

Alfred Parsons Encounters with Japan

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After more than two hundred years of Seclusion from 1639 to 1853, Japan became open to foreign trade in 1868. Japanese arts aroused the interest of artists and collectors in Europe and America. Japanese gardens were one of them. Alfred Parsons (1847-1920) was a landscape painter and gardener who had been regarded as an artist engaged with expressing a cult of Englishness since his solo exhibition of garden paintings in 1891. Japan's reputation as 'the Land of Flowers' intrigued Parsons. Although in 1892 Parsons had travelled around Japan painting landscapes and gardens, scholars have tended to neglect how and in what way Parsons' stay in Japan may have influenced his paintings and gardens. After coming back from Japan to England, Parsons focused energetically on designing gardens. At the same period many Japanese gardens were created in Europe and America. According to Amanda Herries' *Japanese Gardens in Britain* (2001), "the discovery of unknown trees and shrubs led to great excitement; the gardens; however, were much more difficult to interpret in a Western culture" (Herries:5). Lawrence Weaver (1876-1930), a British architectural writer, criticised "the disposition of a few typical ornaments of a bronze stork here and stone lantern there, does not make a Japanese garden: it only make an English garden with a Japanese accent" (*Country Life*, 1915:94). While some painting and gardens are simply displaying a Japanese 'touch', Japanese elements in Parsons' paintings and gardens do not take the obvious forms of Japanese lanterns, holding screens and fans. However, Parsons successfully achieved a hybrid between different elements, the Japanese and British in his works. Therefore, this study attempts to reveal the Japaneseness of Parsons' English landscape paintings and gardens, exploring Parsons' theories of landscaping and garden design, and his travel book *Notes in Japan* (1895).

Travels in Portugal: Landscape, architecture, and national character

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I propose to do a presentation on British and German perceptions of Portugal in the first half of the 19th-century based on travel accounts written by men and women who visited the country for reasons as varied as diplomatic and financial affairs, health, and - particularly as one approaches the mid-19th century - leisure, or 'tourism.'

I will look specifically at the way observations on space (public and private, interior and exterior) and the built environment (secular and religious) correlate with commentary on the character of the nation, including "temperamental" and physical traits of the population. In general the texts reveal a perception of Portugal as an alien, "not quite European" region within Europe; some ambivalence is present when the "uncivilized" Lisbon is seen as "exotic."

I will also explore the social and literary contexts in which these accounts are produced and consumed, particular as regards the geographic and cultural perceptions of 'North' and 'South' underlying the Grand Tour and the relationship between the travelers' expectations and the travel literature that fuels them. The presentation will underline the role played by the increasing publication, translation and circulation of travel writing in 19th century Europe and its influence in the formation of world views, particularly of Self and Other.