



Art nouveau and the French book of the eighteen-nineties

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Art Nouveau and the French Book of the Eighteen-Nineties

IN the history of Art Nouveau, still scantily recorded,¹ the relation of that bizarre and feverish style to book illustration and design has been observed, but only fragmentarily, with emphasis on English and Belgian examples at the expense of others. In the present article an attempt will be made to redress the balance somewhat, by examining the contribution made to the development of the style by the French book of the eighteen-nineties. The attempt has been facilitated at every turn, and indeed made possible, by the resources for the period of the Department of Printing and Graphic Arts in the Harvard College Library, from whose collections most of the illustrative material has been drawn.²

In tracing the contribution made by the French book, the focus will be upon the work of three artists whose drawings not only con-

¹ Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius* (London, 1936), reissued in revised form as *Pioneers of Modern Design from William Morris to Walter Gropius* (New York, 1949), was the first published survey. Subsequent treatments include Henry R. Hope, 'The Sources of Art Nouveau,' doctoral thesis, Harvard University, 1942; Henry F. Lenning, *The Art Nouveau* (The Hague, 1951); Zürich, Kunstgewerbemuseum, *Um 1900; Art Nouveau und Jugendstil. Kunst und Kunstgewerbe aus Europa und Amerika zur Zeit der Stilwende* (catalogue of exhibition held June-September 1952; 2nd ed.); Stephan Tschudi Madsen, *Sources of Art Nouveau*, translated from the Norwegian by Ragnar Christophersen (New York, 1956). The most careful bibliography to date is James Grady, 'A Bibliography of the Art Nouveau,' *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, XIV, 2 (1955), 18-27.

A reviving interest in Art Nouveau has become apparent in very recent years, with a number of articles appearing on specialized phases of this style. For a general and critical appraisal of this tendency, see Aline B. Saarinen, 'Famous, Derided and Revived,' *New York Times*, 13 March 1955, Sec. 2, p. 9, where the extensive and pioneering collection of the New York Museum of Modern Art is cited. The spreading influence of Art Nouveau in contemporary decoration is described by Edgar Kaufmann, Jr, in 'Art Nouveau, Yesterday and Today,' *New York Times*, 21 September 1958, Sec. 6, Pt. 2, pp. 56-57.

² Books discussed that are in the Department of Printing and Graphic Arts are listed at the end of this article. For a study of many of these same books from a different point of view, see Philip Hofer, 'Some Precursors of the Modern Illustrated Book,' *HARVARD LIBRARY BULLETIN*, IV (1950), 191-202.

tributed to the shaping of Art Nouveau but also laid some of the foundations of Modern Art: Pierre Bonnard, Maurice Denis, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Although the work of Bonnard and Lautrec has greater strength than that of Denis, it was Denis' theories in particular that influenced succeeding generations of artists; especially potent was his famous and radical pronouncement of 1890: 'Se rappeler qu'un tableau — avant d'être un cheval de bataille, une femme nue, ou une quelconque anecdote — est essentiellement une surface plane recouverte de couleurs en un certain ordre assemblés'³ — a manifesto that opened the way to future and greater abstraction.

Denis was the spokesman for French painters of the Symbolist generation of 1890, antagonistic to realism, whether impressionist or academic, and recently introduced to the gospel of Gauguin by Paul Sérusier, a student with Denis at the Académie Julian. This was one of the most popular studio schools in Paris, founded by the painter Rodolphe Julian, which offered students an opportunity to work from the model and to have their work criticized by visiting professors from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. There seems to have been a minimum of formality and supervision. Sérusier had briefly met Gauguin in the summer of 1888 at Pont-Aven in Brittany, and the impact of the older painter's powerful and simplified style impelled Sérusier to spread this doctrine when he returned to Paris in the autumn of that year. In 1889, at the time of the great exposition at the Champ de Mars, seventeen paintings by Gauguin were included in an informal exhibition at the Café Volpini, in the shadow of the new Eiffel Tower. Two years later Gauguin left for Tahiti, and Sérusier thereafter considered himself Gauguin's artistic heir and evangelist. Strongly influenced by Denis' theoretical formulations and Sérusier's interpretation of Gauguin (Denis said later that Sérusier spread the ideas he *attributed* to Gauguin,⁴ but Denis was nevertheless proud to have been a 'pupil' of Sérusier), a distinctive style in book and magazine illustration, in poster

³ Maurice Denis, *Théories, 1890-1910*, 4th ed. (Paris, 1920), p. 1. This book, a collection of articles that first appeared in various periodicals, begins with 'Définition du néo-traditionisme,' published in *Art et critique*, 23 and 30 August 1890, when Denis was not yet twenty, under the pseudonym Pierre Louis. He used various pseudonyms: Pierre Louis (which he dropped at the insistence of the poet Pierre Louÿs), Louis Picose, and Pierre L. Maud ('Maud' deriving from the abbreviated signature on some of his paintings: 'Mau[rice] D[enis]'). The second chapter of *Théories* appeared in the *Revue blanche*, 25 June 1892.

⁴ Suzanne Barazetti-Desmoulin, *Maurice Denis* (Paris, 1945), p. 28. Sérusier's theories were published in *ABC de la peinture* (Paris, 1921).

and book design, was evolved. Not since the eighteenth century had painters experimented so freely with the graphic and decorative arts, and within a decade a small group of French artists had established the leading tradition in modern book illustration, leaving a more lasting influence than their English or Belgian contemporaries. At the same time their experiments directly contributed to the shaping of the style that was to be known as Art Nouveau.

'The style of the nineties,' as it is often called (although in some media it extended well into the first decade of the twentieth century), turned its back on symmetry and space in design and exploited shallow surface effects, using motifs derived from nature but conventionalized into decorative forms, freely curvilinear in character, with the S-curve most prominent. Simultaneously there was exploration of the expressive possibilities of exaggeration and distortion. The break with the Renaissance tradition and the all-pervading naturalism of the later nineteenth century in favor of mediaeval symbolism and Japanese stylization plainly set the stage for the more radical experiments of the twentieth century.

From the first seeds sown in the late eighties and early nineties, Art Nouveau emerged as a distinct style about 1893 in Belgium; whence it spread first to France, to make its official debut at Samuel Bing's ⁶ *Maison de l'Art Nouveau* in the winter of 1895/96, where one could see the graphic work of Bonnard, Denis, and Lautrec, as well as furniture and room design by Denis and by Henry van de Velde, the Belgian leader and theorist of the style, who has recorded his admiration for these three French artists.⁶ In England Art Nouveau manifested itself as one phase of the Arts and Crafts Movement, in Germany and Austria it flourished as the *Jugendstil* and *Sezessionstil*, and in Italy it became known as the *Stile Floreale* or *Stile Liberty*, from the textiles of Arthur Lasenby Liberty, the English designer and merchant.⁷ Eventually, the clearest and most consciously created

⁶ Since Bing always signed himself S. Bing, there has been considerable confusion as to his first name, which has been variously suggested as Samuel, Siegfried, and Solomon. The Library of Congress refers to him as Samuel; the *Bibliothèque Nationale* catalogue records him, in his own manner, as S. Bing.

⁶ Henry van de Velde, 'Les expositions d'art à Bruxelles,' *Revue blanche*, X (1896), 287.

⁷ Italian interest in this field is demonstrated by many recent articles in periodicals of architecture, interior design, and fashion, such as Alessandro Pasquali, 'Lo stile Liberty,' *Novità*, No. 68 (June 1956), pp. 19-23.

manifestations of the style appeared in the decorative arts and in ornamentation generally, familiar to us in Hector Guimard's Paris Métro stations and in Lalique and Tiffany glass (see Plates Ia and Ib).⁸

Both the painters and the architects and designers of the Art Nouveau were, as if by definition, striving to create new forms. In later years Victor Horta, one of the most important exponents of the style in Belgium, explained that in architecture he had sought 'de faire oeuvre personnel . . . à l'égal du peintre et du sculpteur qui ne souciaient que de voir avec les yeux et sentir avec leur coeur.'⁹ There is even a parallel of limitation in the accomplishments of the leaders of each of these major groups when compared with their pronouncements: just as Denis' own work never realized the boldness of abstraction implied in his theories, so the buildings of Van de Velde did not always demonstrate the functionalism he advocated. Yet Denis' adventurous dogmas blessed the surface experiments of the Fauves of 1905 and the Cubists of 1908 (and even the Abstract-Expressionists of 1958), while Van de Velde's functionalist doctrine helped to form the International Style of architecture of the nineteen-twenties and thirties.

In retrospect, Art Nouveau has been considered 'transitional between Historicism and the modern movement,'¹⁰ but in its own day it was a matter of violent dispute, suffering from the opprobrium of Edmund de Goncourt's apt and chilling epithet, 'yachting style.'¹¹ Even some of the artists who contributed to its formation and shared its characteristics attempted to dissociate themselves from the term, and accordingly their relation to Art Nouveau is often obscure. Thus Maurice Denis, writing in 1903 of Gauguin's influence in the eighteen-

⁸ Plates Ia and Ib are reproduced from *Um 1900*, Plates 14 and 24 (see note 1 above), with the permission of the Kunstgewerbemuseum, Zürich.

⁹ Letter of 1936 from Horta to Pevsner, quoted in Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design*, p. 139, n. 5.

¹⁰ Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design*, p. 65.

¹¹ In accounts of Art Nouveau, Goncourt is invariably credited with this *bon mot* (Pevsner, p. 60; Lenning, p. 35; *Um 1900*, p. 15; Madsen, p. 79), but without documentation. In an entry of 30 December 1895, in the *Journal* ('édition définitive,' Paris, 1935-36, IX, 288-289), Goncourt records with some indignation his reaction to the Art Nouveau on exhibition at Bing's (whom he had long known because of their mutual interest in things Japanese). Sputtering with childish vulgarities, he speaks of pieces of furniture 'empruntées aux hublots d'un navire' and 'ayant une parenté avec les lavabos d'un dentiste, des environs de la Morgue.'

nineties, stated that Art Nouveau and its *snobisme* did not then exist.¹² Yet during the same nineties he had been entirely willing to have his work appear, along with that of Bonnard and Lautrec, under the very label as presented by Bing's Maison de l'Art Nouveau.

The first French book illustrations to be attempted in the new style, by Maurice Denis, were not published until 1911, but they were shown at the Indépendant exhibition of 1891, two years after their execution. That they were consciously done within the framework of the new theories of design is indicated by Denis' own analysis of these sketches the following year.¹³ Verlaine's *Sagesse* was one of the books that Denis and his artist friends read with enthusiasm, and he drew an ambitious series of illustrations. Although they engendered some interest on the part of Catulle Mendès, Gustave Geffroy, and Verlaine himself, nothing came of the project, and not until twenty years later were the illustrations, now colored, published by Volland. Like many of Denis' illustrations, they were cut in wood for reproduction by Beltrand, with a richness of tone suggestive of lithographs. A decided break with the usual narrative and naturalistic illustration of the nineteenth century is seen in these pages, which are partially framed by vignettes, often with irregularly curved inner margins. Figures and landscape are interlaced in a flat and shadowy design, evocative, rather than descriptive, of a vague melancholy. In his article of 1890 Denis (using his pseudonym Pierre Louis) tried to be objectively critical of his recently completed sketches and spoke of the intensity of expression of the best of them, as well as the weakness of those too dependent on the literary source. He scorned illustration that was too literal and competed with the text, and he sought inspiration in mediaeval manuscripts.

One of the first published French books heralding the new style is a little-known work of 1892, Victor Joze's *Reine de joie* (issued in his satirical series *La ménagerie sociale*), which brought together the work of Bonnard and Lautrec. Bonnard was one of the original members of the group of artists who called themselves the Nabis¹⁴ (from

¹² Denis, *Théories*, p. 170.

¹³ Denis, *Théories*, p. 11.

¹⁴ Three recent publications furnish excellent summaries of this group: Bern, Kunsthalle, *Die Maler der Revue blanche, Toulouse-Lautrec und die Nabis* (catalogue of exhibition held March-April 1951); Agnès Humbert, *Les Nabis et leur époque* (Geneva, 1954); and Paris, Musée National d'Art Moderne, *Bonnard, Vuillard et les Nabis* (catalogue of exhibition held June-October 1955).

the Hebrew word for prophet) and for whom Denis served as spokesman, but his work and all his contemporaries attest to his stubborn individualism, which refused to be tied to any dogma. Lautrec was never a Nabi, but as a student at the atelier Cormon he was one of a group having close and congenial relations with the Nabis and imbued with Gauguin's views as disseminated by Emile Bernard, who had encouraged Sérusier to talk with Gauguin at Pont-Aven in 1888. However, one must proceed with caution when linking Lautrec's brilliance with any theories, as witness his painted parody on *Le bois sacré* of Puvis de Chavannes, an artist revered by the Nabis. Before designing for books, Bonnard and Lautrec had gained notoriety for their poster designs — Bonnard for *France Champagne* of 1891 and Lautrec for the *Moulin Rouge* of 1891 and the *Divan Japonais* of 1892. The latter poster, as well as paintings by Maurice Denis, was shown in 1892 in the Salon des XX in Brussels, in an exhibition considered significant for its influence on the Art Nouveau that was to blossom the succeeding year in that same city. Bonnard and Lautrec were carrying on the poster tradition of Cheret and Grasset, with an asymmetrical distribution of picture and lettering, the lettering itself being free and informal and part of the crowded, off-center design.

The poster quality is evident in Bonnard's cover for the *Reine de joie* (Plate II; 7½ by 10 inches), and Lautrec's frontispiece (Plate IIIa; 5 by 3½ inches) is actually a reproduction, at smaller scale, of his poster advertising the book. Bonnard's design is a flat one of curvilinear lights and darks flowing in Art Nouveau abandon across the upper and lower cover, against which satirical, masklike faces seem almost pasted. The drawing is light and quick and the quality of silhouette is important, especially in the hand of the central figure of the woman, which is similar to the shape of Jane Avril's hand against her black dress in Lautrec's *Divan Japonais*. The woman on the lower cover, with her sharp, clenched teeth, might have come from Utamaro, and suggests the origin of Bonnard's soubriquet — 'le Nabi japonard.' Whereas Lautrec's worldly, witty design of exaggerated outlines employs the perspective of the table top to give the illusion of location in space, Bonnard's is completely flat and decorative. Never so incisive as Lautrec, Bonnard in this early essay nevertheless demonstrated the vitality he was to carry to further warmth and animation the following year in his illustrations for the *Petit solfège* and *Petites scènes familiales*, both sheet music collections by his brother-in-law,

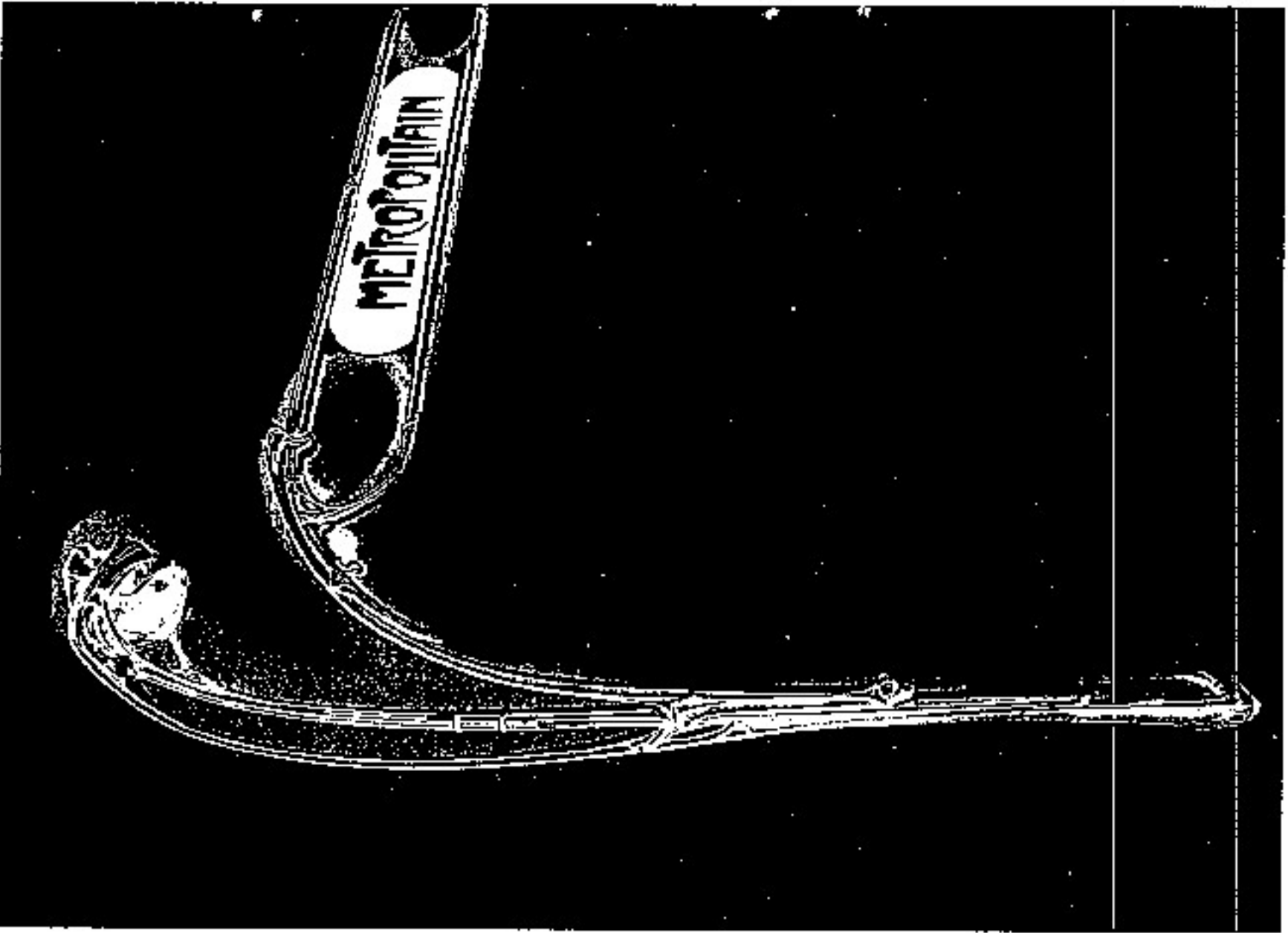


PLATE Ia

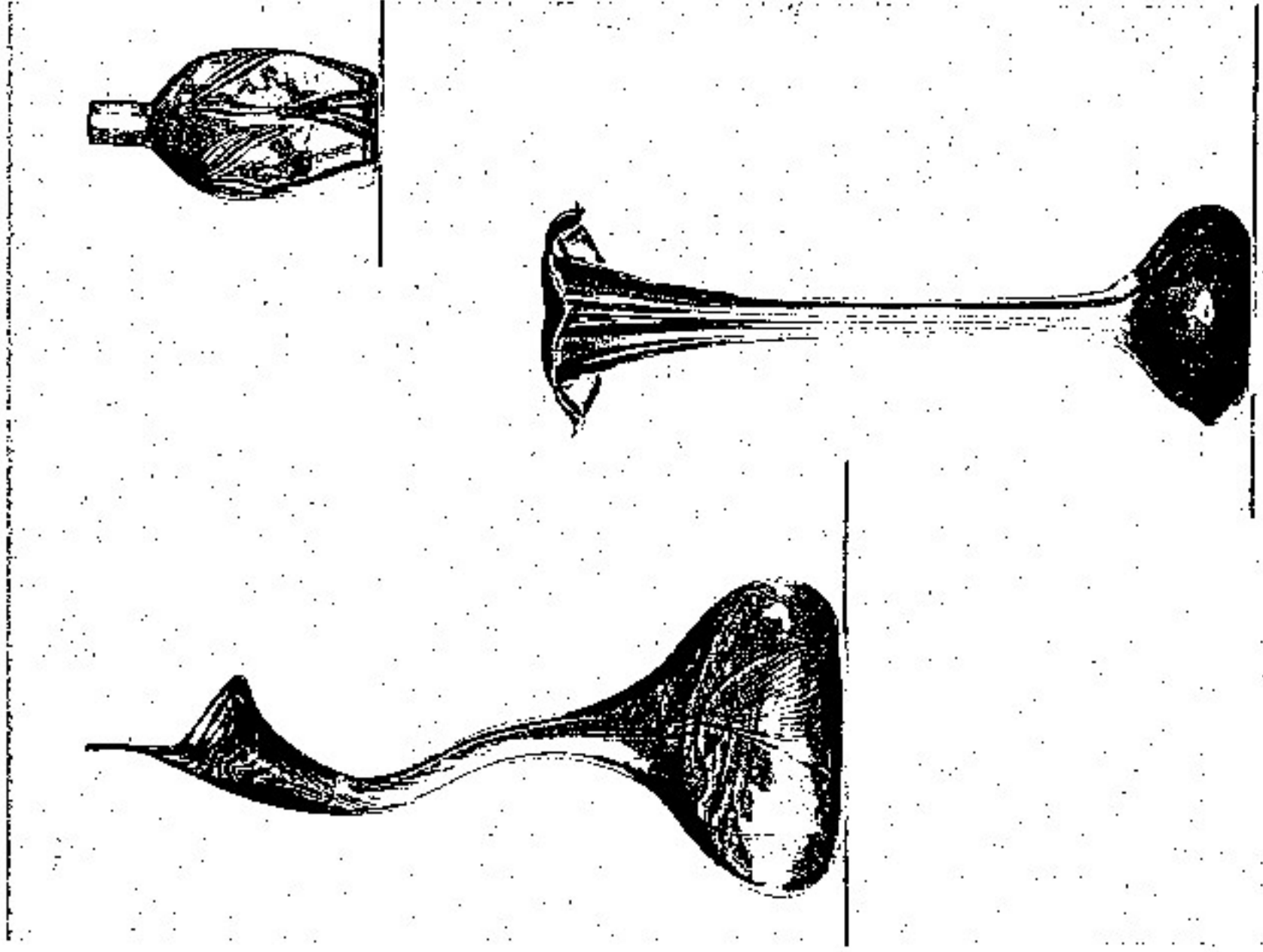


PLATE Ib

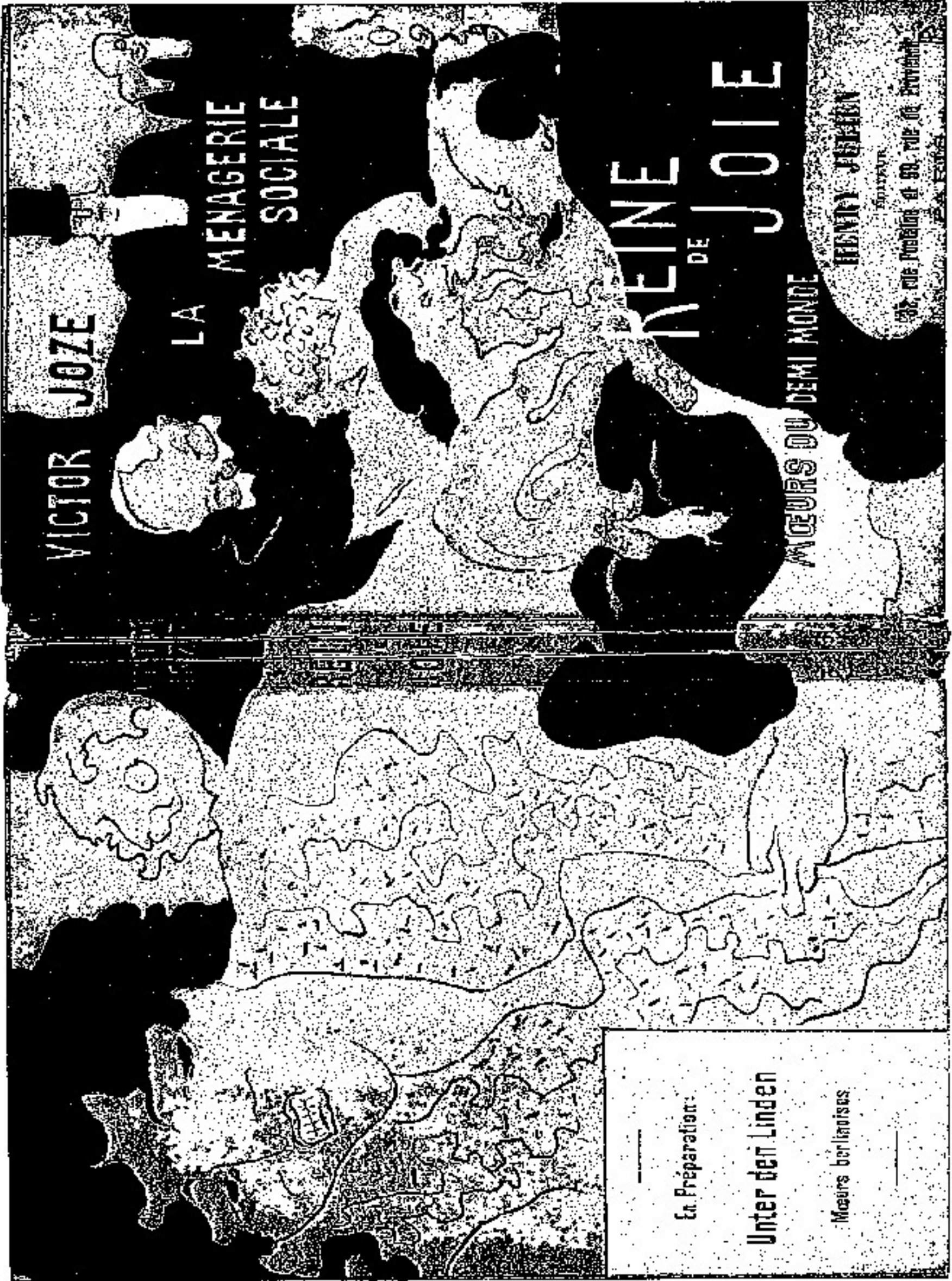


PLATE II



PLATE IIIb

PLATE IIIa

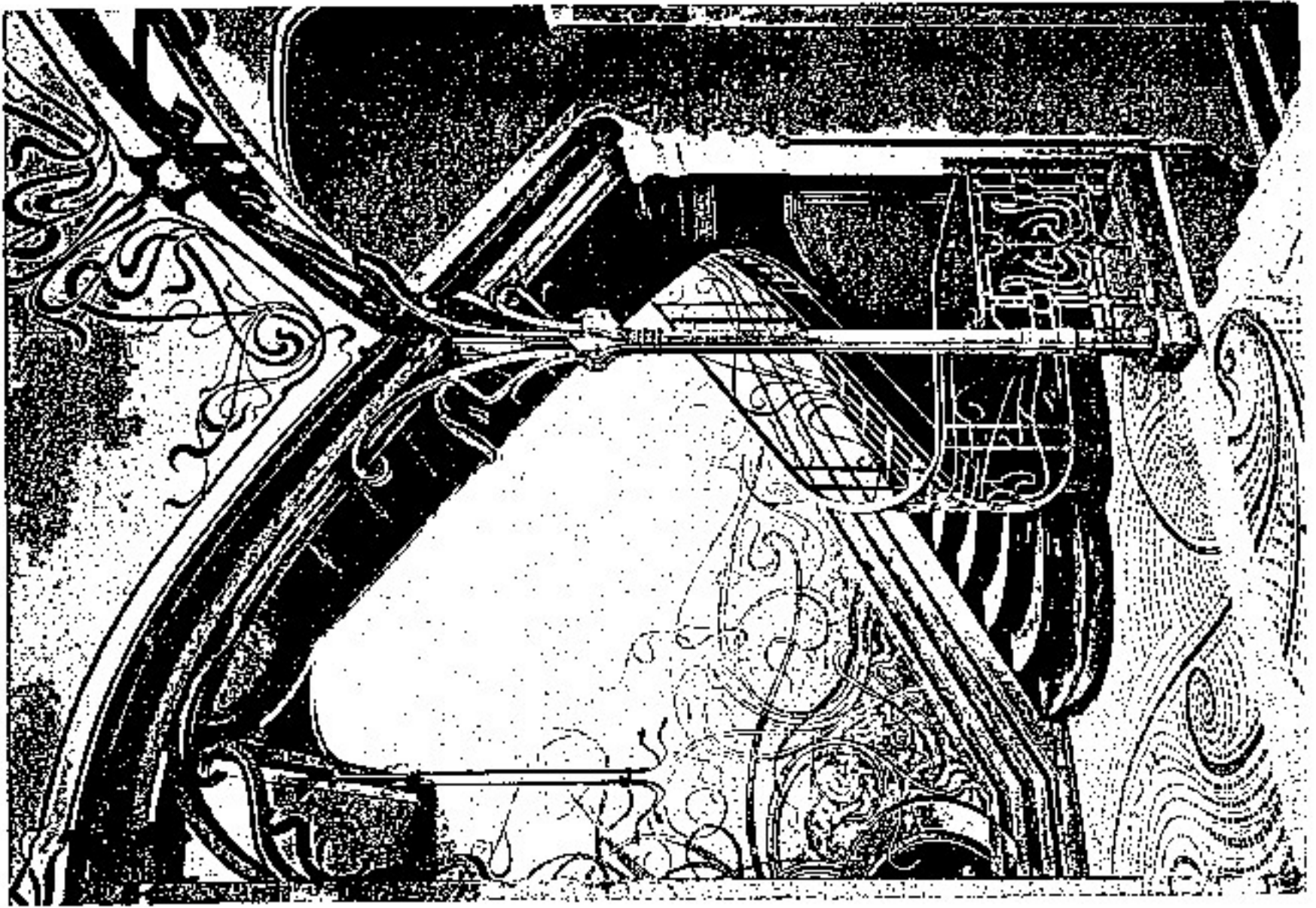


PLATE IVb



PLATE IVa

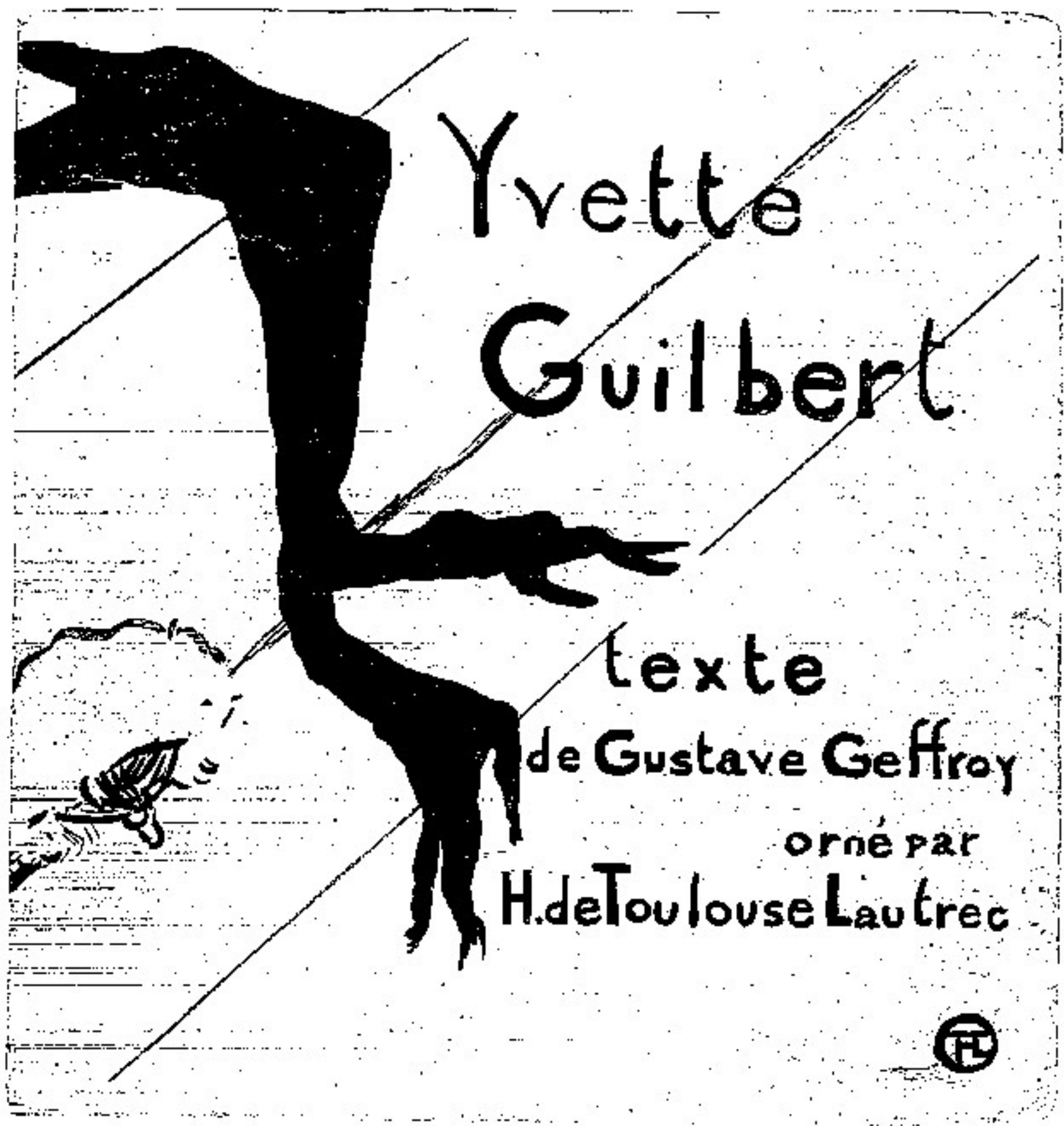


PLATE Va



PLATE Vb



PLATE VIh

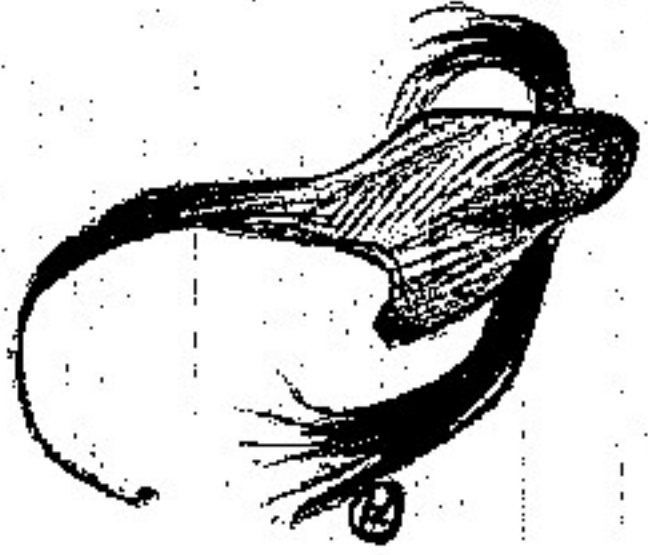


PLATE VIb

Le GRASSET

Corps 48

abcdefghijklmnopqrstu
vwxyz éàèùâêîôû çwœæ
1234567890

Corps 67

ABCDEFGHI
JKLMNOPQ
RSTUVXYZ
WÆOEÉÈÊË
abcdefghijklmnop
opqrstuvwxyz

FONDERIES DEBERNY & PEIGNOT, 14, rue Cahanis, PARIS (14^e) II Papier des PAPETERIES DE FRANCE 10, rue Commines, PARIS (3^e)

PLATE VIIa

L'AURIOL

Corps 36

abcdefghijklmnopqrs
tuvwxyz éàèùâêîôû çwæ
œ ; - () " ' ? 1234567890
AABCDEFGHIJKLL
MMNOPQRSTU
VWXYZÉÈÊÇWÆOE&
abcdefghijklmnopqrstu
vwxyz ffffffiff çwæœ éàèùâ
êîôû , ; - ' () ! ? « » 1234567890

Corps 43

ABCDEFGHIJK
LMNOPQRSTU
VWXYZÉÈÊ & et etc
ÇWÆOE , ; - () « »

FONDERIES DEBERNY & PEIGNOT, 14, rue Cahanis, PARIS (14^e) 20 Papier des PAPETERIES DE FRANCE 10, rue Commines, PARIS (3^e)

PLATE VIIb



Histoires Naturelles



TRADE MARK

Hector Fabre

ART NOUVEAU

PLATE VIIIb

PLATE VIIIa

the composer Claude Terrasse. Here again, the effect is achieved by the contrast of large, curved, flat areas of black against the white of the paper, as seen in a 'Quadrille' from *Petites scènes familiales* (Plate IIIb; 4¼ by 9¼ inches).

By 1893 Art Nouveau had 'arrived.' In that year Horta's Tassel House, at once the first complete and most perfect expression of the new style, was built in Brussels. In England during the same year the *Studio* magazine began publication and Beardsley's illustrations for *Le morte d'Arthur* appeared. In France the *Revue blanche* printed for the first time lithographic frontispieces, including those by Bonnard and Denis, who, because that magazine was the first periodical to encourage the work of the Nabis, are often referred to as 'painters of the *Revue blanche*.'

This same year, 1893, also saw the publication of André Gide's *Le voyage d'Urien*, an important monument in modern book illustration. Though little known today,¹⁵ at the time of its appearance Lucien Muhlfeld spoke of Gide's realization of his earlier promise 'avec le concours du dessinateur abscons et charmant Maurice Denis.'¹⁶ The importance that Gide attached to Denis' contribution is indicated by the arrangement of the title-page, which is headed 'André Gide — Maurice Denis.' It is recorded that Denis' own copy was autographed 'A mon cher Maurice Denis, ce voyage vraiment fait ensemble, son ami, André Gide.'¹⁷ In 1892 Gide, who had admired Denis' work, including the unpublished illustrations for *Sagesse* that he had seen at the Indépendant exhibition, met him and asked him to undertake the illustration of *Le voyage d'Urien*, sending him pages of manuscript as soon as they were written.¹⁸ The book was published by the Librairie de l'Art Indépendant, with the lithographs printed by Ancourt. The square format had been used as early as 1874, in Charles Cros' *Le fleuve*, with illustrations by Manet.¹⁹

¹⁵ In 1914, in the volume devoted by the *Studio* to the 'Art of the Book,' there was no mention of it, nor of any work by Bonnard, Denis, or Lautrec, although Lautrec's illustrations for Jules Renard's *Histoires naturelles* had been published in 1899 and Bonnard's for *Parallèlement* in 1900 and *Daphnis et Chloé* in 1902.

¹⁶ Lucien Muhlfeld, 'Chronique de la littérature,' *Revue blanche*, V (1893), 245.

¹⁷ Barazetti-Desmoulins, *Maurice Denis*, p. 245.

¹⁸ The closeness of the collaboration between Gide and Denis is documented by letters published in Maurice Denis, *Journal* (Paris, 1957), I, 104-110 (covering the years 1884-1904).

¹⁹ For a discussion of the significance of this book, see Hofer, 'Some Precursors,' HLB, IV, 193-195.

The spirit of Gide's strange and disquieting text is remarkably projected by Denis, an artist who considered his true mission to be the revitalization of Christian art and whose Franciscan goodness and religious preoccupation led him to be known as 'le Nabi aux Belles Icones.' Yet his later illustrations for Dante, Saint Francis, and Thomas à Kempis, authors one would think more congenial to his temperament, are far less distinguished than these boldly conceived lithographs. Curiously enough, it was Gide who, a few years later, precipitated Denis' break with this highly charged form of expression and his conversion to classicism by revealing to him, in the Piazza Barberini, the grandeur of Rome.

The plates of *Urien* (Plate IVa; 2 1/8 by 4 1/2 inches), pale and shadowy, in green or yellow tone, with a rich nuance of black crayon, present figures caught in a desperate Limbo. The devices of twisting branches and endlessly swirling streams have become the landscape of despair. Here Maurice Denis, although he was not wholly satisfied and hoped to do better, best achieved his own program: 'L'illustration, c'est la décoration d'un livre . . . sans servitude du texte, sans exacte correspondance de sujet avec l'écriture; mais plutôt une broderie d'arabesques sur les pages, un accompagnement de lignes expressives.'²⁰ These expressive lines and those of Horta's famous iron staircase in the Tassel House (Plate IVb),²¹ of the same year, have a dynamic energy of their own, independent of their descriptive or structural function. Lautrec's poster of Loie Fuller, also 1893, carried this linear independence of Art Nouveau to the border of abstraction, while Van de Velde, in his cover for Max Elskamp's *Salutations* (Plate VIa; 3 3/4 by 6 1/4 inches), again of this same year, went even further and produced a wholly abstract design, one of the first of its kind.²²

Also in 1893 appeared *Le café concert*, with a brief text by Georges Montorgueil, the historian of Montmartre, and large, full-page lithographs by Lautrec and Ibels (one of the Nabis), published by l'Estampe Originale, the lithographs printed by Ancourt; and in 1894 Gustave Geffroy's *Yvette Guilbert* with Lautrec's illustrations. These collec-

²⁰ Denis, *Théories*, p. 11.

²¹ Plate IVb is reproduced from Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design*, Fig. 41, with the permission of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, publishers of the book.

²² The relation of Van de Velde and the Jugendstil to German abstract painting is discussed by Werner Haftmann in the exhibition catalogue of the Museum of Modern Art, *German Art of the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1957), pp. 25-26, 75.

tions contain some of his most brilliant and best-known figure drawings, executed in daring perspective and with a strong and disciplined line that is the culmination and the triumph of the wandering Art Nouveau. The combination of sharp angles and curves on the *Yvette Guilbert* cover (Plate Va; 16 by 15 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches) invest the famous black gloves with the singer's own dynamic style. The swelling, vigorous lines that endow the saucy figure of Jane Avril, in *Le café concert*, with such superb animation and fullness (Plate Vb; 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ by 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches) make a linear pattern of arabesques possessing, like Denis' designs for *Urien* and Horta's ironwork, an independent vitality. In writing of Jane Avril in these pages, Montorgueil says: 'Mais quelle chanson, hors la très moderne qu'on dit fin de siècle, pourrait bien incarner Jeanne Avril, au sourire fûté et si menu, printanier comme son nom de guerre, liante et serpentine, dessincuse d'arabesques avec le bout de sa petite mule barbottant dans les mousses de son jupon?'²³ He might have added: what style but that of the most modern *fin de siècle* could bring her to life? For the undulating serpentine and arabesque that made the dancing of 'La Mélinite' so popular were also the essential characteristics of the Art Nouveau style.

Lautrec executed many book covers in this decade, the one for Victor Barrucand's *Le chariot de terre cuite* in 1895 being the most striking and the most fully representative of Art Nouveau since his poster for *Reine de joie*. For this drama, derived from the ancient Sanskrit, he drew a fragment of a stylized elephant, with long, curving trunk and ears, appearing at the top and sides of the page. Decorative Indian letters, like the ornamental borders of so many Art Nouveau minor arts, further enliven the design.

Although the new style was now thoroughly launched, none of these examples of illustration was very much esteemed. In 1896 Bing, at his *Maison de l'Art Nouveau*, featured an exhibition of the modern book that the critic Edmond Cousturier considered disastrous in its revelation of the ineptitude of French design.²⁴ He was struck by the distinction of the English private presses and, singling out Morris, Burne-Jones, Beardsley, Crane, Ricketts, Shannon, Bradley, and Lucien Pissarro, he pleaded for a similar renaissance of the art of the French book from such artists as Forain, Bonnard, Lautrec, and Vuillard, all

²³ Georges Montorgueil, *Le café concert* (Paris, 1893), p. 4.

²⁴ Edmond Cousturier, 'Exposition internationale du livre moderne à l'Art Nouveau,' *Revue blanche*, XI (1896), 42-44.

of whom were represented in the exhibition, but whose entries failed to rouse the critic's enthusiasm. In his search for *livres d'art* with the unity and polish of the English examples, Cousturier overlooked the quality of French illustration. He blamed what he considered to be failure on the conservatism of editors, publishers, and societies of bibliophiles, just as Vollard was to do a few years later, after the financial debacle of his production of *Parallèlement* and *Daphnis et Chloé*, when he was told by bibliophiles that 'painters are not illustrators. The liberties they permit themselves are incompatible with the "finish" which is the whole merit of an illustrated book.'²⁵

Art Nouveau reached its climax at the Paris exposition of 1900, but before this date the three artists we have been considering began to drift away from this style to a less linear and more solid one. Denis' next major illustrations were of the following decade — *L'imitation de Jésus Christ* in 1903. In Lautrec's later book illustrations — for Georges Clemenceau's *Au pied du Sinaï* in 1898 and Jules Renard's *Histoires naturelles* in 1899 — the drawing is more massive and heavily shaded and the probing of absurdities tempered with sympathy. The flat areas are still present, and the stark placing of handsome silhouettes against the white page, but within each figure there is more modeling, and accompanying this three-dimensional quality is a broader emotional interpretation. An exception to this is the sly little tailpiece in *Au pied du Sinaï* (Plate VIb; 2 by 1 ¾ inches) drawn in simple arcs — at first glance a flat, decorative vignette, at second glance a sharp suggestion of a Semitic face. The fox on the cover of the *Histoires naturelles* (Plate VIIIa; 12 ¼ by 8 ¾ inches), flat, black, and sinuous, is a final reminiscence of this style in Lautrec's work, for the animal illustrations within the book are rich in modeling and tonal values.

Bonnard, too, grew away from the sharply silhouetted style of the early nineties, and his illustrations for Peter Nansen's *Marie*, first published by the *Revue blanche* as a serial in 1897 and brought out in book form the following year, became, like Lautrec's drawing, less linear and purely decorative. Evocative of the deft and calculated sensuality of the story, these lithographs recall his print series, *Quelques aspects de la vie de Paris*, issued by Vollard in 1895. Notable in this book are

²⁵ Ambroise Vollard, *Recollections of a Picture Dealer* (London, 1936), p. 254. The English edition, translated from the original French manuscript by Violet M. Macdonald, was published before the French *Souvenirs d'un marchand de tableaux* (Paris, ca. 1937).

the range and flexibility of black, employed as a positive tone, not as a mere modeling agent.²⁶

Other French illustrators participated in Art Nouveau, but with less ease and distinction, and the manner became trivial and overworked. It is seen at its best in the work of Bonnard, Denis, and Lautrec in the decade of the nineties, when they anticipated and briefly shared in the movement, for within its limitations they indeed helped to launch a 'style nouveau.' Yet, the distinction of the illustrations is not usually matched by the typography of the books, and, as one leafs through them, one is struck by the contrast between the daring pictorial innovations and the conventional letterpress, and one begins to wonder whether the latter, more conservative medium underwent any influence of this pervasive style.

Certainly lettering of an irregular character played an important role in the graphic productions of Art Nouveau and of its forerunners, and as early as 1889, in writing of Cheret's posters, Ernest Maindron had spoken of 'la forme vive et originale des lettres.'²⁷ However, in the early years of Art Nouveau, the use of these letters was random and scattered. Drawn freehand, they were reproduced in posters and book and music titles, but did not appear in typographic form.

Like the forms of Art Nouveau in any medium, the typical letters are asymmetrical in shape and layout, often embellished with trailing and curving serifs reminiscent of manuscript hands, and with three-dimensional shading. Although they show a strong family relationship, they are not standardized. Carolingian, Gothic, Renaissance, and Japanese shapes each in turn contributed to their formation, producing a bewildering variety, ranging from the casual freehand tracings of Lautrec, Bonnard, and Van de Velde on posters and book covers of the early nineties to Guimard's Japanese-style signs for the Métro stations of 1900 (see Plate Ia). However, not until the end of the decade were typographic fonts created reflecting this freedom and diversity. In France these innovations were due to two designers whose names are now largely in eclipse — Eugène Grasset and George Aurioi. Each of them produced type faces that were widely used not only in

²⁶ The attachment that Bonnard must have felt for *Marie* is suggested by his painting of *Le Canner: La Fenêtre* of 1925 (Tate Gallery, London), a view of the Mediterranean shore from his window, where a copy of *Marie* is prominently displayed on a pile of books.

²⁷ Ernest Maindron, 'Les affiches illustrés,' *Gazette des beaux-arts*, 2me période, XXX (1884), 546.

Art Nouveau publications during the waning of the style, or until about 1910, but also for some years afterwards, as important examples of 'modern' types.

Grasset, a Swiss trained in architecture and a mediaevalist guided by the archaeological principles of Viollet-le-Duc, worked in a wide field, including stained glass, metals, furniture, and book illustration. As early as 1883 he had designed an edition of the legendary *Quatre fils Aymon* with sinuous ornaments prophetic of Art Nouveau. A mixture of mediaeval, Minoan, and Japanese motifs crowd the colorful pages, while the title is drawn in carefully rounded uncials, the half-title in a mixture of uncials and angular Greek letters. Technically this publication is important as a predecessor of the halftone. It was published by Launette and printed by Charles Gillot, whose process of etching tone blocks on zinc with a resin ground became an important and successful means of color printing at this time. The *Quatre fils Aymon* was one of the first publications in this 'Gillotage' manner and is thus of interest both for its advanced technique and for its letter design, although, like other books of these and later years, the innovations in letter forms were confined to titles, the text being set in conventional type. Grasset was for many years one of the most accomplished and influential letter designers in France and even produced the 1891 Christmas cover for *Harper's Bazaar*. He was also responsible for the widely known 'Je sème à tout vent' mark of the Librairie Larousse.

Grasset was the first book and poster artist of his generation to create a typographic font. Georges Peignot of the Fonderie Peignot & Cie., which in 1923 joined with Deberny (then known as Girard & Cie.) to form the present firm, Fonderies Deberny & Peignot, commissioned Grasset about 1898 to design a type face. The result was a broad, straightforward roman (Plate VIIa; 8¾ by 6⅛ inches),²⁸ firmly constructed, which has been likened to certain fifteenth-century French faces, but its small asymmetrical details could have been created only at this time: for example, the serifs on the upper case I (both pointing to the left), the H (three pointing to the left, one to the right), and the T (all pointing to the left). The lower case f, i, l, and m have similar asymmetrical features. Grasset also designed an italic with nervous,

²⁸ Plates VIIa and VIIb are reproduced from a copy of Fonderies Deberny & Peignot, *Album d'alphabets pour la pratique du croquis-calque* (Paris, 1924), pp. 11 and 21, from a copy in the collection of type-specimen books of Mr William Bentinck-Smith, on deposit in the Harvard College Library.

sharply hooked serifs. It, too, has a generously rounded body and is a distinct and lucid design, not merely a sloping version of the roman. The Grasset type has a technical importance, for the final design was achieved by a photographic reduction of the artist's original drawing, instead of by hand-copying, which was the usual practice.²⁹ Grasset's roman first appeared in the Didot edition of *Huon de Bordeaux* in 1898, where credit is given his design. It was widely used for a decade or more, and a Deberny & Peignot specimen book calls it 'l'aîné des caractères modernes . . . dont le succès fut mondiale.'³⁰

Georges Peignot, whose taste and vision provided the impetus for these typographic innovations, also commissioned George Auriol to produce an extensive series of designs: Roman in 1901, Française Légère in 1902, Auriol Champlévé in 1903, Française Allongée in 1904, Auriol Labeur in 1904, and four versions of Robur in 1907-11.³¹

Whereas Grasset's letters, with their sharply triangular feet and clearly defined terminations, suggests the lettering pen of the poster artist, Auriol's structural separations recall the freedom of the brush (Plate VIIb; 8¾ by 6⅛ inches). An Oriental quality of flourish characterizes his work, which has less solidity and more restlessness than Grasset's. Auriol's Roman was first employed in an edition of Huysmans' *A rebours* published for Les Cent Bibliophiles (Paris) in 1903 with wood-engravings in color by Auguste Lepère. The capricious Française Légère, reminiscent of a compressed Greek letter, was first used in Felicien Champsaur's *L'orgie latine*, published in 1903 by Fasquelle and illustrated by Auguste Leroux. Nervous and irregular, composed of striking individual members not fully harmonized, this face is the essence of Art Nouveau, as are Auriol's Champlévé, a broadened outline version of the Française Légère, and Française Allongée, a dark and more staccato rendering. His Robur, a bold type

²⁹ Francis Thibaudeau, *Manuel français de typographie moderne* (Paris, 1924), p. 118. This volume and Thibaudeau's *La lettre d'imprimerie*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1921) give numerous illustrations of the work of Grasset and Auriol. *La lettre d'imprimerie* is dedicated to 'George Auriol, innovateur français de l'écriture typographiée'; the *Manuel français de typographie moderne* to 'Eugène Grasset et . . . Georges Peignot . . . créateur et . . . fondateur du Romain calamique'; both are set in Auriol's Française Légère. Copies of both works are in the Bentinck-Smith collection.

³⁰ *Specimen general des Fonderies Deberny & Peignot* (Paris, ca. 1935) I, [5], copy in the Bentinck-Smith collection.

³¹ These dates are taken from a list kindly supplied by the Fonderies Deberny & Peignot.

long used for display, is his simplest and clearest design, yet characterized by a restlessness of outline and exaggeration of detail, as in the upper case H, O, and Q.

Grasset and Auriol both designed numerous ornaments and vignettes in stylized, curving Art Nouveau forms, which filled books and theatre programs for many years. Auriol's *Le premier livre des cachets, marques et monogrammes* (1901) is a fascinating collection of Art Nouveau monograms expressly designed for his contemporaries, including such figures in the world of arts and letters as Stéphane Mallarmé, Félix Fénéon, Arsène Alexandre, Octave Mirbeau, Jules Chéret, and Anatole France. Auriol's own mark is decidedly Japanese, but his suggestion for an Art Nouveau monogram is, disappointingly enough, the most geometric and regular of his designs (Plate VIIIb; 4¼ by 3¼ inches). Neither he nor Grasset considered himself to be an Art Nouveau artist.

Adolphe Giraldon and Bellery-Desfontaines also designed for Peignot (in 1905 and 1911) alphabets whose irregularities and restlessness express an Art Nouveau feeling, but their undisciplined, eclectic forms lack a true typographic character and their influence was less lasting and extensive.

Grasset's and Auriol's type innovations, immediately hailed as 'modern,' led the field for at least ten years and were employed well into the second decade of the twentieth century. They were long carried in the Deberny & Peignot specimen books, but are no longer in use, for, although Grasset's roman has an undeniable vigor, the others seem dated. We may ask why this is so. Perhaps the answer is that the typographic forms were solely an expression of their time and fashion, with emphasis on the decorative, exotic qualities of Art Nouveau.

The illustrations, on the other hand, as we have seen, were composed not merely with the decorative overlay of Art Nouveau, but with a structural foundation of stylized line upon which Modern Art was to build. Although much of Art Nouveau seems barren and exaggerated to us now, these illustrations helped to mold a new conception of form and of the function of a picture on a page, and the stylization that adds so much to the visual power of the modern book had its roots here in the nineties. The simplicity and linear expressiveness of Bonnard, Denis, and Lautrec not only revitalized the French tradition and clarified some of the aims of Post-Impressionism, but also pointed the way

to future experiments in abstract and expressive design. The graphic art of the twentieth century is inconceivable without their contribution.

ELEANOR M. GARVEY

BOOKS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF PRINTING AND GRAPHIC ARTS,
HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY

Paul Verlaine

Sagesse

Paris, Ambroise Vollard, 1911

Seventy-two illustrations by Maurice Denis, drawn in 1889; engraved on wood by Beltrand; printed by Beltrand

One of forty copies on Japan paper, with the woodcuts in black and white, and also a set hand-colored by Denis in 1910

Victor Joze

Reine de joie; moeurs du demi-monde

(*Le ménage sociale*)

Paris, Henry Julien, 1892

Upper and lower cover a continuous design by Pierre Bonnard, signed 'PB' (see Plate II); frontispiece after the poster by Toulouse-Lautrec, 1892, signed 'TLautrec'

Presentation copy inscribed: 'A Romain Coolus, cordialement, Victor Joze'

Claude Terrasse

Petites scènes familiales pour piano

Paris, E. Fromont, [1893]

Nineteen lithographs and cover by Pierre Bonnard

André Gide

Le voyage d'Urien

Paris, Librairie de l'Art Indépendant, 1893

Thirty tinted lithographs by Maurice Denis, printed by Edw. Ancourt; text printed by Paul Schmidt

Two copies in the Department of Printing and Graphic Arts:

- 1) The only copy on Japanese vellum, inscribed in Gide's handwriting: 'Heu, Heu, quam pingui macer est mihi taurus in ervo. André Gide'
- 2) Copy No. 39 (of 300), a presentation copy inscribed: 'Oscar Wilde, en hommage, André Gide'

Max Elskamp

Salutations, dont d'angéliques

Brussels, Paul Lacomblez, [1893]

Design on upper cover by Henry van de Velde; printed by J.-É. Buschmann, Antwerp

Copy No. 175 (of 200)

Georges Montorgueil

Le café concert

Paris, L'Estampe Originale, [1893]

Eleven lithographs by Toulouse-Lautrec, eleven lithographs by Henri-Gabriel Ibels, printed by Edw. Ancourt

One of fifty copies on Japan paper, signed: 'H. G. Ibels,' 'G. Montorgueil,' 'T. Lautrec'

Gustave Geffroy

Yvette Guilbert

Paris, L'Estampe Originale, [1894]

Sixteen lithographs and cover by Toulouse-Lautrec, printed by Edw. Ancourt; text printed by Frémont, Arcis-sur-Aube

Copy No. 40 (of 100), signed: 'Yvette Guilbert'; also ten proofs before all letters or text

Victor Barrucand

Le chariot de terre cuite, cinq actes d'après la pièce du théâtre indien . . . attribué au roi Soudraka

Paris, Albert Savine, 1895

Cover by Toulouse-Lautrec

Georges Clemenceau

Au pied du Sinaï

Paris, H. Floury, 1898

Ten lithographs by Toulouse-Lautrec; printed by Chamerot and Renouard

Copy with loose plates, each in three proofs, plus a set of 'pièces refusées'

Jules Renard

Histoires naturelles

Paris, H. Floury, 1899

Twenty-two lithographs and cover by Toulouse-Lautrec, printed by Henry Stern; text printed by Ch. Renaudie, Paris

Copy No. 35 (of 100)

Peter Nansen

Marie

Paris, Editions de la Revue Blanche, 1898

Translated from the Danish by Gaudard da Vinci; illustrations by Pierre Bonnard

Histoires des quatre fils Aymon

Paris, Launette, 1883

Illustrations on every page by Eugène Grasset; printed by Charles Gillot

Four copies

*Aventures merveilleuses de Huon de Bordeaux . . . mise en nouveau langage
par Gaston Paris*

Paris, Didot, [1898]

Type face designed by Eugène Grasset and cast by the Fonderie Peignot; water
colors by Manuel Orazi

George Auriol

*Le premier livre des cachets, marques et monogrammes dessinés par George
Auriol*

Paris, Librairie Centrale des Beaux-Arts, 1901

Printed by Gustave de Malherbe

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