

THE INFLUENCE OF JAPANESE ART ON IMAGINATIVE THINKING OF EDMOND DE GONCOURT

© Z.M. Taran

The article deals with the interaction of cultures of the East and the West, which is reflected in the artistic, scientific and critical discourse of the French writer, critic and collector Edmond Goncourt. He was the first who scientifically researched and described the phenomenon of ukiyo-e in Japanese art. E. Goncourt's reflections on the essence of ukiyo-e and its prominent representatives are contained in the "Diaries" of the writer of 1880-1890s, as well as in the illustrated monographs "Hokusai" and "Utamaro". E. Goncourt devoted considerable attention to the works of great masters of the Japanese visual arts; their work gave rise to reflection on the ways of development of European painting and literature of the late XIX century. E. Goncourt noted the desire of the Japanese ukiyo-e artists to reflect life in its entire fullness and variety, ordinary people in everyday situations, and the beauty of individual moments. According to E. Goncourt, it corresponded to the search of contemporary French artists-impresionists and novelists. Collecting scientific and critical studies of the art of Japanese ukiyo-e representatives influenced the artistic consciousness of E. Goncourt, who was looking for a new novel form in his literary career, which would adequately reflect the volatile present. E. Goncourt as a novelist used the techniques of Japanese artists and French impresionists. He created a gallery of images of women from different walks of life and described their emotional state in novels (written with his brother Jules and on his own). In his later works, E. Goncourt masterfully used portrait (conceptual, dynamic, distant and close-up, etc.), landscape (of wildlife and city) and other peculiarities of fine art techniques. External plot in later works of E. Goncourt is weakened, as the writer paid more attention to the plastic descriptions, transmission of impressions from the image of the object, floating life moments in its ordinary manifestations. Thus, the novel became a more open and dynamic form, which corresponded to the modernity.

Keywords: *Edmond Goncourt, ukiyo-e, impresionism, novel, image, landscape, portrait.*

French writers Jules and Edmond Goncourt made a significant contribution not only into fiction but also into the world art, promoting the rapprochement of cultures of the West and the East. They were passionate collectors, collecting

paintings and antiquities from different countries, studying history of art at “human documents” which were rich in artifacts in their collections. Having a great interest in painting, and especially in the prints, they made quite successful attempts in drawing on their own and also used painting techniques in their literary works. Around the Goncourt brothers there were reviewers, art historians, collectors, who promoted discovering masterpieces from the East in Europe that influenced the development of different types of art – painting, music and literature of the late XIX century.

Japanese art kindled the Goncourt brothers` interest as far back as 1870's. After the death of his brother, Edmond further admired East. Japanese discourse grew considerably in his collection and also found reflection in the “Diaries” (since the mid-1880s) and his literary works.

The issue of influence of Japanese art on the works of the Goncourt brothers has not often drawn the attention of researchers; however some works have covered the interest of French writers to the Far East. Thus, P.J. Warner noted that E. Goncourt had noticed similarities between Japanese and European society of the late XVIII – XIX centuries in that thing “aristocracy got weaker and gave way to natives of democratic strata who became the main objects of portraying in art” [6, p. 3]. P. Havrysheva and N. Naumenko rightly noted in their article “Art in the works of the Goncourt brothers”: “The attitude of the Goncourt brothers to the art projects both to painting and literature; art in their conception reflects not so much the reality as personal feelings, and author and hero`s emotions” [3, p. 12]. Researchers have noted that due to the introduction of books “Hokusai” and “Utamaro” by Edmond Goncourt Japanese art became very popular in Europe. However, the problem “Japan and the Goncourt brothers” requires more thorough study, particularly in the context of interaction of literary movements of the second half of the XIX century: realism, naturalism and impressionism. In this regard **the main purpose of the article** is to reveal the influence of Japanese art on the imaginative thinking of Edmond Goncourt, on the formation of his scientific and critical discourse and literary practice in the novel as a genre.

Why were the Goncourt brothers fond of Japanese art? What cultural phenomena in Japan drew their attention? In the XVII century in Japan there was a particular trend in art – ukiyo-e. Literally, the expression means “pictures of the floating world”. Sources of ukiyo-e take roots in Buddhist philosophy, in which illusory being, fleeting and ephemeral human existence have found their reflection. Variability of the world and the transience of life are the leading concepts of ukiyo-e way back to the beginning of its inception.

Subsequently ukiyo-e was filled with new content, especially in the days of Edo. Previously artists perceived impermanence of the world as a reason for

mourning, but now – as a call for expression of happiness and life satisfaction. Ukiyo-e, so far, approached the present, that widely entered the Japanese art of the XVII century, especially the Japanese color prints. “A man is living instantly, swinging merrily on the waves of the Unknown” [4, p. 4], – wrote Asai Ryōi in the “Tales of a Floating World”, 1661.

Ukiyo-e reflects the modern world, the world of earthly pleasures and love. Due to the fact that the golden age of ukiyo-e accounts for the Edo – time of fast flourishing of cities and urban culture, this trend in Japanese art becomes relevant. By the middle of the XVIII century Edo population was about 1 million people. Mortal life in its usual manifestations became more valuable. Classes of merchants, artisans, moneylenders and others were forming. Townspeople had free money and went to the theatre (Kabuki), sumo wrestling, and the so-called “merry districts”. At that time a new understanding of beauty was being formed. The diversity of life and all spheres of human existence, without exception, were considered to be the beautiful. The great achievement of the poetry of that time was haiku by Matsuo Bashō, who sounded in a modern, compared with predecessors` lyrics. In prose genre of ukiyo-zōshi (“the stories of the floating world”) dominated. And ukiyo-e prints reflected the fleeting life, becoming a kind of poetry of everyday life, city life and ordinary people in ordinary situations. Even the traditional themes of Japanese painting – landscapes, flowers and birds – found a new incarnation. They became not abstract images anymore but specific manifestations of Mother Nature in its changing conditions.

Along with the proliferation of ukiyo-e a new technique developed – xylography (wood block printing). Thereby, a large number of prints that performed a kind of role of colored cards appeared. The democratic nature of the engravings of that time was in that thing plots and characters of prints were taken from an ordinary life; in addition, prints became cheaper and available even to the poor. Prominent representatives of ukiyo-e were Hishikawa Moronobu (1618 – 1694), Matabei Iwasa (1578 – 1650), Katsushika Hokusai (1760 – 1849) and others.

Artists working in the style of ukiyo-e were interested in particular personalities of Kabuki actors, beauties (courtesans, geishas), moments of everyday life of ordinary people, scenes of everyday life, nature in its various manifestations, admiring the landscapes (flowers, birds), erotic scenes.

In ukiyo-e the method “mono no aware” was often used, i.e. the personification of a certain feeling in ordinary things, “self-perception of things and phenomena”. Therefore, each engraving inspired certain mood. Admiring things and phenomena (sunrise or sunset, flowers, hills, etc.) embodied in the works of ukiyo-e became a well-known Japanese tradition.

In the second half of the XIX century in Europe there was a great interest to Japanese art. In 1856 a collector and trader F. Bracquemond opened an exhibition of Japanese prints in Paris. The writer Oscar Wilde popularized Japanese prints in England. Introduction to the Japanese art was complicated by the fact that Japan's ports were practically closed to foreigners up to the middle of the XIX century. The only port connected Japan to other countries was Nagasaki. In XVII-XIX centuries the port city of Nagasaki was the original “window to Europe” for Japanese people, and vice versa, via this port Europeans received information, goods and works of art from the Far East. Nagasaki was one of five Japanese ports opened to trade with the Western world in the middle of the XIX century after almost two centuries of isolation of the country. This had a positive impact on the cultural exchange between Europe and Japan.

Since 1870s “Japanese fever” literally swept France and other European countries. Known in art circles traders Sishel, Bing, Hayashi used to bring everyday objects and works of art from Japan. In 1883 Louis Gonz organized an exhibition of Japanese art, which presented Utamaro paintings and of other ukiyo-e artists. Japanese prints were collected by French artists and writers Emile Zola, Edgar Degas, Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro and others. But the most ardent supporters of Japanese prints were the Goncourt brothers.

Japanese art of ukiyo-e prints was interesting for French impressionists, who sought new means of displaying the real world. Inspired by the works of Utagawa Hiroshige and Utamaro, Camille Pissarro wrote in his diary on February, 3, 1893: “...Japanese artists confirm my confidence in the correctness and accuracy of our visual perception” [4, p. 5].

French impressionists were appealed by nonsymmetrical, incorrect beauty (in terms of proportions), namely beauty of moments they sought to capture by means of painting. Simple stories and ordinary people increasingly filled the space of paintings by French artists by the example of prints of representatives of Japanese ukiyo-e. In addition, the French artists created paintings in which Japanese themes and motifs were noticeable. Thus, Claude Monet designed the painting “The Woman in the Green Dress” (1866), where the artist was mostly interested in the point of movement, rustle of woman's dresses. Painting “The Japanese Woman” (1875) by Monet (Camille Monet also posed for it) embodied the artist's admiration by Japanese art. The Rouen Cathedral series by Monet (1890s), Irises series (1910s) also indicated that feeling. Rouen Cathedrals by Monet reminded 36 Mount Fuji landscapes by Katsushika Hokusai. In 1889 in Paris at the Great exhibition various types of Japanese gardens were introduced, by the example of which ones Monet created a decorative pond with lilies and Japanese bridges in his garden, and painted them a lot (“Water Lilies (Nymphaea”),

1907, “Japanese Footbridge”, 1899 and others). Vincent Van Gogh copied some engravings by Utagawa Hiroshige (“The Plum Garden in Kameido”, “Sudden Shower over Shin-Ōhashi bridge and Atake”). He also depicted the Japanese prints by Utagawa Hiroshige on portraits (“Portrait of Père Tanguy”), painted irises, which performed by V. Van Gogh reminded Japanese prints. As it is known, copies of the painting “The Great Wave off Kanagawa” by Katsushika Hokusai were kept in the collections of Monet and V. Van Gogh. The composer Claude Debussy wrote the music on the theme of “The Great Wave”. Women's portraits on canvas of Auguste Renoir reminded Japanese beauties engaged into the usual chores.

For the first time the Japanese art of ukiyo-e was scientifically described by French writer, collector and critic Edmond Goncourt. Inspired by Japanese artifacts during Jules` lifetime, Edmond continued collecting household items and art works from Japan after his brother's death. In his so-called “attic” (the third floor of the house in Auteuil) panels of Japanese prints, engravings by Utamaro, Hokusai, Harunobu, various kakemono, decorations and costumes (fans, belts, etc.), boxes and even a box for cookies depicting picture by Hokusai were collected. The red color of the ceiling was specially selected to flower decoration and a coat of arms of Tokugawa dynasty.

In E. Goncourt`s “Diaries” a lot of bright and subtle observations relating to Japanese art can be found. In addition, E. Goncourt wrote two large illustrated monographs on ukiyo-e: “Utamaro” (1891) and “Hokusai” (1896). E. Goncourt mastered and used the ukiyo-e art style in his own literary art, in his novels, where you could find many descriptions created in a new manner. E. Goncourt`s activities contributed to the convergence of cultures of the West and the East, the enrichment of French art by Japanese traditions.

Why was E. Goncourt fond of Japanese art? What value did he see to Europe of his time? Who of Japanese artists drew E. Goncourt`s attention and why? And how did Japanese art influence the style of E. Goncourt`s novels?

Japanese theme powerfully entered the pages of E. Goncourt`s “Diaries” in mid-1880s. “Our, i.e. European, plastic art prefers to portray only the highest representatives of the animal world: carnivores, horses, dogs; our artists are deprived of a kind of tender feeling, which makes artists of the East love to paint all the animals, the vilest, the smallest, most despicable, for example, a toad...” [1, p. 354].

At that time E. Goncourt enthusiastically wrote about the talent of Katsushika Hokusai: “Truly the most interesting feature of Hokusai is his talent of naturalist, nature is the surest, most accurate, most rigorous, and going sometimes to fantasy, however, it always reflects the ideal in art” [1, p. 354]. Later the attention

of the writer was drawn by K. Hokusai's series of drawings for the book "One Hundred Poets" (the book was seen by E. Goncourt in trader's Hayashi Takamura at a meeting with the Japanese at Bing's): "You are struck by the genuine originality of this elusive, fragmented pattern that... emphasizes the movement of men's legs ... and swaying long women's dresses..." [1, p. 389].

In 1888 E. Goncourt wrote in the "Diaries" about a plan to create a new book about art, which, according to his schedule, was to consist of five studies: on Hokusai, who updated ancient Japanese art; on Utamaro whom E. Goncourt called "Japanese Watteau"; on Ogata Corin and Rittsono (Ridzono) – famous painters and decorators (varnishers); on Yashima Gakutei (Hokusai's pupil), surimono master (Japanese woodcut like a greeting card), a developer of dynamic image technology.

In 1889 E. Goncourt repeated again the names of five Japanese artists who attracted his attention and which he would devote scientific research: Utamaro, Hokusai, Gakutei, Corin and Rittsono (Ridzono): "I've been thinking of what I would do in my last years, if the Lord gave me another ten years of life, keeping my mind and vision. <...> Oh! How I would like these ten years were given to me under the conditions which I asked; because I feel that even though I'm old, I'd still manage to scribble something, what would be ahead of time" [1, p. 452].

In 1895, overcoming the illness and old age, E. Goncourt tirelessly worked with the merchant and collector Hayashi on translations of Hokusai's forewords. These materials were needed for E. Goncourt to create books about the Japanese artist. Finally, in the 1896 the book "Hokusai" was finished. Why was Katsushika Hokusai who exactly drew Goncourt's attention?

Hokusai, according to the French writer and critic, was able to learn some of the techniques of European painting and bring them into Japanese prints (owing to his teacher Tokan, Hokusai studied the methods of diversifying the color palette, made western-inspired frames for his paintings, studied the techniques of Dutch Masters whose paintings got into Japan through the port city of Nagasaki).

Thus, the works of Hokusai showed interaction of cultures of the West and the East. Hokusai left a huge heritage – about 30 thousand prints and 500 illustrated books. The 15 volume work by Hokusai "Manga" confirmed the idea that "nothing in nature can be ignored". Moreover, Hokusai filled his art with modernity, reflected the world of ordinary workers and organic connection between man and nature. People in his engravings were inscribed into landscapes and engaged into usual chores, and nature was always changeable and unique. These features of Hokusai's works were noted by E. Goncourt in his scientific and critical study. And these particular characteristics, according to the writer, might be useful for European painters and word painters.

The book “Hokusai” by E. Goncourt is designed as an illustrated biography, in which the facts of the artist’s life are represented by his drawings and accurate author’s comments, embodying his fascinated view on the Oriental art. “This is an artist who triumphantly raised the art of his country over the Persian and Chinese influences, and by, I would say, reverent study of nature, he rejuvenated, renewed, made it indeed Japanese; a universal artist who in equally vital drawings depicted a man, a woman, birds, fish, trees, flowers and sprouts; here’s the artist who made 30 thousand drawings and prints; here’s an artist who was the true creator of the school of ukiyo-e, the founder of the national school of painting, that is, a person who was not satisfied with copying academic works of the Tosa school, depicting in affected and conventional manner the chronicle of court life and the official life of the high dignitaries with artificial pomp of an aristocratic way of life, opened wide the doors of his works to the people of his country, in a bid to reality, avoiding the requirements of aristocratic art of his time; then, finally, a fiery preacher and servant of art, signing his creations – “a madman of a drawing” [2, p. 334].

E. Goncourt said that Hokusai devoted his works to reflection of people's lives. This way, according to the French writer, was prolific for European art of the late XIX century as well, which had to depict life in all its specificity and originality of manifestations.

The book “Manga” by Hokusai is a special object of E. Goncourt’s contemplation. “Man” literally means “whimsical”, “ga” – the picture that appears directly under the influence of an impression or idea. This work of the Japanese artist, according to the French writer and critic, was in unison with the search of the impressionists and their penetration into the secret of depicting changing nature. E. Goncourt wrote: “Manga” is the abundance of images, an avalanche of drawings. That revelry of a pencil, these fifteen notebooks, where sketches are crowded on the sheets ... this is a set of sketches of everything on the earth, in the sky, under the water, those magical moments, snatched from the life of the bodies and souls of moving human and animal world; finally, it is a variety of delusional visions on paper of this great “madman figure” – all is there” [2, p. 337].

A lot of attention was paid by E. Goncourt to dynamic drawings of Hokusai. The researcher considered which means the artist managed to use to put movements of the human body into action in various situations. E. Goncourt also liked that Hokusai was interested mainly in residents of poor neighborhoods (artisans, miners, fishermen, dancers, men and women in everyday matters). And seventh volume of “Manga” attracted French writer by that thing “it all was filled with landscapes, the sun, fog and thunderstorms”.

E. Goncourt regarded the value of Hokusai`s heritage as it reflected not only external but intimate life of ordinary Japanese people (the world of “merry neighborhoods” with specific relationships). French writer noticed that Hokusai was able to portray posture, position, figures of people in everyday existence, in familiar situations true to fact.

Within the field of Hokusai`s view, according to E. Goncourt, there were not only beautiful and elegant, but also ugly (for example, a series of pictures of ugly women opposed a series of beautiful ones). E. Goncourt was fond of it as well because he believed that contemporary art should be substantially expanded. Art objects could be everything in the world. He gave a high rating to the independence of the Japanese master, his ability to follow his own inspiration and impressions.

E. Goncourt`s attention was paid to the Hokusai`s color scheme created from 50 different colors and shades with some explanation of where and what color to use. “...paints must be neither too thick nor too liquid, and brushes must be down, otherwise they leave dirty marks ... an outline should never be too distinct, but really does not use a lot of paint ...” [2, p. 337]. “The black color makes him say: “There is an ancient black and fresh black, shiny black and matte black, black-lit and black immersed into shadow. For the ancient black it is mixed with red, for the fresh black – with blue, for matte black – with white, the shiny black is mixed with glue, the black-lit has to be given a gray gleam ...” [2, p. 339]. “A little further, speaking of colors, Hokusai revealed a curious tone of watercolors to have adopted in their painting. This tone is *smiling*. But listen to the oldest artist: “This tone called smiling is used for painting female faces to make them lively rosy, and also for coloring flowers. Here is a means to make this tone: it is necessary to take mineral red, dissolve it in boiling water and leave to stand until a precipitate is formed. It's a secret which is not usually reported by artists” [2, p. 340]. E. Goncourt himself in his novelistic heritage, especially of the later period, was remarkably attentive to colors and hues, bringing techniques of French impressionists and Japanese artists into the verbal art. Study on Hokusai promoted E. Goncourt`s artistic seeking.

Jules and Edmond Goncourt from the very beginning of their joint activities focused attention on female images. After his brother`s death Edmond did not stop hard work in this direction and researched types of women from different social strata, depicted the emotional state of women in everyday situations. That`s why the heritage of the Japanese artist Kitagawa Utamaro was no less interesting for E. Goncourt than the works of Hokusai. In the book “Utamaro” the author noted the ability of a master to reflect the emotional state of women in a subtle and unobtrusive manner, bringing characters closer to the audience. E. Goncourt liked

that Utamaro painted women`s portraits not only in full growth, but also enlarged their faces, which helped reveal the inner world of characters. This method was used in his later novels by E. Goncourt. Utamaro painted different women`s states: grief, expectation, longing love, melancholy, dreaminess, joy and so on. The subject of E. Goncourt`s scientific and critical thinking became such Utamaro`s pictures as: “Ten Types of Women's Physiognomies”, “Three Beauties of the Present Day”, “Beauty Holding a Fan”, “Crying Beauty”, and others. Women types, nervous conditions and mental disorders of women were also in the spotlight in the novels of Jules and Edmond Goncourt, and Edmond`s own works.

In his works E. Goncourt had a lot of experiments in the field of a novelistic genre. He sought to make it more open and credible. And impressionistic elements closely intertwined with the methods of Japanese painting largely contributed to it. Studying the experience of impressionists (his contemporaries) and Japanese masters (representatives of ukiyo-e), E. Goncourt expanded the artistic boundaries of a novel. He believed that the novel of a new type had to reflect life in each truthful and unique moment. He created “instant” (sketch) portraits of individual characters and the mass scenes in the meantime where there were no distinct lines and contours.

In E. Goncourt`s novels impressionistic sketches of different types of landscapes (of wildlife and city ones) can be found where the important role is played by light, movement, color and hue fogging. The concept of “living nature”, according to E. Goncourt, includes not only natural beings and phenomena, but also various strata of society. That`s why E. Goncourt equally masterfully portrayed members of the “bottom” and “top”: prostitutes, soldiers, prisoners, aristocrats, circus and theater actors, and others. In the later period of creativity E. Goncourt was mainly interested in “artist`s models” (actresses, circus actors, etc.).

Thus, E. Goncourt made a significant contribution into the field of intermediality using painting techniques in literature. He achieved great success in the use of light and shade, plastic image, creating an instant impression. It enriched a European novel, brought it to modern life and gave it a new perspective. E. Goncourt for the first time deeply and thoroughly revealed the importance of Japanese art to develop visual and verbal art in Europe. On the other hand, E. Goncourt as a novelist himself experienced the influence of Japanese prints and French impressionism in his works focused on the present.

Sources:

1. Гонкур Э. и Ж. Дневник: В 2-х тт. / Э. и Ж. Гонкур. – М. : Художественная литература, 1964. – Т. 2. – 783 с.

- Gonkur E. i Zh. Dnevnik: V 2-kh tt. / E. i Zh. Gonkur. – M. : Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1964. – Т. 2. – 783 s.
2. Гонкур Э. Хокусай / Э. Гонкур // Толстой С.Н. Собрание починений: в 5 т. – Т. 5 (Кн.1) Переводы зарубежной прозы. – М.: Алгоритм, 2004. – С. 322–340.
- Gonkur E. Khokusay / E. Gonkur // Tolstoy S.N. Sobraniye pochineniy : v 5 t. – Т. 5 (Кн.1) Perevody zarubezhnoy prozy. – М. : Algoritm, 2004. – S. 322–340.
3. Гавришева Г., Науменко Н. Живопись в творчестве братьев Гонкуров / Г. Гавришева, Н. Науменко // Электронный ресурс : <http://davaiknam.ru/text/lingvisticheskie-i-literaturovedcheskie-interpretacii-francuzs>
- Gavrisheva G., Naumenko N. Zhivopis' v tvorchestve brat'yev Gonkurov / G. Gavrisheva, N. Naumenko // Yelektronniy resurs: <http://davaiknam.ru/text/lingvisticheskie-i-literaturovedcheskie-interpretacii-francuzs>
4. Мировое искусство (Мастера японской гравюры) / Сост. И.Г. Мосин. – СПб. : ООО «СЗКЭО», 2008. – 208 с.
- Mirovoye iskusstvo (Mastera yaponskoy gravyury) / Sost. I.G. Mosin. – SPb. : ООО «SZKEO», 2008. – 208 s.
5. Punal R. Goncourt / Punal / Laffont-Bompiani. Dictionnair encyclopédique de littérature française. – P. : Robert Laffont, 1999. – P. 416–417.
6. Warner P. J. Compare and Contrast : Rhetorical Strategies in Edmond de Goncourt's Japonisme / P. J. Warner // Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Spring 2009). – P. 3–28.