Portrait of the Opportunist as Circus Acrobat: Félicien Champsaur's *Entrée de clowns*

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Abstract (E): Félicien Champsaur's collection of short stories, *Entrée de clowns* (1886) features a multitude of illustrations by almost three dozen artists. Few fin-de-siècle works were illustrated as extensively. Some scholars consider this work as representative of an aesthetic transition involving a more integrated fusion of graphic art with literature. But, while the title promises a narrative with the circus as its milieu, the composition is quite non-circus related, assuming strictly formal values through the iconography. In the context of the title, therefore, the illustrations could only serve a performative function, an idea supported by the preface's claims to reproduce a circus program's organization with a topsy-turvy entrance of clowns introducing each number. A closer examination of Champsaur's use of illustrations in this collection reveals, however, that he seized on and exploited an avant-garde icon (the clown) and its iconography, banking on familiarity with this icon in order to manufacture an avant-garde persona for himself, and capitalizing on marketing strategies to promote and sell his work.

Abstract (F): On trouve dans le recueil de récits courts *Entrée de clowns* (1886) de Félicien Champsaur une multitude d'illustrations par une trentaine d'artistes. Bien peu d'œuvres fin-de-siècle contenaient autant d'illustrations. Certains interprètent cette œuvre comme représentative d'une transition esthétique offrant une fusion plus intégrée de l'art graphique et de la littérature. Mais, tout en promettant un texte avec le cirque comme milieu, la composition (hors les valeurs formelles de l'iconographie) n'a aucun rapport avec le cirque. Dans le contexte du titre, alors, les illustrations ne pourraient avoir qu'une fonction performative, une idée appuyée par la préface qui prétend reproduire un programme de cirque avec une entrée de clowns chaotique précédant chaque numéro. Un examen plus approfondi de l'usage que Champsaur fait des illustrations révèle, pourtant, qu'il s'est approprié et a exploité une figure de l'avant-garde (le clown) et son iconographie, comptant sur la familiarité de cette figure pour fabriquer une image

d'avant-garde pour lui-même et, se servant de stratégies marketing pour faire valoir et vendre ses œuvres.

Keywords: Félicien Champsaur, *Entrée de clowns*, circus, clown, acrobat, Jules Chéret, Paul Gavarni, "Les Gens de Paris," *Le Diable à Paris*, Bertall

Circus performers figured prominently in the late nineteenth-century creative imagination. Many writers identified with what they perceived as the social isolation of acrobats, offering as allegories of their relation to their art and society the image of a sublime aerialist soaring high above an array of uncomprehending bourgeois spectators. Devoted to the quest for purity and absolute beauty in his art and to self-sacrifice before the degrading temptations of ordinary life, the writer as misunderstood acrobat is defined by a martyrdom grounded in noble suffering. Circus performers were also seen as working from both "'within' and 'outside' culture," manipulating assumptions about cultural codes and physical limitations, and offering the artist a vision of freedom from social constraints (Bouissac 7). The clown, in particular, was usually not the sad victim of social conditions, but embodied playfully, sometimes wickedly mischievous qualities like those found in Georges Seurat's pranksters in *Cirque*.

From 1886 to 1901, the literary works of Félicien Champsaur, a minor but rather prolific writer and journalist, exploited this image of the impish acrobatic clown. Champsaur's circus-related literature, representing roughly the first half of a productive, if not controversial fifty-year career, corresponds to the richest period in the imaginary association of the artist with the circus acrobat. In practice, Champsaur had no clear ideological alliances: associated with *la bohème* of the 1880s *(*"les Hydropathes, les Hirsutes, les Zutistes, les Jemenfoutistes et autres représentants de l'esprit fumiste"), he wrote a scathing critique of "[les] poètes décadenticulets" in 1885 (Basch 588).[1] Often claiming to be at the forefront of a *moderniste* movement (of his own peculiar design), he broke with the fin-de-siècle revues to which he contributed in his first years to write for more conservative papers like *Le Figaro* (Pauvert-Raimbault 23). And while he accused

[1] Félicien Champsaur, "Poètes décadenticulets," *Figaro littéraire* 3 Oct. 1885.

other writers of shameless stylistic imitation, if not outright theft, he may have lifted sentences and appropriated ideas from authors of greater talent and stature like Théodore de Banville, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, and J.K. Huysmans.[2] Finally, while generally disliked by other authors, Champsaur seemed to enjoy, as attested from his correspondence, the friendship and admiration of a few important writers like Stéphane Mallarmé and artists like Félicien Rops.[3]

Champsaur may have recognized the limits of his writing talents early in his career and compensated by supplementing his texts with illustrations. While there were some contemporaries who did find originality in Champsaur's writing skills, it is his unconventional use of illustrations (1886-1901), a reportedly novel juxtaposition of text and image that owes much to the aesthetics of the circus and the circus poster, that has retained the greatest interest of scholars today. Champsaur's first circus-related work was *Entrée de clowns* (1885 [1886]),[4] which precedes by sixteen years the publication of Champsaur's more well-known and celebrated work, *Lulu, roman clownesque* (1901), that novel, according to Arnaud Rykner, "si important pour la pensée des relations entre texte et image à la fin du XIXe," and the novel that Evanghélia Stead and Dorothée

[2] There is a famous quote regarding contemporary opinion of Champsaur that has been attributed variously to Emile Goudeau and Charles Cros. On the one hand, the quote has been attributed to Félix Fénéon who said that "Goudeau avait l'habitude de crier de sa voix puissante en voyant pénétrer Félicien dans les brasseries de Montmartre: 'Rentrons nos idées! Voilà Champsaur!'" (24). However, in a May 22, 1889 article from *Le Moderniste illustré*, Julien Leclercq attributes a slightly modified version of this quote to Charles Cros, who said, "Voici Champsaur, Messieurs, rentrons nos idées" (58). Four years earlier, in a December 1885 article in *Gil Blague* signed "Jack Stick," the author accuses Champsaur of going to the boulevard cafés at the absinthe hour "pour faire provision d'esprit pour l'article du soir!" (1). Dorothée Pauvert-Raimbault, a rare Champsaur specialist, refutes the reputation as a plagiarist that Champsaur had among his fellow men and women of letters: "Je n'ai cependant jamais découvert de preuves corroborant la réputation de plagiaire de Champsaur, bien qu'en effet il en ait le profil. Je peux simplement affirmer qu'il s'inspire assez librement de différents auteurs, sans que cela constitue pour autant un argument suffisant" (24). Notwithstanding, Mireille Dottin-Orsini cites the one-line verse ending of Champsaur's *Lulu, roman clownesque*, "*le jet d'eau qui montait et n'est pas descendu*" as being "une citation (légèrement erronée) d'une poésie du recueil de Catulle Mendès *Hespérus* (1872): *'Un jet d'eau qui montait n'est pas redescendu'*" (363n1; italics in original).

[3] The excerpts of letters that Champsaur often attached to the prefaces or postscripts of his novels as proof of the admiration and respect that he enjoyed from writers like Mallarmé or artists like Raffaëlli or Félicien Rops are less persuasive in light of possible ghostwriting for Champsaur by younger or less connected writers in exchange for a good review or some other professional assistance. See Dorothée Pauvert-Raimbault's discussion of Octave Mirbeau as possible ghostwriter for Champsaur's play *La Gomme* in "Champsaur, Mirbeau et Rimbaud."

[4] The first edition of *Entrée de clowns* carries 1885 as its publication date, but, according to Stead, it didn't appear until March 13, 1886. She attributes this delay to the overwhelming number of illustrations that Champsaur added late in the publication process ("Faust" 147n328).

Pauvert-Raimbault accord the status of being its own genre (169n31).[5] If *Lulu, roman clownesque* is indeed its own genre, *Entrée de clowns* provided the template. Both *Entrée de clowns* and *Lulu, roman clownesque* share obvious circus references, as well as a formal component in the multitude of illustrations by almost three-dozen artists, among whom Jules Chéret, Henry Gerbault, Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen, and Adolphe Willette.[6] While it was hardly unusual for fin-de-siècle works to be illustrated, few were illustrated as extensively: the first editions of *Entrée de clowns* and *Lulu, roman clownesque* contain roughly 200 illustrations each.[7] Few writers from the last quarter of the century would make illustration as integral a part of their *oeuvre*, and even fewer would enlist the efforts of quite so many artists.

Champsaur's scandalous reputation—in the words of Jean de Palacio, he is an "écrivain suspect à ses pairs comme à la postérité"—however, gives one pause regarding his artistic commitment to the *saltimbanque* as an aesthetic figure (qtd. in Pauvert-Raimbault 23). In Champsaur's use of circus imagery, can we truly speak, to quote Jean Starobinski, of "une forme singulière d'identification" with the circus performer (9)? Does Champsaur participate in the creation of "[d]es images hyperboliques et volontairement *déformantes*" that other artists "se sont plu à donner d'eux-mêmes et de la condition de l'art" (Starobinski 9)? Or, did his use of the circus figure belong more to "l'objectif commercial de ses pratiques" (Pauvert-Raimbault 24)? It is the aim of this article to examine the nature of Champsaur's investment in circus aesthetics, not in his more well known *Lulu, roman clownesque*, but in his first illustrated work, *Entrée de clowns*.

The Graphic Legacy of *Le Diable à Paris*

The pairing of text and image is in part an adaptation of Champsaur's earliest journalistic activities after his arrival in Paris at the end of 1876. Along with the caricaturist, André Gill, he was the co-founder of *Les Hommes d'aujourd'hui*, a revue

[5] For Stead, this genre is the *roman clownesque* ("Faust" 148). For Pauvert-Raimbault, it is "l'oeuvre hybride" (23). For Rykner, however, not only is it "hybride, "it is an "oeuvre inclassable" (169n31, 169).
[6] Although 34 artists' names are listed on the title page of the 1st edition of *Entrée de clowns*, there were actually 37 contributors. Subsequent editions corrected the omission of the three missing credits. 34 artists are listed in *Lulu, roman clownesque*.
[7] The 1929 edition of *Lulu, roman clownesque* boasts only one artist, Jacquelux, but as if to compensate for that paucity, there are over 300 illustrations.

whose first thirty issues were signed by Champsaur. In 1880, in collaboration with another caricaturist, Alfred Le Petit, he continued to produce illustrated biographies in *Les Contemporains*, in which he recycled (apparently a lifelong habit) "une bonne vingtaine d'*Hommes d'aujourd'hui* en *Contemporains* (Goudeau 227n3). Among other early journalistic affiliations, he also was editor-in-chief of *Panurge, journal parisien illustré* (1882-1883), a short-lived revue where he would have met and/or worked with some of the other artists whose images he would feature in his works: Adolphe Willette, J. Blass, Albert Robida, etc. Champsaur would also have mingled with many of these artists in the Latin Quarter and Montmartrois art circles to which he belonged (the Hydrophathes, the Chat noir, the Incohérents) and at the avant-garde events in which he participated. This creative milieu was one in which multidisciplinary collaboration was the norm, a practice that Champsaur can be said to have adapted to a certain degree to *Entrée de clowns* (Cate, *Spirit of Montmartre* vi).

Working in a "culture de l'image dessinée" (caricature, illustrated revues, etc.) where text was in many instances subordinate to image was no doubt instrumental in providing a model for Champsaur's incorporation of illustration as a major component of his work (Pauvert-Raimbault 23). Evanghélia Stead notes, however, that one must also bear in mind that the nineteenth century was "un grand siècle des images," and the invention of many different technical modes of industrialized reproduction benefitted not only the illustrated press, but gave new life to and attracted readers for illustrated books as well (Stead "Le voyage" 137). Champsaur's recourse to illustration owes as much to the nineteenth-century illustrated book as it does to the illustrated press and avant-garde clubs.

One finds one such influence on *Entrée de clowns*' formal structure in the *livres-macédoine* of editors like Louis Curmer, Henri Fournier, and Pierre-Jules Hetzel from the 1840s, in particular *Le Diable à Paris* (1845-1846). *Le Diable à Paris* was published under the direction of Pierre-Jules Hetzel, and featured chapters by authors like Honoré de Balzac, Théophile Gautier, Gérard de Nerval, and Georges Sand, and contained a multitude of illustrations, by, among others, Paul Gavarni (over 300 engravings, principally the series "Les Gens de Paris") and Bertall (almost 550 vignettes). The element binding (and introducing) the different contributions in the two weighty volumes

is P.J. Stahl's (Hetzel's pseudonym) tale of Flammèche, Satan's personal assistant, who is sent to Paris to gather historical, sociological, statistical, and cultural information about the great capital and send regular reports back to his singularly bored master. Hetzel's massive production veritably explodes with images, a format mirrored in the tale's information-gathering mission: Flammèche tells Satan that his reports will contain "toutes choses contre lesquelles votre ennui ne saurait tenir,—sans oublier ce que vous aimez tant,—des images à toutes les pages!" (29). Satan occupies the position of the contemporary reader who was courted similarly through illustrations.

The graphic contributions to *Entrée de clowns* were by artists who were by profession the natural descendants of powerful Romantic era precursors like J.J. Grandville, Gavarni, and Gustave Doré, all involved at one point in their careers with the *livre-macédoine*. *Le Diable à Paris* was perhaps the most accessible to these artists, having gone through several more editions than Hetzel's *Scènes de la vie privée et publique des animaux* (1841-1842) and Curmer's *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (1840-1842). Its influence is palpable, for example, in two illustrations by Ferdinand Lunel, the first which one finds in *Entrée de clowns*' preface and the second in "Le Petit-fils de Faust." The first page vignette to P.J. Stahl's prologue to *Le Diable à Paris* features a swarm of *diablotins* climbing up another's tail to get to the top of the page/Satan's dais, which is echoed in the preface illustration by Lunel featuring clowns climbing one on top of the other to reach the moon.[8] In "Le Petit-fils de Faust," Lunel provided a vignette featuring Satan as a *diablotin* that resembles strikingly Bertall's in *Le Diable à Paris*: Lunel's devil is miniscule like Bertall's *diablotins* and is figured with Flammèche's signature cane and basket (here containing matches as opposed to reports to be sent to Satan) [Figs. 1 and 2].

[8] Many of Grandville's illustrations for *Petites misères de la vie humaine* (1843) represent the little evils of daily life as tiny beasties with long antennae and tails that, given Hetzel's lively spirit of competition with his confrères and his active involvement in the conceptualization of his publications' illustrations, may be the inspiration for Bertall's vision of the *diablotins* in *Le Diable à Paris*.

[Figure 1: Ferdinand Lunel, "Le Petit-fils de Faust," *Entrée de clowns* (59)]

[Figure 2: Bertall, "Table des Matières," *Le Diable à Paris*, vol. I (377)]

Le Diable à Paris seems to have had an influence on the structural organization of *Entrée de clowns*, as well. Bertall's *diablotins* are scattered in various caricatural scenes throughout *Le Diable à Paris*, behaving like stagehands prepping each new act/chapter in the tableau of Paris and Parisian life. Indeed, the blank "canvas" that the *diablotins* affix to the corners of one of the prologue's pages could just as easily be interpreted as a stage curtain (5). Rather than characterize Champsaur's "mise en page" as a "mise en scène," as does Jean de Palacio, it would perhaps be more accurate to describe the distribution of clowns throughout *Entrée de clowns* as a "mise en piste," but the purpose is the same

(*Pierrot* 43).[9] The entertainment is less theater than circus ring, as Champsaur makes clear, first, in the title, and second, in the preface's metaphorization of the entire anthology as the tumbling clown interlude between a Japanese acrobatic act and that of an *écuyère de haute école*. While the title deceptively promises a narrative with the circus as its milieu, the tales are quite non-circus related. The clowns, like Bertall's *diablotins*, seemingly possess a performative function, here reproducing a circus program in which the transition from one number/story to another features their characteristic topsy-turvy entertainment.

In the 1868 edition of *Le Diable à Paris*, the one with which Champsaur would most likely have been familiar, Hetzel inexplicably and incongruously replaced many of Bertall's illustrations with images by J.J. Grandville taken directly from the latter's *Un Autre Monde* (1844). Substituting many of Bertall's illustrations with those from Grandville's proto-science fiction tale necessitated modifications intended to harmonize the narrative with images wholly foreign to the original conception of the work. The textual changes, however, made for a fragmentary and often-incoherent relationship between text and image, further aggravated by Bertall's and Grandville's different visual styles.

It is this incongruity and contradiction between images, as well as of text and image that may have served as a model for Champsaur, since illustrations in *Entrée de clowns* are often surprisingly ill-matched with the text, as well as with the other illustrations. In addition to the clown images scattered throughout the collection, each tale of *Entrée de clowns* offers its own series of illustrations, sometimes possessing a modicum of stylistic and thematic cohesion, as in "La Leçon de cathéchisme" in which over half of the vignettes are by Steinlen, but more often resulting in an aesthetic stew, itself either aggravated by or aggravating the lack of unity in the bundle of tales in the collection. While Stead concedes that the volume's 200 or so illustrations do not, in their distribution throughout the text, promise a comprehensible dialogue between text and image, she believes that they do possess a logic established by Champsaur, who acts as a sort of "music conductor" who "allie de ce fait combinaison ingénieuse, productrice de

[9] While Palacio refers here specifically to *Lulu, roman clownesque*, his comments apply as well to *Entrée de clowns*.

sens, disparate et ironie" ("Faust" 146). Stead provides an example of what she deems an image endowing the narrative with greater meaning in "Le Petit-fils de Faust," which she sees as a clever modernization of Goethe's Faust story enriched by a subtle tribute to the iconography associated with earlier illustrated editions, notably Delacroix's lithographs for the 1828 French translation ("Faust" 145). [10] "Le Petit-fils de Faust" was published twice before its inclusion in *Entrée de clowns*—1882 (*Le Chat noir*) and 1885 (*La Vie moderne*). The 1885 version carried two illustrations by Ferdinand Lunel that opened and closed the tale. Eight more illustrations were added for the publication of *Entrée de clowns*, one represents a moonlit Parisian street.[11] Stead contends that Lunel's new vignette directly contradicts the narrative's "devaluation" of the moon ("la lune comme un louis d'or jeté à la nuit, discrète entremetteuse tirant sur les amoureux des rideaux étoilés") in the way that the composition and figures recall one of Delacroix's sublime lithographs (Champsaur, "Le Petit-fils" 56, Stead, "Faust" 145). The contradiction is visually reinforced, Stead continues, by the illustration that follows, one that counters a pathetic but comic domestic scene against the rich literary and graphic referentiality of the preceding one: a beautiful young woman, kept by an older, stereotypically unattractive but wealthy man, awakens in the latter's bed under which one sees a comically ordinary bedpan ("Faust" 146). Stead interprets this graphic dissonance as indicative of a new or more modern aesthetic. Since Champsaur recycled many of the illustrations from revues at which he worked, however, the discrepancies, like that of the bedpan, may reflect elements that he simply didn't notice or neglected to remove in preparation for publication.

[10] The potential Faust intertexts for Champsaur's tale are hardly exhausted by the high-brow illustrated translations of Goethe. Champsaur's story begins with Faust's grandson leaving a performance of Charles Gounod's opera, *Faust* (1859), but it most certainly references a veritable explosion of popular versions that were the rage in London and Paris in the 1870s and 1880s, most notably, Hervé (music), Crémieux, and Jaime fils's immensely successful comic opera *Le Petit Faust* (1869), which was revived at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin in April of 1882, the year that Champsaur published the first version (September 1882) of his Faust tale (Traubner 22). Hervé and company's Marguerite is a calculating seductress on the hunt for a rich prince, an obvious precursor to Champsaur's temptress, Alice Penthièvre. Not to be omitted from the list of predecessors is Grandville and Old Nick's *Petites misères de la vie humaine* (1843), in which one of the characters is none other than Faustus, victim like Champsaur's character of one of the most mundane of conjugal miseries.

[11] I haven't been able to determine if Lunel's illustration was commissioned for the tale or if Lunel offered Champsaur a pre-made illustration. The scene is generic, offering no details that link it specifically to the tale.

Champsaur might also have adopted what he perceived to be the formal strategies of *Le Diable à Paris* in the clown images that he interspersed between tales, the placement of which also mimics that of Gavarni's series of engravings "Les Gens de Paris." Unlike traditional illustration that works to bring to life episodes in the series of narratives, Gavarni's 208 plates carry their own title and self-sufficient contextualizations (captions composed by the artist), demonstrating that they possess an independent and equal standing with the contributions by the collection's illustrious authors, with the difference that, unlike the other chapters, "Les Gens de Paris" also figures prominently along with the artist's name on the title page. Gavarni's engravings offer a pictorial presentation of Parisian social types, in particular those from the lower tiers, and thereby contribute harmoniously to the presentation of the second part of the anthology's subtitle "Paris et les Parisiens."

Gavarni's "Gens de Paris" came "ready-made" to *Le Daible à Paris* (Lerner 247). While the clown images in Champsaur's volume are not part of an independent thematic series or the brainchild of one artist, they too, were in a sense "ready-made," or rather recycled. Up until just a few months before the publication of *Entrées de clowns*, the collection carried a different title, *Flagrant délit, et cætera*, which Champsaur drew from the first tale in the volume (Stead, "Faust" 148). In the months before the book went to press, however, Champsaur renamed the collection and solicited from his artist friends and acquaintances a variety of clown illustrations. In all likelihood the clown drawings were stock images or had previously been published in journals, since there was little time before publication to produce new ones on such a large scale. The artists recycled many of the non-clown illustrations that they contributed, in particular those offering only generic links to the narrative, requiring that Champsaur, like Hetzel with the 1868 edition's prologue of *Le Diable à Paris*, modify portions of the tales to accommodate the new images. Stead contends that the sentences that Champsaur added to the final version of "Le Petit-fils de Faust" spring from the inclusion of new illustrations, concluding that "ce n'est pas devant une série d'*illustrations* que l'on se trouve, mais devant une série de signes graphiques contribuant à la confection de la nouvelle au même titre que les mots" ("Faust" 149). Reluctant to explain the presence of certain new images in the Faust tale as playing a purely decorative role (the "simiesque" clown [see Fig. 4], the "danseuse

décolletée et fringante," and the wading bird protecting a sack of what she assumes is money), she sees them as supporting the multiple signifying registers of the narrative (150): the clown's mocking stance represents the irreverence of the tale in its modernization of the Faust story; the "danseuse" as woman of easy virtue stands in opposition to the purity of the Faust tale's Marguerite;[12] and the bird's sack of money signifies the power and influence of lucre. This is technically not "ready-made" art, since the found object (here, an image originally unrelated to the narrative) is usually commonplace and possesses a distinctively non-art function: the artist subsequently endows this everyday object with aesthetic value, as in the work of Marcel Duchamp. Champsaur's use of the images does allow, however, for a certain "found" quality akin to that of disparate objects, often parts of pre-existing art, assembled in a collage in the creation of a new work. Indeed, he did trim down some of the illustrations that he borrowed from issues of *Panurge*. But did he treat them as one does cutouts in a collage? It is more likely that Champsaur eliminated those elements whose specificity to another context would have worked against the generic use that he made of the images in *Entrée de clowns*. So, Willette's "Pierrot à Monaco" (from the first page of issue #6, 5 Nov. 1882) lost its caption ("Le Petit-fils de Faust" 61). However, Willette's "Grand Meeting au Palais de l'Industrie" (pages 4-5 of issue #25, 18 March 1883) retained its caption because Champsaur was able to create an implicit correspondence between text and image ("La Toux" 117). Although I haven't been able to find the original journal version of this tale, it would be logical to assume that the short passage in which Champsaur's painter/protagonist Robert Galtoine submits two tableaux to a Salon only for them to be rejected was added in order to co-opt the wittiness and defiance of Willette's critique of the very academic Salon. The four paragraphs add nothing to the development of the story. If we interpreted the play of text and image as collage, Champsaur's text itself would assume a more plastic quality reminiscent of the work of the period's Incohérent and Chat noir artists and writers. In this light, Champsaur would be as avant-garde as he so vigorously promoted himself. If, however, he padded the narrative in order to accommodate an illustration that would add a certain plus value to the tale, then, while this would support Stead's theory that the graphic component of *Entrée de clowns*

[12] The "danseuse" is perhaps the *commedia* stock character Colombine.

contributes as much as the words to the construction of the story, this would diminish considerably his claim to originality ("Faust" 149).

In his 1885 *Gil Blague* article devoted sarcastically to Champsaur as "Chef d'école," Jack Stick (a pseudonym, of course) amuses the reader with a stanza of uninspired "moderniste" verse from the movement's self-proclaimed "leader." If these lines lack art, Stick proposes that it is because Champsaur 's creative energies were distracted by more mundane concerns: Champsaur had dedicated the lines to the perfumer Aimé Guerlain (the reader is led to understand that this is someone from whom he sought money or favor), and because he may have composed "Les Violettes" with a financial objective ("ils [the lines] ont rapporté vingt-cinq louis au poète et vingt-cinq autres à l'éditeur") (1). Champsaur is in his eyes more *arriviste* than avant-garde, more toady to "tout seigneur de la littérature" than head of a literary movement, interested in commercial *and* critical success inasmuch as the latter assures the former (1). Although this article appeared a few months before the publication of *Entrée de clowns*, there are several negative allusions to Champsaur as a fairground circus mountebank making his pitch to attract paying customers. The comparison reflects in part the currency of an analogy—circus arts were, after all, as popular as ever with artistic circles. It may also indicate foreknowledge of the title of Champsaur's soon-to-be-published collection of short stories, a likelihood given the number of artists involved with its iconography and the speed with which news travels in small circles. Jack Stick paints the portrait of Champsaur as a resourceful, if crassly brazen, manipulator of the literary market. His assessment pertains to the way in which *Entrée de clowns* mixes two classes of publication, one that appeals to a readership that defines itself as discriminating, and another that aims to sell books. It counterfeits the collaborative hybridity of the works by Montmartrois *fumistes*, while at the same time adopting the publishing tactics associated with both the *livre macédoine* from the 1840s and popular literature from the Third Republic.[13]

[13] By 1889, *Entrée de clowns* had gone through 6 editions, which means that it sold well. One can get an idea of just how well it sold from an interview with Emile Zola in 1878 in the *Messager de l'Europe* in which he states that "les éditions sont généralement de mille exemplaires. Il faut être très connu et avoir déjà un public fidèle pour atteindre une deuxième édition. Au delà, on entre dans l'exception" (qtd. in Luquet 504).

Graphic Stereotypes and the Construction of a Narrative's Imaginary Universe

With the advent of illustrated papers, text yielded much of its primacy to image, which subsequently became "la forme privilégiée de la consommation populaire" (Letourneux, "Illustration"). The illustration of popular literature during the Third Republic not only continued to perform the traditional task of completing the narrative, it played an important role in its construction, relying on an increasingly sophisticated popular reader to acquire and possess the competence to actualize the story's generic conventions (Letourneux, "Illustration"). The ambition to sell in quantity accounts in no small part for the recourse to formulas. The publisher interested in selling in quantity was also interested in producing on the cheap, creating conditions that, by necessity, forced illustrators to work with stereotypes. Artists of popular fiction often either didn't have the opportunity to read, or had no access to, the texts that they were illustrating. Like the authors of popular fiction, they compensated for all sorts of constraints by composing their images "en ayant des conventions génériques en tête" (Letourneux "Illustration"). While Champsaur's illustrators probably didn't work under such conditions, it is nevertheless likely that they had little input on the distribution of their images. It is rather Champsaur, who "veille à tout, à la mise en page, à la typographie, à l'iconographie," who would have exploited the generic potential of each illustration (Basch 597).

Popular literature also compensated for the subpar physical quality of the text ("son format de journal, son mauvais papier et son impression médiocre") through a multitude of illustrations (Letourneux "Illustration"). The images could, and did, counteract for the generally formulaic nature of the writing, as well. The stereotypical nature of the illustrations, able to suggest the operational codes of a particular generic world, enabled the reader to render a weak narrative richer and fuller, all by virtue of his/her "compétences sérielles" (Letourneux "Illustration"). Although there are scholars who disagree, the short stories in *Entrée de clowns* are mediocre and only mildly entertaining, especially when compared to those, for example, in Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *Contes cruels* (1883) or in Jules Laforgue's *Moralités légendaires* (1887), which, while also having been published in revues before being collected in an edition, demonstrate much greater conceptual and aesthetic uniformity. Champsaur made up for the average

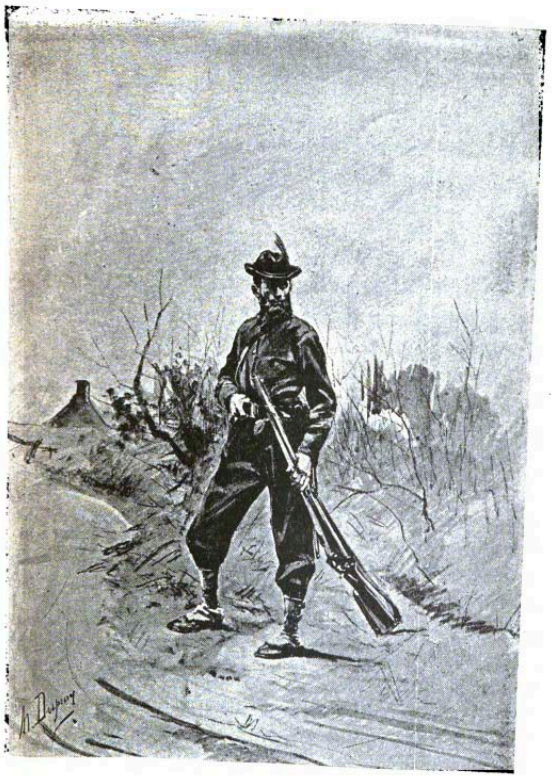
quality of his tales by relying on the interpretive competence, not of the popular reader, but of another sort of reader, one who "refusera[it] probablement le jeu de la lecture générique, s'arrêtant à la pauvreté des stéréotypes sans accepter de lire" (Letourneux "Répétition"). He demonstrated shrewdness and acumen in offering a product that more cultivated readers wouldn't refuse: the stereotypes that give form to the world of *Entrée de clowns*' short stories are hardly weak, masking their shallowness with the rich symbols of the contemporary imaginary, drawing from literature, entertainment posters, and the illustrated revue. His reader was urban, educated, often financially comfortable, and, given Champsaur's inclination to exploit erotic themes, most certainly male. This reader flattered himself that he consumed better quality works than popular novels, and he probably also enjoyed the fashionable entertainments of the era.

Champsaur seems to have appealed to the power of a higher-brow stereotype to give the volume not only the semblance of coherence that it lacked, but a surplus value, as well. To use an example, ten illustrations accompany "Une Exécution," of which six are by Georges Tiret-Bognet, a friend most likely from their days as Hydropathes. That over half the drawings are by Tiret-Bognet would seem to suggest that they were commissioned expressly for an earlier version of the tale. And yet, only between two to four serve to highlight specific moments in the narrative, leading one to infer that these alone may have belonged to an earlier incarnation of the story in a revue. [14] Tiret-Bognet often drew upon military figures for his subjects. Of the other four illustrations, a plate by Wilfred Constant Beauquesne and another by Henry-Louis Dupray, they, too, are the work of artists known for their depictions of military scenes.[15] Champsaur, in his editorial capacity, chose from among his artist friends' store of images those illustrations that possessed a certain recognition factor for readers and that would thereby function to endow with an abundance of meaning the military setting and theme of the tale. None of the lone soldier plates depict the same individual, so it can be assumed that they were not

[14] Once again, I haven't been able to determine if this story was published earlier in a revue. At this time, however, Champsaur was already in an active recycling mode. He had republished, some of his journalistic work in four books—*Le Massacre* (1885), *Le Cerveau de Paris* (1886), *Le Défilé* (1887), and *Masques modernes* (1889)—and he pulled two entire chapters from his novel *Dinah Samuel* to republish them as separate works—*Le Coeur* (1885), and the poetry collection *Parisiennes* (1887). Champsaur's *Pierrot et sa conscience* also came from *Dinah Samuel*, but it didn't come out until 1896. It would be reasonable to assume that the majority of the stories had appeared elsewhere prior to their inclusion in *Entrée de clowns*.

[15] One plate and one vignette do not carry decipherable signatures, but they, too, represent soldiers.

intended to give a human face to the court-martialed Mignot. Some of the soldiers are burdened with cumbersome backpacks, heavy overcoats, or large weapons. Their hard, immovable faces are framed by cold, desolate landscapes, and while each one is stylistically different from the other, they serve to reiterate each in their own way the solitude, the grandeur, and given the theme of the story, the vulnerability of these men [Fig. 3]. The *gravitas* of these plates recalls to the reader who would have been familiar with such portraits the events surrounding the crushing defeat of 1870. They draw, as well, on the popularity of collections like Alphonse Daudet's *Les Contes du lundi* (1873) and Ludovic Halévy's *L'Invasion, souvenirs et récits* (1872).[16] By their ability to bring into play a figure drawn from a variety of mediums (paintings, posters, memoires, etc.) existing outside the text, the plates contribute immeasurably to the construction of the imaginary universe of the tale.



[Figure 3: Henry-Louis Dupray, "Une Exécution," *Entrée de clowns* (77)]

[16] The narrative tone and the familiarity with military terminology and protocol of Champsaur's story are particularly reminiscent of Daudet, who had enlisted in the army during the Franco-Prussian War. It does not appear that Champsaur ever served.

The inclusion of these plates also creates a troubling tonal dissonance. They impart a solemnity that the tale should, but cannot quite deliver, undermined by the text's vacillation between seriousness and levity, an inconsistency echoed by the jarring contrast between the stark portraits of soldiers and the caricatural scenes of the other illustrations in the tale. Champsaur would correct the disparity between graphic moods in works that followed, first, by drastically paring down the number of artists involved on a given project, and second, by entering into a more standard creative collaboration with the illustrator(s). While he would return to the format of *Entrée de clowns* in *Lulu, roman clownesque*, even recycling many of its clown images, he orchestrated greater uniformity among the illustrations, the majority of which offer Lulu as multiform incarnations of woman.

Send in the Clowns

Champsaur's use of these illustrations provides an important key to understanding his use of the clown imagery. In adopting the figure of the clown, Champsaur gave the impression that he, like others who had embraced the circus acrobat as an artistic symbol, was a writer/artist "in search of a new art uncontrolled by traditional, academic themes and standards" (Cate, "Cult" 38). Indeed, Stead contends that the non-circus illustrations support the literary "nouvel esprit" epitomized by the figure of the clown ("Faust" 144). For example, she interprets Bac's prankster inserted between "La Leçon de catéchisme" and "Le Petit-fils de Faust" as symbolically belonging to the latter tale, representing the general idea of irreverence (he is sticking out his tongue), and thereby alerting the reader that the author will take playful liberties with Faust in his modernization of the tale (Stead, "Faust" 152) [Fig. 4]. In light of the generic function of the other illustrations, however, his use of clowns can be said more aptly to reflect the ambition to activate the cluster of meanings associated with the circus in order to impart a spirit of literary misbehavior and aesthetic innovation to the entire collection.

[Figure 4: Bac, Monkey-like clown, *Entrée de clowns* (52)]

The initial burden of establishing ties between the circus graphics and the text was given to the new title of the volume. Without it, like Gavarni's "Gens de Paris" in *Le Diable à Paris*, his clown vignettes would possess a virtual life of their own, especially since they have no thematic link to the collection's tales. To counter their relative independence from the text, he promoted them, first, as noted, on the title page, not as a work within a work as Hetzel did with Gavarni's engravings, but as the collection's very *raison d'être*, and second, in the preface, where he offers the entire volume as an interlude between the publication of two other works seemingly of greater seriousness and artistic weight: *Miss America* and *Le Coeur* (1886).[17] Each tale, however, is preceded by its own *intermède* of clowns, signaling that Champsaur intended each story, as well, to be accepted as the equivalent of an important number in a circus performance.

Where there are collective artistic symbols, there is the risk of stereotypes. The metaphor of an *entrée de clowns* recalls other, better, writers who took circus performers as images of themselves and of "la condition de l'art" (Starobinski 9). Champsaur, as a young, ambitious writer, recognized the value of the currency of circus aesthetics from many of the authors whose works he had read and admired and from the artistic circles that he frequented. Among the most important contemporary literary precursors who had

[17] Ironically, contrary to Champsaur's intentions, *Le Coeur* came out before *Entrée de clowns*. In addition, *Le Coeur* did not represent new creative work since, as noted earlier, it was a chapter from *Dinah Samuel* (1882) that had been repackaged as a separate work.

produced one or more works under the sign of the acrobatic clown were: Théodore de Banville, one of Champsaur's literary heroes, who had been associated both figuratively and literally with the *saltimbanque* since his *Odes funambulesques* (1857); Paul Verlaine, whose *Fêtes galantes* from 1869 featured commedia figures, as did *Jadis et naguère* (1884); Champsaur's friend, the journalist and novelist Jules Claretie, whose circus novel *Le Train 17* came out in 1877; Edmond de Goncourt with *Les Frères Zemganno* (1879); Catulle Mendès with *La Vie et la mort d'un clown* (1879); Octave Mirbeau, who under the pseudonym Alain Bauquenne, published *L'Ecuyère* (1882); J.K. Huysmans, a writer who was a rich source of inspiration for the young Champsaur throughout the 1880s and early 1890s, in particular *À Rebours* (1884) in which one chapter features the American trapeze artist Miss Urania, but perhaps most important in terms of the focus of this article, *Pierrot sceptique* (1881), co-written with Léon Hennique and illustrated by Jules Chéret; and, finally, Jules Laforgue, whose *Complaintes* and *L'Imitation de Notre Dame La Lune* came out in 1885 (July and November, respectively), poetry collections in which many poems adopt the figure of Pierrot.

The clown, as embodied by Pierrot, was a very visible figure in avant-garde art and in the popular arts and entertainments of the 1880s. In 1879, the celebrated Hanlon-Lees acrobatic troupe had just finished a 13-month engagement at the Folies-Bergère (Cosdon 47). They had adapted their brand of raucous acrobatic pantomime to the pervasive icon of Pierrot, who was attaining quasi-mythic status in the French cultural imaginary (Cosdon 48). Paul Margueritte's *Pierrot, assassin de sa femme* was published in 1882 and performed by its author for his friends throughout the decade, an initial step toward the creation of the Cercle funambulesque in 1889. As editor-in-chief of *Panurge*, Champsaur published illustrations of carnivalesque clowns (Blass) [see Fig. 7], of Pierrot (Willette) and of Pierrette (Heill), all reproduced in *Entrée de clowns*. The *fumiste* milieu in which he circulated in the first part of the decade was saturated with the spirit of the carnivalesque *blague* embodied by the clown, whether from the circus, pantomime, or carnival.

Champsaur understood the dynamics of the privileging of the acrobatic clown as a symbol of the artist, and his/her ability to evoke qualities of alterity, artistic purity, and creative superiority, but especially he understood the circus as a transgressive *mise en*

question of the whole of society's cultural codes. The circus semiotician Paul Bouissac states that it is "individuals who have not been fully integrated into a culture [that] find it more acceptable to enjoy this type of performance [the circus], as do individuals with a marginal or unique status, such as poets and artists" (8). Through his use of the image of the clown, Champsaur attempted to manufacture a "unique status" as a writer and poet. He chose a figure possessing the ability to trigger the constellation of meanings imminent in the collective imaginary.

Champsaur seized upon a type that was pervasive in the business of daily life as well as it was in literature and put it to work in the construction of *Entrée de clowns*' signifying world. The relaxation of laws toward advertizing and the use of public spaces to accommodate the display of posters transformed streets, as it has been often remarked, into outdoor museums: brilliantly colored posters were plastered across city walls, beckoning to passers-by. The circus poster played a central role in this display. Champsaur tapped into the aesthetics of the circus poster, especially those by Chéret, with whom he was a friend. On the one hand, there is a very simple economical explanation for the circus poster as an, if not *the*, originary format for Chéret, and the transgressive aesthetics that it represents.[18] As Marcus Verhagen notes in his study of the poster in the fin-de-siècle, the businesses that took advantage of the new poster as a means of advertising were neither the "smarter establishments" like the Opéra, nor the establishments disposing of more "modest revenues" like the "cafés, fairground installations, or working-class dance halls," but the "new leisure palaces, the café-concerts, music halls, circuses, and hippodromes" (107). Of these leisure venues, the circuses and the hippodromes were the ones that offered a poster artist like Chéret the components that would formalize the aesthetic formats with which we are all familiar, namely cascading bodies and diaphanous women floating in air. If indeed one can qualify *Entrée de clowns* as evincing a "modernisme," to use Champsaur's description of his work, or an "esthéthique de l'instantané," to use Stead's term, there was nothing more readily apt to render the exhilirating sensations, the sense of virtiginous movement, and the immediacy of the historical moment than a circus poster by Chéret ("Faust" 152).

[18] Impressively, circus posters composed roughly 15% of Chéret's entire output. To be more specific, "Au total, cent vingt-sept affiches sont liées aux spectacles de cirque" (Le Men, "Jules Chéret" 14).

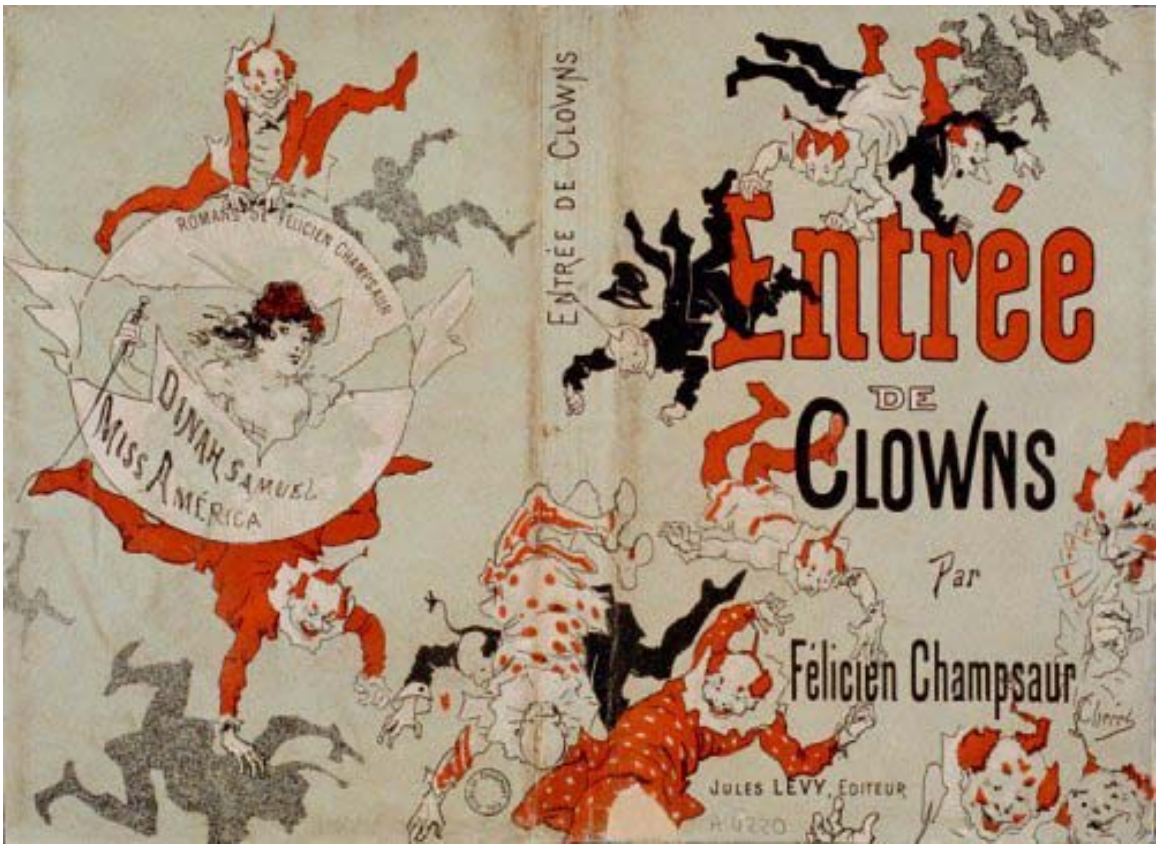
The basic grammar of the Chéret circus poster is one that communicates a few key bits of information: first and foremost, there is always movement. With Chéret, one has always the sense of bodies in motion, sometimes frantic activity of the kind characterized by Baudelaire in "De l'essence du rire" as a "délire" that facilitates the provoking of "le vertige" in the spectator, and announces entry into a fantastic realm (377). In Baudelaire's essay, the characters endowed with the power to effect this transformation from the ordinary into the extraordinary come from the *commedia dell'arte*—"Pierrot, Cassandre, Harlequin, Colombine, Léandre," more or less the same figures repeated in an illustration in *Entrée de clowns*' dedicatory page (Baudelaire 376) [Fig. 5].[19] The kinetic arabesque that their bodies describe stylistically and thematically continues the gay delirium of the tumbling clowns of the book cover [Fig. 6]. The last word of Champsaur's preface characterizes his stories as "fantasques," below which the reader finds a representation of Polichinelle by J. Blass [Fig. 7], another *commedia* figure. To cover all the semantic bases of circus culture, the preface also includes two illustrations of clowns (one by Henry Gerbault, the other by Lunel) [Figs. 8 & 7] and another of an *écuyère de haute école* (by Max Claude) [Fig. 9], loosely recalling the standard components of the nineteenth-century circus poster (including those by Chéret), which usually features a clown and an acrobatic equestrienne, iconic figures dating back to the beginnings of the modern circus with Philip Astley and Antonio Franconi. That we find in the preface an illustration featuring an aristocratic *écuyère de haute école* (associated today with dressage) rather than an *écuyère de panneau* (associated with acrobatics on horseback) is irrelevant to Champsaur's ambition to evoke the strange, yet magical universe of the circus. The last image in the preface is a figure described by Stead as a winged devil that she interprets not only as a "prolongation" of the preface but as the "frontispice décalé, vignette inaugurale" of "Le Petit-fils de Faust," that sets the terms for a reading of both the Faust tale as an irreverent modernization of a legend and of the volume's circus aesthetic as transgression [Fig. 10]. The sinister clown's tight fitting "maillot noir," Stead contends, resembles Lunel's depiction of the devil in "Le Petit-fils de Faust," and his wings, she conjectures, may also serve as a nod to Delacroix's

[19] It is difficult to identify with confidence the artist of this illustration. While the style of the poster and the movement and position of the bodies in a descending arabesque replicate many a poster design by Chéret, the signature may be that of Auguste François Gorguet.

Mephistopheles. One could also say, however, that the wings of this "devil" recall Bertall's illustrations of *Le Diable à Paris*'s mischief-making *diablotins* [Fig. 11], updated through the prism of the visual type established by Chéret's posters (long acrobatic limbs in tights suggesting madcap movement, arms thrust into the air) in the last half of the 1870s featuring, for example, "Les Hanlon-Lees" at the Folies-Bergère (1878) [Fig. 12], and his rendering of Pierrot in Huysmans and Hennique's *Pierrot sceptique* [Fig. 13]. While Blass's diabolical figuremay encourage a rich chain of mental associations springing from multiple graphic sources—a desired effect in Champsaur's strategic exploitation of iconic stereotypes—it is certain that its primary function is to be the last component of the preface's allusion to topsy-turvy worlds, in this case, the carnivalesque. Blass's "devil" (as well as the figure of Polichinelle) was extracted from a much larger and detailed illustration encaptioned "Adieu carnaval!" in *Panurge, journal parisien illustré,* of which Champsaur was editor-in-chief.[20] The order of images begins with the playful subversiveness, gay pandemonium, and unbridled creativity of *commedia* characters, continues with the iconic circus figures who are marked by a more dangerous defiance of physical limitations and social conventions, and ends with the sinister spirit of the carnivalesque and the threat of the profanation of ordinary life and its accepted hierarchies. The disorder and unpredictable movement of the falling clowns in Chéret's book cover illustration are the prelude to these iconic figures, all of them indicating that what follows in the volume will be daringly original.

[20] In all, Champsaur recycled and recontextualized 10 illustrations from his tenure at *Panurge* and included them in *Entrée de clowns*. The sources are 1) Willette's "La Rentrée à Paris" from the first page of issue #1 (1 Oct. 1882) reproduced on page 243 for "Les Groseilles"; 2) E. Heill's illustration for Pierrot's poem "Le Spleen de Pierrette" from the first page of issue #3 (15 Oct. 1882) reproduced in the "Table [des matières]" plate; 3) Willette's "Pierrot à Monaco" from the first page of issue #6 (5 Nov. 1882) reproduced on page 61 for "Le Petit-fils de Faust"; 4) Henri Detouche's "Les Parfums" on pages 4-5 of issue #8 (19 Nov. 1882) reproduced on page 154 for "Le Dernier homme"; 5) Luigi Loir's illustration framing Champsaur's poem "Noël" from the first page of issue #13 (24 Dec. 1882) reproduced on page 272 for "La Mort de Canard"; 6) Willette's "Comment Panurge dîna le 27 décembre au cabaret de la bonne ville de Bordeaux" on page 5 of issue #14 (31 Dec. 1882) reproduced on page 33 for "Flagrant délit"; 7) Willette's "Entrée du bon roi Henri dans sa bonne ville de Paris" from pages 4-5 of issue #18 (28 Jan. 1883) reproduced on page 215 for "Les Groseilles"; 8) Willette's "Névrose" from pages 4-5 of the supplement of issue #22 (25 Feb. 1883) reproduced on page 125 for "La Toux"; 9) J. Blass's "Adieu carnaval" in between pages 2 and 3 of issue #24 (3 March 1883) reproduced on the last two pages of the preface of *Entrée de clowns*; 10) Willette's "Grand Meeting au Palais de l'Industrie" on pages 4-5 of issue #25 (18 March 1883) reproduced on page 117 for "La Toux."

[Figure 5: Unknown artist, Dedicatory page, *Entrée de clowns*]



[Figure 6: Jules Chéret, Book cover, *Entrée de clowns*]

une quinzaine de clowns, décrocheurs de lune, avec des bonds étranges, des déhanchements merveilleux, des torsions extravagantes, des escalades éperdues, entrent, sautent, pirouettent, gambadent, cabriolent, tourbillonnent en intermède ;

de même,
entre deux romans,
ces nouvelles modernistes et fantasques.

FÉLICIEN CHAMPSAUR.

[Figure 7: On the right, J. Blass, Polichinelle; on the left, Ferdinand Lunel, Clowns climbing up each other to catch the moon, Preface, *Entrée de clowns*]

Comme au cirque,

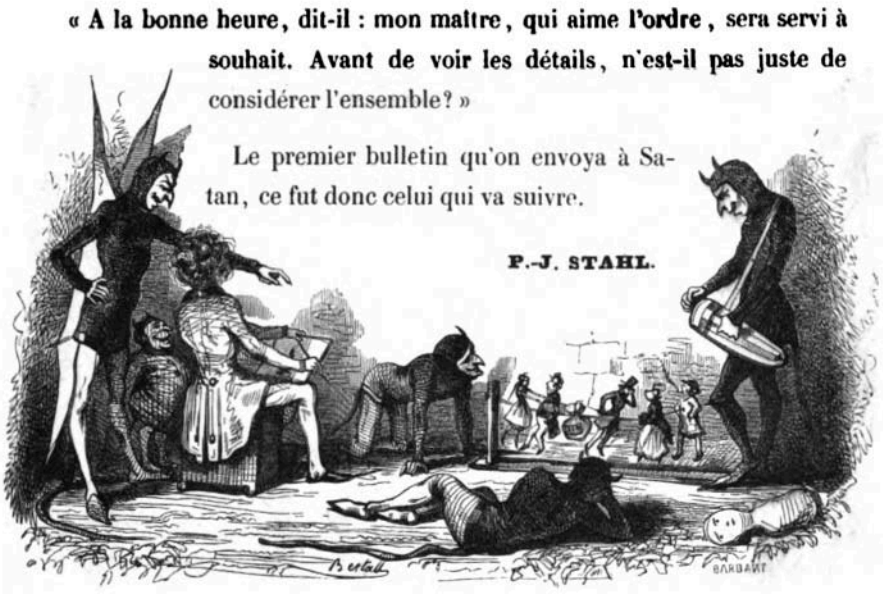
[Figure: 8: Henry Gerbault, Clown, Preface, *Entrée de clowns*]

après, par exemple, les exercices compliqués d'acrobates japonais, faisant, au bout de perches, des taches bizarres et harmonieuses ;

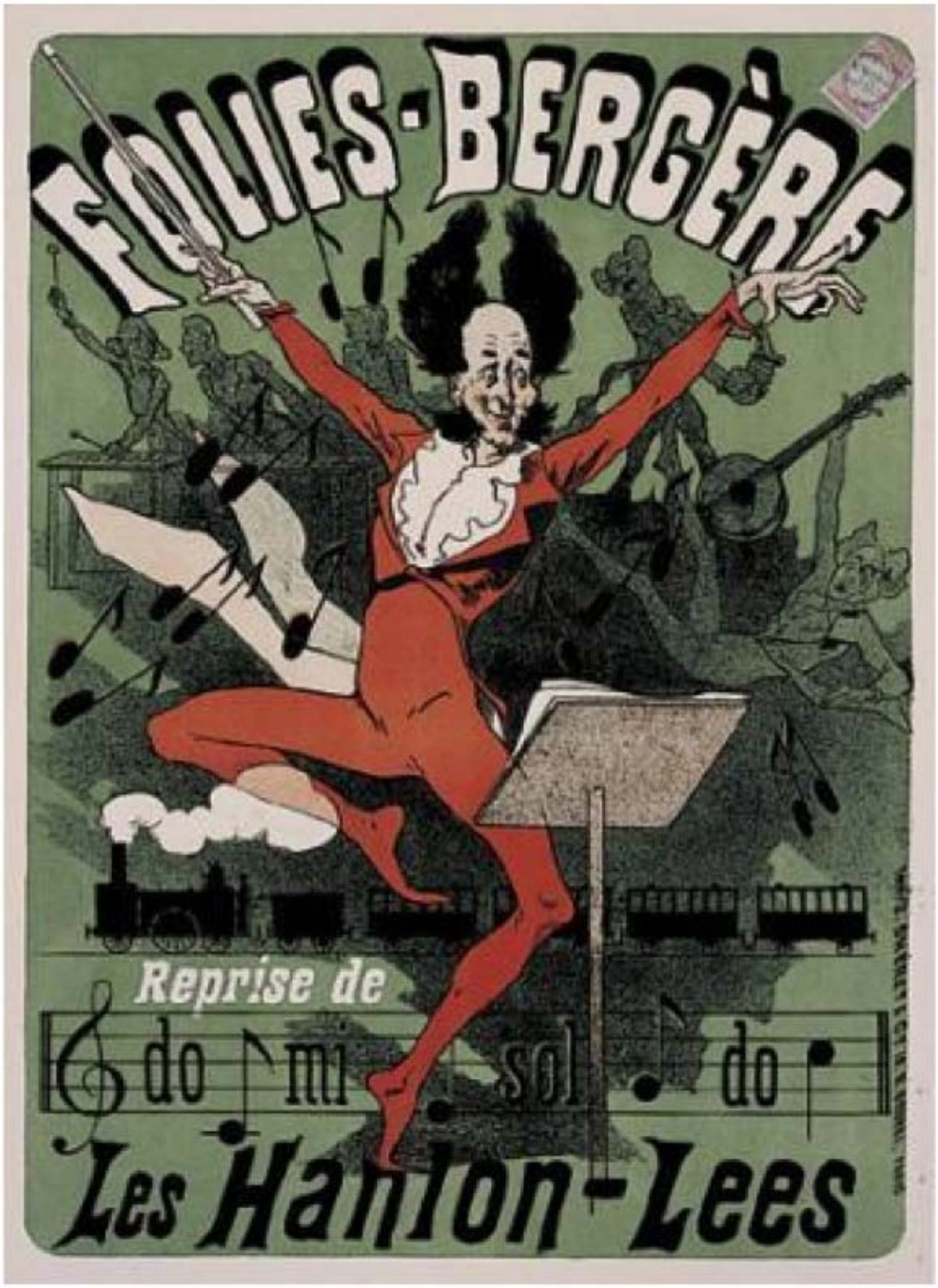
avant le développement des élégances, des habiletés, des finesses accomplies d'une jolie écuyère ;

[Figure 9: Max Claude, *Ecuyère de haute école*, Preface, *Entrée de clowns*]

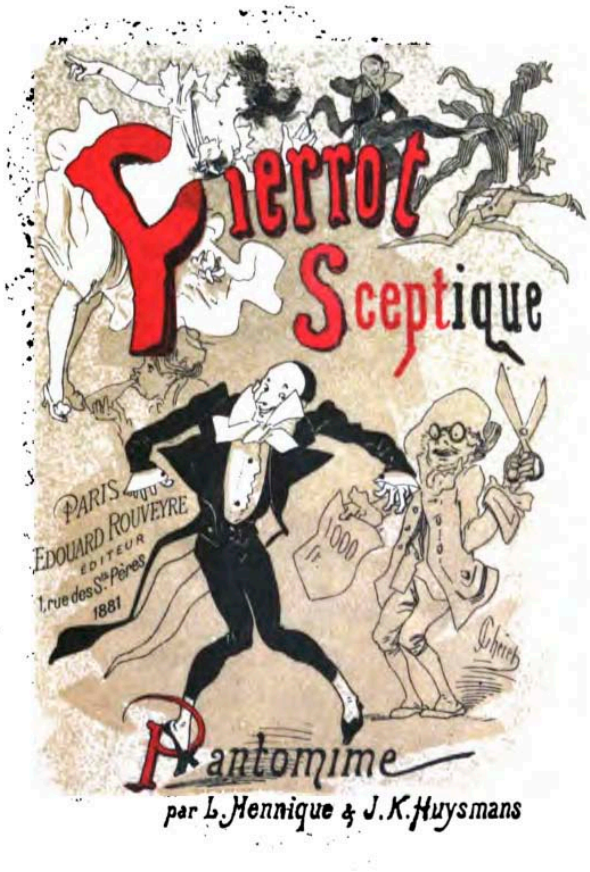
[Figure 10: J. Blass, Winged devil, Preface, *Entrée de clowns*]



[Figure 11: Bertall, *Diablotins*, "Prologue," *Le Diable à Paris*, vol. I (30)]



[Figure 12: Jules Chéret, "Folies-Bergère / Les Hanlon-Lees" (1878)]



[Figure 13: Jules Chéret, *Pierrot sceptique*, Book cover, (1881)]

A second element in the basic grammar of the circus poster is vibrant color, a factor merely implied in *Entrée de clowns*'s internal illustrations through Chéret's variegated book cover. The typical circus poster's showy reds, yellows, blues, greens, and oranges offset by the harsh white faces of acrobats signal the presence of a magical world, a glaring contrast to the grey tones so often associated with nineteenth-century Paris. Bold color is complicit in the shock that one experiences in the circus/pantomime universe, and it is inseparable from the other constitutive elements of its topsy-turviness. In "De l'essence du rire," Baudelaire, for example, cannot help but include the jarring effect of the "deux énormes plaques de rouge pur" on the English clown's cheeks, of his mouth that had been abnormally elongated by "deux bandes de carmin," of the garish multicolored ribbons festooning his outlandish costume in an assessment of the excess of which this clown is the embodiment (376-77). For *Entrée de clowns*' book cover [Fig. 6], Chéret contributed either a modified version of the poster he had made that same year for

the Hippodrome [Fig. 14] or a studio stock image that was the source for the Hippodrome and other posters [Fig. 15]. The similarities in both content and formal organization are striking. Chéret adapted the same basic poster format, one inspired by clown antics, to non-circus advertizing, such as the toy store poster "Aux Buttes Chaumont" [Fig. 16]. The cover's design and use of color would have been all too familiar to anyone prone to perambulating along the streets of metropolitan Paris. Reactivating those codes in the book cover represents the first important step in the series of actualizations. The tumultuous tumbling of the clowns, the *charivari* or "chaotic display of clowns and acrobats" of the circus ring is replicated in the Chéret book cover as a gravity-defying cascade of colorful, magically superhuman bodies (Bouissac 183).[21]

[21] Champsaur suggests that he was the first to recognize the artistic value of Chéret in his article, "Le roi de l'affiche" (1893). He quotes from his 1885 article in the *Figaro* to show that he had recognized Chéret's talent ahead of other critics and then states that, "Depuis [1885], d'autres critiques sont venus qui ont popularisé le talent du maître de l'affiche" (480). J.K. Huysmans, however, preceded Champsaur by at least 6 years by praising the art of Chéret in his "Salon de 1879" (*Le Voltaire*, 10 June, 1879), a publication of which Champsaur could not have been unaware, since it was reprinted in Huysmans's volume *L'Art moderne* (Paris: Charpentier, 1883). As regards the first illustrated book cover in color by Chéret, he claims that Chéret "a composé la première de ses éclatantes couvertures—un envolement gai de silhouettes de cirque—pour un volume de nouvelles: *Entrée de clowns*" (481). An irrefutable first exists, however, in the book cover that Chéret did for J.K. Huysmans and Léon Hennique's *Pierrot sceptique* in 1881, five years before Champsaur's *Entrée de clowns*. While the cover lacks the vibrant colors generally associated with Chéret's work, the illustration is in black, white, and sepia with the lettering primarily in bright red. The cover of *Entrée de clowns* possesses the same colors with the negligible difference that the background is light green and roughly a third of the clown costumes are bright red like the lettering. Another notable distinction is that while Chéret's cover and illustrations for *Pierrot sceptique* were conceived specifically for the book, that for Champsaur's volume is undoubtedly composed of a stock image.

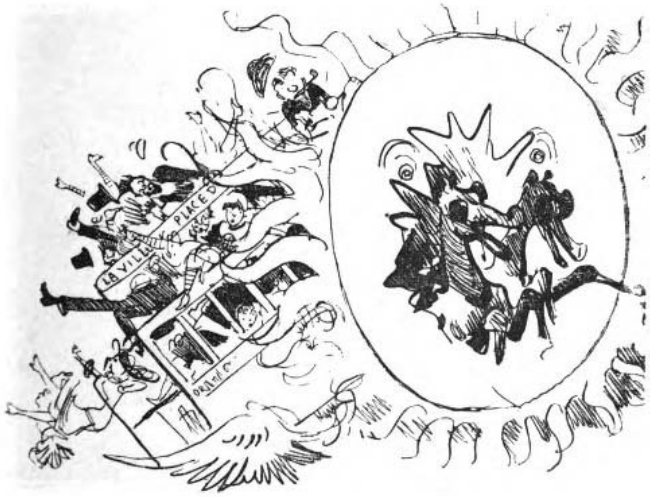
[Figure 14: Jules Chéret, *Hippodrome*, 1885]

[Figure 15: Jules Chéret, stock image, 1880s]

[Figure 16: Jules Chéret, *Aux Buttes Chaumont*, late 1870s]

The clowns in the interludes between tales perform their duty as symbols of freedom, adding the surplus value of transgression, a trait that the tales themselves only minimally possess. They exist within the tales as reminders to the reader of the semantic grounding of the volume lest s/he literally lose sight of them. To this end, Champsaur also orchestrated the occasional clown or pantomime figure as an *en-tête* or *cul-de-lampe*.

He also had the illustrators arbitrarily append circles to some of their designs in order to recall the hoops through which the *écuyère de panneau* leaps. Indeed, the coach horse of "Ballade du tramway" jumps through one such hoop [Fig. 17]. The circus iconography points to a deliberate marketing ploy on the part of Champsaur to tap into the signifying code of the circus in order to create an aura of otherness, innovation, and playful transgression.



[Figure 17: Unknown artist, "Ballade du Tramway," *Entrée de clowns* (101)]

Champsaur's *Entrée de clowns* contains the requisite images that offer an artistic persona for Champsaur, patched together from the codes of the poster and the circus found in the illustrations made by his friends, and culminating in the portraits of himself that often introduce many of his works. The recycling of clown images in *Entrée de clowns* served Champsaur's purpose, perhaps better than original illustrations would have, primarily because of the recognition factor: readers would be familiar with them, thereby creating a short-cut in suggesting the rich conventions of the circus poster and, by extension, the symbolic register of the circus.

Conclusion

In 1887, Jean Moréas offered this terse appraisal of Champsaur's recently published collection of poems: "Champsaur publia, il y a quelques mois, un volume de vers. Titre: *Parisiennes*. De qui tient cette poésie, sans similaire en écriture? —Rops?

Degas? Forain? Willette?" (qtd. in Mendès 50). It has been suggested that Moréas's words were perhaps in retaliation for Champsaur's ridicule of Moréas in his "Poètes décadenticulets" (Basch 588-89). Surprisingly, *Parisiennes* is one of the few works by Champsaur from the period by that possesses no illustrations, so Moréas does not refer here to any real play between text and image. Nor is it a commentary on the degree of ability Champsaur had to evoke through writing mental images as if with a paint brush, as he boasted in his postface to *Lulu, roman clownesque.* Rather, Moréas suggests in his terse and unflattering critique that there is no Champsaurian style, no dialogue of text and image, only the work of better artists whose aura Champsaur assimilates.

The hasty and late reconceptualization of Champsaur's collection as an *entrée de clowns* prevents one from describing the interaction between text and image as a true "contamination réciproque" (Bazile). The 1926 edition of the volume, in which the illustrations disappear completely, confirms this lack of contamination. Champsaur, strangely enough, had faith in the ability of the stories to stand on their own. He made no change to the title and minimal modifications to the preface: whereas in the 1886 edition, he characterizes the tales as "modernistes et fantasques," in the 1926 edition, he qualifies them only as "fantasques." Champsaur did make some structural changes, adding some new tales and deleting others, among which, curiously, "Flagrant délit," the original title story of the volume. Gone, as well, are the more traditional illustrations that functioned to visually complement the narrative of the stories. But the absence of the clown illustrations—central to the *modernisme* perceived by scholars then and now—shocks the most since they were the aesthetically distinctive components that ostensibly forced one to approach the text in its relation to the images. While Champsaur hardly abandoned illustration in the last decade of his life, he offered not *modernisme* in the sense of an avant-garde aesthetic, only "une volonté d'être « au goût du jour »" (David-de Palacio 138).

While the majority of the nineteenth-century stationary circuses had closed well before the 1920s, circus-related entertainments remained a rich symbol for artists. Champsaur, however, had a minimal aesthetic investment in the circus's signifying codes. He remained faithful, however, to the transgressive freedom of his heroines, a freedom that translated into their sexual availability and in the titillation that they offered the male

reader, hence the new, but generally erotic, illustrations of Lulu for the 1929 reissue of *Lulu, roman clownesque*. He remained faithful, as well, to the cult of himself and his literary legacy, which took on greater urgency as he neared the end of his life. In the 1885 *Entrées de clowns*, in addition to the frontispiece portrait of himself (a standard component of many of his publications), Champsaur co-opted the marketing strategies of the popular literature poster: while the back cover continues the illustration of the front cover, it also advertises in the *ecuyère*'s hoop his *Dinah Samuel* and *Miss America* [see Fig. 6]. Two years before his death, Champsaur brought out his final work, *La Roseraie* (1932), his second and last poetry collection, which contained an equally promotional illustration featuring his jazz-age Lulu surrounded by books whose bindings' titles announce his works [Fig. 18].

[Figure 18: Félicien Champsaur, *La Roseraie*, 1932]

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