MEN correspond to the source images of chapters 48 to 53 of *Le Japon illustré*. These are some of the key chapters in which Humbert develops his argument about prostitution in Japan, and we have no information about their content (Doyen, Lorrain, and Mayor 2015, 205–206).

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Figure 7: Louis Crépon (?–?) and C. Laplante (?–?), *Nearby Bridges*, facsimile of a xylograph

(Source: Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 251)

Figure 8: Louis Crépon (?–?) and Antoine V. Bernard (1824–?), *Hostel Maids*, facsimile of a xylograph

(Source: Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 252)

door environment at night. The framing is inevitably focused on the body, each time dramatizing the subject in close-up because it is her body that is constantly brought into play. This body is contextualized in the universe to which it belongs, far from the idealization exalted by most ukiyo-e woodblock prints. These bodies are "over-exposed" (*sur-exposé*), as per the expression of the French philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman (2012).[29] When a series of portraits is unified by a common approach, the whole takes on a community and civic dimension (Didi-Huberman 2012). The plebs are exposed as themselves. Each woman presents a separate subject. Their portraits give an indication of individual sovereignty, an individuality that was intentionally granted to them. Moreover, this series of illustrations does not follow the hierarchical order established by Humbert in the narration. The ranking is not

[29] George Didi-Huberman intentionally uses a dash in "over-exposed" to separate "over" (*sur*) from "exposed" (*exposé*) in order to stress the type of exposure, brilliantly opening a space for questioning the disparity between over- and under-exposure. As Didi-Huberman (2012) argues, they should be two opposite words in meaning, but in fact they are not so far from each other.

maintained because the essence of his discourse is probably not to be found in the variations of their status. To illustrate his argument, Humbert ([1870] 2005, vol. 2, 252) uses an interrogative rhetorical form that involves the reader:

> But where shall we find the last vestige of abject misery? Is it to be seen in the impoverished girl, who, on account of her landlady, wanders by the bridges, all the while shivering and barely decently covered in a garment woven from thin cotton? Or should we seek it out in the depths of Sin-Yosiwara's abyss?

It seems that Humbert does not really attempt to define the worst form of prostitution. He observes that while there is a hierarchy of prostitution, in which some sex workers are elevated to a higher status, the miserable conditions of the prostitutes are shared by all within this hierarchy equally. In this aspect, the series of images is essential to the speech. As a genre, the series represents a perpetual tension between its singularity and its fusion into the group, and it constantly plays on both sides of this dynamic. The individual portraits therefore each represent a singular misfortune, but their serialization shows that there is no distinction or hierarchy possible in a situation that Humbert considers tantamount to slavery.[30] The portraits bring together members of the same corporation, the same discrimination, the same human "misery" (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 252). In this chapter, Humbert does not use pathos in the narration; he wants the reader to freely reach his same conclusions through the force of his rhetoric.

5. Chapter 51 – "Sin-Yosiwara": Exhibiting prostitution

From this chapter on, under the depiction of the Swiss Minister Plenipotentiary, Shin-Yoshiwara,[31] flagship of the *ukiyo* (浮世, "the floating world") culture, renowned quarter of social entertainment, essential meeting place for *iro-otoko* (色男, "dandies"), was losing its charm. It is through the description of this famous place that Humbert sets up the scene in order to answer the questions he posed at the end of the chapter "The Teahouses of Asaksa." His rhetorical questions were, in fact, a springboard to continue the description of this universe in a chapter fully dedicated to this notorious district (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 275–287).

To aspire to the highest ranks, a courtesan had to have a good sense of repartee and practice various arts with talent, in addition to possessing beauty and grace.

30 Humbert ([1870] 2005, vol. 2, 252). The author continues to be vague about women's condition of slavery when explaining their work environment, partly because he will provide further explanations in Chapter 51, "Sin-Yosiwara" (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 275–287).

31 In *Le Japon Illustré*, Humbert ([1870] 2005, vol. 1–2) refers to "Shin-Yoshiwara" (吉原) as "Sin-Yosiwara." This is also the title of this chapter (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 275–287).

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Dancing and singing had to be mastered because she would be called upon to perform and entertain clients during her career. The engraving *The Butterfly Ballet at the Gankiro Theatre* (*Le ballet des papillons au théâtre du Gankiro*; see Figure 11) represents a children's theatre where young dancers from seven to thirteen years old are training on stage (Humbert [1870] 2005, 280). Humbert explains that they are under the teaching of emeritus courtesans, but the illustration depicts a rather distracted audience of several courtesans. The main subject (the one mentioned in the title) is relegated to the background in order to highlight the female audience in the foreground. The five women symbolize the different stages of a high-ranking courtesan's lifetime, from a little *kamuro* (禿, "young woman in apprenticeship") to a *yarite* (遣手, "middle-aged woman who served as a matron, teacher, or female chaperone of courtesans"). It is a microcosm that is presented in the foreground, an autonomous system, closed in on itself. At the same time, the butterfly costumes of the dancers are a reminder that beauty – and the resulting status of those who possess it – are fleeting.

Day and night, the spectacle of the floating world takes its course. *Sin Yosiwara Private Walk* (*La promenade réservée de Sin-Yosiwara*; see Figure 10) shows the quietness of the streets of Shin-Yoshiwara during the daytime. The building seems to extend to infinity due to the use of a markedly cavalier perspective, evocative of certain types of *vedute*. Courtesans dawdle there while a few men walk on the street, but at this time of day, they are the minority. It is quite different at night – as evidenced by *The Restaurant of Gankiro* (*Le restaurant du Gankiro*; see Figure 12) – when the streets are taken over by a throng of individuals from different social classes. The impression of a tumultuous crowd is accentuated by the absence of a focal point and the close framing on a building; people dance, dine, feast, parade, converse, seduce, and negotiate under the lantern lights. The image is saturated by a great variety of events happening simultaneously. Like an onlooker, the viewer does not know where to look, alienated by the spectacle of the floating world.

"Every now and then, in the midst of night-time revelry, a grim rumor of a bloody catastrophe suddenly reveals the abyss that has been veiled with decorations and flowers in these cursed places" (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 283). The (at first glance) pleasant appearance of these sites hides a sordid reality that Humbert wishes the reader to pay attention to. This chapter presents a darkness that the preceding ones do not. Using metaphors and hyperboles, Humbert ([1870] 2005, vol. 2, 284) testifies to the alarming state of health of these places: "Dante's hell, in contrast to certain existences, fades away before the horror of this reality." The idealized images of *Sin-Yosiwara Private Walk*, *The Butterfly Ballet at the Gankiro Theatre*, and *The Restaurant of Gankiro* described above are not intended to deceive the reader. They attest to the seduction of this extraordinary universe; Humbert agrees that one can be deceived by the welcoming aspect of

Figure 9: Louis Crépon (?–?) and C. Laplante (?–?), *Exhibition Room*, facsimile of a xylograph

(Source: Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 275)

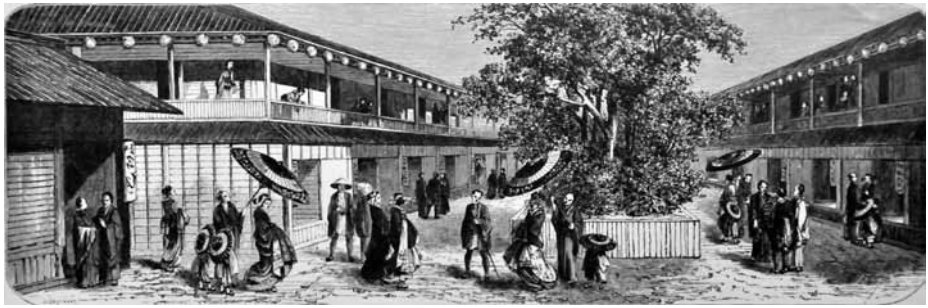

Figure 10: Emile Thérond (1821–?) and Henry T. Hildibrand (1824–1897), *Sin-Yosiwara Private Walk*, facsimile of a xylograph

(Source: Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 277)

the neighborhood. The illusion is absolute when "all these rooms are illuminated, decorated with flowers, animated by gatherings, songs, and board games, it seems that family celebrations follow one another from door to door until the two ends of the street" (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 283). The visual appearance of prestige clashes with the tone of the chapter, which creates a disparity with the images, but also with two engravings, one that opens and the other that closes the sequence of illustrations of this chapter. The frontispiece above the title and the tailpiece appear in a darker register, ultimately closer in substance to the tale developed in the text.

Placed on the front page of the chapter, the image titled *Exhibition Room* (*Salle d'exhibition*; see Figure 9) links to the questions left unanswered at the end of the

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Figure 11: Emile Thérond (1821–?) and Félix J. Gauchard (1825–1872), *The Butterfly Ballet at the Gankiro Theatre*, facsimile of a xylograph

(Source: Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 281)

chapter "The Teahouses of Asaksa." The viewpoint of the scene is at the level of the roadway, at a distance that allows a complete view of the ground floor of the building and of the pedestrian path that borders it. A row of openings (腰 *kōshi*) runs along the facade to allow viewing the girls in the room, which was a typical design of exhibition rooms. These rooms served as parlors where prostitutes were showcased and waited to be chosen by clients.[32] To Westerner eyes, vertical openings have a similar shape to prison bars, which gives a sense of a lack of freedom.[33] In the background of the image, a halo of light emerges from the openings, accentuating the contrast between the interior and the exterior of the building. The *chiaroscuro* gives a surge effect and creates a visual barrier, which prevents the gaze from clearly seeing what is happening inside. The scene is relayed by

[32] According to a study by Cecilia Segawa Seigle (1993, 233), exhibition rooms seem to have been the standard ground floor of teahouses since the late 18th century. An establishment's rank was identifiable by its *magaki* (籬), the partition between the entrance and the trellised parlor. Even high-ranking courtesans were subject to this practice of exposure, although they did not make appointments or negotiate directly with clients, as others did.

[33] In *Un voyage autour du Japon*, published six years before *Le Japon illustré*, Rodolphe Lindau (1864, 57–58) tells how he observed, on his way to a *matsuri* festival in Edo, young prostitutes exposed in "windows." He qualifies them as "curious animals" and "trained animals." Lindau uses two animal metaphors to accentuate the inhumanity of their treatment. The Prussian writer's description is undoubtedly exacerbated by the architecture of the place, which reinforces this impression of imprisonment.

passers-by who see what we, as onlookers, cannot see. A mise en abyme of the gaze is achieved in the composition, which returns us to our condition of simple observers of this universe.

Below the engraving, the text is constructed in rhetorical pathos. The author evokes the fate of a resourceless mother who finds herself in the obligation to sell her child, because "to send a young girl to Gankiro, it is to save her from destitution and to delay, for a few years perhaps, the mother's own ruin" (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 279). This anecdote operates as a testimony to the miserable origins of prostitution. Hence, Humbert demonstrates that sex work does not result *de facto* from voluntary servitude. On the contrary, according to him, it is a state undergone by a fellow human being sold, raised in an unsuitable environment, and exploited until the end of her contract. This chapter addresses an essential question about the origin of prostitution. The discourse slides from glory to misery or, by means of two terms developed by Didi-Huberman (2012), it moves from "over-exposed" (*sur-exposé*) to "under-exposed" (*sous-exposé*) people. In light of the theory developed by the French philosopher in his essay *Peuples figurés, peuples figurants*, extreme overexposure makes it impossible to see because "too much light blinds" (Didi-Huberman 2012, 15). At the other extreme, people stay in the shadow of exposure, negated and censored.[34] Such over- and under-exposure outline two sides of a same coin

Figure 12: Louis Crépon (?–?) and Henry T. Hildibrand (1824–1897), *The Restaurant of Gankiro*, facsimile of a xylograph

(Source: Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 285)

[34] Didi-Huberman (2012, 15) is highlighting an existing threat to people's "representation—

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Figure 13: Louis Crépon (?–?) and Paul A. Fournier (1847–?), *Gigokoō, the Lady of the Underworld*, facsimile of a xylograph

(Source: Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 287)

that represents voiceless people. Humbert wants to lift the veil on the unspoken, on what is hidden beneath the decorations of the pleasure districts. The backdrop allows him to detail a fundamental notion to his discourse on female slavery for the first time.

The chapter ends with a full-length portrait of Gigokoō, a *yūjo* known for her beauty, but also for her cruelty. Humbert ([1870] 2005, vol. 2, 283) tells us that she unscrupulously brags about her love for money and luxury, and about the number of men who have committed suicide on her behalf. Titled *Gigokoō, the Lady of the Underworld* (*Gigokoô, la dame des enfers*; see Figure 13), the engraving painstakingly follows up on the elements depicted in the narration. The symbols of her power are manifold: among others, the armchair, which, by its size, is analogous to a throne, the embroideries of her garment, which depict scenes from the underworld to which she belongs, and the fly swatter that she holds, which looks like a carved scepter. All these elements deliberately add to the demonic power Humbert describes. They might even resonate with Christian iconography for the Western reader for whom the image is intended. The illustration probably invites reflection on the nature of this type of trysts, at the same time announcing the disastrous outcome for those who would be tempted by them.

In this chapter, the sequence of images plays on its potential, an alternately revealing but also fallacious and misleading artifice. However, it is Humbert's text which is most indicative of his view of slavery and prostitution. The text takes a moral and authoritative tone, positioning Humbert as an advocate and crusader for the predicament of women in the slave trade. In this text his voice is one of moral and social concern.

political, aesthetic—and even, as too often happens, to their very existence." He adds that: "Under-exposure deprives us of the means to see, quite simply, what it could be about" (Didi-Huberman 2012, 15).

In this chapter, the development of the narrative shifts from over-exposed prostitution to the hidden, under-exposed aspect, which is now revealed to the reader. The dramatic intensity of the discourse about the sold child leads to a new step in the discussion of servitude and its involuntary aspect, which is a subject infrequently mentioned by travelers writing about Japan.

6. Chapter 59 – "A Transitory Colony": The *mousmé*

The chapter "A Transitory Colony" (*Une colonie transitoire*) (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 369–378) begins with the 1863 conflict between Japan and England following the Namamugi incident. Humbert engages with the issue relating to the restriction that confined foreigners to specific zones around designated ports in Japan, better known as treaty ports.

The illustrations in this chapter, however, are in discrepancy with the storytelling because the majority represent independent portraits of *mousmés*. In the 1860s, the term *mousmé* was certainly not commonly used outside the Japanese colony of Yokohama and was a novelty when published in Humbert's monograph. Indeed, it is generally accepted that the word could be found in the French language since the 1887 publication of *Madame Chrysanthème* by Pierre Loti (Ortolang 2021). Its etymological origin is linked to the Japanese word *musume* (娘) which means "a young girl" in a filial sense. Its use in French is based on a similar semantic field, the parental aspect being, however, absent from the definition. The French term is even tinted with a gallantry that the Japanese one lacks. Although Loti's novel was an immense success that contributed to the circulation of the word in France, the common belief that he introduced the world to the French language should be reassessed, considering that it was introduced as early as 1870 with the publication of *Le Japon illustré*.

Figure 14: Gustave Staal (1817–1882) and Antoine V. Bernard (1824–?), *Mousmé of Yokohama*, facsimile of a xylograph

(Source: Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 370)

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In the context of the novelty of this word in the 1870s, it could be argued that the first two prints of *mousmés* might have aroused readers' curiosity. Their interest was potentially increased by their lack of knowledge about the definition of the term "*mousmé*" that titles the depictions. Indeed, *Mousmé of Yokohama* (*Mousmé de Yokohama*; see Figure 14) and *Mousmés Sleeping* (*Mousmés dormant*; see Figure 15) interfere with the storytelling, creating a gap between the text and the image. The titles represent lexical enigmas that contribute to the general intrigue and dynamism of the chapter. It is only after the second illustration of a *mousmé* that her identity is revealed.

The author introduces the subject of private prostitution by stating that during his stay in Yokohama, the colony was mostly made up of unmarried young men. These foreign residents hired maidens, or *mousmés*, as housekeepers. The distinguishing characteristic of these employees, however, resided in that: "whatever position they [the maidens] occupy, they [the masters] surround them with the same respect as married women" (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 376). The definition given by Humbert introduces an ambiguity to the profession exercised by the *mousmés*. They are young female workers that might accept intercourse with their master, but the way Humbert structures his sentence is interesting to analyze further. It seems clear that the use of "they" in the second part of the sentence implies that the action comes from the men and the situation is not the responsibility of the object pronoun "them," which passively undergoes the action. The sentence construction discharges the *mousmés* of any ploys. This information is essential; the maid's behavior is dictated by her master's, as is customary in relations of domination. Humbert emphasizes the fact that this form of private prostitution is the responsibility of the Western men and not of the female domestic workers.

Figure 15: Gustave Staal (1817–1882) and Antoine V. Bernard (1824–?), *Mousmé of Yokohama*, facsimile of a xylograph

(Source: Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 370)

According to the author, the *mousmés* were not completely innocent either. Humbert warns that they could take advantage of the emotional situation that bound them to their employer to attain a new financial position for themselves and their family. The author cautions that this situation could promptly become harmful to the Western men.

The woodcut *Mousmé with her Child* (*Mousmé avec son enfant*; see Figure 16) features a Japanese woman carrying her little boy on her back, according to the local custom. The passage of the book the print illustrates is set slightly back, so that the reader might first be surprised by this unconventional depiction of the child. Indeed, the latter is not shaved, as was common, which highlights his fair hair. With this indicative detail, the viewer might realize – and the story will confirm it – that the little boy is the fruit of an illegitimate union between a foreigner and his *mousmé*. The author then emphasizes the fatal consequences the birth of such a child could entail.

Figure 16: Adrien Marie (1848–1891) and Johann J. Ettling (?–?), *Mousmé with her child*, facsimile of a xylograph

(Source: Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 377)

Throughout the monograph, the figure of a woman carrying her child on her back has appeared many times, constituting a system of signs that becomes a symbolic system. Since the first appearance of a mother carrying her child in the print *Japanese Women Going for a Visit* (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 1, 74), the child on the back becomes a strong attribute of Japanese motherhood. This symbol is bypassed in *Mousmé with her Child*. Even though the maiden is a mother (the title endorses it), her offspring is deemed socially unacceptable and society will reject him. The graphically prevailing maternal praise is made impossible by the tenor of the text.

The final print, *Mousmé of Yokohama* (*Mousmé de Yokohama*; see Figure 17), presents a standing woman leaning on the back of a Western seat with a seemingly vacant stare. As the tailpiece, the image could illustrate the situation following the funeral rites performed after the death of an illegitimate child, described in the text. Her haggard attitude, in contrast to the gaze of the *mousmé* in the first print of this chapter (see Figure 14), could result from the loss of her baby. A moralizing interpretation could also be possible: a housekeeper must remain in her place, literally standing behind and symbolically at the service of her master. If everyone fulfils his or her role, no tragic issue should arise. Between the lines, Humbert seems to make male readers aware of their responsibility and encourages the "disciplinarization of bodies," as defined by Michel Foucault (1975, 159–200). The Swiss

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Figure 17: Gustave Staal (1817–1882) and Jean-Marie J. J. Huyot (1841–1921), *Mousmé of Yokohama*, facsimile of a xylograph

(Source: Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 378)

diplomat maintains a discourse that does not incriminate anyone in particular and condemns the system as a whole: those who generate it, those who manage it, and those who profit from it.

The chapter "A Transitory Colony" addresses the problems linked to the prostitution of domestic workers. The figure of the *mousmé* is a way for Humbert to approach the delicate issue of private prostitution with decency and with the seemliness of his time. The author formulates an impartial critique by placing all individuals on equal footing regarding their responsibilities. Over the entire monograph, Humbert's method spares neither over- nor under-exposed forms of prostitution from his criticism. With the double material support of text and image, *Le Japon illustré* seeks to shape a perspective and conquer readers by arousing their own revulsion when faced with the misery generated by institutionalized – as well as secret – prostitution in Japan. Each graphic unit adds to the global discourse that has been built throughout the book.

The next two sections examine how speech modalities contribute to the overall strategy established by Humbert. Through the written word, he laid the foundations for a sharp critique of a system that allowed prostitution.

7. A book in service of a cause

This paper has hitherto shown how the selection of wood prints serves to unfold in their materiality, their aestheticism, and their dialogical relationship with the text, but the autonomous evolution of the written tale has been neglected. This investigation aims to identify a few key words that reflect the structural model of the author's thoughts on the trade of women's bodies.

The theme of prostitution is gradually introduced in *Le Japon illustré*. The timing of the story allows Humbert to develop a global understanding of this phenomenon. The strategy of a gradual narrative is suitable for transcribing a nat-

ural feeling of a progressive discovery. Both surprising and menacing, his first impressions of Japan progressively give way to a greater familiarization with the Japanese society. In a way, the timing of the narration tries to respect the timing of the progressive discovery of the archipelago, and the specific theme of prostitution follows the same strategy.

Before the *matsuri* parades, the Swiss legation went to the south of Yokohama Bay to visit the Kamakura temple. An incident disturbed their visit, when a monk tapped on a member's shoulder and offered him a young girl groveling at his feet (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 1, 239). Humbert does not use this episode to broach the subject of sex work. The narrator retains his role of simple observer, without further comment on what happened. For the first time in his account, an obvious example brings together the world of prostitution and religion.

On various occasions, the Swiss Minister emphasizes the diversity of honest teahouses established in the capital, to better distinguish them from the brothels (also named "teahouses" or *maisons de thé*) (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 1, 71, 215–216, 324; vol. 2, 45) he plans to present in the chapter "The Teahouses of Asaksa." Indeed, Humbert gets to the heart of the subject with the description of an aristocratic teahouse. The division of tasks within the establishment is the starting point for explaining the hierarchy of the courtesan classes that could be found in the Asaksa district. Humbert thus reveals what he deems to be the terrible living conditions of the women working there. He explains that prostitutes were subject to the double supervision of the pimp and the government, from which they could hardly be freed. Their situation under patronage was a form of oppression that he qualifies as "slavery." The author also condemns the corruption of the local administration, which he considers driven, above all, by the lure of profit from the taxes levied on this economy. In addition, he regrets that the shogunal power was not concerned about the repercussions of prostitution on public health (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 252).

Humbert continues the deployment of his discourse with the most emblematic of the *yūkaku*: Shin-Yoshiwara. In this chapter, all the key words of the author's indictment converge. First, there is the word "slavery," which appears again. The condition of courtesans is compared to that of "Black" people:

> Thus it is with this kind of slavery, as can be witnessed with the enslavement of Black people or as can be seen with all abuse that stems from brutality. These misdeeds are avenged by their own consequences to the point where an excess of evil brings about the downfall of the institution that has created it. (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 283)

The downfall referred to by the author was undoubtedly inspired by the recent history of the United States of America. The question of the abolition of the slave trade led to the Civil War (1861–1865) and the defeat of the slavers. Humbert impli-

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citly announces the fall of the Japanese powers that authorized what he considers female slavery. Then, the "excess of evil" Humbert ([1870] 2005, vol. 2, 283) mentions refers to the abuse of power he judges some people to exert for their own benefits and to the detriment of the freedom of others. The end of this passage on prostitution leads the reader to reflect on the relations of domination between human beings beyond the notions of race or gender. Talking about the condition of "Blacks" places the discourse on a more global scale and, in that sense, his viewpoint reflects a position that coincides with the abolitionist movement of his time.

Humbert does not forget to mention that the process of domination could shift when a courtesan took advantage of a man and imposed her authority on him. In particular, he describes the *yūjo* Gigokoō, who is the only explicitly greedy and cruel courtesan identifiable in a print of *Le Japon illustré*. Its author tacitly suggests that her behavior is the product of her environment. For instance, he uses the word "contagious" and complains about how the "vice city" of Shin-Yoshiwara could "ravage younger generations" (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 283). For him, Gigokoō was the result of system that promoted economic gain to the detriment of social morality. His judgement of Japanese society accepting the opening of these vice cities is nuanced; he explains that cruel women were not free from trial by the mob, confirming that those behaviors were not commonly accepted (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 284).

The second key word is "female servitude" (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 284). The concept is used to describe the subjugation of sex workers in order to invite the reader to question, once again, the legitimacy of any authority over individuals. Third, the term "prostitution" is used in relation to religion:

> Thus it is, that Buddhism, if fed by speculative genius, will tolerate [...] prostitution, in all its organized forms to any degree, to its being accessible without judgement or limit to all classes of people—including that of the traffic of young children, or indeed, of children of any age. The notion of coming-of-age as a right is a mere illusion, should it clash with the will of parents. (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 276)

The single use of "prostitution" over the entire monograph accentuates its use value. Under the weight of this word, the discourse is transformed and the disapproval of the author becomes fiercer. The Buddhist religion is clearly the essence of the problem for Humbert. Judgements against Buddhism appear gradually, with the same strategy employed as for prostitution. The two concepts are doomed to be linked together as of the incident with the monk in Kamakura, followed by the passage about the *matsuri* that happens to affirm the tenuous connection existing between religion and prostitution. The image of the courtesans' parade functions as a visual tell-tale sign.

Between "The Teahouses of Asaksa" and "Sin-Yosiwara," the chapter of "Asaksa-téra" (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 253–261) recalls the link between the sex trade and the religious universe. Apart from the parades, Japanese temples annually promoted prostitution by exhibiting portraits of the seven most beautiful courtesans of Edo on their walls, alongside statues of the Buddhist pantheon (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 258).

Then, in the chapter "Asaksa's Fair," Humbert ([1870] 2005, vol. 2, 268) begins blaming the local religion, qualifying it as a "bastard religion." He goes on to designate religious literature "as a narcotic that makes man a sort of perpetual sleepwalker" (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 268). This meaningful metaphor evokes Karl Marx's ([1843] 1998) theory of the alienation of people by religion. Humbert seems to share with the German philosopher a feeling of religious misery when he observes Buddhist practices. The Japanese religion is weighed down by a plethora of derogatory terms, whereas the denunciation of prostitution in "Asaksa-téra" works with a reverse system, mentioning a few relatively decent words, such as "courtesan" or "privileged" (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 258). Nevertheless, the force of the indictment is increased tenfold with the use, unique and powerful, of the word "prostitution."

Ultimately, "Sin-Yosiwara" is the chapter where all the most elementary and fundamental notions of a critical discourse about prostitution converge. Everything comes together in Shin-Yoshiwara because this *yūkaku* had become an icon of the floating world and, as such, a symbol to be destroyed. By portraying what is hidden behind the curtains, Humbert uncovers the abject misery which some women lived in. For him, the teahouse makes possible a breakthrough into the pleasure slums. Language, like depiction, materializes the position taken by the author. The two modes of expression underlie a common strategy of denunciation that each develops in parallel, while simultaneously apprehending a dialogic form between them.

8. When the carnal body meets the social body

To persuade the readers of the horrors of female slavery, the strategy identified in *Le Japon illustré* is that of slowly introducing depictions of daily life and the struggles of the female sex workers described. The districts where the girls were kept, the system for selling children, their daily life, their servitude, the collaboration of Buddhist priests, and the government's incitement to debauchery – none of these escape Humbert's vehement critique. Nevertheless, the author did not choose to end his argument at the climax he reached in the chapter "Sin-Yosiwara." A shift from the capital to the treaty port area takes place where, against all expectations, the author decides to end his critique.

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The chapter "A Transitory Colony" holds a decisive place, as it is the endmost sequence of the print series related to sex work. Having examined a variety of categories of public girls who exercised their work in teahouses, streets, or exhibition rooms, "A Transitory Colony" stands out by speaking about secret prostitution. Humbert describes the living conditions of under-exposed women, forced to sell their bodies in the shadow of another profession. In this sense, private prostitution is a radical thematic novelty materialized by the figure of the *mousmé*. Half-servant, half-married woman, as Humbert describes her, she had an ambivalent function. The ambiguity of her role, however, is matched only by that of her master, and it is very precisely the man's conduct that Humbert wishes to address. As of the end of the "Sin-Yosiwara" chapter (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 287), a reversal of the criticism is clearly announced in the last four paragraphs:

> Veils of mystery cover public morality in ways which shield and condemn simultaneously. The observation of conventional behavior has a greater impact on us than any interest we might invest in justice and humanity.
>
> Female slavery, even in those countries where it appears that such slavery may be carried out on a voluntary basis, is the most insidious form of oppression possible.
>
> Any legislation which does not outlaw such a practice is unworthy of being recognized as a proponent of the principled behavior on which our century prides itself.
>
> If the actions of the Japanese *gankiros*[35] were truly put into practice and the consequences thereof justly analyzed, no flattering comparisons for Western Civilization could be drawn. Indeed, the West would urge us to shun any such terms of comparison.

When reading this passage, the idea (dear to Humbert) of consistency between principles and actions is essential; everybody must firmly condemn prostitution to become true guarantors of the fundamental values of the 19th century. Humbert first proceeds to an inventory of public mores that are incomprehensible to him. In the same impetus, he presents himself as a member of a social group – Westerners – to better move away from it and address a critique to his fellow members. The effectiveness of the text lies in that it encompasses all individuals who do not walk the talk. In the first place, the author blames his fellow writers,

[35] Gankiro (岩亀楼) was a famous teahouse in the Miyozaki District of Yokohama. Humbert mentioned it with a capital letter, but he also repeatedly mentioned any generic courtesan's teahouse as "*gankiro*," as is the case here. The use of the word as a common name can be interpreted either as a term used in the Japanese colony of Yokohama to refer to a certain type of teahouse or as a personal choice (consciously or mistakenly) by Humbert.

whose travelogues about Japan abound in comments about modesty and who take umbrage at the gender diversity reigning in *sentō* (銭湯, "public bath establishments") but apparently collectively fail to describe the situation undergone by prostitutes. Even though this situation should have been detrimental to the values that Humbert and his colleagues supposedly share as representatives of "modern" society, the latter do not mention it. Then, in the second place, the author attacks the legislative and judicial authorities before extending his criticism to the whole of Western civilization, which does not prohibit sex work as a form of slavery. The singular audacity of this passage initiates a shift in Humbert's upcoming critiques of Western behavior.

In the final sequence, "A Transitory Colony," Humbert's accusations are still valid, but they are softened, almost insidious. It should be kept in mind that the practices of his time did not allow people to write freely about prostitution, and even less so when they condemned the behavior of their potential readers.[36] To compensate for this constraint, he relies on the power of representation to transmit his critical message. The arrangement of the portraits of the *mousmés* accentuates the individuality of those that Walter Benjamin ([1870] 1991, 356) calls "the nameless."[37] The general content of the story of this chapter, which tends towards universalism, also becomes more anecdotal, sublimated by the omnipresence of the *mousmés*. In the text, Humbert tries to identify the conduct of a Western man and a Japanese woman by focusing impartially on the wrongs of each. Ultimately, Humbert nevertheless seeks to demonstrate that men's actions have implications in the prostitution of housekeepers. Their disgrace culminates with the woodprint *Mousmé with her Child*. At this remarkably simple level of visual reading, the child represents factual, irrefutable proof of misconduct with a *mousmé*. In the end, treaty ports, where most Europeans lived, failed to shield them from some form of sex trade or another. Humbert requests the reader's attention to focus on the licentiousness of certain foreigners and the disastrous consequences their irresponsibility could entail.

When the Swiss Minister looked at Japanese courtesans, he did not fall into the trap of seeing "the birth of humanity" (Boyer 2011, 19) in indigenous practices that seduced many ethnographers, amateur and professional. It could be argued that his discourse embraces a colonial approach, and he clearly advocated for Japan's necessary transition to a "modern" system. Even if he saw the world through

[36] As highlighted previously, Humbert only mentions the word "prostitution" once in the entire book *Le Japon illustré* (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 276).

[37] As Walter Benjamin ([1870] 1991, 356) claims: "It is harder to honor the memory of the nameless (*das Gedächtnis der Namenlosen*) than that of the famous [passage crossed out: celebrated people, poets, and thinkers are not the exception]. Historical construction is dedicated to the memory of the nameless."

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the lens of Western imperialist superiority, Humbert went beyond this *topos* and opened his eyes to the condition of prostitutes both in the Far Est and the West. In other words, his stay in Japan functioned as a primer that sensitized him to the universal injustice of the trafficking of women. Art historian Eleanor M. Hight (2011) accurately describes Humbert as a man who stands out for his countercurrent views on women. The written work he left to posterity, and which cannot be reduced to *Le Japon illustré*, proves that he was concerned about women's living conditions as few men were at the end of the 19th century.

Humbert left various records of the fight he led on his return from Japan. In particular, he tried to create awareness about sexually transmissible diseases (1877). Public health was not his only preoccupation. He also wrote about the White Slave Trade (*Traite des Blanches*), which encompassed all forms of slavery suffered by "White" female individuals. For instance, the article "Traite des Blanches. Les émules en Autriche-Hongrie" ("White Slave Trade. Emulators in Austria-Hungary") (Humbert 1883) focuses on the fate of household children placed in Switzerland to work and who found themselves confined against their will, as well as mistreated, by their foster families. For Humbert, these incidents make evident that slavery in any form and for any duration is intolerable and must be legally condemned. Hence, as of his return from his diplomatic mission to Japan, the politician was involved in the defense of fundamental rights through his written work.

Humbert did not content himself with making his voice heard by publishing articles, but he also acted as a spokesman. In 1875, his introductory speech during the *Conference on Public Morality*, held in Neuchâtel's Bellevue hotel in the presence of Josephine Butler, was the starting point for the fight of the Swiss man against the White Slave Trade in Europe. On the evening of the 1875 conference, an action committee was formed to look after the interests of public morality. This conference was followed by several others organized by Humbert. In 1877, Geneva became the seat of Butler's movement, which changed its name from British Continental and General Federation for the Abolition of the State Regulation of Vice to become the International Abolitionist Federation (IAF), which aimed to abolish state regulation of prostitution with different programs between members. Humbert was given the position of continental commissioner and later secretary general of the federation.[38] Along with his dedication to the IAF, Humbert and his wife founded Les Amies des Jeunes Filles ("The Friends of Young Girls"), an organization similar to Butler's that offered assistance to girls travelling alone in search of work and helped with the social reintegration of sex workers by training them for other professions.

[38] Humbert's official biographer, Quartier-la-tent (1900, 40), confirms that he "displayed considerable activity [...] in this work."

The IAF's fight is one of the oldest feminist movements known to date. One point must be noted, however, about the disparity that reigned within the federation. Butler's own position "on the state regulation of prostitution was rigorously and consistently liberal" (Summers 2006, 217), a view that was not shared by all members. Consequently, IAF programs varied significantly between and within the federations. For instance, the Social Purity group in Switzerland found it more interesting to focus its discourse on the degradation of public morality and private life. Humbert followed the Social Purity movement, whose philosophy is blatantly apparent in *Le Japon illustré* and his later writings.

9. Conclusion

At the end of this study on *Le Japon illustré*, intended to be an analytical essay on the material employed by Aimé Humbert to denounce Japanese prostitution, I would like to present three points of conclusion. First, Humbert's position seems to be embodied in the language, the words, and the literary composition used. Then, it appears materialized in the illustrations created with his crucial role as an assembler. Ultimately, it is the total monographic work that allows the reader to grasp the relationships that arise from the perception of an aesthetic and a narrative. The two intertwined forms of discourse show that they were alternately in movement, in tension, mirroring each other, but never purely independent. In that sense, *Le Japon illustré* is an accomplished illustrated book where the reader can appreciate how the author made the most of the contemporary wood print production available both in Japan and in France.

Initially, the Swiss diplomat and the legation he headed reached Japan with the main mission of defending the economic interests of their country; however, the ratification of a treaty was compromised by local conflicts, freezing negotiations with Switzerland. The postponement of talks was profitable for Humbert's publishing project; his long stay in the archipelago, as well as the remarkable diversity of visual materials he collected, would serve as a monographic project that quickly took over the article.

The reconstruction of Humbert's artistic journey, from the sources he collected to the final printed object, shows the substantial work he carried out. He was already flirting with the artistic with his triple role as a traveler, writer, and collector. However, the most noteworthy of his creative phases is the montage, through which he shows that associating images is already creating a thought. From image hunter to editor to layout manager, Humbert undoubtedly played a transversal role in the production of illustrations that crystalized his viewpoint on Japanese society at the end of the Tokugawa regime.

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Guided by his own values, the Swiss traveler begins his monograph by reflecting on the concept of slavery through the figure of the courtesan. He describes his progressive discovery of the relationships between religion, institutions, and prostitution. He tries to make the reader attentive to the social scourge that contravened "the interests of justice and humanity" (Humbert [1870] 2005, vol. 2, 287). To accompany his textual argument, the depictions become plural. Through this process, Humbert seeks to acquire various perspectives to report on the polysemy of the female sex trade. The hierarchical presentation of courtesans begins from its top, with the description of the high-ranking *yūjo* of the Sannō *matsuri*, then, with aristocratic teahouse workers, and so on until the order brings the depiction to its breaking point. The last ranks of women's abject misery are not exposed to the gaze because their exhibition would not help to highlight the core of the matter. The ladder of sex workers ultimately matters little to the author. Prostitution seems to have no valid hierarchy for him; this was a profession exercised only by women and ostensibly differentiated them from free individuals, and, as such, should be eradicated.

The information on Japanese prostitution presented here is intended to provide a reference for the thought system of a man who thoroughly exploited the possibilities offered by a medium – the illustrated book – to convey his message. The author's position on prostitution as a nadir for women, as well as his broader cultural assumptions considering the promotion of some social patterns over others, could be questioned from a modern perspective. His discourse on the stigmatization of sex work needs to be addressed, but this was not the aim of this paper and I invite further research on this matter.

Some observations, however, can be tentatively proposed. While Humbert's arguments can be qualified as being rooted in patriarchal and colonial beliefs, he provided a way to bring awareness to the social condition surroundig sex work during this period. Through his critique, Humbert not only unveiled the suffering of some courtesans, but also gave a voice to the illegal, unspoken, and under-exposed face of prostitution. His prosecution went beyond the Far East and opened to a broader scale, including the part of the world that he came from. After the publication of his monograph about Japan, his meeting with Josephine Butler worked to highlight the necessity of continuing this fight. He became involved in Butler's movement in 1875, participating actively in opening a debate on the sex trade and the slavery of women in Europe through different activities. Humbert's question on prostitution seems to have been inherited from those surrounding the abolition of the slave trade, anticipating later debates on universal individual freedoms and the blossoming of feminist movements of the 20th century.

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