HENRI-GABRIEL IBELS: FANFARE FOR THE WORKING MAN

BY

GORICA HADZIC

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dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Francesca C. Sautman

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_____ _____

Date Chair of Examining Committee

Peter Consenstein

_____

_____ _____

Date Executive Officer

Francesca C. Sautman

Mary Ann Caws

Antoinette Blum

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

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GORICA HADZIC

Adviser: Professor Francesca C. Sautman

This dissertation concerns the work of the artist Henry-Gabriel Ibels (1867-1936), and examines why, having been a founding member of the Nabis, an avant-garde group of painters active in the nineteenth century in Paris, having made major inroads in developing the relationship between art and text in modern terms, and having attained significant acclaim in his day, Ibels became, in subsequent decades, a virtual unknown. This neglect was so patent that contemporaries with whom he worked, like André Antoine, completely erased his role from the record and even attributed his work to others. I examine his important contribution to the artistic culture of his time in relation to the twists and turns of his public fame, and argue that it was largely because of his consistently leftist politics, that marked many of his artistic choices, that he was thus isolated from his original affinity group, the Nabis, and almost cut out of their history. Ibels's contemporaries enjoyed his art and his talent almost on a daily basis, and critics compared his rare attention to life and movement to that of the great masters, Leonardo da Vinci and Rembrandt, as well as to his contemporaries Daumier and Degas. This shows that Ibels's contemporaries were responsive to his aesthetics and recognized that his art was representative of the new visual perspective that proved to be as significant in its own time as any other intellectual manifestation. This dissertation examines numerous

articles and mentions which prove that Ibels's contemporaries also recognized his ideological and artistic contributions to the art of painting, poster design, theater, and caricature, as well as the fact that succeeding in all of these genres is reserved to only a few of the greatest talents.

* * *

To my father, Radoman Lalic, painter, sculptor, theater director, set designer, and art history teacher, whose life mimicked Ibels's in so many ways.

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(Ibels's Letter to Antoine - September 1, 1904)

Henry-Gabriel Ibels: Fanfare for the Working Man

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Henri-Gabriel Ibels, 1893-1894
Oil on Cardboard
201/2 x 15 ½ (52.1 x 39.4 cm)

Introduction

This thesis concerns the work of the artist Henry-Gabriel Ibels (1867-1936). It examines why, having been a founding member of the Nabis, an avant-garde group of painters active in France in the nineteenth century, having made major inroads in developing the relationship between art and text in modern terms, and having attained significant acclaim in his day, Ibels became, in subsequent decades, a virtual unknown. This neglect was so patent that contemporaries with whom he worked, like director André Antoine, completely erased his role from the record and even attributed his work to others. I wish to examine his important contribution to the artistic culture of his time in relation to the twists and turns of his public fame, and will argue that it was largely because of his consistently leftist politics, that marked many of his artistic choices, that it was conceivable that he could be thus isolated from his original affinity group, the Nabis, and almost cut out of their history.

Ibels studied at the Académie Julian, Paris, in 1888-89 with Edouard Vuillard, Pierre Bonnard, Maurice Denis, Paul-Elie Ranson and Paul Sérusier who constituted the Nabis group. He first exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants in 1891 and participated in the Nabis group shows at the Louis le Barc de Boutteville's gallery. Ibels's strong and very personal style was already apparent in these early venues, and indicated that he was drawn to addressing the social conditions of the working class and issues of social justice.[1]

It was through the Nabis that he came in contact with the work of Gauguin and his theories of Synthesism and Cloisonnism.[2] Ibels seems to follow Gauguin's instruction "examinez les Japonais," by adopting their use of pure line, its endless variation and control. This linear sparseness and the new technique that he has developed along with the rest of the Nabis was well suited for lithography, a medium in which he began to work with passion.[3] Like Bonnard and Lautrec, Ibels used a raw color, brusque line and was known for his strong compositions, all of which was well suited to the poster. It is also the subject of his posters that set him apart from the others. They are the first indication of his socialist commitment and demonstrate his concern with political and social issues – something the rest of the Nabis were not involved with in their art.

In 1890, he collaborated with the *Père Peinard*, the proletarian journal run by the anarchist Emile Pouget, and, in 1893, with his brother André's *La Revue Anarchiste*. He also published his work in *La Plume*, *La Revue Blanche*, *Le Cri de Paris, Le Mirliton*, *Le Courrier Français*, *l'Echo de Paris*, and *Le Sifflet*, a journal he founded in order to defend Dreyfus, and many others. He also published posters and illustrations of popular songs and singers.

In the second part of the last decade of the nineteenth century, Ibels's different preoccupations started to alienate him from his friends the Nabis. He continued his work as a painter by illustrating books, both his own and those of others (*La Fille Elisa*, by Edmond de Goncourt, for example), illustrated numerous journals and was very active at

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[2] Judith Hanson-O'Toole, « Henri-Gabriel Ibels, Nabis journaliste – L'œuvre graphique des années1900. » *Nouvelles de l'Estampe* 29 (1980) : 25-33.

[3] Saunier, Charles. « Henri-Gabriel Ibels, Nabis journaliste » *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, Jan.1882 : 31-35.

the Société des Humoristes, consisting of illustrators and cartoonists. By the turn of the century he was devoting much of his creative talent to the promoting of actual political and social issues. He spent much of his time writing plays and short stories, and teaching at different academic institutions such as the École du Louvre.

What is known of Ibels's involvement in the development of the lithographical poster shows that he was very influential and successful in promoting this medium as a means of valid and original artistic expression. After Daumier, Ibels was one of those who took it up with great conviction, and continued to discover the range of its technical possibilities. By 1892, he was already well-known in the artistic world of Paris. Favorable articles in the press started to appear, and he was invited to be a member of the "Commission de Placement" for the Salon des Indépendants of that year. An important retrospective of Ibels's work was shown at the exhibition at the Galerie Bodinière as early as in 1894. The exhibition included his drawings, paintings, sculptures and fans, and it was well received.[4] In 1896, along with Toulouse Lautrec, Ibels agreed to illustrate a text by Georges Montorgueil, *Le Café Concert*. At the time, he was the better known of the two artists, and was most likely responsible for securing the project. The reopening of the Dreyfus Affair inspired Ibels to work for the defense of social principles. He wrote and illustrated *Allons-y! Histoire Contemporaine Racontée & Dessinée* in which he defended the very notion of the French intellectual, (31) and promoted the revision of the verdict while giving a fresh recounting of the events, in opposition to the anti-Dreyfusard journal, *Psst…!* in which the fierce anti-Dreyfus artist Forain had a marked presence..

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[4] Charles Saunier, « Henri-Gabriel Ibels» *La Plume*, (Jan. 15, 1892) : 31 - 35.

Ibels also formed the journal *Le Sifflet* which appeared 12 days after Forain's *Psst…!* and which actively supported the revision of the trial, attacking Esterhazy and his supporters.

The part of his career that has been most researched are his posters done for the Théâtre Libre. Antoine had commissioned eight theater programs to be executed by Ibels for the 1892-93 season. These were a remarkable series, and rank among the best examples of program design of the 1890s. In *La Carrière d'Antoine*, Ibels recognized how much the lithographs he executed for the Théâtre Libre in 1892-1893 contributed to his popularity (2).

While Antoine had invited Ibels to work with him on numerous plays after he became the director of the Odéon, Ibels's correspondence with Antoine reveals that in his memoirs "le patron" did not acknowledge Ibels's contribution, and even attributed the execution of the 200 costumes for *L'Honneur japonais* to another artist. This unexplainable disregard on the part of Antoine deeply hurt his loyal collaborator. It also took Ibels's name out of the book that many scholars have used as a point of departure and essential reference for their research on the Théâtre Libre, l'Odéon, and on Antoine and his work. So far, scholars have not questioned Antoine's account. Finding the reason for this disloyalty on Antoine's part, and assuring the proper place of Ibels in the history of the French theater will be one of the particular contributions of this thesis.

Although Ibels was a founding member of the Nabis, most of the historical works on this group only mention him "en passant," and without giving more details on his work. Charles Chassé (1883-1965), Ibels's contemporary, a longstanding authority on the Nabis, in his book *Les Nabis et leur temps* mentions Ibels only in a four-sentence

biographical note at the end of the book. Geneviève Aitken emphasizes the programs Ibels executed for the Théâtre Libre. This part of Ibels's work has, indeed, been widely researched. Aitken gives a list and description of Ibels's programs. However, this includes neither Ibels's work at l'Odéon, nor his work on costumes and set decorations. Agnès Dellanoy, in her 1996 book on Maurice Denis and the Nabis, talks about Ibels's drawings from the *Cirque and Forains* series, and about his song illustrations that were, as she states, rarely done by painters at the time. She briefly evokes Ibels's aesthetics, compares him to the rest of the Nabis, and confirms that although there are similarities, the subject matter of his work is distinctly his.

The two articles that show the extent of Ibels' popularity at the time were both written by contemporary critics. In the foreword to *l'Estampe et l'Affiche*, André Mallerio wrote about Ibels's omnipresence in the artistic world of fin-de-siècle Paris: «Ibels est partout: dans l'affiche, l'illustration de journal ou de livre, dans les programmes du Théâtre Libre."(19) In his article in *La Plume* (published in conjunction with a one-man show of Ibels' work held at the "Salon des Cent"), Charles Saunier compared Ibels' uncommon attention to life and movement to the great masters, Leonardo da Vinci and Rembrandt. (31-32) That was a way for this critic to introduce Ibels as one of the "masters" and to recognize his work. It is interesting to note that the majority of sources that mention Ibels base themselves on the information provided by this five-page article.

Indeed, the 1980 article by Hanson O'Toole repeats more-or-less the information given by Saunier, and talks mostly about Ibels's involvement with the Théâtre Libre (the two articles have the same title). Hanson-O'Toole also devotes one page to Ibels's cooperation with Toulouse-Lautrec, but only from a historical perspective. To my

knowledge, since the publication of his article in the *Nouvelles de l'Estampe* in 1980, the author has not published or presented any further work on Ibels. In her 500- page book on the *Nabis: Bonnard, Vuillard, Maurice Dennis*… Claire Frèches-Thory devotes merely two pages to Ibels, and reproduces two of his lithographs. She also sheds light on why Ibels slowly separated from his Nabi friends.

In his "Promenades aux environs de 1900," now in his early thirties, Ibels explained why he was marginalized. He was conscious that it was because of his political engagement and also, because of his involvement in another medium, the theatre, which was not considered pure art. This may provide a partial answer to the problem of the exclusion of Ibels from the literature: he was labeled a radical and engaged artist early on, not only by former Nabi colleagues but later by art historians who were not interested in the political dimension of art. In *The Color Revolution*, Philip Dennis Cate et al. discuss the posters and color lithography produced in France in the last decade of the 19th century. They state that along with Toulouse Lautrec and several other young avant-garde artists, it was Ibels who started the "color revolution." His "L'amour s'amuse," a series that included his comments, published in *l'Estampe Originale*, represents a completely new chapter in the innovative printmaking of the 1890s. Cate calls Ibels's work more 'violent' than Lautrec's and "full of spontaneity." When Ibels died in 1936, two journals, *Comédie* (2.2. 36), and *Le Signe* (3.3.36), published an obituary in which he was praised as one of the most influential and prolific artists of his time.

This thesis is based on research I have completed in New York and Paris beginning in 2005 on the artistic contribution of the Nabis to the Parisian avant-garde theater. I returned to Paris in 2007 to do more research on Ibels. That last research trip

confirmed the fact that Ibels was ubiquitous in the artistic world of Paris at the time. It also confirmed that the existing references related to his work are incomplete and fragmented, examined rather briefly if at all, and only partially cover his large body of work, and, in most cases, show a lack of critical information. Everything in the way of information that we can accumulate regarding his oeuvre shows that he was not marginal at all during his time, and in fact, was recognized by contemporaries as very important. Critics in our day are influenced by the writing or omissions of certain key figures of the time, and take their neglect of Ibels at face value. My approach will question these omissions, and will envisage the quasi totality of his work.

By reviewing this record of omission and silence, I hope to shed light on several decades of French culture that have been largely misunderstood or rapidly glossed over up to now through the disregard of this important figure. I will also investigate the influences that molded him, who his friends were among artists and art lovers, and to what degree his experience of art influenced his work. My sources include Ibels's artwork, correspondence, various biographies, various editions of his drawings, journals of the period, and relevant critical literature. I have consulted primary source documents at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal and the Musée Maurice Denis in Saint Germain-en-Laye. I have worked at the Rutgers University gallery, which contains some of Ibels's work. One of the limitations of this study has been the lack of available information on Ibels's private life. I have checked the archives at the Bibliothèque des Archives in Paris (Etat Civil Parisien –1860-1902). Most of the sources that mention Ibels state the same problem.

Because of all these twists and turns in the perception of Ibels's oeuvre and of him as a cultural actor, the crucial role he played in developing forms of art in which word and image were blended and reflected upon each other has also been underestimated, a flaw I seek to correct.

While my thesis is mostly based on historical and archival information about Ibels, the interpretative premises of my present and future studies on Ibels stem from the work of scholars such as Norman Bryson and Mary Ann Caws, and on their exploration of the theoretical issues associated with perception. Norman Bryson's examination of the painting as a sign, the evolution of narrative styles, and the relation of formal and literary elements as crucial in the production of a painting were the starting point for my understanding of how semiotics can be applicable to the visual arts.

Mary Ann Caws' intellectually challenging essays in *The Art of Interference: Stressed Readings in Verbal and Visual Texts*, and her book *The Eye in the Text: Essays on Perception, Mannerist to Modern*, shed light on the phenomenology of the reading process. She has shown that our writing system and technology dictate the separation of art and writing. However, writing and drawing both remain texts.

Also important to my approach are the essays by Roland Barthes in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation.* This is mainly a reflection on Massin's book *Letter and Image* which examines letters found in images such as advertising and illustrations. Barthes states: "All the artists Massin cites- monks, lithographers, painters, designers- have blocked the road which seems to run so naturally from the first articulation to the second, from the letter to the word, and have

taken another road, not of language but of writing, not of communication but of signification: an adventure located in the margin of the so-called finalities of language and thereby in the very center of its action." (100)

These critical writings were very important to my study since they focus on a wide selection of literary and artistic subjects, and examine the relationship between verbal and visual forms of expression, and ultimately raise the question of eliminating the distance (the censorship) that institutionally separates picture and text. As much as he was a part of the most prolific period of lithography, Ibels also participated in the invention of its vocabulary, a new visual language that is based on the relation between text and image, and the art of the projection. His particular relation to word and text is noteworthy and places him in the vanguard of his time.

Ibels's contribution to art, his collaboration with the Nabis, his leading role in the development of the lithographical poster, his work for the theater – programs, decors and costumes, as well as his tireless political involvement, put him on the map as one of the most active artists in the last decade of the 19th century in Paris. The lack of more complete information on his work is surprising but leaves wide open a path to examine and interpret it in greater detail.

The thesis undertakes this task through the following four chapters, accompanied by appendices and illustrations:

Chapter One,"Ibels and the Nabis," focuses on the years of Ibels's collaboration with the Nabis group, the similarities and differences in their work, and identifies the points where their work diverged and went separate ways. It also introduces my argument

regarding the importance of Ibels's work and his contribution as part of the Parisian avant-garde.

Chapter two, "Ibels and the Printed Medium," discusses the work Ibels as a major contributor to the development of poster art, as a book and song illustrator, and generally as an artist visible in the Parisian journals of the time. I provide profiles and dates of the journals' run depending on their importance. I discuss Ibels's contribution to the development of a distinct genre of poster art by focusing on specific artistic and technical dimensions, such as his use of line, color, color juxtaposition, and of specific printmaking media such as lithography.

This chapter combines analysis of Ibels's artistic expression with his involvement in political issues, and also, with art criticism for journals. I also discuss his important role with respect to one art form, the caricature, and make a case for its place in fine arts, based on Ibels's insights into the relation of caricature with the fine arts.

Chapter three, "Ibels and Anarchism," takes up the political views expressed by Ibels and his gravitation around the anarchist movement in late 19th-century France. It is in this chapter that I discuss Ibels's involvement in the Dreyfus affair and examine the political as well as artistic motivations behind his role. The first part will situate the debate surrounding the anarchist movement in France in the last two decades of the 19th century within the broader context of contemporary discussions on anarchy, and discuss the writings of anarchist leaders such as Fernand Pelloutier who profoundly influenced Ibels and his work.

Chapter four, “Ibels and the Theater,” explores Ibels’s artistic contribution to the Parisian avant-garde theater – from theater programs and set decorations to costumes. It will also provide history and context for each play studied. It considers the role of Ibels in the theater as a multi-dimensional performance.

In conclusion, I hope to have demonstrated the multi-faceted influence of Ibels in the Parisian art world of his time, as well as the specific transmediality of his work that mirrored the changing environment.

* * *

CHAPTER I

Ibels and the Nabis

"Les principaux nabis sont au musée du Luxembourg et je ne suis plus parmi eux! C'est ma faute, ma très grande faute," wrote Ibels in his *Promenades aux environs de 1900*.[5] He was referring to the painting by Maurice Denis "L'Hommage à Cézanne" (figure 2) which was, at the time, exhibited at the Luxembourg Museum, and expressed his regret that he was not included. The painting features Paul Sérusier (with whom, Ibels said, he founded the group Les Nabis in 1888), Edouard Vuillard, the godfather of Ibels's younger son Robert André,[6] Pierre Bonnard, Paul Ranson, André Mellerio, Ambroise Vollard and Odilon Redon - all surrounding one of Cézanne's still life paintings. Not only were they featured in that particular painting, but their own paintings hung in the same museum, next to the ones of other Nabis, Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, Armand Séguin, and Paul Gauguin.

In *Promenades* Ibels calls this period in his life a happy time of his youth and "l'époque héroïque de la révolution cézannienne." While he confirms that they were, most of all, inspired by Cézanne, he also claims that these artists rejected the formulas of his school, and, at the same time, insisted on remaining independent from one another in

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[5] *Promenades aux environs de 1900*. p. 1. An unpublished manuscript written by Ibels around 1930, provided to me by Marie El Caïdi, Attaché de Conservation at the Centre de documentation of the Musée Departemental Maurice Denis in St Germain-en-Laye. Le centre de documentation provides a photocopy of a handwritten transcript of *the Promenades*.

[6] Robert was drafted and died on the front in World War I on August 19, 1917, at the age of 22. He was a poet and his name is engraved on one of the stones of the Panthéon. He received the *Croix de guerre*, three citations, and was *Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur*.

terms of their style and aspirations.[7] This chapter as well as the rest of this thesis will try to explain why Ibels was not part of this "homage" when it was obvious that he had an active role in the creation and subsequent development of the aesthetic ideas of the group.

Birth of the Nabis

A great deal is known about how the Nabi group started, where the members gathered, how often, and the ideas they shared. Agnès Humbert, in particular, has written at great length about their work, as have, more recently Claire Frèches-Thory, and Antoine Terrasse. Nevertheless, there are different versions of the group's history, especially on the issues of the year when it started and of who were its original members. Some sources mention 1888, and some 1889 as its founding year, and many do not even include Ibels as a founding member. Ibels's *Promenades aux environs de 1900* thus provides an invaluable insight on those first days of their existence as a group, details that are not mentioned elsewhere, and that will be discussed in this chapter.

According to Ibels, the original members were himself, Paul Sérusier (1864-1927), Maurice Denis (1870-1943), Ker-Xavier Roussel (1867-1944) and Edouard Vuillard (1868-1940).[8] Armand Séguin (1869-1903) who is rarely mentioned in books on the Nabis, and who died at the age of 30, was also a member. His friendship was very

[7] Gauguin once owned the still life painting, "Still Life with Compotier" (1879-1882), shown in Denis's "L'Hommage à Cézanne." In fact, in 1880s he owned six of Cézanne's paintings, whose style he valued and copied in a few instances. He considered collecting of Cézanne's paintings a valuable investment. The fact that motifs from his paintings appeared in Gauguin's studies [for instance, "Nature morte au profil de Laval" (1886), "Portrait de femme à la nature morte de Cézanne" (1890)], did not sit well with Cézanne, who, as it is well documented, disliked Gauguin and his art. Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. 163.

[8] Roussel married Vuillard's sister. *Promenades aux environs de 1900*, p. 11.

important to Ibels, since their discussions on art and their sharing of a studio, canvases, and paints, were part of his early memories. They met in 1896 at the École des Arts Décoratifs. Ibels, Sérusier, Vuillard and Roussel soon invited Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947) and Paul Ranson (1864-1909) to join the group.

Another member of the Nabis was Auguste Cazalis who was not a painter by profession, and did not attend the Académie Julian, however Verkade and Denis mention him in their letters and writings.[9] Cazalis studied Hebrew and held several positions, yet he was constantly dissatisfied with his current jobs. He was the one who suggested the word "Nabis," from the Hebrew "Nebiim," or "prophets," as a name for the group. In his book *ABC de la peinture*, Denis reminisces:

> Il (Cazalis) nous donnait un nom vis-à-vis des ateliers, faisait de nous des initiés, une sorte de société secrète d'allure mystique, et proclamait que l'état d'enthousiasme prophétique nous était habituel.[10]

Contemporary critics referred to the group mostly as "Symbolists, and the name Nabis appears to have been used only among the friends at the time."[11] Indeed, in his *Théories*, Maurice Denis does not mention the word, and in general, people were unfamiliar with the name. However, their idea of forming a movement was clear, as they held weekly meetings and worked closely on numerous theater projects and group commissions, as well as on their own projects.[12]

The friends studied together at the Académie Julian, in the Faubourg St. Denis, and met regularly at the Lycée Condorcet, rue du Havre, where they discussed art, music, and

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[9] Maurice Denis, *Paul Sérusier, sa vie, son oeuvre*. In Paul Sérusier, *ABC de la peinture*. Paris: Floury, 1942, pp. 45-46.

[10] Paul Sérusier, *ABC de la peinture*. Pp. 45-46.

[11] More on this period in Charles Chassé's *Les Nabis et leur temps*. Lausanne: Bibliothèque des arts, 1960.

[12] Charles Chassé 15.

philosophy. This was the only lycée in Paris that was attended by day students who had freedom of movement outside of school hours.[13] One of the head teachers at the time said that:" On n'a pas l'air d'y travailler, parce qu'on vit à moitié sur les bancs, à moitié dans le monde."[14] They were all bachelors at the time of their closest collaboration, except for Ranson, who, when he was 20, married Marie-France Limoges, who became an active supporter of her husband and of the group, and who, after her husband's death, headed the famous Académie Ranson under the spiritual guidance of Maurice Denis.[15] Ibels calls Ranson "le prophète des Nabis" since he predicted their arrival at the "Temple," the "Temple" being the Institute and the Louvre. From 1891 to 1892, the group gathered every Saturday at Ranson's studio, which they jokingly also called "the Temple."[16] Ranson's wife Marie-France received the guests with a "charmante camaraderie," and even allowed them to paint on the walls of the studio."[17] They shared interest in arts and literature, listened to music, worshiped Cézanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin, read the poetry of Mallarmé, Verlaine and Baudelaire, but most of all, through their discussions about art, developed a sense of mission. They gave each other nicknames: for his work for the Parisian journals Ibels was nicknamed Nabi Journaliste, Vuillard, Nabi Zouave, Sérusier, Nabi à la Barbe Rutilante, Bonnard, Nabi Japonard, Verkade, Nabi Obéliscal, Denis, Nabi aux Belles Icônes. Other gathering places were the studio that Bonnard, Vuillard and Denis shared with the young actor Lugné-Poë; the offices of *La Revue Blanche*

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[13] Arthur Ellridge, *Gauguin et les Nabis*. Paris:Terrail, 2001, p. 60.

[14] Quoted in Ellridge, p. 60.

[15] Some twenty years later, Ibels taught art history at the Academy Ranson. On December 15, 1911, he started a series of courses entitled: "Cours d'Histoire de l'Art avec Projections Lumineuses," and "Cours de l'Histoire du Costume avec Projections Lumineuses (habillage et drapé sur le Modèle Vivant)." Source: a printed pamphlet from the collection Musée Maurice Denis, St Germain-en-Laye.

[16] Bernard Dorival, *Les peintres du XX^e siècle*. Paris: Éditions Pierre Tisné, 1957, p. 13.

[17] Dom Willibrord, Verkade, *Le Tourment de Dieu*. Paris: 1923, p. 80.

which, after being founded in Brussels in 1889, moved to Paris the following year; the offices of the *Mercure de France*, created in 1890; and the gallery owned by Le Barc de Bouteville where they regularly showed their art from 1891 to 1896 in some thirteen exhibitions. Ambroise Vollard opened the doors to his gallery to the group in 1897 and 1898, Durand-Ruel the following year, Bernheim the younger and son in 1900, and finally, the Salons – the Salon National des Beaux-Arts from 1895-1898, in 1901, and others followed. Worthy of mention also are their exhibitions at the Brussels's Salon de la Libre Esthétique where they exhibited in 1892, 1893, 1896, 1897, 1898, and 1901.[18]

It was Sérusier and Ibels who invited others to join: Sérusier invited Jean Verkade and Emile Bernard, and Ibels brought in Toulouse-Lautrec,[19] Armand Seguin, René Piot, and several "civils" (non-artists), such as Auguste Cazalis, whom they called Nabi à la Parole Hésitante, because he stammered "effroyablement." The group's "formula" was "En ta paume mon verbe et ma pensée," with which they signed their invitations and letters. "Ensemble," Ibels said, "nous nous sommes sérieusement amusés." The Nabi friends went to the Louvre and to the Concerts Lamoureux, while being openly despised by other students from the same school that they were attending.[20] These students were, according to Ibels, preoccupied with artistic and social hierarchy, with medals and decorations, which were their reward for accepting to be trained in certain approved ways. Their work and the work of the artists they worshiped lacked the sense of contemporary reality and the kind of awareness of social protest that Ibels admired. Also,

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[18] Dorival 12.

[19] Lautrec was the godfather of Ibels's eldest son Pierre René Gabriel, who was born on August 3, 1893.

[20] The Concerts Lamoureux was officially known as Société des Nouveaux-Concerts, an orchestral/concert society which gave weekly concerts by its own orchestra, and founded by Charles Lamoureux in 1881.

Ibels's rapid working methods were incompatible with the academic style. By doing sketches and drawings he could preserve the freshness of his visual sensations, and quickly express his emotional response.

In 1888, the very same year the group was formed, Sérusier, whom Ibels called "le massier de l'atelier, un artiste pompier par excellence," was admitted to the Salon, and soon after went to Pont-Aven, Brittany, where he met with Paul Gauguin and Emile Bernard. At that time, Gauguin's painting style was called Synthesism (an anti-naturalist style of painting). This meeting with Gauguin profoundly influenced Sérusier, who, during his first lesson in painting in this style, used a wooden panel and painted "cinq formes de couleurs pures" on which the Nabis' ideas were crystallized, and on which they focused their artistic aspirations. This painting represented in a nutshell Gauguin's idea that the painting is use of "pure color" on a flat surface, organized in a certain order. The Nabis titled it "the Talisman." (figure 3) Many sources claim that this was painted on the bottom of a cigarette box, which, based on Ibels's account, was not true.[21] The size of the painting is 27.5 x 21 cm or 10.83 x 8.27 inches, and can actually be seen in the Musée d'Orsay. This false account of the size of the painting probably came from Maurice Denis' *Théories,* where he mentions "un couvercle de boîte à cigares."[22] The idea behind "the Talisman" liberated the young Nabis who did not find answers to their artistic queries in the traditional teachings of the French Academy of Fine Arts. Ibels explains how they adopted separating the colors and contouring of objects with a line, in order for the colors to become more prominent, as one of the characteristics of their new style:

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[21] Ibels calls it "petit panneau chargé de couleurs pures," *Promenades*, 6.

[22] Maurice Denis, *Théories 1890-1910: Du symbolisme et de Gauguin vers un nouvel ordre classique*, Paris: L. Rouart et J. Watelin,1912.p.168.

> Il (Sérusier) nous a montré que si le sertissage par des traits n'existe pas dans la nature, il est nécessaire en art pour accuser, affirmer nos sensations colorées, et que les couleurs séparées par des traits plus de valeur.[23]

This taught them to find the courage to break off with the "false" traditions of the institutionalized art world and the teachings of their "Maîtres" who, now, refused to continue to teach and correct them, and whose observations the young Nabis, from then on, completely disregarded. It is important to note that none of the Nabis accepted Gauguin's theories to the letter. This way they became an "atelier à part," where many young intellectuals came and left, like Henri Bataille, who joined the group but soon left it in order to work in the theater. Except for Sérusier, none of the Nabis were students of Gauguin. In *Théories*, Maurice Denis gives another important account of the significance of Sérusier's meeting with Gauguin for the future of the group, and of painting in general:

> C'est à la rentrée de 1888 que le nom de Gauguin nous fut révélé par Sérusier, de retour de Pont-Aven, qui nous exhiba, non sans mystère, un couvercle de boîte à cigares sur quoi on distinguait un paysage informe, à force d'être synthétiquement formulé, en violet, vermillon, vert Véronèse et autres couleurs pures, telles qu'elles sortent du tube, presque sans mélange de blanc. "Comment voyez-vous cet arbre", avait dit Gauguin devant un coin du Bois d'Amour, "il est bien vert? Mettez donc du vert, le plus beau vert de votre palette; et cette ombre, plutôt bleue? Ne craignez pas de la peindre aussi bleue que possible." Ainsi nous fut présenté, pour la première fois, sous une forme paradoxale, inoubliable, le fertile concept de la "surface plane recouverte de couleurs en un certain ordre assemblées". Ainsi nous connûmes que toute œuvre d'art était une transposition, une caricature, l'équivalent passionné d'une émotion reçue. Ce fut l'origine d'une évolution à laquelle participèrent immédiatement Ibels, Bonnard, Ranson, Denis."[24]

Although this meeting was an important point in the group's evolution, Gauguin's ideas were not immediately understood by the members, not even by Sérusier.[25] In 1889,

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[23] Ibels, *Promenades*, 6.

[24] Maurice Denis, *Théories 1890-1910*, p.168.

[25] In a letter to Denis, written at the end of his summer vacation in 1889, Sérusier said that he did not quite understand Gauguin's ideas. Denis, *Théories* 1890-1910, p.168.

during the Universal Exhibition in Paris, the friends finally made a connection with "Talisman," and the new paintings they saw at the exhibition of Synthesist art put together by Gauguin at the Café Volpini, near the newly-built Eiffel Tower. The official art exhibition that accompanied the Universal Exhibition was organized at the Palais des Beaux Arts, where the "official jury" made a selection of artists that excluded Gauguin, which is why he decided to organize an exhibition on his own. The Nabis were impressed by the "surfaces lourdement décoratives, puissamment coloriées et cernées d'un trait brutal."[26] All of the paintings were framed in white, and had heavily decorative surfaces, strongly colored, with forms outlined with a thick black line, separated or "cloisonnés." The Nabis now better understood the principles of composition and the use of the thick outline, pure color, and the simplification of the form, as in medieval stained glass windows but also as in Japanese art. Painting became, for them, at the same time "idéiste" and "symboliste." The artist did not have to attempt to portray the reality directly observed but present a reflection of his/her temperament and translation of what was viewed. Young and passionate, the Nabis quickly adopted these elements as their new artistic ideal. It is important to note that while some sources claim that Gauguin was a direct initiator of the group, Sérusier, in his article for the January 1890 issue of *Mercure de France*, wrote:

> Gauguin! vous savez qu'il fut mon libérateur et celui de beaucoup d'autres. Il a brisé les liens qui nous attachaient à l'Ecole. Je lui en suis, pour ma part, à jamais reconnaissant. C'est après l'avoir rencontré en Bretagne que j'ai jeté, en pleine Académie Julian~ le cri de liberté qui groupa Denis, Vuillard, Roussel, Bonnard, Ranson, Ibels, et d'autres. Je dois toutefois reconnaître que Gauguin n'est pas l'initiateur du mouvement actuel.[27]

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[26] Maurice Denis, *Le Ciel et l'Arcadie*. Paris: Hermann, 1993. p. 207.
[27] *Mercure de France.* (January 1890): 543.

Although it was not Gauguin's idea to initiate the movement, his fierce individualism, inexhaustible imagination, and ideas influenced all of the Nabis. He was romantic, mystical and passionate character. Although he did not initiate the Nabi movement, this one was profoundly inspired by his championing of Symbolism in painting, a concept infused with mysticism that served as a bridge toward abstraction. It was also characterized by flat brilliant colors, abandonment of perspective, suppression of relief, which many thought "deformed" the painting. The influence of Gauguin is evident in Ibels's early oil paintings, one of which is "Le Bois d'Amour" (1890).[28] (figure 4) It shows the famous Bois d'Amour, a frequent subject-matter for Gauguin and his followers, and conforms perfectly to his definition of what a painting should be. Its elements are firmly held together by the features of its surface - the flat patches of bright color, the outlining of the trees, which are the essential parts of the pictorial structure. This influence is particularly evident in Ibels's lithographs and posters, whose free composition also shows his knowledge of Japanese art. Another work that shows this influence is "Les Amoureux dans un champ" (1893-1894), in pastel and gouache; it shows a young couple in an embrace in the middle of a field, on a summer day.[29] (figure 5)

Some modern works of art history present the Nabis as a movement, and some as a group, and some found common features between their works and the works of the Fauves. They were also classified separately as belonging to different movements. For instance, works by Denis, Sérusier and Vallotton were included in a 1975-76 exhibition

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[28] The painting can be seen at the Musée du Petit Palais (Musée d'Art moderne) in Geneva. The size of the painting is 65 X 92 cm.

[29] The size of the painting is 79.5 x 64.2, and can be seen at the Zimmerli Art Museum in New Brunswick, NJ.

of Symbolist art, while the works of other Nabis were not featured.[30] Also, in the exhibition of the Fauves and the Nabis, held in the Zurich Kunsthaus in 1983, works by Denis and Sérusier were not included.[31] The hard-to-define quality that infuses the work of the Nabis is the reason for this diversity and even difficulty in ascertaining commonalities between their styles. The friends' artistic aspirations expanded in the milieu of many museums, theaters, and galleries, and with the increased freedom of the press in turn-of-the-century Paris. Being accepted by the Academy was no longer important to them. They saw themselves as young intellectuals set apart from the mass--as the true initiates.

In 1889, Léon Dechamps founded the journal *La Plume*, which became an important supporter of the Nabis, especially of Ibels who was frequently invited to contribute. He regularly attended the soirées organized by *La Plume*, and later held solo exhibitions at the Salon des Cent, which was located at the same premises as the journal. In June 1891, Denis, Vuillard, Bonnard, and Lugné-Poë rented a small studio, but Bonnard was the only one who actually lived in it. Lugné-Poë, Thadée Natanson, Georges Roussel, Ibels, Sérusier, Gauguin, Ranson, and many others, spent hours in this tiny atelier.[32] This became a "temple" that many came to visit. During these frequent and fructuous gatherings, the friends would paint, while Lugné-Poë (called le Grand Tuberculeux by his friends because he was very thin) would try to interest them in his

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[30] Le Symbolisme en Europe, exhibition: Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen, November 1975-January 1976, Bruxelles, Musées royaux des beaux-arts de Belgique, January-March 1976, Baden-Baden, Staatliche Kunsthalle, March-May 1976, Paris, Grand Palais, May-July 1976.

[31] Nabis and Fauves. Zeichnungen, Aquarel, pastelle aus Schweizer Privatbesitz, Kunsthaus Zurich, Kunsthaus Bremen. KunsthalleBielefeld, Zurich, 1982.

[32] Claire Frèches Thory and Antoine Terrasse, *The Nabis:Bonnard,Vuillard and their Circle*. Paris: Flammarion, 2002. p. 478.

new ideas on theater. He was a student at the dramatic "conservatoire," and was an actor with Antoine's Théâtre Libre.[33] He played an important role in Ibels's eventual involvement with the Théâtre Libre, and later on, with his Théâtre de L'Oeuvre. In his souvenirs, Denis depicted the years 1889-1895 as years of hard work, extensive painting, defining new theories, and artistic and intellectual effervescence.[34]

They all left the Académie Julian in 1890 in an effort to find a way to express themselves on a deeper spiritual level.[35] Their goal was to free art from the structure of the academic environment and to eschew painting confined by traditionalism in order to create artwork that captured the ephemeral nature of life. Above all, they sought to subvert the academic hierarchy, and to fight for the equal place of both decorative and fine arts. Along with his friends, Ibels fought against "meaningless" naturalism, and sought to imbue the work of art with a deeper meaning, beyond the fleeting moment during which the person observing the canvas formulates impressions.

Very early in his career Ibels explored different media ranging from oil, ink, pastel, and sculpture to lithography. He used lithography to create posters that attracted attention and brought him many admirers, among them Achile Rouguet, the founder of *La Revue Méridionale*, who, in the May-June 1905 issue, spoke with great admiration about Ibels and his early years as an artist:

> Banni comme la plupart des artistes créateurs des salons officiels, il (Ibels) envoya au Salon des Indépendants, chez Le Barc de Boutteville, à des expositions particulières, des pages fort expressives. Une de ses peintures eut un succès colossal parmi les amateurs délicats et les ânes qui braient de joie lorsqu'ils passent devant une œuvre; elle faisait voir un gros hercule soulevant une énorme

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[33] George L. Mauner, *The Nabis: Their History and Their Art,1888–1896*. New York : Garland Publishing, Inc.,1978, p. 44.

[34] Maurice Denis, *Le Ciel de l'Arcadie*. p. 212.

[35] Maurice Denis, *Paul Sérusier, sa vie, son oeuvre*, p. 63.

> haltère dans une baraque en toile, avec pour admirateurs, les habituels spectateurs des deux sexes y compris les militaires ahuris, un pitre sec au maillot trop large donnant le signal des bravos, une femme à la poitrine débordante, en tutu jaune, tapant le tambour. Cette interprétation du monde forain, la plus étonnante qu'il m'ait été donné de contempler, réunissant des types aux aspects brute et sentimental, animés par un dessin chercheur d'une audace et d'une énergie rares, au coloris brillant des notes plus vives, justes et harmonieuses, consacrait la renommée de l'artiste.[36]

As is discussed later in this chapter, Achile Rouguet joined many other art critics who recognized the innovativeness of Ibels's style and his particular penchant for depicting the work of the *forains*.

As Achile Rouguet mentioned, Ibels first exhibited in 1891 in the Salon des Indépendants at the Louis le Barc de Boutteville gallery. The exhibition gave the public its first opportunity to see a selection of Ibels's posters, which showed him as a keen observer and brilliant draftsman. The startling force of his different "types" of people in vibrant colors and brilliant compositions were reminiscent of Gauguin but also of Japanese art. The works on display, such as "Bonhomme portant un sac de charbon," showed Ibels's interest in social justice and the conditions of the working class. Another important work from this exhibition is a study of *forains*, which depicts circus grounds and the audience, while the attention is focused on a weightlifter – an "hercule," more fat than strong, in a too-tight maillot that seems to get tighter as he is trying to lift the weight in front of him. Here, the crowd is skillfully positioned on the right side, three people in the center, a quite thin weightlifter waiting for his turn, and two women, all attentively watching the weightlifter. That same year Ibels created a formidable painting of a *forain* titled "L'Haltérophile," in oil on cardboard, in which he shows a weightlifter who, with his back bent, is about to lift the barbell with only one arm. There is no audience, no

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[36] Achile Rouguet, "Henri-Gabriel Ibels," *La Revue Méridionale*, (May, 1905): 6.

stage, and all we see is the weightlifter. In his article on Ibels, Charles Saunier commented about this painting:

> L'attention se fixe sur l'hercule central entouré de ses poids. Son maillot se tend, trop étroit sur ses formes adipeuses, les jambes s'équilibrent, prêtes à subir, les muscles des bras se gonflent, la face apoplectique halète.[37]

Saunier states that Ibels uses the same image for a later project - a painted fan, shown at the Salon des Indépendants in 1892. In her book *Symbolistes et Nabis: Maurice Denis et son temps,* Agnès Delannoy emphasizes the synthetic quality of this painting in which the outlining of the body has a purely decorative purpose.[38] The same grouping of spectators on the right side of the fan and of performers in the middle and on the left, can be seen in the study for a fan "L'éventail du Cirque," in *Les Demi-Cabots*. The audience, the exiting performers and managers are grouped on one side, while a female dancer and two male figures, one of them a Pierrot, are about to join her on the other side.[39]

On Ibels's passion for the circus as well, Thadée Natanson wrote:

> Ibels passait beaucoup de temps au cirque ou y entrait pour une heure. Il y a trouvé le point de départ de nombre de ses dessins ou de ses tableaux et il atteint dans des profils de paillasse et de chevaux de voltage ou de gymnastes, à un style. Or il aimait l'endroit pour lui-même, ainsi qu'il en aimait les odeurs de piste ou d'écurie et n'y cherchait jamais l'extraordinaire comme un autre qui serait venu exprès. Il goûtait le cirque le plus quotidien à la façon d'un habit.[40]

The posters showing Ibels's evocative rendering of the daily life of circus performers are close in intent to many Japanese prints, especially those of Harunobu, which depict simple and somewhat melancolic figures. These prints empowered Ibels

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[37] Charles Saunier, « Henri-Gabriel Ibels, *» La Plume*, (January 18829) : 31.

[38] Agnès Delannoy, *Symbolistes et Nabis: Maurice Denis et son temps*, Paris: Somogy, 1996, p. 81.

[39] Ibels, *Les Demi-Cabots*, p. 150.

[40] Thadée Natanson, *Peints à leur tour*, Paris: A. Michel, 1948, p. 292-293.

with a new sense of graphic abstraction based on simple forms, and with a focus on line, which marked the beginning of his strong, vigorous and uncompromising style of startling force and bold composition, which was always different from the style and choice of subject favored by the rest of the Nabis. Indeed, his choice of subject matter did not go unnoticed. Achile Rouguet, thus commented on Ibels's interest in the life of ordinary people:

> J'ai encore présents à mon souvenir, parmi ses premières lithographies, la belle affiche de Mévisto, ayant au premier plan le chanteur qui observe sous un ciel gris qu'enfument des cheminées d'usine, un travailleur de terre dans un champ, courbé par le labeur, un militaire endimanché promenant sur la route qui borde le champ, un ouvrier fumant sa pipe, assis dans l'herbe des fortifs; ensuite ce dessin du Messager français représentant une grosse fille en chemise dans sa chambre aidant un troubade [sic.] à ceinturer sa capote « j'ai un fils comme toi soldat !» dit-elle avec amour; enfin ce pastel où une femme du peuple pressant son enfant contre le sein veut lui donner tout ce qu'il peut contenir. Ces œuvres d'une belle simplicité, prises au hasard parmi les plus anciennes, témoignaient d'un ami de l'humanité et d'un grand artiste.[41]

This last drawing from le *Messager français* also appeared in the February 15, 1893 issue of *La Plume* with the caption, "Mon fils est soldat comme toi."[42] (figure 6) His poster of Mévisto, further described in the chapter on Ibels and the Printed Media, brought him considerable recognition and placed him, according to Saunier, at the very top among the French poster artists at the time, along with Toulouse-Lautrec:

> Jusqu'alors l'affiche avait été simplement attrayante. M Chéret, puis MM Bonnard, Denis en avaient extrait la joie, la séduction. Il appartenait à M. Ibels et aussi à M. de Toulouse-Lautrec, de lui donner une signification plus élevée, d'en faire une satire de moeurs, un réquisitoire contre la société plutocrate.[43]

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[41] *La Revue Méridionale*, p. 6.
[42] *La Plume*, 92 (Feb. 15, 1893): 76.
[43] Charles Saunier 32.

Saunier was one of the art critics who closely followed Ibels's career from the very beginning. In 1892 he wrote an article in which he spoke about the difference between Ibels's and Toulouse-Lautrec's style:

> Ibels et de Toulouse-Lautrec peignent les vices et les ridicules de leur temps. Observateurs subtils, ils notent de fugitives impressions qui, réduites après réflexion à l'essentiel, motivent de curieuses toiles: tandis que M. De Toulouse-Lautrec se confine dans l'étude des viveurs et des filles, M. Henri-Gabriel Ibels s'applique à rendre le caractère de types très divers: banquistes, soldats, bourgeois, travestis. Ce monde traduit dans ses habitudes les plus spéciales, vit, étonne sous les accentuations voulues de l'artiste.[44]

The critic recognizes the fact that Ibels focuses on the peripatetic existence of many of his subjects, and that for him, what they do counts less, while they themselves are all-important, especially in their off-work moments. From very early on in his career Ibels's innate compassion compelled him to observe and use the full spectrum of the human condition and his life and work reflected that compassion.

A Decade of Fervent Activity

Thanks to the invitation secured by Denis, the group's first exhibition was organized at the famous château in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, from August 1 to September 30, 1891.[45] The mere fact that this was organized independently from the official Salon made this exhibition important. Ibels submitted an oil painting, a pastel, and two ink etchings; Bonnard showed an aquarelle and a decorative panel; Ranson, an oil painting and a pastel; Sérusier, an oil painting; Verkade, two oil paintings; Denis, five oil paintings, and a pastel; and Vuillard, two oil paintings and two pastels. The response to the exhibition

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[44] *La Revue Indépendante*, 74 (Dec. 1892): 403-405.

[45] This was a royal palace, home of the kings François I^{er}, Henri II, and birth place of Louis XIV.

was mostly negative, as many found the exhibited artwork sketchy and half-finished, a reaction similar to the initial criticism of the paintings by impressionists that were considered "unfinished and primitive," and, in some cases the result of painter's "mental derangement."[46]

Except for Ibels, the members of the group gradually adopted a more symbolist style. Their paintings and their theoretical commentary show that they stressed color and form and not subject matter. Denis, in his article for the first issue of *the Mercure de France*, another vehicle of publicity for the Nabis, wrote:

> […] avant d'être un cheval de bataille, une femme nue ou une quelconque anecdote, un tableau est essentiellement une surface plane, recouverte de couleurs en un certain ordre assemblées.[47]

This definition of painting complemented the symbolist theory that artists' striving for the universal begins with an idea, and that painting does not imitate anything. This theory prepared the terrain for future artistic movements such as cubism. Decades later, in his *Cahiers 1917-1952*, Georges Braque gave a similar definition, stating that painters do not attempt to reconstruct an anecdote but to establish a pictural fact.[48]

During 1892 and 1893, Ibels was very popular and attracted significant attention as an artist, which prompted the press to take favorable note of him. He took part in the "Commission de Placement" for the Salon des Indépendants of that year, and was very influential and successful in promoting lithography as a means of valid and original artistic expression, and, was finally recognized as someone who, after Daumier, took it up with great conviction, and continued to discover the range of its technical possibilities.

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[46] Emile Cardon, "L'exposition des Révoltés," *La Presse*, Avril 29, 1874.

[47] Maurice Denis, "Definitions du neo-Traditionnisme," *Art et Culture*, August 23 and 30, 1890, Reprinted in *Théories,* p. 1.

[48] Georges Braque, *Cahiers 1917-1952*, Paris, N.R.F. Gallimard, 1952, p.13.

There were two articles that testified to the extent of Ibels's popularity at that time. In the foreword to *l'Estampe et l'Affiche*, André Mellerio wrote about Ibels's omnipresence in the artistic world of fin-de-siècle Paris: « Ibels est partout : dans l'affiche, l'illustration de journal ou de livre, dans les programmes du Théâtre Libre."[49] In his article in *La Plume*, published in conjunction with a one-man show of Ibels's work held at the Salon des Cent, Charles Saunier went so far as to compare Ibels's rare attention to life and movement to the great masters, Leonardo da Vinci and Rembrandt, for his

> [...] rare souci de vie et de mouvement, que peu eurent, fait beaucoup présager de M. Ibels. Ses procédés sont ceux des plus grands : de Leonard de Vinci et de Rembrandt, plus récemment de Daumier et de Degas. Aussi sera-t-il permis de trouver quelque parenté entre un croquis de ces maîtres et telle recherche de M. Ibels. Comme eux, aussi, ses investigations ne se bornent pas aux seuls êtres coudoyés en la vie, mais aux objets, aux paysages ; d'où, une œuvre très diversifiée, interprétée à l'huile, au pastel, à l'eau forte : par la lithographie, la sculpture, l'affiche.[50]

This encomium was a way for the critic to introduce Ibels as one of the "masters" and to recognize his work as a dialogical artifact, to borrow Mikhail Bakhtin's term. The comparison with Da Vinci and Rembrandt points to Ibels's sensibility to the medium, his stylistically diversified œuvre, his aptitude to explore several different forms of artistic expression, and to apply to his lithographic work the craft of the painter and draftsman.[51] This entire article summarizes the high esteem Ibels's contemporaries expressed for his work, and by comparing him with his famous contemporary, Daumier, for instance, it asserts his ideological and artistic contribution to the genre of caricature. It also asserts that succeeding in this genre is reserved to only a few of the greatest talents. It is quite possible that Ibels saw an exhibition organized in 1888 at the famous École des Beaux-

[49] André Mellerio, *L'Estampe et l'affiche*, vol.1, 1897. (foreword)

[50] Saunier 30.

[51] It is interesting to note that the majority of sources that mention Ibels base their information on the content of this five-page article.

Arts on "Les Maîtres de la caricature française au XIX^{e} siècle," an important retrospective that confirmed the place of caricature in the arts. The exhibition was, in general, an homage to Honoré Daumier (1808-1879) to whom Ibels was often compared throughout his lifetime because of his tireless and extremely prolific work in the domain of social and political caricature. The plurivocality and polyfocality of Ibels's drawings prompt viewers to ask themselves "who is talking?" Being a man of his time, he brings difficulty of interpretation to caricature, which as a genre, is characterized by its metadiscursive and metaiconic effects, because its purpose is to emphasize stereotypes and codes while using irony or ambiguity. This aesthetic or, rather, this pragmatic (in the linguistic sense of the word), leads us to Mikhail Bakhtin and his desire to end the ideological distinction between content and form, expressed in traditional stylistics. In this manner, Bakhtin focuses on romantic discourse as a phenomenon that is pluristylistic, plurivocal and plurilingual. The suggestion can be applied to the fine arts, and sheds light on the question of biography and the notion of point of view.[52] Thus, according to Bakhtin,

> Le véritable milieu de l'énoncé" [in this case, I suggest,Ibels's oeuvre] "là où il vit et se forme, c'est le polylinguisme dialogisé, anonyme et social comme le language, mais concret, mais saturé de contenu, et accentuée comme un enoncé individuel [...] Un énoncé vivant, significativement surgi à un moment historique et dans un milieu social déterminés ne peut manquer de toucher à des milliers de fils dialogiques vivants, tissés par la conscience socio-idéologique autour de l'objet de tel énoncé et de participer activement au dialogue social. Du reste, c'est de lui que l'énoncé est issu: il est comme sa continuation, sa réplique, il n'aborde pas l'objet en arrivant d'on ne sait où. [...] Au lieu de la plénitude inépuisable de l'objet lui-même, le prosateur découvre une multitude de chemins, routes, sentiers, tracés en lui par sa conscience sociale.[53]

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[52] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Esthétique et théorie du roman*, Paris: Gallimard, 1975, p. 96 and 99-103.

[53] Bakhtin 96.

In the arts, Bakhtin's "parole vivante"[54] can be interpreted as the notion of the point of view. His "duality" opposes two concepts of the artistic creation. First, as in the case of Ibels, his world is seen from his point of view. The second concept makes Ibels a man of his time or a man from a social class (proletarian or bourgeois), of which his oeuvre is a reflection. This dualistic vision is deeply rooted in the study of art history. Ibels becomes the one who talks from the point of view of a social advocate, and his commentary is void of all political suspicion, because his view is at the same time natural, evident, and universal, such as the view of Rembrandt or Michelangelo. This naturalization of the point of view is situated precisely as the opposite of the social and historic perspective and represents Ibels's work as a "dialogical artifact," to borrow Bakhtin's term.[55]

Art for All

One idea that all the Nabis shared, and that prompted them to explore the possibilities of lithography, was their desire to make art affordable for all - the idea inspired by the teachings of William Morris that led them to turn more and more to the decorative use of art, as well as creating posters. Together with Chéret, Lautrec, Willette, Steinlen and others, their activity in this domain marked the last decade of the nineteenth century as a "mouvement des affiches." In this domain, Ibels held a prominent place among his fellow artists. He used lithography for posters and theater programs, as he had indeed become involved in the theater very early, first with Lugné-Poë, and then with André Antoine and Firmin Gémier. His longest collaboration was with Antoine who often called upon Ibels to work on plays. Other Nabis sent different projects to Antoine that he did not accept:

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[54] Bakhtin 170.

[55] Bakhtin *174.*

Bonnard suggested two projects for programs that were never executed, and Vuillard sent him numerous projects out of which he accepted only one.[56] Their style was more symbolist at the time, and not suited for the mostly naturalistic plays that Antoine staged. Ibels's involvement in the theater led him to master completely different skills, that of a theater decorator, scene painter and costume designer, who had to work fast, for immediate effect and often on a large scale.

The collaboration of Ibels and the other members of the Nabis group was intensive during this early period. In its September 15, 1891 issue, *La Plume* published drawings by Ibels and Denis. It reproduced Ibels's drawing dedicated to Emmanuel Signoret, a young poet (1872-1900) who lived and died in poverty and misery. A few months later, friend, patron, and important supporter of the Nabis, Thadée Natanson invited the group to exhibit at the *Revue Blanche*, in November of 1891.[57] In his book *Peints à leur tour*, he wrote about Ibels with admiration and understanding, and commented on his often brusque personality:

> Il y avait dans l'allure d'Ibels un peu de raideur et parfois de brusquerie. L'oeil vif, les lèvres minces, en entier tout effilé, gaiment il venait et d'un pas preste à ses amis, ne prenant le temps de souffler un mot ou deux, ou de rire, les yeux plus plissés que fermés, et avait aussi vite fait d'aller porter un peu plus loin son accent où riait celui des faubourgs et sursautaient des saillies assez souvent savoureuses. Pour venir et repartir il était assez souvent en mouvement et assez peu restait en place pour que fît partie de son accent le cri de cuir de ses souliers. Il était susceptible. Pour un rien, blanchissait de colère, mais plus d'une fois un éclat de rire emportait ce qui serait resté de l'orage menaçant. [...] Mais ses croquis ni ses légendes ne manquaient pas pour cela de mordant, encore moins de la coquetterie de l'aigrette de leur courage.[58]

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[56] Arthur Ellridge, *Gauguin et les Nabis*, p. 156.

[57] Letter from Ranson to Verkade [November 1891] Mauner, 1978, appendix no IV, p. 277.

[58] Thadée Natanson, *Peints à leur tour*, Paris: A. Michel, 1948, p. 86.

The fertile collaboration between the Nabis in 1891 was crowned by an exhibition of the impressionist and symbolist painters organized in December at the gallery Le Barc de Boutteville. Ibels displayed three works: two paintings and one etching.[59] The press took notice and *L'EnDehors*'s critic Christophe [sic], talked favorably about Ibels's exhibited artwork:[60]

> De M. H.G. Ibels, très intelligent dessinateur du *Messager français*, fameux depuis peu, par son "Scandale dans la salle" du Théâtre d'Art: Paysage, des Pommes, la Bonne Dame, eau-forte, deux dessins ingénieux, d'un spirituel crayon ou d'un pinceau entendu.

Ibels simultaneously worked on the scenery for the dramatic trilogy by Camile Mauclair, Stuart Merrill, and Adolphe Retté shown at the Théâtre d'Art on December 11, 1891 where he collaborated with Bonnard and Vuillard.[61]

The beginning of 1892 was marked by an outbreak of anarchist attacks in Paris. The unrest of that winter was indeed just the beginning of a long decade of political turmoil in France. The anarchists threw bombs at cafés, restaurants, the Paris Stock Exchange, and the homes of the judges and prosecutors responsible for sending their comrades to jail. On March 30, one of the anarchist leaders, Ravachol,[62] was arrested and condemned to death for murders, bombings, and robbery, and was guillotined on July 10

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[59] "Impressionnistes et Symbolistes," *Journal des Artistes*, 27 December 1891, p. 390. Vuillard showed two paintings; Ranson one painting, Denis three paintings; Bonnard one painting and four decorative panels; and Denis, three paintings.

[60] Christophe, *L'EnDehors,* 34 (Dec. 27, 1891) (No page numbers given). *L'EnDehors* was an anarchist newspaper founded in 1891 by the satirist and journalist, Zo d'Axa.

[61] Phillip Dennis Cate. *The Circle of Toulouse-Lautrec*, An Exhibition of the Work of the Artist and his Close Associates, Rutgers: Rutgers Press, 1985, p. 125.

[62] Jean Grave condemned the extreme violence incited by Ravachol. He declared "He is not one of us and we repudiate him." Cited in Robert Hunter,*Violence and the Labor Movement*, New York: Macmillian Company, 2010, p. 81.

of the same year.[63] Ibels was already involved, lending his talent as an artist to anarchist journals and anarchist leaders' projects. At the same time he continued to exhibit alongside the Nabis. That year he had several exhibitions. One (March-April) took place at the Salon des Indépendants, with Anquetin, Bonnard, Lautrec, and Bernard. He presented ten works from his Café-Concert series, plus an oil painting, and was chosen to be a member of the hanging committee.[64] The other Nabis were also present. In *La Vie Artistique*, the critic Geffroy reported on this exhibition, which attracted many artists who liked the idea of showing their artwork in a place where there were no awards or honorable mentions:

> L'Exposition ne contient pas moins de douze cent trente-deux numéros, et c'est dire que, même au point de vue de nombre, elle fait une sérieuse concurrence aux deux Salons.[65]

Ibels also showed a fan with the drawing of "Hercule" that he reprinted from the previous year, and a still life that reminded many of Cézanne's work. On a crumpled tablecloth, it featured a bottle, several apples with golden overtones, and a knife.[66] He also showed pastels studies of wrestlers, lithographs and two etchings titled "Bonne dame," and "Femme couchée." (figure 7) In May 1892 he participated in the Second Exhibition of the Impressionist and Symbolist painters at the Barc de Bouteville's gallery, where he exhibited two prints and two wax sculptures. He did not, however, participate in the Second Exposition des Beaux-Arts at Saint-Germain en Laye, on August 14, 1892, in

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[63] This tumultuous period culminated in June 1894 with the assassination of President Sadi Carnot.

[64] Ranson showed 7 paintings, one of which was titled *Le Nabi*, and a painted fan; Verkade, three paintings and a for a restaurant menu.

[65] Geffroy, *La Vie Artistique*, March-April, 1892: 371.

[66] Saunier 31.

which his friends Bonnard, Vuillard, Ranson, Sérusier, and Denis showed their work. It is possible that the reason for this was that he actively worked on programs for the Théâtre Libre 1892/1893 season. On the other hand, he continued his participation at the Third Exposition of the Impressionist and Symbolist painters, back at Le Barc de Bouteville's gallery (November 1892), where he showed four works, including one original for the program of the Théâtre Libre.[67] One of the most famous art critics of that time, Gustave Geffroy, commented on this exhibition and Ibels's design for the program.[68]

> [...] L'assistance est nombreuse, puisqu'il y a cent-vingt-dix numéros au catalogue. Elle est aussi un peu mêlée, et tous les exposants ne sont pas les servants de la même chapelle, puisque voici des néo-impressionnistes tels que MM. Angrand et Lucien Pissarro, - un observateur très doué et très violent de la basse humanité, tel que M. de Toulouse-Lautrec, un paysagiste de Bercy et de la Bastille tel que M. Schlaich, un incertain tel que M. Anquetin. Voici également Chéret avec un Clown, et Willette avec un archange d'un mysticisme un peu douteux. Le programme pour le Théâtre Libre, de M. Ibels, dont je vois bien le résumé de ligne et la tâche de couleur, ne se réclame guère non plus du symbolisme.

Geffroy commented that the common trait of the exhibited artwork was the desire to reconcile the linear quality of Synthetism with the use of strongly contrasted patches of flat color. He added, however, that there was nothing new in this technique, and that the use of a form-enveloping line could be found in ancient art, especially in the art of Egypt, Greece, as well as the Middle Ages, for example, in stained-glass windows and illuminated manuscripts. We can also find an example of the outlining of the human figure in Japanese art with its single uninterrupted line which surpasses all others in freedom of movement and suppleness. It is true that very early in his career Ibels was

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[67] "Troisième Exposition des Peintres Impressionnistes et symbolistes", *Le Journal*, December 1892. In it, Sérusier had two oil paintings, Ranson three oil paintings and two decorative panels; Vuillard showed five oil paintings, one pastel and one aquarelle; Denis six oil paintings; Bonnard, two panels, one fan, and one oil painting.

[68] Geffroy was one of the first members of L'Académie Goncourt and held the title "Maréchal des lettres." Gustave Geffroy, *La Vie Artistique*, Paris: E. Dentu, (1893): 379-380.

inspired by the Japanese use of the *tâche*, the patch of pure color. He excelled, in the early 1890s at the application of these qualities to his lithographs, oil paintings and drawings. Yet, Geffroy obviously failed to observe the fundamental originality of these works, noted instead by the critic of *Le Nouvel Écho* in his report on the exhibition:[69]

> La troisième Exposition des peintres-impressionnistes et symbolistes [...] est remarquable par ses tendances nouvelles et par les dessinateurs de talent mis au jour qui propagent avec hardiesse les formules jeunes. Signalons particullièrement [...] CHÉRET, rutilant de couleurs joyeuses; MAURICE DENIS, d'une fine mysticité; IBELS, aux palpitantes pierroteries, qui consacre un souvenir ému au pauvre Aurier sur son lit de mort.

This series of back-to-back exhibitions of the Nabis is evidence of the growing curiosity of the art world and of the public in general in response to their art. It resulted in a heightened and prolific output on the part of the young Nabis, and continued into the early months of 1893, compelling Ibels to hire and agent, Edouard Kleinmann, who also represented other caricaturists and illustrators of the day, such as Lautrec, Chéret, Willette, and Steinlen.[70] Prints by Ibels, Bonnard, Ranson, Denis, Roussel, Vallotton, and Vuillard were published in the first issue of the *Estampe Originale*, with a cover by Lautrec.[71]

Ibels exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants in 1893 where he showed six illustrations from his Café-Concert series, and he also submitted his theater program and sheet music covers for the Barc de Bouteville gallery exhibition.[72] May 17, 1893 was the opening night of the Symbolist play *Pelléas and Mélisande* by Maurice Maeterlinck at

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[69] "Échos et nouvelles," *Le Nouvel Écho*, (1. Dec. 1892): 69.

[70] Claude Jeancolas, *La Peinture des Nabis*, Paris: FVW Edition, 2002, p. 206.

[71] *The Studio*, vol. II, (1893): 102-104.

[72] March 18 to April 27, 1893. Dennis Cate, Phillip, *The Circle of Toulouse-Lautrec*, An Exhibition of the Work of the Artist and His Close Associates, Rutgers: Rutgers Press, 1985, p. 125. Vallotton showed two paintings, and several wood engravings; Ranson, two decorative panels; Denis, six paintings and one decorative panel; and Bonnard, four paintings.Lugné-Poë, op. cit. 1930. p. 231.

Lugné-Poë's Théâtre de l'Oeuvre. The play, with its dreamy and other-worldly effects, is about a doomed, forbidden love. The program cover was the creation of Maurice Denis. Ibels, on the other hand, created the program cover for a naturalistic play, *Les Tisserands* (*the Weavers*), by Gerhart Hauptmann at André Antoine's Théâtre Libre.[73] The play, which opened on May 29, was about a subject close to Ibels's heart - Silesian weavers and their fight against the mechanical looms that were increasingly replacing human hands. The following month, the Théâtre Libre showed three plays for which Ibels executed a program cover: *La Belle au bois rêvant* by Mazade, *Mariage d'argent* by Bourgeois, and *Ahasvère* by Heyermans. By this time Ibels's work for the theater assumed a new importance in his art. He worked tirelessly, using every opportunity to show his work alongside his friends, and at the same time, looked for work independently. That year, he married Ida Delaporte, and his bachelor days as a "bohemian" artist without financial pressures would soon be over. However, due to the growing interest in the Nabis work, the demand for longer exhibitions had grown, which subsequently resulted in expanding opportunities for him. The fifth exhibition of the Nabis at Le Barc de Boutteville's gallery was open to the public for three months, from October until December of that year. Ibels showed several diverse pieces - a poster, an original made for the 7th program of the Théâtre Libre, and his "Silhouettes de café concert," a series of drawings on the café-concert theme, reflecting his ever-growing fascination with the world of circus and theater performers.[74]

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[73] Aitken 176.

[74] Ranson showed two oil paintings and one charcoal drawing; Rippl-Rónai, an oil painting and a pencil drawing; Roussel, two oil paintings; Sérusier showed two oil paintings; Vuillard, two oil paintings; Lacombe, two wood sculptures, and Denis, six oil paintings.

Ibels, Bonnard, and Vallotton were asked to contribute drawings for the first issue of the weekly magazine *L'Escarmouche* (November 12, 1893) which, along with *La Plume*, supported the anarchist movement, and subsequently asked Ibels for his contributions.[75] He designed a poster and illustrated the premiere cover that was an immediate success, and which made him one of their most sought-after contributors, along with Lautrec and Anquetin. On November 15, *La Plume* published an issue on French poster art naming Ibels and Toulouse-Lautrec as leaders in the medium.[76] One month later it published Ibels's pencil drawings "Les Amants éternels," and "L'Inquiétude."[77]

A large Ibels retrospective was displayed at the gallery Bodinière from November 6 to December 15, 1894. For the poster that announced the exhibition, Ibels created a brilliant composition that revealed a sophisticated aesthetic, featuring "types" that visitors could expect to see in the show: *forains*, theater performers, singers, pierrots and harlequins. (figure 8) He used light shades of brown, green and yellow that unified the interrelated elements of the composition. The exhibition included drawings, paintings, sculptures, and fans, and was greeted with great enthusiasm and favorable reports. In his *Journal* Edmond de Goncourt wrote: "Du Raffaëlli battu avec du Daumier, et des ressouvenirs d'impressions japonaises, avec quelque chose de macabre qui lui (Ibels) appartient."[78] The most comprehensive account on the extent of Ibels's presence in the

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[75] This weekly magazine stopped being published four months later, on March 16, 1894.

[76] *La Plume*, (November 15, 1893): 475-490. With articles by Roger Marx, J.-K. Huysmans, and others.

[77] *La Plume*, (15 December 1893) : 540.

[78] Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, *Journal. Mémoires de la vie littéraire, 1891-1896*, Tome IV, Paris: Fasquelle et Flammarion, 1956, p. 672. ; In December, *L'Echo de Paris* published a supplement with ten illustrations by Lautrec and Ibels's works from the Café-concert series.

art world in this year comes from Raoul Sertat of the *Revue Encyclopédique*, who wrote a column in the section *Revue Artistique*. He stressed the omnipresence of Ibels on the Parisian art scene as a talented, prolific and inexhaustible artist whose posters covered the streets of Paris, and whose talent, often "rude," becomes softer and takes on the form of "un surcroît d'agrément par l'emploi des tonalités recherchées et délicates.[79] This was a very important article for understanding the extent of Ibels's popularity and how much his work was respected by contemporary art critics.

By the end of 1894, Ibels was spending more time working on lithographs, and with his friend Toulouse-Lautrec, often visited café-concerts, the circus, and popular balls, in pursuit of inspiration - the Moulin Rouge, where la Goulue performed along with Valentin le Désossé; the Mirliton, Aristide Bruant's café, the Divan japonais where Yvette Guilbert sang, and where Jane Avril danced; the Jardin de Paris and l'Olympia, where he could hear Avril's lover, the Irish singer and dancer May Belfort.[80]

The end of the 19th century was a golden age for the illustrated journal in France. This gave the Nabis a very important outlet for their creativity, as evidenced by Bonnard's collaboration with *La Vie moderne* (1894) and *l'Escarmouche* (1893-1894); Ibels's contribution of lithographs and drawings to *L'Escarmouche*, le *Cri de Paris*, *L'Assiette au Beurre*, and many other illustrated journals of that time; and Valloton's work with *Le Rire* (1894-1897), *Le Canard Sauvage* (1903), and *L'Assiette au Beurre* (1901), among others.

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[79] *Revue Encyclopédique*, 97 (1894): 384.

[80] A very informative source on the history of the café-concert is François Caradec and Alain Weill's *Le Café-concert*, Paris: Hachette, 1980. Also, John McCormick, *Popular Theaters of Nineteenth-Century France*, London: Routledge, 1993.

Of all these journals, *La Revue Blanche* was the first to offer the Nabis the opportunity to contribute their lithographs. Its first issue was published in Brussels in 1889, and then in Paris the following year on April 1. Its Parisian founders, the brothers Natanson,[81] found a place for their main offices in the rue des Martyrs, in the middle of Montmartre, the artistic center of Paris.Various issues were illustrated by Vuillard (July-August, 1890), the September issue by Roussel, the October issue by Denis, and Ranson illustrated the November issue.[82] During the 13 years of its existence, poets such as Verlaine and Mallarmé contributed to the journal, along with writers such as André Gide, and Alfred Jarry, as well as composer Claude Debussy, who also wrote theoretical articles on music. As opposed to other avant-garde revues, such as *Le Mercure* and *La Plume*, *La Revue Blanche* was mainly interested in the topic of art, and the artists that it promoted and defended, and who, in return, offered their illustrations. This changed, however, after 1903 when it added columns on politic, history and sports.[83] The Brothers Natanson were part of Ibels's circle of friends that attended the Lycée Condorcet and celebrated the "cult du moi," the individuality and freedom of all artists to create.

The Renaissance of Graphic Arts

During this period France saw a renaissance of the graphic arts, which had been in decline for some 20 years. A need was felt for an organization that could unite these artists under one name. Many such societies were founded during this period, such as

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[81] Alexandre Natanson (1867-1936),Thadée (1868-1951) and Louis-Alfred (1873-1932)

[82] André Mellerio, *Lithographie Originale*, 1898. In 1894, Vuillard contributed to the January issue, Vallotton to the February one, Roussel to April, Sérusier to May, Redon to June, while Ibels illustrated the July issue, Rippl-Ronaï the one for August, Bonnard the September one, Ranson the November one and Denis the December issue.

[83] Venita Datta, *Birth of a National Icon: the Literary Avant-Garde and the Origins of the Intellectual in France,* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999, p. 33.

L'Image, L'Estampe Originale, and L'Imagerie, which also published journals whose columns attracted eminent contributors such as Roger Marx, Lepère, and Remy de Gourmont. Private art collectors, the most prominent being Ambroise Vollard, presented albums of prints to various societies, which, later on, published them. The period of 1890 to 1900 is considered to be crucial for the advances in lithography, the revival of woodcut printing, and to have been the golden era for both techniques. Ibels, more than the other Nabis artists, was responsible for the revival of the graphic arts in France. In this period he seemed to be everywhere where support was needed to revitalize these techniques, and also where those techniques were at the fore. He contributed plates for the 1895 album of the *Revue Blanche*, and later the same year, for Zola's *Germinal*.[84]

As much as Ibels's oil paintings were important for his career, it seems that he was most innovative in the graphic arts, where he found new forms and modified his vision and his skills as an artist. The ensemble of his lithographs and, particularly, his color lithographs, had only a few equivalents at the time, in the work of Bonnard, Vuillard, and Toulouse-Lautrec. His work has been praised by modern art critics such as Alain Weill, who, in 1977, published an article in *Connaissance des arts* titled "Les Affiches des maîtres," in which he discussed the lithographs by the Nabis within the context of the entire history of lithography.[85] The section on the Nabis' posters includes a discussion on the work of Ibels, Vuillard, Vallotton, and Denis. In 1993, François Fossier published an article in the *Nouvelles de l'estampe* entitled, "La Lithographie en couleurs

[84] The Nabis, already famous outside of France, were asked to contribute illustrations to the journal *l'Insel* in Hanover, in 1900.

[85] Alain Weill, Les Affiches des maîtres," *Connaissance des arts*, 307 (Sept. 1977): 101-6.

chez les Nabis," where he discussed the innovativeness of Nabi lithography.[86] Ibels's poster work was examined and praised, as well as the lithographic work by Dennis, Vuillard, Roussel, and Bonnard.

Art critic Claude Jeancolas calls Ibels a "Nabi marginal," for he seemed to be more interested in the political turmoil, the instability within French society, and in theatrical conflicts, than in the "calm, tranquil art" of the rest of the member artists.[87] Jeancolas, however, neglects the fact that Ibels was a founding member of the Nabis, and that he exhibited side by side with the group from their first exhibition at the Gallery of Le Barc de Boutteville in 1892, to their 1899 exhibition at one of the major galleries in Paris at that time, the gallery Paul-Durand Ruel. This political involvement that Jeancolas mentions, in fact, placed Ibels in the ranks of the most socially aware artists of his time, and, according to contemporary critics, as a successor of Daumier. His immense popularity as an observer of everyday life was reflected in a book*, Les Demi-Cabots*, with his illustrations, some of which were created specifically for this volume but many of which were copies of his most successful posters and prints. The book, then, should be considered an anthology of Ibels's work prior to 1896.[88] The text was written by Georges d'Esparbès, André Ibels, Maurice Lefèvre and Georges Montorgueil. The 247- page book contains more than 100 drawings by Ibels that show his trademark simplicity and economy of line. It features the circus and theater worlds, as well as the world of café-concerts. Some are of great beauty, such as the poster for the performance of Irene

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[86] François Fossier, "La Lithographie en couleurs chez les Nabis," *Nouvelles de l'estampe,* 129 (Aug. 1993): 3-10.

[87] Jeancolas 208.

[88] Henri-Gabriel Ibels, *Les Demi-Cabots*, Paris: Charpetier et Fasquelle, 1896, p. 44.

Henry,[89] or the drawing of Mlle Bloch, an actress sporting an army hat and a sword behind her back, in a performance that entertained many. (figure 9) He created this image using the thick, supple, uninterrupted line that complements the ample shape of the actress.

The Influence of Japanese Art

As Ibels and the rest of the Nabis explored new ideas about artistic expression, they found elegance and refinement in Japanese art that was becoming available to the Western public. In France, the influence of Japanese art on 19th-century French artists was beginning to be felt as trade had opened up between Western merchants and the Japanese world.[90] The country had been closed to significant contact with other countries from the 17th to 19th centuries when Commodore Perry brought his ships to Japan in 1853. It was under the rule of the Tokugawa clan, which prohibited any contact with foreign missionaries or traders. Even the presence of a foreign national within the territorial borders of Japan was dealt with harsh sanctions. This prohibition is attributed to fears regarding Christian proselytizing and European political interests. The rulers of Japan feared that either of these two influences might empower some feudal landlords to rebel against them.[91] This policy of isolation lasted more than 200 years.

Under pressure from the imperialist West, mainly the United States, Japan was forced to sign a trade treaty, on very unequal terms, of course, and finally started opening up. Porcelain, prints, and furniture began arriving in Europe and the United States. The

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[89] Ibels, *Les Demi-Cabots*, 82.

[90] On the history of Japan, see Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: from Tokugawa Times to the Present,* New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

[91] Harold Stern, *Master Prints of Japan: Ukiyo-e Hanga*, New York: Abrams, 1969. p. 87.

Universal Exposition of 1867 stimulated the demand for objects of art, and the knowledge about Japan and its culture became more detailed. This, coupled with a new emperor of Japan, allowed the mercantile class to flourish, giving birth to a socially and economically powerful class known as the *Choønin*. As various forms of arts became popular, *ukiyo-e*, a genre of Japanese woodblock prints emerged. Though woodblock prints had existed since the 1600s, Western cultures had not discovered it until the 1860s. *Ukiyo-e*, which literally means "pictures of the floating world," is based on themes from daily life, depicting the physical and cultural landscape of Japan. The prints were a portrayal of the pleasures that helped to relieve the pressures of urban Japanese life.[92]

The first exhibition to display Japanese prints was held at the Paris Universal Exposition in 1867, followed by another exhibition at the Gallery of Georges Petit in 1883. Neither of these exhibitions was as extensive and comprehensive as the one held in 1888 at the gallery of Samuel Bing (1838-1905),[93] an art dealer who played a pivotal role in the distribution of Japanese art throughout Europe. These exhibitions were crucial to the incorporation of Japanese artistic elements in Western art. An exhibition at the École des Beaux Arts in 1890 set off a craze for Japanese prints, even among the general masses. Japanese prints were now available even in French department stores, such as the Bon Marché or Printemps. They were mostly sold as mass-produced, innexpensive illustrated albums and series of prints on particular themes.[94] Phylis Floyd states that whether quality impressions were available in large numbers or not, contemporaneous

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[92] Stern 88.

[93] Samuel Bing is erroneously called Sigfried Bing in many publications and art historical research.

[94] Phylis Floyd, "Documentary Evidence for the Availability of Japanese Imagery in Europe in Nineteenth Century Public Collections," *The Art Bulletin*, 68, 1 (Mar., 1986): 127.

accounts affirm the importance and deep interest that Japanese art, whether in the form of copies or originals, held for French artists.[95]

A turning point for Ibels and his colleagues was an exhibition that took place from January to February 1893 at the gallery Durand-Ruel, with prints by Outamaro and Hiroshige. These works particularly impressed Ibels as he was drawn to their simplicity of expression as well as their authenticity. As his fascination with *Japonisme* grew, Ibels was inspired to create work that could express the emotional content he was trying to achieve. Japanese prints achieved this very effect by dealing in two-dimensional images that were essentially flat in nature. *Ukiyo-e* prints thus used clear color in a flat, opaque and two-dimensional manner. In fact, the flatness in painting, which later became a characteristic feature of the Nabis, was inspired by the *ukiyo-e*.[96] Another key attribute of the Nabis, which was a result of the Japanese influence, was the emphasis on linear configuration.[97] The *ukiyo-e* prints are renowned for their skillful handling of lines using a pointed brush, creating strokes that outline shapes. They also exhibit the absence of a central perspective in the traditional sense of the word, as Japanese artists never used a fixed point or convergence of lines in their work. Adopting this different approach to perspective allowed the Nabis to alter completely the spatial relationship within their work and return to the flat surface of the canvas. This adoption of the innovative style was a rejection of the "illusionism" of European painting. By using different vanishing points in the same painting, they created a completely new space. Bonnard, for example,

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[95] Floyd 127.

[96] Frèches-Thory and Antoine Terrasse*,The Nabis.Bonnard,Vuillard and Their Circle,* New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc, Publishers, 1990.

[97] Further on the Japanese influence on French Art, see Gabriel. P. Weisberg et all, *Japonisme: Japanese Influence of French Art, 1854-1910,* Cleveland Museum of Art, Rutgers University Art Gallery, 1975.

talked about the "vision mobile et variable" of a painting, which was a striking contrast with the fixed vision of the central perspective of European paintings in the past.[98] It is also interesting to note that both the *ukiyo-e* artists and the Nabis used intricate sets of symbols and icons. Maurice Denis wrote, "Lord, we are only a few young fellows, devotees of the Symbol, misunderstood by the world, which mocks us: Mystics! Lord, I pray, may our reign come to pass."[99] This pursuit would eventually lead them toward a sense of abstraction.

Using bold, strong colors and intense lines, the Nabis typically applied thick layers of paint and distinctive brushstrokes to their canvases. They also brought about some rather radical changes in the materials on which they painted. Instead of standard canvas they used cardboard or even velvets. The close association that the Nabis developed with the Japanese prints can be shown by the fact that they possessed a rich collection of *ukiyo-e* paintings themselves. Vuillard alone owned some 190 Japanese prints, some of which he had on the walls of his house.[100]

The Nabis were also impressed by Japanese painters' representation of kneeling women and their bent hips, with their torso leaning forward. The thick line, or arabesque, that Ibels adopted from the Japanese, and that outlined the figures in his drawings, provided a sense of volume and depth, as he was searching for a curve that could confer some plasticity to his drawings. Instead of modeling the figures with light and shadows, he focused on a line which, by its own movement, gave a projection of volume to the flat surface. In a simple line drawing, included in *Les Demi-Cabots*, a generously

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[98] Quoted and translated in Frèches-Thory et all, p. 177.

[99] Gloria Groom, *Beyond the Easel*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001, p. 214.

[100] Groom 115.

proportioned actress struts with her hips and her bust jutting forward, gesturing with her satin-gloved hands.[101] The thick arabesque that outlines her floor-length gown suggests a dynamic sweep downstage. Another feature of Japanese prints that Ibels most likely studied was their ability to make calligraphy a compatible element in their design, a skill he used for his many posters and theater programs.

Ibels and Samuel Bing

While the Nabis certainly contributed to the conversion of the Japanese aesthetic into a decorative one, they were not mainly responsible for it. The main contributor to this movement was Samuel Bing (1838-1905), the Jewish -German entrepreneur who was living in France at that time. During his visit to New York in early 1894, he met with the glassmaker Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933), whose work he found to be modern and his techniques innovative, and he decided to introduce them to the French market. He promoted the integration of the arts and crafts, in the same way that William Morris did in England. While Morris found inspiration in medieval art, Bing was inspired by the Japanese arts and crafts, and he visited Japan on several occasions.[102] With Tiffany, Bing discussed the possibility of commissioning young French avant-garde artists for the purpose of producing stained glass windows. When he went back to France he immediately contacted Ibels who told him about his aesthetic ideas and those of his Nabis friends as suitable for stained glass windows. Ibels immediately informed his friends about this exciting opportunity.

In his letter to Denis of May1894, Vuillard reports on this event:

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[101] *Les Demi-Cabots*, 35.
[102] Groom 115.

> Here is a proposition which comes from Ibels. He has made the acquaintance of Bing, the merchant of curios who would like to present, in France, with the help of artists/decorators, a special type of colored glass where one can achieve all kinds of color, including gradations in the same color while the glass remains transparent. He has, at his home, samples of this type of glass and samples by artists of the country (who are Americans). Ibels has told him about all of us and Bing is waiting to show us samples. He would take it upon himself to have our sketches executed because the fabrication itself is a secret which they will not divulge. Would you like to come to see it? It might interest you. All of us have made an appointment at about 3PM in my studio. Come, since it should interest you and Bonnard most of all. [103]

Many drawings were sent to Bing who gave the artists instructions on how to render their designs, taking into account the special properties of Tiffany glass, but the final choice was left to Tiffany. The artists used heavy black lines to outline elements of their compositions. All the preparations were completed by October, and the project was underway. By March 1895, eleven windows were ready, among them "L'Été," based on Ibels's drawing. (figure 10) Information on how many windows were returned to France varies. [104] Some sources state it was eleven, and some thirteen. *The Revue des arts décoratifs* (issue 1894-1895), reported from Le Salon du Champ-de-Mars (mid-April 1895) on eleven Tiffany stained glass windows created by the French artists, among them, Ibels. These windows were: "La Cascade" by Besnard; "La Moisson fleurie" by Paul Ramon ; "Le Jardin" by Roussel ; "La Maternité" by Bonnard; "Iris, Roseaux" by M. P.-A. Isaac ; "L'Été" by Ibels ; "Les Marronniers" by Vuillard ; "un Paysage" by M. Maurice Denis ; "Papa Chrysanthème" by de Toulouse-Lautrec; and "Une Parisienne" by Vallotton.[105]

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[103] Letter translated and quoted by Gabriel Weisberg, *Art Nouveau Bing*, Paris: style 1900, New York, 1986, chapter 2., p. 49.From the Family Archives of Maurice Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye.

[104] Groom 116.

[105] Weisberg,51-52.

The reviews were mixed. Some applauded the originality of the project and the richness of the colors, and some found the style too primitive.[106] The critics from the *Revue des arts décoratifs* wrote unfavorable reviews of the Tiffany windows, and referred to them as having a "caractère hasardeux." *L'Art Moderne*, on the other hand, raved about the beauty of the windows and looked forward to future collaboration between the French artists and Tiffany. However, this was the only project of this kind and it was never repeated. Among those who applauded were also Jacques-Émile Blanche who called Tiffany the "hero of the exhibition," and Roger Marx who praised their "jewel-like" qualities.[107] Except for Besnard, an artist whose work Bing collected, and Isaac, a fabric designer, all of the artists were members of the Nabis group.[108]
On December 26, 1895, Samuel Bing organized the inaugural exhibition in his newly built gallery – the Salon de l'Art Nouveau, which remained open to the public until January 1896. The catalogue from this exhibition lists Ibels as Henri-Guillaume Ibels, and his 6 works of art as: "Chanteuse de café-concert," ink, "Soldats au Cabaret," pastel, "Paysage," "Maternité," La Charrette de blé" (medium not mentioned).[109] Along with Ibels, windows by Ranson, Roussel, Vallotton, Toulouse-Lautrec, Vuillard, and Bonnard were shown. The entire gallery was redesigned to accommodate these seven windows.

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[106] Jacques Emile Blanche, "Les Objets d'art I, au Salon du Champ-Mars," *Revue Blanche* 8, 43 (15 May 1895): 466.

[107] Weisberg 51.

[108] Salon de l'Art nouveau: [Galerie Samuel Bing, 26 décembre 1895-janvier 1896]: premier catalogue, [peintures, pastels, aquarelless, dessins] . Paris: imp. de Chamerot et Renouard, 1896.

[109] Only three windows survived - by Toulouse-Lautrec, Bonnard, and Roussel, and they were purchased by the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Paris, at the Bing sale, Paris, Hôtel Druot, 26 May 1909, in Groom p. 265. Today, only a few windows have survived - those by Bonnard and Toulouse-Lautrec.

It is not known exactly why the collaboration between Tiffany and the Nabis did not continue. It is possible that the artists were either not satisfied with how their work appeared in its final form or they simply moved on to different projects. The medium of stained glass perhaps was not entirely suited to their styles or to the needs of their patrons. Soon after, the group abandoned creating decorative objects in general, and went back, in Ibels's case, to painting, working for the theater, and poster making. His political involvement added the "puissance" and "combativité" to his art, to borrow expressions used by a journalist fo*r L'Ère Nouvelle* in an article titled "La Rosette de H.G. Ibels," published to commemorate Ibels's receiving the Legion of Honor. In this article filled with superlatives in describing Ibels's work and character, the journalist added:

> Ibels fit alors preuve d'autant de courage que de talent. Il est voué d'instinct aux causes justes, aux idées généreuses, mais dangereuses. [...] Il se fit d'indestructibles amitiés, il souleva autour de lui quelques bonnes colères.[...] L'ivresse politique n'empêcha point Ibels de construire une oeuvre splendide. [...] Force, simplicité, l'humanité, telles sont les qualités de son oeuvre. [110]

As a period of theorizing, work, and excitement, Ibels's collaboration with the other members of the Nabis group was intensive, especially during the first eight years. He continued to work for the theatre, and was more engaged in the political scene, contributing mostly to anarchist journals, as well as illustrating many books and sheet music. In his book on Vuillard, John Russell states that it is important to realize that in groups such as the Nabis, it was the "less original minds who clung to their group status, while the livelier and more independent natures took what they needed from it and went

[110] *L'Ère Nouvelle*, (November, 1927). NP.

off on their own."[111] Like other Nabis, Ibels undoubtedly learned much from Japanese art with respect to form. He was different from the rest of the group in his choice of themes but also in the fact that he placed more value on anecdotal and literary content than on decorativeness. Finally, in Nabi painting overall, the individual is not developed much at all, while Ibels emphasized psychological characterization.

Ibels's last exhibition with the Nabis was at the gallery Durand-Ruel in 1899. This exhibition was organized by Paul Signac in homage to Odilon Redon, and was considered a sign of considerable success for the Nabis, since they were now able to exhibit in a major gallery, and alongside better-known avant-garde artists.[112] Mellerio commented that the exhibition brought out the sum of all contemporary trends.[113] He further states that the exhibition was divided in three rooms with Ibels, Denis, Roussel, Ranson, Rippl-Rónai, Roussel, Sérusier, Vallotton, Hermann-Paul and Vuillard in one, called "Poetic Symbolists." Redon and the mystical-spiritual Rosicrucians were in the "Rose + Croix" room, that included Filiger, Bernard, La Rochefoucauld, and others; and the group in the third room called "Neo-Impressionist painters," included Signac and the Belgian painter Van Rysselberghe.

The year 1900 found Ibels engulfed in the Dreyfus Affair, and though artistically he was no longer connected with the rest of the Nabis group, their lives intertwined as they maintained their personal relationships, and in the case of Ibels, Vuillard and Lautrec, family relationships. Vuillard was godfather to Ibels's eldest son, and Toulouse-Lautrec godfather to his younger son. The War of 1914 separated Ibels from Vuillard,

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[111] John Russell, *Edouard Vuillard*, 1868-1940, London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1971, p. 16.

[112] Paris: Galeries Durand-Ruel, Exposition, exh. Cat. With preface by André Mellerio (10-31 Mar., 1899)

[113] Groom 31.

and we know that in 1934 he wrote that he had not seen his friend for twenty years due to the "guerre imbécile." He respected the admirable nature of the man who "never worried about money." Vuillard lived with his mother and his sister who took care of him and made sure he was always free to devote himself to his work. "Sauf pour acheter des couleurs et assister aux concerts du dimanche," wrote Ibels, "Vuillard ne savait ou ne se souciait pas de savoir à quoi pouvait servir l'argent."[114] Since K. X. Roussel married Vuillard's sister, Ibels says that he, too, lived and worked in a serene and calm environment. This calmness and "sérénité antique," was a dominant feature in his work.

> [...] il est le seul peintre que je connaisse dans l'histoire de l'Art qui, sans sujet, sans littérature, ait, par la seule magie de ses couleurs évoque l'harmonieux paysage hellénique tel que nous nous le figurons d'après les descriptions d'Homère, de Pindare, ceux de la Pleïade.[115]

The two friends, Ibels and Roussel, separated after a falling-out regarding their collaboration on the play "Pénélope" by Gabriel Fauré. Roussel complained that Ibels, while working on the costumes for the play, did not take into account his decor, a mistake Ibels admitted in his *Promenades*, where he expressed sincere regret that his disregard caused the two friends to part.

However, Ibels remained close friends with Bonnard, whose talent he admired. In *Promenade*s, he wrote:

> Par ses tableaux récents, actuellement exposés, je constate que l'acuité de sa vision n'a pas varié - qu'il a conservé la même compréhension du sujet toujours si bien enveloppé de son atmosphère intime. Que ce soit le corps d'une femme, un bouquet de fleurs, le coin d'une ferme, ou d'un bois, celui d'un salon parisien ou d'une basse cour - tout lui est familier - et nous y retrouvons tous le souvenir de nos intimes sensations.[116]

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[114] Ibels, *Promenades*, 9.
[115] Ibels, *Promenades*, 11.
[116] Ibels, *Promenades*, 12.

Till the last days of his life he remained close friends with Maurice Denis for whom he had great admiration. Several letters written to Denis during his last years are a proof of this long-lasting friendship, and mutual admiration.[117] He said that Denis was born to decorate the church and the theater, emphasizing the rare intelligence and talent of an artist who was able, with the same fervor, to paint both profane and religious themes.

In the 1920s, Ibels lectured in Parisian schools and museums, some of those lectures being on the group he was part of three decades previously. In 1929, the public was able to subscribe to a series of three of his lectures, which turned out to be very popular. The topics were: "L'art de reconnaître les styles, architecture et mobilier; L'histoire de l'art - Peinture - Sculpture."[118] In 1930 he also held a series of lectures at the Musée du Luxembourg on Les Nabis.[119]

While reminiscing on the years spent in collaboration with the Nabis, Ibels expressed regret for his being drawn away from his friends:

> C'est toujours avec une grande émotion que je revois au Musée du Luxembourg "l'Hommage à Cézanne" de Maurice Denis. Dans cette oeuvre (qui un jour trouvera sa place au Musée du Louvre, non loin de celle de "l'Hommage à Manet" de Fantin-Latour) Maurice Denis a groupé, devant le Maître d'Aix, quelques-uns des prinicpaux nabis. Pourquoi ne suis-je parmi eux? C'est ma faute, ma très grande faute! Parce que qu'à leur milieu sage et calme, j'ai préféré la turbulence des luttes politiques à côté d'un Briand, et des batailles théâtrales auprès d'un Antoine et d'un Gémier.[120]

Prolific and curious to try his skills in various media, Ibels produced work of biting realism, but while his friends continued to develop their painting, he ventured into

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[117] These letters were provided to me by Madame Marie El Caïdi, Attaché de Conservation at the Cente de documentation of the Musée Departemental Maurice Denis in St Germain-en-Laye.

[118] *La Semaine à Paris,* 4-11 (January, 1929): 114.

[119] *La Semaine à Paris,* 416 (1930): 4

[120] Ibels, *Promenades*, 5.

exploring the possibilities of lithography, poster art, theater, and furthering his political involvement which culminated in 1894, with the onset of the Dreyfus Affair.

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CHAPTER II

Ibels and Printed Media

At the time when Ibels became interested in lithography, advances in the dynamic technological and cost effectiveness of photomechanical reproduction were largely being encouraged by relaxed printing and press laws. The addition of verbal messages to the art of lithography created an expanding need for a new form of advertising that in return made the development of that printing medium very profitable while creating additional venues for artists. Ibels was enthusiastic about the technique of lithography which he embraced very early in his career, and which led him to early recognition as an artist. He actively worked on developing its syntax by tirelessly working on posters and illustrations for numerous Parisian theaters, journals, advertising and art exhibitions.

This chapter will not attempt to give a full account of the totality of Ibels's work, but rather, offer an analysis of the interplay between his artistic endeavors and the socio-political situation that influenced them, all of which marked his substantial contribution to various trends in the arts in late nineteenth-century France that have been largely neglected.

Besides lithography, drawing became very important for Ibels, not just as a means to work out the composition of a painting, but as a medium in its own right. As a result, as we will see in this chapter, his ubiquity in Parisian journals (for which he earned the nickname "Le Nabis journaliste,") as a caricaturist, political commentator, and illustrator of song sheets, was remarkable. He focused on drawing because he could capture the essence of a scene unfurling in front of him in a short amount of time. In this manner, he was able to portray actual Paris life and the movement of the people he used as the subject matter for his drawings, without having to freeze them into artificial poses. He brought this same sense of immediacy to his printmaking, which enabled him to radically contribute to fresh departures in the history of the medium.

Ibels's Work with Posters

As printing became less expensive and techniques for including illustrations in the posters were discovered, it is no surprise that the uses of illustrated posters expanded. The economic boom during the Restoration (1814-1830) was accompanied by the larger production of commercial posters, especially during the period during the Second Restoration and leading to the 1848 Revolution.

John-Grand Carteret who chronicled the life of the nineteenth-century Paris, stated that by 1840 posters covered literally all the walls of Paris, and that, in order to control where they were posted, the city government ordered the first "murs pignons," or poster columns to be erected around the city.121 The Dépôt Légal Statute required that a copy of all printed material be deposited in the National Library.

For centuries the entire process of printing was performed by skilled printmakers, and not artists. It was only at the beginning of the 19th century that artists deliberately attempted to make the poster a work of art, an expression of their vision that directly communicated with an audience. Judging from the extremely large number and high artistic quality of the posters from this period, it is quite clear that applying his talent to posters was not unfavorable to the self-esteem even of a great artist. His task was not just to provide a decorative touch but to use his talent and imagination to call attention to the value of an object. His success was directly linked to his ability to assist the advertising process, and he therefore had to constantly keep in mind what it was that he was helping sell. For those reasons, the most talented artists decided to become involved with poster art, agreeing to work within the strict constraints imposed on them in the production of an illustrated poster. They were testing the limits of painting, as well as the ground for new ideas that were not so readily acceptable, for instance, in art schools, salons or other art establishments. The result of their talent and enthusiasm was that color and interest were added to the street, and for inventive artists such as Ibels, the real attraction was the complexity of the problem that gave him the appetite for experiment.

Young Ibels was eager to extend the scope of art and make it universal. Prolific and ready to occupy new fields, he believed that it was the artist's mission to inform with art. His ideal was art everywhere: in posters, books, journals, and sheet music, proving that he was certainly the product of his time, in ways that illustrate Raymond Williams's ideas on culture and society. Indeed, in his *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, Williams presents the hypothesis that, within the scope of the evolution of society, the art of a period is closely and necessarily related to the generally prevalent way of life, and that, in consequence, "aesthetic, moral and social judgments

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[121] John-Grand Carteret, *Le XIX^e siècle*, Paris:Firmin-Didot 1893, p. 686.

are closely interrelated."122 This is an essential hypothesis in the development of the very idea of culture, and which, he states, finds its roots in the intellectual history of the nineteenth century.

Ibels contributed to the visual language he had initially adapted to represent the world around him while polishing his gift as a caricaturist. His numerous posters show that he was passionately interested in his own moment, and depicted modern life with insistence, including its ugly and bizarre aspects. Many of his friends also devoted their talent to designing posters: Toulouse-Lautrec, Steinlen, Mucha, Bonnard and others. In very broad terms, Ibels's work in the printed media can be divided in five directions: Posters for the theater, Café-Concert performers, art exhibitions, journals, and song sheet illustrations.123

Ibels created his first poster in yellow and black with a simplified composition for Jules Mévisto's performance at l'Horloge (May 1892), in which he showed the performer as Pierrot.124 (figure 11) Numerous mentions of this "Mévisto à l'Horloge" poster point to the fact that it was considered his best design at the time. Commissioned in 1892, it was the first of several posters done for the popular café-concert performer whose lyrics told of the trials of the working class and the plight of the poor in an increasingly industrialized society. Like Bonnard and Lautrec, Ibels used a brusque line, strong composition and raw color that were well suited to the printing techniques that were being used in poster production.

It is important to note that Ibels simultaneously created posters for the café-concert performers and created illustrations for newspapers. We see him at his most original in poster advertisement for the illustrated paper, *L'Escarmouche* (November 12, 1893) to which he contributed drawings, together with Lautrec, Vuillard,Willette and Anquetin, and other recently emerging artists active in a range of media. The image shows one of the many cafés that abounded at the time in the workmen's quarters of

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[122] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, Garden City: Double Day & Company, Inc., 1960, p. 140.

[123] First to chronologically and thematically divide Ibels's work is Anne-Marie Sauvage, who in her five-page article "Henri-Gabriel Ibels, Le Nabi journaliste" *Nouvelles de l'Estampe* 32. 1997, lists chronologically some of Ibels's most important posters, journal, book and song sheet illustrations.

[124] Around the same time he created a poster for Auguste Mévisto (or simply Mévisto), the younger brother of Jules Mévisto.

Paris. It features the sturdy patron at the metal-topped bar; the waitress, cloth in hand, in her wide peasant-like dress; the workers in their typical blue smocks; in all of these, Ibels emphasizes the working class physicality as the figures observe the passing troops out on the street. At the time, by law, certain posters could be posted outside and others could not; this particular poster had to have a printed line on the bottom which read: "Cette affiche ne peut être apposée qu'à l'intérieur, elle ne peut être vendue."

Another poster in this series of politically subversive works is the one Ibels created for Mévisto's 1896 performance at La Scala. (figure 13) This poster is of great size (11 3/8 in x 15 3/4 in), and depicts a quiet, rural, factory scene, with Mévisto in the foreground as its observer. We see a gray sky, smoke coming from factories, a laborer in a field, a soldier on his Sunday leave walking down the road that borders the field, and a worker smoking his pipe. This poster is of remarkable originality, and is one of Ibels's most reproduced works.

In its issue of September 1, 1895, *La Revue Encyclopédique* published an article in which it praised Ibels's expressive style and insistence on depicting the world of the poor:

> H.-G. Ibels a tenu, lui aussi, à témoigner de ses préoccupations sociales. [...] il a délaissé les vices aristocratiques pour la vie pauvre, dont il a su montrer les désespérances dans quelques affiches: Mévisto, etc. Par des accentuations voulues, des colorations lourdes, mais expressives, M. Ibels y évoquait vraiment très bien le monde de misère où s'agitent le soldat abêti, le laboureur opiniâtre, le prolétaire découragé. Il y avait, notamment, dans le Mévisto, dans ce terrain vague, flugineux, enserré en des usines noires, comme une vision d'enfer, où à perpétuité, sans jamais un rayon de joie, décidaient de vivre, s'agiter irrémédiablement les trois êtres dessinés par l'artiste.[125]

We see Ibels also treating "lighter" topics, such as one of his most delightful posters, decidedly in the Nabi style, the one of the café-chantant singer Irene Henry singing at L'Horloge (1894), an open air garden pavilion on the Champs-Elysées--in this poster, it appears lit by radiating white globes, and against a background of trees. The predominant green color and the extended line of the Henry figure contrasted against a dark-blue evening sky, create a most pleasing effect, and promise the visitors a relaxing evening.

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[125] *Revue Encyclopédique*, V (September 1, 1895): 329.

Two versions of the poster existed and show that the Nabi style was fundamental and impossible to ignore in Ibels's work- one version was for L'Horloge and another for the Parisiana Concert.

This book *Picture Posters*, Ibels's contemporary, the art critic Charles Hiatt, said that "men of rarer, of more fascinating talent have now and again devoted themselves to the affiche."[126] As for Ibels, he said that the young painter experimented in many media, and that he was astonished at how he succeeded in a great number of such experiments. More praise came from André Mellerio, who, in the foreword to *L'Estampe et l'affiche* wrote about Ibels's omnipresence in the artistic world of the fin-de-siècle Paris: « Ibels est partout : dans l'affiche, l'illustration de journal ou de livre, dans les programmes du Théâtre Libre."127

Ibels created a poster in three colors for the first exhibition of the Salon des Cent (1893), organized in the premises of the journal *La Plume*. The poster was printed before the text and sold to private collectors. (figure 13) It features the Commedia dell' arte characters Harlequin and Pierrot. Here, multiple perspectives elevate this work as one of Ibels' true masterpieces. Seen from above in an almost voyeuristic angle, Harlequin, at the easel, paints a ballerina who poses in a distant, surreal light. Pierrot is seemingly captivated, peering over Harlequin's shoulder, and admiring his handiwork. Ibels colored Pierrot's costume in muted jewel tones, while for the rest of the studio he used shadowy earth tones. Since these posters were printed in large numbers, they were not costly to produce, and, thus, were cheaper for the collector. The journal later organized a series of similar exhibitions in which Ibels showed his work. In 1894, he created a poster for his first solo exhibition at La Bodinière, which showed some 132 pieces, organized by theme. The poster shows three different scenes: in the upper left corner are two *forains*, their bodies slumped, as they await their turn to perform with a barbell. To the right of the men is the image of a blond actress, bowing in the glow of the footlights. The bottom left corner of the poster reveals a different actress in a black evening gown. She curtsies, supported from each side by Harlequin and Pierrot, as she receives the adoration of the crowd. The text, skillfully juxtaposed between the three images, announces the event. This exhibition met with a tremendous success. Ibels showed his oil, aquarelle and pastel paintings, and his dry point etchings. An unknown art critic at *La Plume* (signed X...), declared that

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[126] Charles Hiatt, *Picture Poster*, London: G. Bell and Sons, 1895, p.102.
[127] André Mellerio, «Henry-Gabriel Ibels« *L'estampe et l'affiche*, 1 (1897):16.

Tous les grands tempéraments ont besoin de cette exhubérence d'action et j'affirme avoir vu des petits bronzes et des reliefs pétris de Daumier où ce que le crayon n'avait pu rendre retrouvait une originalité nouvelle et une excellence de geste. [...] A la Bodinière, l'œuvre entière nous attire et nous retient et nous y goûtons le même charme en y déplorant les mêmes défauts et en y louant les mêmes reliefs. [...] J'admire chez M. Ibels cette force avec laquelle il sait rajeunir ce Pierrot tant et tant usé déjà par l'amusant Willette. Le profil de Mévisto explique. Les forains sont ici sur leurs planches, avec la grossière bonhomie de leur vigeur et la souplesse de leurs membres.128

What the writer of this article liked the most was Ibels's ability to "saisir immédiatement l'attitude;" he thus finds his popular sketches "superior," and his poster for the cover of *L'Escarmouche* "une œuvre qu'on n'oublie pas."

In November 1894, Ibels created a poster for the celebrated cabaret singer and actress Yvette Guilbert. (figure 15) We see her by the glow of the stage light, in the wings of the theater, making final adjustments to her long evening gloves, leaning back and casting a confident look at the viewer before making her entrance. Her extended right arm draws attention to the text that declares her performance will take place at the Théâtre d'Application. An 1895 poster for Jane Debary "dans son répertoire," shows the popular performer on a passerelle that extends out beyond the orchestra pit. Ibels captures her mid-gesture, leaning forward, hiking up her fur-trimmed, gigot-sleeved gown. In this composition, Ibels used earth tones and rose-colored accents, with the actress' name in bright red. (figure 16)

An unknown critic from the *Revue Encyclopédique* also discussed Ibels's poster for Irma Perrot (figure 17), praising it as

> si curieuse et si neuve affiche pour Irma Perrot, où sur fond bleu la diseuse se multipliait en ses attitudes préférées, avec, comme décor, l'I et le P de son nom

128 "I^{ère} Exposition de H.G. Ibels," *La Plume*, 135 (1 December 1894): 503.

> artistement assemblés.[129]

The critic noted that this was a curious departure in style for Ibels, who, while mostly focusing on creating posters that showed working class people, also enjoyed the occasional diversion of creating posters of Parisian theater artists. The same critic commented on the social utility of posters in general:

> N'est-il pas intéressant, au moment où l'on commence, dans la peur de périls imaginaires, à poursuivre les écarts de pensée afin de retarder la sourde révolte qui semble gronder parmi les misérables, de voir l'affiche, toute pimpante de ses fraîches couleurs, apporter sa part de satire au pamphlet et au journal? Et son rôle en ce sens n'est peut-être pas terminé.

He further cited art historian Roger Marx (1859-1913) who commented on the broader economic usefulness of the poster industry which, during this golden age, generated a growing number of collectors. As the industry grew, it employed more workers than ever.

> Les afficheurs eurent un âge d'or. […] Les marchands d'estampes ne retenaient pas encore de tirages; les amateurs devaient se les procurer par les moyens les plus audacieux: par une pluie d'orage, risquer rhumes et contraventions pour décoller l'image désirée, ou à force de séduction et d'argent corrompre un ouvrier afficheur. […] D'où les prix très variables des affiches, non en rapport avec leur importance et leur beauté, mais en raison de leur rareté. (L'affichage est dit simple lorsque l'affiche doit être apposée au hasard sur les murs parisiens. Il est dit réservé lorsque l'affiche est destiné aux cadres réservés aux Compagnies d'affichages sur certaines maisons. Un inspecteur passe derrière l'afficheur, et pointe sur un carnet les affiches apposées, qui ne sont remplacées que lorsque leur détérioration est constatée par le susdit inspecteur).

This situation resulted in posters becoming a necessity in which both the advertising and art worlds had a stake. In an appropriate frame, posters could be considered an exquisite interior decoration "ainsi qu'une fleur," added Roger Marx, "qui s'harmonise à merveille avec les meubles modernes un peu frêles et les tentures aux

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[129] *Revue Encyclopédique*, V (September 1, 1895): 329.

couleurs osées; tapis orientaux et voiles indiens." In this manner, Marx emphasized the role of posters in the renaissance of decorative arts.

Another poster for the Théâtre d'Application with a title "Le Lever du Critique," reveals Ibels's capacity for dry commentary. The poster is for the "fantasy" in one act by Jules Chancet and Edmond Sée that premiered on January 12, 1895. (figure 18) In this black and white poster, Ibels shows what appears to be an actress hoping to affect the opinion of the critic. She climbs onto a bench and whispers in the ear of a decorated marble bust representing the immovable and stolid character of the theater critic, Francisque Sarcey. Scarcey is represented here as self-professed Hermès, whose singular opinion reflects the definitive judgment of her performance.

Yet another, created in 1897 for a paintings and art posters merchant at 12, Rue Bonaparte in Paris, titled "Pierrefort," generated considerable attention. In this image, four of the five primary Commedia dell'Arte characters are depicted on stage in various typically whimsical poses. (figure 19) The outlined figures of Columbine, Pierrot, Harlequin and the Clown are up onstage in front of a banner announcing the name and address of the store. This composition and arrangement of the characters is reminiscent of Japanese prints. Columbine and Pierrot share the space on the left in front of the light-colored banner that offsets the lettering, while Harlequin and the Clown stand in front of a green, cross-hatched background. The poster was praised in *Le Mercure de France* of January 1898 as a novelty.

In its January 1898 issue, *l'Estampe et L'Affiche* published Ibels's preparatory drawing from which he created a poster for the famous circus performer Andrée Sumac. (figure 20) It shows shocked audience members in the foreground, looking up at a

colossal woman, dressed in athletic costume, seeming distressed, and performing at the command of a black man holding either a drum mallet or lever of some sort. The text on the poster reads - *Tous les Soirs au Champ de Foire à 10 Heures. Andrée Sumac dans ses Boniments*. This poster shows that Ibels was not interested in a simple statement, and refused the convention that was accepted by many artists involved in poster art - that of showing everything as being "beautiful and fun." Instead, he focused on the shocking and the grotesque that exist in everyday life alongside with the "beautiful and pleasing." Thus the shock in people's eyes in this poster, and the distressed look of the performer, whose body in its all grotesqueness causes a sensation. This visual ambiguity that leads our imagination replaced the fixedness of many posters we see from this period.

Ibels as Illustrator in the Press

The period between 1890 and 1900 was for Ibels one of intense activity, and it didn't take him long to achieve a wide success. He continued to exhibit regularly with his Nabi friends, worked for the theater, further developing lithographic techniques, his favorite print medium, and contributed to numerous journals. As the printmaking movement gathered momentum, originality was at a premium, and many journal editors and printers looked to publish the work of young artists. This played a major role in the noticeable increase in the production of journals, books, and posters, providing artists with more venues to show their works of social and political satire, as well as an opportunity for developing an alternative career. However, the criticism of newspaper journalism also followed along from the very beginning. Historian Richard Terdiman commented of nineteenth-century French newspapers:

their ubiquity, their very banality, stand as a sign of dominant discourse, self-confidently bodied forth [...] newspaper almost seems to have been devised to represent the pattern of variation without change, the repetitive autonomization, and commodification which, since the twin revolutions of the nineteenth century, have marked fundamental patterns of our social existence. 130

Terdiman characterizes texts published in journals at the time as flat and sterile with no countercultural potential of their own. Yet, he neglects the fact that France was the country where the modern anarchist newspaper appeared for the first time, and where intellectuals strongly believed in its power as an effective weapon for change within society, if used properly.131 Raymond Williams suggests that many artists directly or indirectly supported the notion that art is a social force and cannot exist as purely aesthetic, but needs to illuminate social relationships, examine the social and political reality, and help the masses change that same reality.132

It seems, indeed, that the significant advance of the printing process has accompanied almost every crisis in French public life, since 1789 to World War I, with the goal of transforming the press into both a symbol of a new society and a means for its construction.133 In France, the realization that the press can change society was fully evolved by the first years of the July Monarchy. The Revolution of 1830 emphasized the role of newspapers more than any other prior crisis in France. Thus the conservative Restoration ministers in their "Report to the King" of 25 July 1830 stated that the press had been only an instrument of disorder and sedition:

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[130] Richard Terdiman*, Discourse/Counter Discourse*,Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985, 117.

[131] Terdiman 120.

[132] In *Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams wrote that it was the industrial revolution along with the rise of democracy that changed the old relationships and created new ones. The way we perceive the idea of culture reflects the way we think and feel about the changes in the conditions of our common life. The nineteenth century was marked by radical upheavals in society and corresponding changes in art, all of which caused a rapid proliferation of new forms and subjects.

[133] For the idea of "press revolution," see Jeremy D. Popkin, "Media and Revolutionary Crises," in Jeremy D. Popkin, ed., *Media and Revolution*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995): 12-30.

The press has disseminated disorder into the most upright minds, shaken the firmest convictions, and produced in the midst of society a confusion of principles that yields to the most sinister attempts. Thus by anarchy of doctrines, it prepares anarchy in the state.134

If we examine the role of the press and that of caricature after 1830, and up to the time when Ibels became active in it, we can conclude that in the Parisian kiosks the number of satirical journals had multiplied to some 250 different publications that were offered to the public largely due to new and more favorable legislations regarding freedom of the press and innovations in the printing techniques.135 This proliferation was also noticeable in book publishing, poster art and illustrated sheet music. In politics, however, this was the period of encroaching imperialism and growing nationalism, while the effects of industrialization and large factory complexes worried many. In the arts, literature was characterized by grandiose multi-volume publications, theater favored multi-act sensationalist melodramas with elaborate trompe l'oeil scenery, and synthesis of arts. We see that the history of the nineteenth-century poster is that of commercial type. The political poster was rare due to the censorship, and the artistic poster almost always promoted some commercial product.

Ibels was born in 1867, when the renovation of Paris by Baron Haussman was coming to an end. He began working for journals in the early 1890s, when many artists had already been hired by journal editors who sought, through illustrations of Parisian life, to encourage people to enjoy Haussman's modern Paris. The city was more inviting than ever with its wide boulevards and parks, artists' processions and balls, new cafés and theaters, "cabarets artistiques," and department stores, all of which were becoming more accessible to the masses. The poorer and less developed Montmartre became a dynamic center of the artistic and literary avant-garde and its "decadent" life was recorded by literary journals such as *Le Mirliton*, *Le Courrier français*, and *Le Chat Noir*, which

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[134] "Report to the King," in Percy Sadler, *Paris in July and August 1830*, Paris: Baudry,1830, pp. 37 - 39.

[135] Popkin 15.

promoted artists and writers by publishing their work.[136] In this milieu many artists, poets, and writers assumed two very important positions: they were able to use and show their talent to describe in words and pictures their own view of contemporary life in Montmartre as well as in Paris. At the same time, they were often in the service of the entrepreneur, which, to many artists, meant that the aesthetic qualities of their work needed to be subordinated to its commercial value. Both these positions - art as the expression of the individual and as the fulfillment of social needs seem equally important at the time, yet their conflicting demands frame a major dilemma in French culture at this point, between truth to the self or service to the values of capitalist society.

During his entire career, Ibels seemed to be able to marry these "truths" of ethics and aesthetics, tightly linking his work to journalism as a specific form of representation, although, he, like many others, was a painter and illustrator sometimes out of conviction, sometimes out of necessity. Working for the printed press meant additional income, which could be modest or quite substantial, depending on the journal, and the fame of the artist who could take home, on average, anywhere from five francs to fifty francs per illustration. Some would have a fixed, monthly salary, like Henriot who was working for *Le Charivari* and earned 300 francs per month. The same amount was given to Forain for his work at *Le Figaro* in 1902, but this time for each illustration, which is a testimony to the popularity of this artist at the time.[137] It is useful to know that if an artist worked for a leading newspaper in 1891 he could earn between 100 and 1000 francs per

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[136] On Montmartre in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, see Phillip Dennis Cate, editor, *The Graphic Arts and French Society, 1871-1914*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988. Chapter "Paris Seen Through Artists' Eyes," p. 1-55.

[137] Further on this period of French color posters, see Philipp Dennis Cate and Sinclair Hamilton Hitchings, *The Color Revolution: Color Lithography in France, 1890-1900*, exhibition catalogue. (New Brunswick:Rutgers University Press, 1978).

single submission, while French workers earned less than 10 francs a day.[138] The porcelain-makers of Limoges, for instance, were considered to have good salary of around 10 francs a day, while the weavers of Mulhouse earned a mere 1fr. 65. The average metal worker earned 3fr.50 or 4 francs a day.[139] It is not surprising to find many artists contributing to as many as possible journals that would publish their work. Aside from providing them with valuable income, journals gave them an opportunity to become known faster, and to a wider public.

To Ibels, Paris was an inspiration: Paris, Parisians, its bourgeoisie and especially the common man, were the subject of his many drawings, sketches, and lithographs. Extremely prolific, he followed in the steps of Honoré Daumier in the field of social caricature, and, in the field of the poster art, emulated Jules Chéret who, upon his return from England in 1866, started the poster art mania by creating poster advertisements for theaters and music halls such as the Folies Bergères, the Théâtre de l'Opéra, and the Moulin Rouge.[140] Among his friends, the Nabis, Ibels was the one who published the most cartoons in magazines and journals. These cartoons were mostly autonomous from the text, and were published in weekly or daily illustrated magazines that commissioned them, or they were simply the result of an ongoing collaboration between the artist and the newspaper.

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[138] Phillip Dennis Cate*, The Graphic Arts and French Society, 1871-1914.*

[139] Theodore Zeldin, *France 1848-1945*, Volume I. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973, pp. 210-211.

[140] Patricia Eckert Boyer, "The Artist as Illustrator in Fin-de-Siècle Paris," *In The Graphic Arts and French Society,1871-1914*, Edited by Phillip Dennis Cate, p.118.

Ibels's first collaboration for a journal took place in 1891, when *Le Messager Français*[141] published eleven of his satirical drawings between May 24, and August 23 of the same year. These drawings reflected his observations of the world of the common people, of the streets of Paris, as well as the world of the "petit bourgeois." Ordinarily, his caricatures and his synthetic drawings were well-suited to the style of the magazine, and described, with a caption, a scene of one or two characters placed in an ordinary situation. One of Ibels' first drawings for *Le Messager*, which appeared in the May 13, 1891 issue was of a bedroom scene between an older woman and a young foot soldier, after what appeared to be an amorous night spent together. The caption read: *Mon fils est soldat comme toi*. Soon thereafter, in the June 28 issue, *Le Messager* published Ibels's "Au Jardin de Paris", a drawing which showed similarities with Toulouse-Lautrec's exploration of the same subject - the concert halls. The captions says: *Nini-les-pattes-en l'air, entourée de ses plus jolies élèves, leur donne une leçon de maintien*. This image has often been compared with Toulouse-Lautrec's "Au Moulin Rouge-la Goulue" (1892), a poster that was plastered all over Paris several months after Ibels's "Au Jardin de Paris" was published in *Le Messager*.[142] Louise Weber (1866-1929), famously called "The Queen of Montmartre," was a dancer whose audacious style of entertaining made her very popular at the time.[143] In their respective works, both Ibels and Lautrec made use of

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[141] *Le Messager Français* was a weekly journal, founded in 1890 that focused on arts, literature and finance.

[142] Boyer 146.

[143] More on La Goulue in Francesca Canadé Sautman, "Invisible Women: Lesbian Working Class Culture in France, 1880-1930." *Homosexuality in Modern France*. Ed. Jeffrey Merrick and Bryan T. Ragan, Jr. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. 177-201. On la Goulue as entrepeuneur, see, Zeynep Çelik and Leila Kinney, "Ethnography and exhibitionism at the Expositions Universelle" *Assemblage* 13 (Dec, 1990) 35-59. In her forthcoming book Francesca Canadé Sautman talks about La Goulue and other dancers being subjected to mockery

a similar composition: Lautrec, with two dancers in the foreground, La Goulue and Valentin le Désossé, surrounded by people positioned in the image in a semi-circle; Ibels, with the reversed image of a dance teacher in a long dark dress, and a dancer that audaciously exposes her undergarments. While in Lautrec's poster, the background behind the audience is deleted, Ibels manipulates the space and depth by placing the orchestra behind the audience, and thus, condenses the compositional depth. The quadrille, as a dance in which partners often shift, gives this image subversive overtones. Eckert Boyer states that the boldness of Ibels' dancer was supposed to shock the "petty bourgeois," and amuse the common man. She further states that "Ibels's delight in depicting this aspect would have been consistent with his leftist sociopolitical sympathies."[144]

Women are undeniably present in Ibels's work: they are mothers, entertainers, waitresses, circus performers, actresses, train ticket controllers. They figure in his posters and journal, book and song illustrations. In an attempt to closer examine Ibels's position on the issue of women in the public eye, we can use the work of art historian Linda Nochlin, *Representing Women*, to compare his representation with those of other artists.[145] Nochlin compares representation of women in the works of Jean-François Millet (1814-1875), Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), Edgar Degas (1834 –1917) with those of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780 –1867), Auguste Renoir (1841 –1919), and others, who, she asserts, represent an objectified, prettified and disempowered image of a woman. She gives as an example Courbet's painting "The Corn Sifters" (1853-54) where

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by men at the time particularly when former "vulgar" dance floor entertainers became teachers of the quadrille.

[144] Boyer 147.

[145] Linda Nochlin, *Representing Women*, New York: Thames & Hudson, 1999.

the artist places the woman into the "realm of history," in which "there can be change, and progress," as opposed to, for instance, Georges Seurat's "Poseuses" (1886-88), where the artist "refuses to represent his subject as a "natural and timeless one."[146] Yet, in her article "Body Politics: Seurat's Poseuses," Nochlin states that Seurat's "Poseuses" consititute "a critical politics of representation of the female body in the late 19th century."[147] Nochlin argues that the work of artists such as Seurat intentionally or not speaks to the possibilities of feminist intervention into monolithic discourse. By refusing to "essentialize" women and by representing more complex and diverse representations of women, these artists establish themselves as "highly exceptional interveners in dominant discourses of their time."[148] One can say that, intentionally or not, Ibels and Lautrec are such "exceptional interveners." They affirmed a multiplicity of narratives, and represented La Goulue in her milieu, and in the "realm of history." They show that the "change and progress" on which Nochlin insists, was already underway: she went from a very poor childhood to become one of the most popular cabaret dancers, the so-called Queen of Montmartre.

Stylistic similarities between Lautrec and Ibels are obvious but are not the sign of the two artists copying from each other. They were very close privately, and worked on many projects together. They often visited dance halls and other public places together, and looked at the same scenes from the same angle. Charles Hiatt commented on this similarity in styles:

> His (Ibels's) point of view is somehow akin to that of Toulouse-Lautrec's: he is passionately interesed in his own moment, and depicts modern life with similar insistence on its ugly and grotesque aspects. And yet Ibels rarely fails to be

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[146] Nochlin, *Representing Women*, 98.
[147] Linda Nochlin, "Body Politics: Seurat's Poseuses. "*Art in America*, (March, 1994): 71.
[148] Nochlin, *Representing Women,* 79.

> decorative, and his style is the outcome of his own artistic personality, rather than the result of study of the work of other men.[149]

Since he was more famous at the time they met, it was probably Ibels who introduced Lautrec to music hall society, and secured jobs for both of them. To my knowledge, Robert T. Wang was the first one, after Charles Hiatt, to point out these similarities between them. In his dissertation "The Graphic Art of the Nabis," he refers to Lautrec as a someone who was involved in the Nabis projects but mostly as a "satellite" of the group, and that Ibels was the only one from the group who became close to him.[150] The two met toward the end of 1892, one year after Bonnard's three-color France-Champagne poster marked his first commercial success; this was also one year after the May 1 riots on the streets of Paris and the killing of 9 protesters by the Police. Lautrec published a portrait of Ibels in the January 1893 issue of *La Plume*, a sign of admiration for his colleague and mentor.[151] Lautrec continued to use Café-concerts as a subject matter for his posters, while Ibels moved on to depicting more "standard" working class people, even though it is true that the Café-concert was generally considered entertainment for that same working class. However, in the middle of the nineteenth-century it had become subject to some degree of "embourgeoisment," as bourgeois men started to search for new pleasures and "immerse" themselves with common people.

Le Messager published, on the cover of its July 19, 1891 issue, Ibels's drawing that showed a coachman stuck in a traffic jam, shouting to a man in front of him: *He! dis*

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[149] Hiatt 102.

[150] Robert T. Wang, *The Graphic Art of the Nabis*, Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1974, pp. 108-109 and 111-112.

[151] Jean Adhémar, *Toulouse-Lautrec, his Complete Drypoints and lithographs*, New York: Abrams, 1965, p. viii.

donc, colignon! c'est-y tes opinions politiques qui t'empêchent d'aller à droite?[152] The journal published another series of nine, full-page sketches by Ibels, all of Pierrot, a character that often appeared in his drawings. One full-page drawing was divided in two, and each half represented a scene with a caption, in a way very similar to a comic book layout. In this manner Ibels showed different phases of the scene, taking into consideration the linearity of the episode. He signed this sketch on the bottom right "Hommage aux auteurs et interprètes," with the main caption: *SCALA-La folie de Pierrot par MM. Byl et Marsolleau, interprétée par Mévisto*. This drawing and the accompanying commentary referred to a performance by Mévisto for which Ibels designed the decor and the program.

Several of his drawings for this journal represented the world of the café-concert, two of which were the actual preparations for the previously mentioned book he illustrated in collaboration with Toulouse-Lautrec, *Le Café-Concert*, written by Georges Montorgueil.[153] One drawing is of Mévisto (June 26 issue), a recurring image in Ibels' work, and the other one is of can-can dancers (July 31 issue). For the March 24, 1891, issue of *Le Messager*, Ibels executed a beautiful composition of two women, seated on the beach, one younger, taller, with a svelte figure, the other one older, with her body overflowing from the chair in which she was seated. The caption says *Je raisonnais comme toi, ma fille, quand j'ai fait la bêtise d'épouser ton pauvre père.* He later used this

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[152] *Le Messager Français*, 29 (19 July, 1891): 4.

[153] Georges Montorgueil, Le Café-concert / Lithographies de H.-G. Ibels et de Toulouse-Lautrec, Paris: L'Estampe Originale, 1893. Praising Ibels and Toulouse-Lautrec as artists "de leur temps," Montorgueil wrote: " Par cette image, vous entendez que ça fait la rue Michel… le compte, Daumier, qui se peut évoquer à propos d'une œuvre née de la collaboration de Toulouse-Lautrec et d'Ibels, faisait son crédo de cette devise – Il faut être de son temps – C'est d'une haute sagesse," p.15.

image as a basis for the program he did in 1892 for le Théâtre Libre for the play *Les Fossiles* by François de Curel.[154]

Without any doubt, the large circulation of *Le Messager* contributed to Ibels's popularity and he very quickly became recognized as the "official illustrator of *Le Messager Français*." Georges Roussel, of *La Plume*, and Jules Christophe, of *l'EnDehors*, referred to Ibels as "le dessinateur du *Messager*."

In 1892 he also began collaborating with the weekly newspaper le *Père Peinard,* an openly anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist, and anti-militarist weekly illustrated magazine, founded in 1889 by Emile Pouget.[155] Pouget was an impassionate activist who wanted to found a journal that spoke "clearly" to the working class.[156] Since the journal was devoted almost exclusively to a lower-class readership, he used only the working-class vernacular. Pouget would also assume the persona of a cobbler who would in his "reflecs d'un gniaff," a cobbler's reflections, speak "directly" to the readers, as "compagnon to compagnon." The journal stood openly for a stateless and classless society and all this activity inevitably attracted the interest of the police. This threat did not prevent Ibels from joining his comrades and contributing his powerful drawings. It is important to note that many of the drawings published in the magazine were not signed,

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[154] On June 26, 1892 Ibels published two drawings on the same theme in *Le Courrier Français*: *Aparté:Mais Sarcey dort*, and on July 31 of the same year, *C'est pour mieux entendre, mon enfant, and Si le café-concert évolue; Le salut...demeure chaste et pur*.

[155] Because of the extreme anarchist content of the journal *Le Père Peinard*, Ibels's contribution to this journal will be described in greater detail in Chapter III - Ibels and Anarchism.

[156] More on Emile Pouget see H.G.Lay, *Réflecs d'un Gniaff. On Emile Pouget and le Père Peinard.* In Dean de la Motte and Jeannene M. Przyblyski, eds., *Making the News. Modernity and the Mass Press in Nineteenth Century France.* Boston: University of Massachusets Press, 1999, Pp. 82-138. See also Jean Maitron*, Le Mouvement anarchiste en France*, Paris: Edition François Maspero, 1975, pp.:251-61. Also Henri de Varennes*, De Ravachol à Caserio*, Paris: Garnier Frères, 1910, pp. 78-79.

possibly for security reasons. However, one of Ibels' more famous ones was signed by him: it was "La chanson du gas" and it appeared on the cover of the January 22, 1893 issue. It shows a laborer, who, with a hatchet in his hand, and an angry look on his face, stares at what appears to be Paris with its Eiffel Tower and Triumphal Arch, the anarchists' symbols of the "ugliness of the industrial revolution." In this image, Ibels expressed both the anti-urban and anti-industrial sentiment of many anarchists. Another drawing in the same journal signed by Ibels was the previously-mentioned "La danse des ventres," representing J. Mevisto as Pierrot. This was a song by E. Decrept, with music by Anatole Lancel. The illustration shows a barefoot Pierrot in his all white outfit, holding a knife in his right hand, and rolling up his sleeve, as he is approaching the terrified Harlequin who is sitting at the table.[157]

In 1894, due to the newly imposed *lois scélérates* and the increased police arrests of suspected anarchists, Pouget had to flee to London, and the printing of the journal was interrupted until his return in 1896, when it immediately resumed.[158] Although any association with Pouget was viewed as precarious, since he was considered even more dangerous for the Republic than literary anarchists, such as Jean Grave, Félix Fénéon, Sébastien Faure, and Charles Chatel, Ibels's sympathy for the struggle of the poor and for the working man, his interest in anarchy as a step toward the proper evolution of society, put him on the front line among the artists who were forerunners of the anarchist movement.

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[157] Phillip Dennis Cate, et all *Prints Abound: Paris in the 1890s*, Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2000, p. 22.

[158] The "villainous laws" or *lois scélérates* were introduced right after Auguste Vaillant's bombing of the Chambre des Députés on December 9, 1893. They targeted primarily the anarchist press, and its subversive activities. It also prohibited any association of individuals organized for subversive purposes, thereby defining as illegal the participation in an "association de malfaiteurs."

In August 1893, Ibels collaborated with *L'Écho de Paris illustré* with five pencil drawings, which he showed the following year at his retrospective exhibition at la Bodinière. These drawings depict scenes from ordinary life with the titles : "Nocturne," "D'autres satisfaits," "Modestie foraine," "Leur fils," and "Après l'enterrement."[159] The caption for " L'Enterrement" reads: *C'pauv'vieux! C'qu'il serait content d'savoir que l'Patron était là*! and for "Modestie foraine": *Enfin...Mad'moiselle Olympe! Des Folies-Bergère de Paris!...En un mot, de l'Alcazar de Bordeaux*!" Although *L'Écho* was a conservative daily journal, during the period preceding the Dreyfus Affair, many anarchist and left-oriented artists and writers such as Octave Mirbeau160, Georges Clémenceau, Ibels and others, contributed to it. Ibels's contribution to this journal ceased with the onset of the Dreyfus Affair, and journal's virulent anti-semitic and anti-Dreyfus campaign.

L'Estampe Originale

The quarterly *L'estampe Originale*'s series of print albums, directed and published by André Marty, appeared between 1893 and 1895 on a subscription basis.161 From the very beginning these albums met with a tremendous success, which in March 1893, prompted Marty to publish lithographs by Ibels and Lautrec from Le Café-Concert series, accompanied by the text by Georges Montorgueil.162 Since Ibels was considered a senior artist, and his name appeared on the cover before Lautrec's, he was assigned to submit illustrations for the cover page. The album consisted of eleven black and white lithographs, all by the two artists. One by Ibels that is particularly beautiful is of the performer Kam-Hill (1856-1930): his slender figure is shown from the point of view from the stage wings, singing, and gesticulating with one arm. Another album published the same year showed Lautrec's print on the cover, and

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[159] *La Plume*, (March 15, 1893): 126.

[160] Ibels's friendship with Octave Mirbeau (1848-1917) was a long one. Mirbeau was a writer, playwright and art critic, who was, like Ibels, part of the Parisian avant-garde and was involved in civic issues. He was an early member of the Académie Goncourt. Ibels illustrated Mirbeau's book *Sébastien Roch* which was originally published by Charpentier in 1890 and dealt with the taboo theme of rape of adolescents by priests. Written in the third person by a 'witness" of this rape, it recounts Mirbeau's experience as a student at a Jesuit school in Vannes where he was raped by a priest.

[161] Wang 114.

[162] Marty was also director and editor of the weekly magazine *Journal des artistes*.

inside works by Ibels, as well as other artists. All this indicates an intensive stylistic exchange between Ibels and Lautrec. In the course of the next two years, the quarterly printed the works of seventy-four artists and printed nine separate albums, in order to offer the best prints to a wider public.163 The most important element that marked these issues, as well as the nine albums published by *L'Estampe*, was their Nabi aesthetic and the predominance of color.164 Printing of albums of assembled best lithographs allowed more people access to original prints and at a very low cost. Ibels persuaded Georges Ondet, a music publisher, that he should illustrate his songs with the works of painters and graphic artists, rather than with commercial illustrations. He introduced Ondet to Lautrec who produced covers for several songs.165 This same year, they illustrated song sheets for Ondet.

This period of intense activity was crowned by the publishing of one thousand copies of the book *La Lithographie originale en couleurs*, by the writer and art critic, and at the time, editor of *L'Estampe Originale*, André Mellerio (1862-1943). In this book Mellerio emphasized the growing importance of lithography as a special artistic form, and the involvement of young artists such as Ibels. He wondered whether the color lithography was encroaching on the domain of painting or whether it has its own essence and its own particular range and scope. He also gave a short list of publishers, printers, and art dealers, and commented on several of the most important artists contributing to *L'Estampe*, among them, Ibels, Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947), Edouard Vuillard (1868-1940), Henri Rivière (1864 –1951), Edmund Dulac (1882-1953), Jules Chéret (1836 –1932, Théophile Alexandre Steinlen (1859 –1923), and Adolphe-Léon Willette (1857– 1926). As many did during this period, Mellerio compared the styles of Ibels and Lautrec. According to him, Ibels was more "violent," and more "naïve," and what he appreciated the most was that Ibels did not compromise the harmony of the image. He also commented on Ibels's "bold," and almost "brutal" use of color. He added that Ibels retains harmony and that sometimes we have thought this is what prints should be: color lithographs, well-printed, in a large number of copies, very inexpensive, showing scenes in which common people can really see themselves. Everything that really amuses them, or makes them feel strong emotions: the circus, the fair, young soldiers, café-concerts, comic or sentimental scenes.166 While he

[163] *Le Livre et L'Image*, (March-July,1893): 189.
[164] Saunier, Charles, "Henri-Gabriel Ibels," *La Plume* (January 15, 1893): 30-35.
[165] Cate et all, *The Graphic Arts and French Society*, 144.
[166] Cate et all, *Color Revolution*, 30.

undoubtedly recognized Ibels's contribution to the evolution of lithography, he qualified his style as "open" and "unsophisticated," filled with humor and liveliness, which, according to him, could be at once a quality or a defect.

Although Ibels also depicted "lighter" themes, such as café-concert performances, he always returned to creating images of the working man. He contributed again for the eighth issue of *L'Estampe originale* (October-December, 1894) with an etching titled "Les Paveurs," showing four male workers laying down pavers, each in a different body position. (figure 21) The subject matter and the figural types are similar to the ones that were represented previously by Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) in his painting the "Stone Breakers" (1849), and the "Corn Sifters" (1853-1854), as well as by Camille Pissarro (1830-1903) in "Apprêteuse et garnisseuse, rue du Caire" (1885-1886), "La Cueillette des pommes" (1888) and others.

"Il faut que je m'addresse [au peuple] directement," declared Courbet in his letter to Marie and Francis Wey.[167] He and Ibels shared a total independence vis-à-vis the government but also vis-à-vis the entrepreneurs who exploited the artists rather than supported them.[168] However, according to Courbet's account, the ideas for his "The Stone Breakers" and "The Corn Sifters" came to him rather as a result of a humanitarian reflex than "preconceived humanitarian ideas."[169]

There is a striking similarity between Ibels's drawing and Courbet's "The Stone Breakers" (1849) in the way they both show the awkwardness of the bodies by their

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[167] [Dijon, July 31, 1850.] Petra ten-Dœsschate Chu, *Correspondance de Courbet,* Paris: Flammarion, 1996.]

[168] *Courbet à neuf!* Actes du colloque international organisé par le musée d'Orsay et le Centre allemand d'histoire de l'art à Paris, le 6 et 7 décembre 2007, Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, Essay by Jerôme Poggi "Le réalisme économique de Gustave Courbet," p. 228.

[169] Georges Boudaille, *Gustave Courbet. Painter in Protest*, Greenwich: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1969, p. 4.

positions and proportions, and in the way they both constructed the background with seemingly deliberate perspective faults. (figure 22) While Courbet's style is closer to that of the Dutch masters he admired, we can still see some similarities in his and Ibels's approach, in the way they arranged the figures and the background. Courbet manipulated the color to represent the harsh reality of the working class, while Ibels achieved the same effect, filling the entire image with interlaced brusque strokes of various shades of dense black and gray, and allowing the bright white color of the paper to shine through, creating a somewhat serious mood. The two silhouetted figures in the background show Ibels's apparent interest in sfumato, and his desire to integrate the figures of the workers with their surroundings. This comparison between Ibels and Courbet is not meant to suggest an influence, but rather, shared interest in constructing the body.

La Plume

On February 15, 1894 *La Plume* published (in the supplement) a superb etching by Ibels, "L'amour s'amuse" of Pierrot and Columbine in an embrace. It shows simple white, outlined figures against a black background. And on April 15, *La Plume* published Ibels's drawings titled "Les jeunes acteurs. Janvier dans la "Fille à Blanchard" (Théâtre de l'Odéon) that show the actor Janvier in three different poses: Janvier in a worker's suit, dressed in a tuxedo, and, again, dressed as a worker, sitting on a bench with a young girl.[170] The drawing is entitled "Des Coulisses" with a caption, *Allons...Là-haut!; Trois seigneurs...des propres*. It shows a scene behind the stage, of a manager calling

[170] *Les Maîtres de l'affiche*; publication mensuelle contenant la reproduction des plus belles affiches illustrées des grands artistes, français et étrangers ...1.-5. v. déc.1895-nov.1900. Paris: Impr. Chaix,1896-1900.

[170] Lucy Broido, *The Posters of Jules Chéret*, New York: Dover, 1992.

performers to come on stage. Another drawing titled "Entendu" was published in a special issue on anarchy. The drawing had a caption that said *Mais il en faut, Monsieur, des gens qui meurent de faim! Car si tout le monde mangeait, la valeur de l'argent baisserait et alors ce serait... terrible Mossieu! Terrible*! The monthly magazine *Le Livre et l'Image* commented on Ibels's contribution to the April 15 and May 1st issues:

> La Plume, la vaillante revue de Léon Deschamps, qui donne une place toujours plus grande à l'élément graphique, vient de publier dans ses derniers numéros (15 avril et 1er mai) d'intéressantes pages de Ibels. L'une, politico-philosophique, rappelle absolument Daumier par la tournure et l'allure des personnages.[171]

La Plume was an extremely important vehicle for Ibels and his career. It was founded on April 15, 1889 by a young writer and poet, Léon Deschamps, who wanted a journal that would be independent of all schools of art, philosophy, or literature. It was a very important supporter of Parisian avant-garde writers and artists. Some of the many famous writers who contributed to it were Emile Zola, Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, along with artists such as Ibels, Chéret, Grasset, Luce, and Gauguin. The magazine's team of art critics, led by Charles Saunier, was very supportive of young avant-garde artists, and very informed about the most progressive art then being produced in Paris. It was in its pages that, in 1893, Charles Saunier wrote an article about Ibels that served for decades as the main source of information about the artist. To express his admiration for Ibels and his work, he went so far as to compare Ibels with Daumier, da Vinci, and Rembrandt.[172]

La Plume organized monthly soirées where all published and unpublished avant-garde artists gathered, read, and showed their work. This changed at the end of 1893 and the beginning of 1894, when it exhibited more commitment to graphic arts in particular.

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[171] *Le Livre et l'Image*, March-July (1893): 189.
[172] *La Plume*, January 15, (1894): 30.

The November 15, 1893 issue was dedicated to the history of the French poster. Writers such as Huysmans, Francis Jourdain, and Maillard wrote about the poster in general, and the issue reproduced selected works by Ibels and Grasset. By January 1894, *La Plume* began to offer a deluxe edition of twenty copies on Japan paper accompanied by an original print, photogravure, or watercolor with each issue.[173] The artists were able to exhibit their work in the ground floor gallery they called Salon des cent that belonged to the journal. The Salon, which was publicized as an "exposition permanente" was named for the roughly one hundred artists who were subscribers to and participants in its exhibitions. The honor of organizing the first show of his art at the newly renovated gallery was given to Ibels. The show opened on February 1, 1894, for which Ibels executed the inaugural poster. One of his posters from this exhibition, featuring Mévisto, met with significant success and put him in the forefront of the movement of creating high-quality posters, as mentioned previously in this chapter. It was included in *Maîtres de L'affiche*, an important art publication of high-quality posters that contained some 256 lithographic plates from the much larger, original works of ninety-seven artists, and which was published in a smaller 11x15 inch format.[174] This book was put together by Jules Chéret (1836-19320,) who was considered the father of poster art. *La Plume* also published reviews of exhibitions through 1899 featuring Mucha, Henri Boutet, and others. It became an important competitor to Parisian art dealers such as Kleinmann and Arnould, who nevertheless regularly advertised in the journal.[175] In the January1894 issue, *La Plume* published Ibels's drawings "Silhouettes de Gémier et Mademoiselle

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[173] Cate et all, *The Color Revolution*, 30.

[174] Georges Coquiot, *Toulouse-Lautrec ou quinze ans de moeurs parisiennes. 1885-1900*. Paris: Société d'Éditions Littéraires, 1921. (in Anne-Marie Sauvage. "Henri-Gabriel Ibels. Nabi journaliste," *Nouvelles de l'Estampe* 32 (1997): 29.

[175] Hiatt 56.

Fériel dans la pantomime *Amants éternels*," and "Silhouettes de Madame Savelli, Gémier – Antoine" from the first Act of l'Inquiétude.

L'Escarmouche and La Revue Blanche

Ibels and Lautrec also worked together for *L'Escarmouche*, a weekly magazine, founded by Georges Darien.[176] Lautrec's letter to his mother, however, suggests that the founding of the journal was a joint effort by a group of friends "Nous venons de fonder un journal, he wrote in a letter to his mother dated November, 1893.[177] Coquiot also suggested that Ibels was a co-founder.[178] The publication of the journal was greeted with great optimism. Darien offered subscriptions to the public, and invited his talented friends-artists to contribute. In the first issue (November 13, 1893) on the topic of artistes dessinateurs, Darien wrote that the contributing artists "prétendent faire ce qui leur plaît et rien que ce qui leur plaît." In the same issue, he explained the reason for the name of the journal *l'Escarmouche*:

> L'Escarmouche, c'est l'engagement qui précède la bataille, qui détermine l'action sérieuse, c'est le contact pris avec l'ennemi, l'épreuve d'adversaires avant la lutte…Titre obligé. Ce journal donc, sera l'organe des combattants d'avant-garde - des tirailleurs dont le coup de feu insouciant de mot d'ordre, décide le canon à faire tonner sa grosse voix des francs-tireurs des opinions libres.

The ideas behind the founding of this journal explain why Ibels wanted to take part in the endeavor; he was thus able to serve the anarchist ideals and have the opportunity to sell

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[176] Darien was a novelist and polemicist whose book *Les Pharisiens* (1891) was an attack on anti-Semitism.

[177] Letter to his mother No 168-[Paris, November 1893] Goldschmidt and Herbert D. Schimmel, *Unpublished Correspondence of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec:* 273 letters by and about Lautrec written to his family and friends in the collection of Herbert Schimmel, London: Phaidon, 1969.

[178] Coquiot 29.

his lithographs at the same time. In each issue, artists made lithographs both for photomechanical reproduction and for sale as original prints. Before the disclaimer was placed on the posters, Darien made lithographs available from the offices of the journal in signed and numbered editions of only 100 at 2.50 francs each. Along with Ibels, other known artists who contributed were Hermann-Paul Anquetin, Vuillard, Villette, and Toulouse-Lautrec. Ibels's impeccable composition uniting word and image, his emphasis on imposing physicality in depicting the common man, were most suitable to the style of the journal and the reason why Darien commissioned Ibels to execute a lithograph for the cover page of the first issue of *L'Escarmouche*. Ibels's illustration met with tremendous success. Charles Hiatt, referring mostly to this lithograph, said that, especially in his posters, "Ibels was so conspicuously successful that it was difficult to point to a single failure."[179]

Thus, the journal *Le Livre et l'Image*, in its December issue of 1893, commented on *L'Escarmouche*, this particular poster, and on Ibels:

> Bien imprimé, point gobeur, ayant des clichés un peu mieux gravés, un peu mieux tirés que ceux du journal qui prétend être "le plus artistique de France", - point d'autre réclame, n'est-ce pas, cela suffit! - cet illustré met en plain relief un dessinateur dont, souvantes fois déjà, il a été parlé en cette revue, H.-G. Ibels. De la couleur, de la vie, du mouvement, de curieuses études de mœurs, voilà ce que nous donne le crayon de celui dont les programmes du Théâtre Libre et les titres des chansons ont déjà fait connaître le talent très individuel. C'est bien le modernisme dans toute sa science et dans toute sa brutalité photographique ; de l'art suivant la donnée des conceptions esthétiques à l'usage des nouvelles couches sociales.[180]

Despite the contribution by Ibels, Vuillard, Toulouse-Lautrec and others, the journal lasted only ten issues - from November 13, 1893, through January 14, 1894. On March

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[179] Hiatt 102.
[180] *Le Livre et l'Image*,10 (December 1893): 337.

1894, a third issue for 1894 appeared, but in a reduced format and with only one image by Ibels on the cover.[181]

As opposed to other avant-garde journals, such as *Le Mercure* and *La Plume*, *La Revue Blanche* was interested only in the topic of art and literature and the artists and writers that it promoted and defended, and who, in return, offered their illustrations, and writing. It was one of the most important avant-garde magazines in fin-de-siècle Paris. It was founded in 1889 in Belgium. Its founders, Auguste Jeunhomme and Joe Högge, and the brothers Charles and Paul Leclerq, moved it to Paris two years later, in October 1891. Between 1889 and its last issue in 1903, the magazine brought together great literary and artistic talents of the time, among them, Tristan Bernard, André Gide, Octave Mirbeau, Ibels, Toulouse-Lautrec, Vallotton, Bonnard, Vuillard, and Alfred Jarry. In issue 103, *La Revue Blanche* published Ibels' illustration of a woman sitting at the table with a self-assured look on her face and a drink in front her. The caption says: *Le Cri de Paris*, apparently commenting on the changing perception of the presence of women in public spaces.

Le Mirliton and La Revue Méridionale

Ibels also worked for a weekly periodical called *Le Mirliton* (1885-1906), edited by a famous Montmartre chansonnier, Aristide Bruant, whose cabaret with the same name, "Le Mirliton," he frequented with Lautrec. The café-cabaret was also the place where Lautrec had his first exhibition. The issues of *Le Mirliton* appeared rather irregularly – sometimes bi-weekly, sometimes monthly, and its primary role was to advertise Bruant's songs. Later on, it became known for advertising Parisian café-concerts.[182] Along with

[181] *La Revue Blanche*, July 31, (1894) NP

[182] More on *Le Mirliton*, see Lisa Appignanesi, *The Cabaret*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004, pp. 22-30. Also see, Gabriel P. Wisberg, *Montmartre and the Making of*

Ibels and Lautrec, another famous artist who contributed to the journal was Steinlen, who worked under the pseudonym Jean Caillou. It is important to note that Lautrec's and Steinlen's careers in color printing started with *Le Mirliton*. What attracted Ibels to *Le Mirliton* was clearly the style of Bruant's cabaret and journal, where the hero of his short stories and chansons, written in slang, was often the proletarian, bolstered by the fact that he was not merely interested in the frivolous-Paris image of the middle-class and demi-monde. Bruant is also known as the creator of the chanson réaliste, a musical genre that was influenced by literary realism and theater, and dealt with the lives of the Parisian working class and the poor.

Ibels illustrated two of Bruant's songs: "Ursule" for the July 15, 1894 issue, and "Célina," which appeared on August 1st of the same year. These are two representations of peasants, which were in contrast to his "La Paysanne au panier," published in *La Revue Blanche* that same summer.[183] "La Paysanne au panier" is an image of a stout Breton woman carrying a white basket, wearing a white bonnet and dark dress, with a certain haunted look in her eyes. This image, which is less caricatural than others, shows the influence of Gauguin and the Pont-Aven school style that Ibels quickly abandoned, and, in the case of "Célina" and "Ursule," replaced with a less attractive representation of peasantry.

The remaining issues were nearly all illustrated by Steinlen, and most of them were colored by hand, on the front page, where texts and musical-scores of Bruant's chansons were often published. After 1895, publication became very irregular and was suspended altogether from June 1896 until May 1903.

Mass Culture, New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 2001. In his book, Weisberg examines the role of Montmartre in the creation of mass culture that reigned in the 20th century.

[183] More on *La Revue Blanche*, A.B. Jackson, *La Revue Blanche (1889-1903).* Paris: Minard, Bibliothèque des lettres modernes, 1960.

In issues No 2 and 3 (Feb-March) 1905, Achille Astre, the founder of *La Revue de l'Aude* (1886), later known as *La Revue Méridionale* (1889), presented Ibels and his work for the first time to his readers. He praised Ibels as one of the young artists who exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants in 1891 and 1892. During his stay in Carcassonne, Ibels met the famous engraver Achille Rouquets, and became familiar with his woodblock prints. He decided to try the technique himself and soon after, sent his first prints to be published in *La Revue Méridionale*. In this issue, Achille Astre expressed his joy and gratitude that Ibels contributed to his journal. Astre also called Ibels "un ami de l'humanité et un grand artiste." He added:

> Par la façon dont il est campé dans ses poses familières, l'ouvrier a une importance considérable dans l'œuvre d'Ibels ; peu l'ont construit aussi solidement. [...]
>
> Des bouges où il a pénétré pour se documenter sont sortis des tableaux remarquables par la composition, une science exacte de coloris qui le classent parmi les meilleurs peintres, la trouvaille de cette atmosphère où se meut la fille qui fait profession d'amour : L'Invitation à Cythère où une Vénus aux formes croulantes, mûre pour la retraite, déploie toute l'artillerie de ses séductions devant le Saint-Antoine, qui n'est autre qu'un jeune soldat résistant sans s'appuyer sur la vertu, est, entre tous, un drame triste.

La Revue Méridionale is important for this study because it published Ibels's article on the Salon des Indépendants, in which he talked about the young artists-participants, the success of the artists and the exhibition itself.

"Pas de jury! Pas de récompense!" exclaimed Ibels, obviously referring to the state-supported Salon and its juries, with its prizes and honors, which was becoming increasingly commercial and biased. As a result, the system was not working for the noble cause of art, but rather, tried to appeal to the taste of the art-buying public. Somehow, the system continued to dominate cultural life in France. Ibels noted that a

couple of paintings had inscriptions such as “Acquis par L’État” or “Vendu,”suggesting a distinction in value between the exhibited artworks. Ibels also commented on the retrospective exhibition of Van Gogh’s paintings at the Salon des Indépendants in the Spring of 1905, which he did not find quite complete. Van Gogh was an artist he admired, especially for his landscapes, and, in this article, he compared him with Claude Gellée and Rembrandt. He called the exhibition by Georges Seurat “un enseignement salutaire” that, however, proved that mathematics and theories of physics had nothing to do with Art, and that painting light by decomposing it into shades was a mistake which resulted in nothing more than showing nature as being discolored.

In the same article, he defended the genre of caricature and called it the art “le plus méconnu” and “le plus incompris.” His explanation of how he separates “les caricaturistes” from “les caractéristes” gives us an insight into his insistence on caricature as a form of art. According to Ibels, in France at the time, there were no caricaturists and Forain, Steinlen, Hermann Paul, and Louis Legrand were simply “caractéristes.” He calls Willette ”un délicieux poète de la palette et du crayon.” He notes that “Léandre réussit superbement la charge, son art est peuple, celui de Sem est bourgeois, et celui de Cappiello est aristocrate.” The caricature style he appreciates is by those artists whose drawing, without any caption and by the sole comic value of line, and not through subject matter, provokes spontaneous laughter, as is the case with Hokusaï in Japan, and Busch in Germany. He did find “real caricaturists” in the Salon des Indépendants, but they were all from “countries other than France.” The final distinction, in his opinion, lies in this: The “caricaturistes” realize that their art is completely based on the comic value of the line, with or without any deformation. Their drawing is comical by itself, without any

caption. The "caractéristes" observe life and seize its distinctive side, which they accentuate or deform by the drawing itself or by the caption. A drawing by a "caractériste" can be funny or sad, depending on the subject and it is almost never understood properly only by itself and without a caption. The "caricaturiste" expresses himself in a funny way, and the "caractériste" expresses funny or sad things and events. One is born a "caricaturiste" he adds, and one becomes a "caractériste."

L'Assiette au Beurre

This last quarter of the nineteenth century was truly the golden age of the French illustrated magazine. Magazines came and went, satirizing various political scandals and the turmoil of the Republic. By 1901, no one would think that another magazine could show anything original and fresh. Yet*, L'Assiette au Beurre* was very quickly recognized as unique, and immediately drew attention at home as well as abroad. The first page of its April 4, 1901 premiere issue, called attention to the plight of the striking workers and to the failure of the government to keep its promises. This first issue is also Ibels's first contribution to *L'Assiette*. He continued with regular submissions till November 5, 1910. He was also asked to create covers for issues on "La Foire du Trône Républicain" (issue # 213) and "Beuglants de Province" (#273, 1906), with text by André Ibels. (figure 23) The magazine lasted until the fall of 1912, and during those 11 years and some 593 issues, it never ceased to criticize. Topics included the exploitation of women and children (prostitution, child abuse), inhumane treatment of non-white people, as well as the documentation of catastrophes and disasters, such as mine and factory explosions and subway fires, and reports of fake charity schemes.[184] The magazine had, on average, 16

[184] Stanley Appelbaum, *French Satirical Drawings from "L'Assiette au Beurre,*" New York: Dover Publications, Inc., p. v.

drawings per issue with captions. Its founder, Samuel Schwartz assembled a great team of artists such as Steinlen, Ibels, and Léandre, who contributed more frequently than others, while Forain, Caran d'Ache and Robida made fewer contributions. The reason for their rare appearances could be the fact that Forain and Caran d'Ache were ardently antisemitic during the Dreyfus Affair, an attitude popular in the press of the time, but something that Samuel Schwartz probably did not allow in his publication. One of its most unique features was the practice of devoting an entire issue to a single theme. Many single-theme issues were drawn by one artist, some were shared by two, some by three. The price for one issue rose quickly, from 25 centimes in 1901, to 50 centimes in 1904, while its competitors were selling for much less.[185] This made *L'Assiette* clearly a connoisseur's magazine.

Ibels contributed several drawings on the subject of *Les Croquants*, the clodhoppers, which Schwartz used for issues 3, 4, 7, and 9. The one shown in the first issue depicted two peasants complaining about the money spent on a sick aging parent. In the April 25 issue, *L'Assiette* published another drawing from the series *Croquants*, showing two young lovers in a stable being surprised by an older man. The caption says: *Malheureux! Sur la paille de seigle*! The December 7, 1901, No 36, issue focused on censorship in cafés-concerts. The headline was, *La Censure, 1ère Partie: Les Cafés-Concerts*, and Ibels produced all sixteen of the lithographed satirical plates, some in color, some half in color, showing different "types" of performers from the Café-Concert, along with a few lyrics from the songs they were singing. These lyrics were usually very risqué and subject to censorship. Many of these "types" are also similar to the figures Ibels showed in his book *Les Demi-Cabots*. Among them, are a singer with a powerful

[185] Appelbaum vii.

voice, and the masterfully executed center page image of the Machinson Sisters, showing them in their frilly undergarments and black stockings, each holding a black cat at crotch level: *Voulez vous me donner un bout, bout, bout? Car j'ai un petit chat, qui n'a pas mangé ça, ça, ça*! (figure 24) Each page had a reproduction of the seal "Visé par la Censure," obviously making fun of it by putting a stamp of "approval" on something so ribald and suggestive.[186] One picture of Mévisto in this issue was titled: "Genre Socialiste" and was accompanied by his lyrics. (figure 25) Ibels also showed four female "types" of performers: L'Espagnole de Belleville, a woman in a hat and a dress with gigot-style sleeves; La Saint-Lazare, a woman in a modest, monochrome dress, Les Deux Braves, a woman in a black, sleeveless gown, and "Je n'ai vu qu'un chat," a woman on stage, singing. Under the image, the caption says *Genre grivois*. (figure 25) This labeling of performers by style was done for the purpose of advertising, and became common practice. Sometimes a genre would be named after a performer, such as "Genre Yvette," or "Genre Mévisto," "Genre diction," etc. Songs were written in a certain "genre," which further marked them as the product of commercial demand. The subject of this particular genre was associated with an anacreontic and erotic style that performers elevated to the heights of the trivial and grotesque.

Ibels illustrated the entire June 23,1906 (# 273) issue on provincial cabarets as hotbeds of prostitution and moral turpitude. The issue comments on the proliferation of prostitution, which was, at the time, tolerated but not legal. The center pages show a scene in which a single full-figured woman is surrounded by bourgeois men and soldiers

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[186] More on censorship of political caricature, and censorship in general in nineteenth-century France, see Justin, Goldstein, *Censorship of Political Caricature in Nineteenth-Century France*, Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1989.

to whom she is offering a plate on which they could place tips for her performance. She is provocatively dressed with her dress barely covering her bust. The title is " Quête." (figure 23) The text, written by André Ibels, Henri-Gabriel Ibels's brother, is about the way young Parisian girls from the age of 15-17 were seduced by promises of a good pay and fame, to leave Paris and move to the provinces in order to sing and pursue the "vocation of an artist" in the café-concert world, where, eventually, they became "filles publiques," women who sold themselves mostly out of material necessity.[187] He states that even journals published the ads that lured innocent girls. He gave an example of an ad by a certain "M. DUMEC," that was printed side by side, along with articles by reputable scientists, journalists and scholars. André Ibels calls the journal and the entire society, "accomplices" in this form of "white slavery." The images and story tell the tale of an upstanding young woman in society, slowly being brought down by men's sexual and financial manipulation. The images depict scenes from cafés with young girls entertaining customers, with "serious" clients with money in their hands, and clients without money, labeled, "not serious." In its best days, the main pages of *l'Assiette* were almost entirely pictorial. It featured one large picture per page, and often there was a single double-page picture in the centerfold. From time to time, one or two pages were occupied by a brief essay concerning the theme of the issue. Many drawings were in black and white but there was also use of a 'full-color' treatment. From the very beginning, the magazine was marked as anarchist, and, therefore, constantly in trouble with the authorities. One of its main contributors, Aristide Delannoy, was fined an

[187] Jill Harsin wrote extensively on prostitution in Fin-de-Siècle Paris. In one of her essays used for this study is "Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris," *French Studies*, V. 17 No. 4 (1992): 1048, she examines the sociology of nineteenth-Century prostitution.

outrageous sum of 3000 francs for his attacks on political figures, and was put in jail for a year. The magazine organized an issue (No. 423, of May 1909) on the general topic of "Artists," for the purpose of offering the original drawings for sale and sending the money to Delannoy's family.

Le Rire, *Le Sifflet*, *Le Figaro*

One of the journals interested in arts, culture and politics that lasted for over six decades was Félix Jouven's *Le Rire*. It was founded in 1894 and lasted into the 1950s (it reappeared shortly in the 1970s), and was one of the most successful journals during that time. What attracted Ibels to it was that it poked fun both at the politicians and at social issues. *Le Rire* was a small print journal with outstanding images in color on the front and back pages, as well as on the two pages of the center spread. Text and advertising were in black and white. Artists were eager to publish their work in this journal, its most famous contributors being Toulouse-Lautrec, Ibels, Steinlen and the Italian Leonetto Capiello.

On February 17, 1898, Ibels founded a journal called *Le Sifflet* in support of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, and in response to Caran-D'Ache's *Le Psst...!* The work for the cause occupied him till June 19, 1899. This journal and Ibels's artistic and political contribution to it are discussed in greater detail in the chapter III, on Ibels and Anarchy.

Book and sheet music Illustrations

In his book published in 1980, *One for the Money: Politics and Popular Song*, historian Dave Harker states that, when we analyze and evaluate popular songs, it is

important to remember that we are, at the same time, "simultaneously reconstructing an alternative working-class history."[188] By "alternative," he implies that there is a culture distinctly separate from the one that is considered "high" culture. If we examine the content and the style of popular songs during Ibels's involvement, we can conclude that it was more "vulgar," and, at the same time, evoked the plight of the working class.

Ibels's first venture into illustrating song sheets and monologues was for brothers Jules and Auguste Mévisto in 1892, first for Jules Mévisto's performance at l'Horloge, a small garden-style café-concert located on the Champs Elysée, and, then, for Mévisto at la Scala, which was a more upscale restaurant. The lithographs were in color or in black and white. One illustration of J. Mévisto as Pierrot is particularly striking. It is for Pierre Trimouillat's song "l'Argent" (at l'Horloge). It features Pierrot in an elongated pose, showing his empty pockets. Saunier commented that these songs and monologues were written by talented poets "qui se plaisent à écrire pour le Café-Concert de petits poèmes où des préoccupations sociales se mêlent aux préoccupations d'art."[189] Ibels followed up with a series of Pierrots (for J. Mévisto) such as le "Pierrot des Macchabées, Le Condamné"- a terrified-looking Pierrot is shown in a white shirt and his black tights, holding in his hand the knife with which he committed a murder. Saunier calls this drawing "une véritable œuvre d'art." Then follow, among others, "la Chanson du

[188] Dave Harker, *One for the Money: Politics and Popular Song*, London: Hutchinson, 1980.

[189] Saunier 34.

Rouet," an image of a robust peasant woman breastfeeding her baby, and "le Malchanceux," of a worker en route to or from work.[190]

Ibels continued to create many other sheet covers, some of which he added two years later to the 56 pieces shown at his exhibition at la Bodinière November 5-December 15, 1894. A large number of these illustrations were shown at the retrospective at the Galerie Documents, May 21-June 21, 1933.

Book Illustrations

In the *Mercure de France's* issue of January 1898, a question from André Ibels, H.-G. Ibels's younger brother, was printed: Should books be illustrated? To that Rachilde responded that a work of literary art should never be illustrated. Mallarmé said that books needed no illustrations since the content of a book should lead readers' imagination. We now know that some writers feared that illustrations would disturb or change the meaning of the text, and preferred to have their works left to stand alone. Valéry and Gide, for instance, never included images to accompany their texts. Ibels wanted to collaborate with writers, especially those whose work he admired and, as we will see, mostly with those who supported anarchist ideas. The collaborators needed to share a certain idea of the appearance of the book, and work on the meeting of literary and artistic expression, where both artist and writer would be in harmony.

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[190] Ibels also illustrated "En Remontant la Butte" by Léon Durocher (1862-1918), poet of *Le Chat Noir*. This was a repertoire of nine songs titled : »La chute des feuilles », « Montmartre », « Le retour de Cythère », « Berceuse conjugale », « la Chosette », « Watteau en correctionnelle », « Cornaronet », « Souhaits pour deux », and « Au pardon. » The illustration on the cover page shows a girl holding a black cat, the title positioned on the left and the partial image of the Eiffel Tower on one side, Montmartre on the other.

Le Journal, in its issue of December 3, 1893, published under the title "Livres d'étrennes," sixteen projects for book covers by Ibels and R. Meunier. Particularly successful were *Émile ou de l'Education*, by Jean-Jacques Rousselot [sic.]," with the image of a man holding and whipping a child; they also illustrated *Bertrand et Arton* (in 3 volumes) with subtitles - *Pourquoi on n'a pas arrêté Arton; Pourquoi on n'a pas arrêté Dupas; Pourquoi on n'a pas arrêté...*)

In 1896 Ibels illustrated *les Demi-Cabots* – with chapters on "le café-concert," "le cirque," "les Forains," published by Charpentier and Fasquelle, the publishers of Zola's *La Terre*. The text was written by Georges d'Esparbès, Andrin, Ibels, Maurice Lefèvre and Georges Montorgueil. The first image inside the covers, and under the title, shows a café-concert as place where people could watch a performance, have a drink and eat.

Historian Theodore Zeldin stated that it is difficult to speak in exact terms about the importance of the Café-Concerts for the life of Parisians at the time.[191] The popular so-called "caf'-con" had live music, with often large orchestras, and with time it took on an important role in social life.[192] Ibels's print "L'Éventail du Café-concert" on one of the introductory pages of *Les Demi-Cabots*, depicts a scene from the perspective of back stage, with a male performer bowing in front of the audience, a female performer anxiously waiting for her turn, and a stage hand, waiting for his cue. Figures are

191 Theodore Zeldin, *France 1848-1914*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 699.

[192] The most famous café-concert was Eldorado, built in 1858 on the Boulevard de Strasbourg, and where the most famous performers could be seen. Right across from the Eldorado was La Scala that was frequented by much lower-class patrons and was much noiser, although, in the twentieth century, it was considered superior of the two. The Moulin Rouge was built in 1889 with a large ballroom, and a garden where one could watch the show. Worth mentioning were also Le Jardin de Paris, Le Nouveau Cirque, Les Montagnes Russes, l'Olympia, Les Fantaisies Oller, and many others. (Zeldin 700-701.)

positioned so the perception of depth is achieved by these cues provided by the artist. Some of the images are simple etchings, croquis, pastels and even watercolors, reprinted in the book. All of them show Ibels's emblematic enveloping and life-rendering, line that gives his 'types' character, and volume.

Ibels also illustrated *La Terre* by Zola with some eighteen lithographs, originally mostly done in pastel. (figure 26) The original preparatory drawings were exhibited at the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts' Salon du Champ de Mars, at the end of April, 1896. The illustration for the cover of *La Terre* was much talked about, but what is almost completely unknown is that Ibels did the illustrations (covers and inside illustrations) for all twenty volumes of Zola's *Les Rougon-Macquart*, for Les Editions Parisiennes. The figures on the cover are all black on orange background, representing a scene from the book with one or two characters. The figures are presented in a unified and simplified style.

Another illustration was for a book by the chansonnier Georges Millandy, *Lorsque tout est fini... Souvenirs d'un Chansonier du Quartier Latin,* published in 1933 by Albert Messein, with images of the chansonniers and the Quartier Latin scene. Along with those by Ibels, drawings were provided by Marcel Lenoir, J. Villon, Willete and others. He also illustrated a book by Georges Renault and Gustave Lerouge, *Le Quartier Latin*. Edmond de Goncourt asked Ibels to illustrate his naturalist novel *La Fille Elisa*, published by Calman-Lévy in 1877. In this book, the story of a prostitute who kills her soldier lover because he attempted to rape her, are shown sixty-eight of Ibels's illustrations originally done in pastel, pencil and watercolor and reprinted in the volume. The illustrations are of superb quality, and in their more naturalistic style, quite different

from what Ibels had done so far. They show Ibels's classical training and remarkable aptitude as a painter and draftsman. Some of the angles are recognizable, such as the in the image of Elisa and her mother in the theater. It shows the two women in the box, watching a performance in an angle similar to the one Ibels used for the poster of *Les Mirages* for Le Théâtre Libre. In 1904 he created a series of illustrations that were assembled in a book titled *Quand nos grands hommes étaient petits*.

On September first of the same year he wrote in a letter to André Antoine:

> Je viens de passer 25 jours et presque 25 nuits à composer pour les magasins du Louvre, une série d'images populaires qui paraitront en album sous le titre: *Quand nos grands hommes étaient petits*…jamais je n'ai dessiné avec plus de facilité.

The volume was published by Quantin Cartonnage 1904, with 45 pages of illustrations in black and white and color, with short biographies of Bertrand Du Guesclin, Michelangelo, Turenne, Molière, Benjamin Franklin, Mozart, Napoléon and others.

Books written and illustrated by Ibels

What is almost completely unknown, is that, aside from illustrating other people's works, and writing plays for the theater, Ibels wrote and illustrated his own books. These included:

L'art et la manière de former un ministère. (A l'usage de Mm. les Preésidents, par H.-G. Ibels, Dessinateur Parlamentaire.) Plus de 1.000 Combinaisons Ministérielles. This first, undated edition was on sale at Ibels's studio, 66 Cardinal Lemoine, at the price of five francs. He used a well-known mix-and-match device common in childrens' books, and prefaces it with the following:

1. Pour UTILISER AVEC PROFIT le présent ouvrage (M. Briand restant toujours aux Affaires Étrangères), si vous voulez reconstituer le Ministère d'Union Nationale, il suffit de TOURNER EN MÊME TEMPS les coupures 1, 2, 3.

2. Pour constituer un nouveau ministère avec LES MÊMES ÉLÉMENTS, ne tourner que les coupures no 2. Essayer chacune des têtes en les plaçant SUCCESSIVEMENT entre la coiffure et le corps de chaque ministère, c'est-à-dire entre LES FEUILLETS 1 et 3 ce qui permet déjà 196 combinaisons, et si on tient compte des NOMS INSCRITS EN MARGE, LES MILLES COMBINAISONS sont largement dépassées.

3. Le choix des 14 députés et sénateurs, actuellement ministres, permettant 196 combinaisons, chacun des 1,000 sénateurs et députés ayant l'espoir justifié de se voir un jour attribuer un portefeuille, c'est UN MILLION de combinaisons que devra envisager. M. le Président de la République au moyen du présent ouvrage.

On comprend pourquoi il y a si peu d'appelés parmi les élus.

H.-G. Ibels

The first page honors Aristide Briand (1862-1932) who served eleven terms as Prime Minister of France during the Third Republic, and whose personality and work Ibels obviously admired. The remaining fourteen pages are cut in three parts, with images of ministers of finance, justice, interior, war, navy, colonies, public works, aviation, public education, pensions, labor, commerce, agriculture. Each page gives three interchangeable options: hat, face, and body. This was clearly Ibels' commentary on the political situation in France at the time, where ministers tended to come and go from one ministerial position to the other. In fact, it appears that many of the ministers at the time held various ministerial titles, to the point of seeming, at least to Ibels, interchangeable. For instance, Minister Joseph Paul-Boncour (1873-1972) was the first Minister of War, then subsequently, Minister of Foreign Affairs, then Minister of Labor; Raymond Poincaré, on the other hand, was first Minister of Public Education, and later on, Minister of Finances; Edouard Daladier, Minister of War an Minister of Public Education, all these functions were represented in this book. On the back cover Ibels depicts silhouetted, faceless figures of two men, in a gesture that is subtitled *Le Sacrifice.... pour la République*! Based on the content of the book we read this gesture as expressing an agreeable exchange of ministerial titles.

Dating this book is a difficult task since many of the ministers whose names were listed on the margins of each page, served in the French Government for decades, often going from one ministerial position to another. However, I found a strong indication that the

book was, most likely, printed in 1929, in the bi-weekly satirical magazine *Cyrano*, in its November 10, 1929 issue. The magazine published an article on the ministerial elections of 1929, and ridiculed the election process, during which Prime Minister André Tardieu elected his cabinet of twenty-eight people in just forty-eight hours. It shows how the positions were given - not based on merit or competence, but on the basis of politicians' preferences. In the same issue the magazine published an illustration by Ibels titled "Le Nouvel Époux," showing Minister Tardieu and Marianne, symbol of France. They are both in evening clothes, he in a tuxedo, bowing while kissing her hand, and she in her Phrygian cap and an evening gown. The caption says : "Tardieu: mariage de raison? Marianne: Pourquoi pas d'amour? " The journal published another Ibels's illustration that also appears in Ibels's *L'Art et la manière de former un ministère*, of Aristide Briand in a room, looking through a window at the word PAIX, right above the beautiful, rising sun.

Ibels found his most powerful weapon of political resistance in the humorous treatment of the body politic. By turning the image of ministers of the French state into a humorous subject, he created an unofficial but persuasive political art. In this book, the distorted images of the ministers became a visual repudiation of the political authority that passed off as reputable and stable government.

Ibels's last published work was a new method of teaching and research using lines and colors, titled *Nouvelle Méthode d'Enseignement et de Recherches par les lignes et par les couleurs*: *Tablettes Chronologiques documentaires, synchroniques et synoptiques de l'Histoire, de la Littérature, des Beaux-Arts et des Sciences*. He started working on this method at the turn of the century but it took him some thirty years to finally publish it. The extraordinarily ingenious method consists of assigning one particular color (out of five - blue, green, yellow and white) to a century. He uses only five colors that are repeated because, according to him, after five centuries it is difficult to confuse historical data and characters. For instance, even though the names of Pericles, Clovis, Hugues Capet, Louis XI and Raymond Poincaré are in different boxes but of the same color (white), their names cannot be confused. Ibels thus spoke about the usefulness of the method in the introduction for the book:

> Cette méthode permet de fixer dans la mémoire, sans effort, par la seule vision, les noms et les événements historiques les plus importants dans l'Histoire, la Littérature, la Science, les Beaux-Arts et permet par la concordance des lignes, qui accompagnent des personnages représentant ainsi la place qu'ils ont occupée dans leur siècle, d'établir entre eux un synchronisme absolu. [...] Il sera très précieux pour la préparation des cours et des examens, surtout si, adoptant le principe de cette méthode, chacun dresse soi-même, sur un sujet à étudier, des cartes de mêmes dimensions que celles de notre album, pour les comparer entre elles.

In this book he gives opinions on this method from reputable sources, including Henry de Chennevierres, Curator of Paintings and Drawings at the Louvre Museum who, in his letter to Ibels, dated July 28, 1905, wrote that "Il est impossible de rêver pour la mémoire de l'oeil et pour la justesse des compréhensions historiques, un mode de clarté plus saisissant." He also includes a letter from A. Bruneau, Inspector of Artistic and Professional Education who said that Ibels's method allows for a faster education and "plus sûre avec des moyens plus accessibles à l'enfant."

To conclude: lithography, through which Ibels expressed himself as an artist, constitutes the principle axis of his career. His work was inspired by contemporary life, and abounds with subjects drawn from the spectacle of modern Paris, particularly from the café, circus and boxing ring. His oeuvre embodies the ideal of art as a part of everyday life, a chronicle of the artist's perception of the world around him. He used his skills as an excellent colorist and draftsman, enriching the vocabulary of lithography by working on numerous posters, journals, books and sheet music illustrations, in which he mirrored the changing environment of the nineteenth-century France.

His work and subject matter strayed from tradition, and were mostly centered on figure drawing that sought an immediate effect. He rejected the laborious craftsmanship of the academics, although several of his drawings show that he possessed

the technique of an academically trained artist. Instead, with remarkable skill and dexterity, he laid pure colors either directly on the canvas, paper or lithographic stone, and even left some parts completely bare. While he continued to paint throughout his life, his oil paintings have not been commented on (the most useful evidence being, so far, numerous auction catalogues), and we can see that his work in oil is dispersed. Locating this part of his œuvre and commenting on it would be the subject matter of another study.

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CHAPTER III

Ibels and Anarchism

This chapter discusses Ibels's involvement in the anarchist movement; the modalities of his inscription in public debate and political crisis such as the Dreyfus Affair; his individual as well as collective intervention in these crises; the diverse functions of his œuvre in these circumstances; and the personal stakes for him and their consequences. The first part will situate the debate surrounding the anarchist movement in France in the last two decades of the 19th century within the broader context of contemporary discussions on the topic of anarchy, and discuss the writings of anarchist leaders including Pelloutier and Grave who profoundly influenced Ibels and his work.[193] The second part will focus on the Dreyfus Affair and the period that immediately followed.

As an artist, Ibels emphasized indifference to traditional subject matter, and very quickly integrated his anarchist engagement into his work. He was friends with anarchist leaders such as Jean Grave (1854 -1939), who was interested in the use of art for the propagandistic purpose of conveying anarchist ideals. Very early in his career, Ibels included etchings and drawings as complements to anarchist leaders' arguments in the brochures, reviews and songs they published, and was conscious of his role as a participant in a struggle leading to, if nothing else, the strong critique of the capitalist order and the documentation of the traumas of the industrial revolution. For the young Nabi still very much involved with the group and its theories, this also meant freedom from the standards and confinements of traditional painting, and finding his own free and

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[193] Major sources for late nineteenth-century anarchism are: Jean Grave, *Le Mouvement libertaire*, Paris: Les Œuvres représentatives, 1930; Jean Maitron, *Histoire du mouvement anarchiste en France (1880-1914)*, Paris: Société universitaire d'éditions et de librairie, 1951; Richard Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin-de-Siècle France*, Lincoln, Neb.,: University of Nebraska Press, 1972; James Joll, *The Anarchists*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980.

expressive voice - the feeling shared by his closest artists-friends. Ibels's depiction of the ordinary life of the Parisian streets was quite radical, and consequently, the press as well as the general public took notice. He glorified the common man through his use of humor and straightforward social comment. He was certainly aware that his art transgressed conventional taste, and chose a form that was easily understood by a mass audience. During the Dreyfus Affair he belonged to the side whose engagement and passion initiated the debate and public outcry which subsequently forced a retrial. His activism as an artist and intellectual was part of a revolutionary, political and social involvement of artists, academicians and writers who were directly involved in reconciling aesthetic innovation and social revolution.

Anarchism and Art Ibels's Early Involvement

Political instability had been recurrent in France since the Franco-Prussian war. Yet, Ibels's early childhood was a relatively prosperous and peaceful one. After the Commune was crushed in 1871, in 1881 the ruling elite put into place a parliamentary democracy. Albeit skewed to the very rich and powerful and stil repressive of those thought to have been formerly associated with the Commune, it did afford citizens some protection against the state, and at the same time, encouraging them to play active roles in politics and commerce.[194] Although democracy grew steadily during this period, the rising national debt, heavy taxation, the Panama Canal scandals, the invasion of Tunisia (Treaty of Bardo), made anarchism and socialism more and more popular with the

[194] On the history of France during this period, see Theodore Zeldin, *The Oxford History of Modern Europe, France 1848-1945*, vol. I, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1977; Roger Magraw, *France 1800-1914. A Social History*, London: Longman, 2002.

masses.[195] The economic depression (a result of the collapse of the Union Générale, a large Catholic bank whose stocks had risen dramatically in the boom years of 1879-81), peaked in 1887, when Ibels was 20 years old, and lingered on for nearly a decade thereafter.[196] This period saw the birth of workers' parties, for instance, the Fédération des travailleurs socialistes de France in 1879, and in 1880, the Parti Ouvrier français (the first Marxist party in France) - and it is quite certain that Ibels was aware of their doctrines.

Robert L. Herbert and Eugenia W. Herbert call it a "small wonder" that many painters awoke to social concerns and that the ever-widening gap isolating the artistic avant-garde from the general public reinforced their sympathies with radical political movements.[197] The Impressionists, with the exception of Pissaro, were indifferent to social issues, as opposed to all of the Neo-Impressionists.[198] Also, most of the painters and sculptors associated with Gauguin and the Nabis were neo-Catholics and conservative, yet Ibels, Steinlen, Willette, Vallotton were directly associated with the

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[195] Alexander Varias, *Paris and the Anarchists*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996, p. 65.

[196] Robert Michael, *A History of Catholic Anti-Semitism: The Dark Side of the Church*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. p. 132. In this book, Michael's view is that Catholics blamed the Jews for all France's disasters - the loss of the war to Prussia in 1870-71; the horrors of the Commune; the collapse of the largest bank, the Union Générale, to which were linked financial and agricultural disasters, and most of all, loss of conservative Catholic influence. Also, Michael's view was that the real culprit was the Union Générale's director, the Jews were universally blamed.

[197] Robert L. Herbert and Eugenia W. Herbert, "Artists and Anarchism. Unpublished Letters of Pissarro, Signac and Others," *Burlington Magazine*, 102 (November 1960): 474.

[198] In his book *Post-Impressionism from Van Gogh to Gauguin*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, (1956): 147-84, John Rewald gives an analysis of the political views of the artists of the Symbolist period.

anarchists.[199] The unpublished letters of Jean Grave were almost entirely addressed to artists such as Camille Pissarro, Paul Signac, Maximilien Luce, and others.

In 1890 Ibels was already involved with the Nabi group, and as an emerging artist, he was most likely aware of the risks involved in making and selling art in the capitalist marketplace.[200] Being young and still unknown, he had to become more adept at drawing attention to himself, and at finding jobs that fit his skills. He understood that cooperative ventures were his best approach to recognition as well as selling because, at that time, many galleries were forced to scale back after the crash of 1882, and had to lower their prices. As a result they had to withdraw the temporary financial support they often provided artists during intervals when their paintings did not sell. Paul-Durand-Ruel, for instance, whose gallery on the Rue Laffitte had regularly showcased impressionist paintings in the early 1870s, turned his attention from 1885 until the Exposition of 1889 toward the US, where he sold impressionist canvases to Americans. As a result of this situation, a larger and larger number of independent artists were competing for buyers directly, rather than through dealers or other agents. The time of traditional patronage was over and the artists had to finance their own projects and find a different way to sell them.[201] Along with his friends, the Nabis, Ibels exhibited in smaller galleries which highlighted their struggle against the establishment that dominated their craft, and showed acceptance of their exile from the academies and the official salons.

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[199] In Robert L. Herbert, From Millet to Léger: Essay in Social History, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002, pp. 99-100.

[200] For a discussion on the market for avant-garde painting in France, including its dealers and exhibition spaces, see Robert Jensen, *Marketing in Fin-de-Siècle Europe*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, Chapters 1-4.

[201] Dennis Phillip Cate, *The Graphic Arts and French Society, 1871-1914*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988, p. 126.

It felt like the right time for Ibels to answer the call of the anarchist leader Peter Kropotkin (1842 –1921) who had encouraged artists to lend their talents to the anarchist movement and to engage their work in a more socially constructive direction. According to Kropotkin, the arts had a mission to accomplish for the achievement of the future society, to show the people the ugliness of contemporary life and make them "touch with the finger the cause of this ugliness." He believed that artists should identify with popular needs, and invited them to join the movement in his *Paroles d'un révolté*:

> Vous, poètes, peintres, sculpteurs, musiciens, si vous avez compris votre vraie mission et les intérêts de l'art lui-même, venez donc mettre votre plume, votre pinceau, votre burin au service de la révolution. [202]

During this period, Ibels was engaged and worked with many other artists, writers, and journalists who were involved with both politics and the arts, and loosely speaking constitute a social category we, in the contemporary context, would refer to as "intellectuals." However, the term was used differently in his time, and took on very specific meanings during the Dreyfus Affair. Ibels commented that "intellectual became the synonym for anti-patriot, informer, spy, traitor, agent of the 'syndicate'- as if there had been a syndicate rich enough to buy all these consciences."[203] The term was associated with the political left, opposition and protest. Ibels, and many of his friends who were artists were close to and collaborated with major anarchist leaders. They invested their talent, donated their art work, their articles and even their money to the movement press. Conversely, these leaders and theorists wrote extensively on the important role of arts and artists in the evolution of society. There is a plethora of evidence on the involvement of artists in the anarchist movement of late nineteenth-

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[202] Peter Kropotkin, *Paroles d'un révolté (1885*), Paris: Editions Tops/H.Trinquier, 2002, p. 60.

[203] Ibels, *Promenades*.

century France.[204] This involvement was direct or indirect depending on whether the artists personally knew the anarchist leaders or simply subscribed to the anarchist journals. We know now that Jean Grave for example was close to the Neo-Impressionists.[205]

Another anarchist leader, Fernand Pelloutier (1867–1901) wanted to add "communism of artistic pleasure to the communism of bread." Pelloutier believed that art had always been reserved for the elites, which intensified the people's sense of inferiority.[206] After all, the public rarely deemed that peasants and workers' lives were worthy of its attention. Artists contributed to that general feeling because they mostly portrayed the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, and in so doing, reinforced their class dominance, whether their inspiration was classical or Romantic. According to Pelloutier, such art was largely a "frivolous ornament of the powerful," and he believed that art could only be considered democratic when the masses were able to truly appreciate paintings and poems. Anarchist leader, philosopher and poet Elisée Reclus (1830-1905) invited artists to join the cause and suggested that their artistic style could remain

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[204] In this study I have consulted, among others, the following works that treat the topic of the involvement of artist in the anarchist movement in the late nineteenth-century France. Alexander Varias, *Paris and the Anarchists: Aesthetes and Subversives during the Fin de Siècle*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996; Eugenia Herbert, W. *The Artist and Social Reform: France and Belgium, 1885-1898*, New Haven: Yale University Pres, 1971, Bertrand Tillier, *Les Artistes et l'affaire Dreyfus: 1898-1908*, Seysell: Champ Vallon, 2009;

[205] Paul Signac, for instance, wrote an anonymous defense of neo-Impressionism that Grave published in his La Révolte in 1891, which has often been used to illustrate the group's loyalty to the anarchist movement and also as a defense of the artist's autonomy. See Martha Ward, Pissarro, Neo-Impressionism and the Spaces of the Avant-Garde, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. p. 233.
Signac wrote: "The anarchist painter is not one who represents anarchist pictures but the one who, without concern for money, without desire for recompense, struggles with all his individuality against bourgeois and official conventions by making a personal contribution." In Robert L. Herbert, From Millet to Léger, p. 109.

[206] Fernand Pelloutier, "L'Art et la révolte," Conference. Paris, May 30, 1896, L'Art Social Club, pub., 5, in Alexander Varias, *Paris and the Anarchists: Aesthetes and Subversives During the Fin de Siècle*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996. p. 184.

personal while still serving the social cause. He wrote: "Peintres, graveurs, musiciens, il vous convient de rester vous-mêmes et de reproduire librement ce que vous percevez dans votre miroir intérieur."[207]

Alexander Varias states that artists wishing to become more politically active were often more drawn to anarchism than to mainstream socialism, feeling that socialist leaders were less sympathetic to their creative needs and more willing to impose uniform standards.[208] This brings to mind Ibels's opposition to such uniformity during his rebellion against the Salons. For this reason he viewed anarchism as an ideology that vindicated both his struggle against Salon standards, and his aspirations for social justice. Yet, his stand was more complicated than it initially seemed. As an artist, he supported the avant-garde's break from convention but was certainly aware of the financial impositions that constantly intruded upon his work. At least during his first years as an artist, he identified with the working man and felt that he was faced with the same injustices afflicting others.

Venita Datta claims that for intellectuals anarchism became a "catchall term for discontent."[209] Hence it appealed to men such as Henri Vaugeois and Maurice Pujo, future founders of Action française.[210] Ibels's involvement in the anarchist movement was based on the conscious reciprocity of contributions. To the political activists he was

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[207] Aline Dardel, "Catalogue des dessins et publications illustrées du journal anarchiste. *Les Temps nouveaux: 1895-1914*." Paris: Université de Paris IV. Thèse de Doctorat de Troisième Cycle en Histoire de l'Art, (1980): 36.

[208] Varias 127.

[209] Venita Datta, Birth of a National Icon: the Literary Avant-Garde and the Origins of the Intellectual in France, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999. p. 51.

[210] Action française was founded in 1894 during the Dreyfus affair as a far-right, nationalist and anti-Semitic organization in order to oppose the liberal intellectuals who supported Captain Dreyfus. See Eugen Weber, *Action Française; Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth Century France*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1962.

involved with, his presence brought the legitimization of the socialist cause. For Ibels, the revolution brought the promise of overcoming the difficulties he faced in order to live and create, while also allowing him to share the ideas of his anarchist 'compagnons' who disdained the bourgeois order of the Third Republic, and to feel sympathy for the poor and the downtrodden. For him, these exclus were marginalized by bourgeois society in the same way many artists were, thus, he shifted his focus from the common themes he and the Nabis friends had painted, to scenes of busy Parisian life, the common man, soldiers, and circus performers. He was one of the most notable and sought-after anarchist illustrators, along with Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen.

Aside from illustrating the songs of entertainers such as Aristide Bruant, he illustrated books by Emile Zola and Octave Mirbeau, and contributed to many anarchist journals and causes. He designed numerous posters that announced performances by Mévisto, (many at La Scala). One poster, "Les Malchanceux," shows a worker in his blue uniform, late at night, on his way home from work. Ibels's captures tension in his facial expression, as well as resignation. The man is neither angry nor in a defeated pose; his walk does not look hurried, yet, he seems exhausted.This poster was not designed to stir rebellion but to show that man's life is eternally difficult. However, Ibels did not just provide a simple transcription of what he saw around him, but created a memorable form of art that connected present and future aspirations, and that made neutral reaction impossible. He had his own ideas about the essence of anarchist expression, which is evident in this image that is subversive in the anarchist sense.

Ibels's connection with Zola and Mévisto was reflected in such realistic portraiture -- of workers, vagabonds, and itinerant circus performers, a thematic range

from which he never diverged. However, he did not want to reduce his art to a formula for political communication, as proposed earlier by the Russian Kropotkin and the Frenchman Fernand Pelloutier. Kropotkin and Pelloutier believed that artists had a unique power to reach the popular masses that were largely inaccessible to verbal rhetoric. However, for them, the aesthetic dimension was not as important as the message that they were supposed to convey.[211] Pelloutier, who was born, like Ibels, in 1867, spoke on the subject of "L'art et la révolte" at the meeting of Le Club de l'Art Social (1896) where such topics related to the revolutionary possibilities of art were discussed. In his talk, he criticized the work of the avant-garde as oriented exclusively around aesthetic ends, and not the popular needs of "sharing in the suffering and sentiments of the community."[212] Anarchists and socialists held regular meetings in 1889, at which such figures as Jean Grave, Emile Pouget, Camille Pissarro and Auguste Rodin spoke.[213]

This drastic shift in the meaning of art did not go unnoticed by contemporary art critics, among whom E. Museaux, who believed that socialist art was the most momentous development of the nineteenth century, and that the finest artistic themes were apparent in the observation of popular lives, allowing audiences to share in the struggles of the masses.[214]

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[211] Richard Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin-de-Siècle France*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989. p. 147.

[212] Fernand Pelloutier, "L'art et la révolte." p. 184.

[213] Robert Herbert, *From Millet to Léger*, p.101. Ibels was friends with Camille Pissarro. They both contributed drawing for *La Plume* for its May 1, 1893 special issue on anarchism, that included articles by Grave, Kropotkin and Reclus, as well as drawings by Lucien Pissarro and Luce. Ibels and Pissarro also shared a passion for Japanese art. They were frequent visitors of Samuel Bing's L'Art Nouveau store/gallery, and, in fact, exhibited together at its opening exhibition, on December 26, 1895. See Victor Arwas, *Art Nouveau: The French Aesthetic*, London: Andreas Papadakis, 2002, p. 27.

[214] Dardel 36.

Cafés were popular places where people gathered to discuss current issues, together or with the owners. Ibels's poster for the January 2, 1893 issue of the illustrated weekly *L'Escarmouche* thus shows a battalion of exhausted soldiers passing by on the street in front of a café. (figure 27) Inside, four characters: two patrons, the establishment's owner and perhaps his wife, all working class, uniformly stout and rumpled, take notice. Another poster shows the singer Mévisto in the foreground, looking compassionately at the toiling laborers. As the factory can be seen in the distance polluting the skies, a worker sits a moment to enjoy his pipe, as a tired foot soldier on his Sunday visit home draws near. These sympathetically portrayed working class men and women that appear in Ibels's drawings with their undeniably subversive quality are omnipresent in his art. They did not shock or astonish his contemporaries, yet the truth they showed, the familiarity of the places and situations provoked a strong reaction from the critics as well as the public, leading to emotion, and eventually action. The movement of the soldiers is a reminder of the instability of peace, and the polluting factories and tired workers, of the price society is paying for the Industrial Revolution.

Ibels and Anarchist Journals

Since Ibels's work for the press has already been mentioned in the chapter "Ibels and the Printed Media," this chapter will briefly comment only on the part that concerns his anarchist involvement. On May 1, 1893, *La Plume* published an issue devoted to anarchism - L'Anarchie. It featured Ibels's drawings, along with those of Adolphe Willette, artwork by Camille Pissarro and Maximilien Luce, and other famous

anarchists.[215] The issue contained philosophical articles by Jean Grave,[216] who, along with Adolphe Retté, became closely associated with the journal. Sébastien Faure also contributed an article, as well as Walter Crane, an English artist and book illustrator.

Anarchism did not fade out of *La Plume* or even of a sympathetic journal like *La Revue Blanche* with the end of the era of *attentats* in 1894, but rather fed directly into the Dreyfusard mobilization. In general, the close contact between artists and anarchists that was so strong throughout the early 1890s did not end in 1894, but the anarchists became more distrustful of their bourgeois colleagues who were, most of the time, the very publishers of prominent left-leaning journals. An example is *La Revue Blanche*, edited by the very influential and important brothers Natanson, who were leading figures in what we would call today Parisian intellectual circles.[217]

Emile Pouget and his weekly journal *Le Père Peinard*, written in slang, called for an alliance between art and the revolution. The journal attracted Ibels who, along with Willette, Luce, Vallotton and Lucien Pissarro, contributed drawings that were rather propagandistic in nature.[218] The journal usually had a large drawing on the front page, such as Ibels's "Chanson du gas," the cover page created for the January 22, 1893 issue. This image (described in chapter on Ibels and the Printed Media) of fascinating dislocation and stillness, represents his clearly modernist view of the function of art defined by a new psychological criterion. (fig 44) It recognizes the formation of a new identity and culture while still dealing with the past. The image shows the awareness of

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[215] Four and a half months earlier *La Plume* published Ibels's self portrait.

[216] Editor Léon Deschamps wrote to Jean Grave in prison in November 1894, requesting these articles for *La Plume*.

[217] Varias 212.

[218] Robert L. Herbert, *From Millet to Léger*, p. 101. For more on the anarchy of *La Revue Blanche* and its role during the Dreyfus Affair, see A.B. Jackson, *La Revue Blanche, 1889-1903*. Paris: Minard, 1960. Pp. 45-6; 95-6;100-8.

emerging capitalism, the industrial revolution imposed on humanity, the anger and confusion it causes. Ibels had been a student of Forain, and was capable of the same biting sarcasm, irony and vindictiveness as his master when he chose. In this drawing he complied with Pouget's desire to express his contempt and hatred for the capitalist order by trying to capture the character of the system by means of theatrical and exaggerated caricature. This drawing was based on the "Chanson du Gas," a poem by Gaston Couté (1880-1911), produced outside of the mainstream literature of the period, and for the needs of the cabaret artistique and radical left-wing culture. In Couté's songs and monologues it was the peasants who spoke out against the moral and social established order. Couté often wrote in patois, in such a way that he would also break linguistic norms and therefore reinforce the subversive effect of his poems.

It is well-known that anarchists used journals as means of reaching a wider audience, which was now possible thanks to advances in the printing process. Journals, pamphlets, and brochures were printed faster and in larger numbers. In *Culture and Society*, Williams discusses the notion of mass civilization, and wonders whether we can equate it and industrial civilization, whether we can find institutions like the popular press and advertising to be the necessary consequences of such a system of production.[219] He argues that total equality in our society is impossible, and that, even if it were , then there would be no such thing as opportunity - equal or unequal for anybody.[220] The anarchist press in this case, used the very means of production it was fighting against, and Ibels channeled this opportunity to support the cause, achieve recognition for himself, and earn money using his own talent. In his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of

[219] Williams 275.
[220] Williams 177.

Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin analyses the effect that the new advancements in lithography and new techniques of mass reproduction have on authenticity of artistic production.[221] He states that "mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual," and that "the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility." It thus does not make sense to ask for an "authentic print" because only the existence of the original is linked to the concept of authenticity. This way we see a reversal of the total function of art - its dependence on ritual is diminished, and its existence is more independent of the original, its quality is always depreciated, and it begins to be based on politics. Benjamin states that the "intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment with the orientation of the expert" is a "progressive reaction" of the masses toward art, and he claims that such fusion has greater social significance. However, this "progressive reaction" does not necessarily equate greater enjoyment by the public. He says that conventionally presented art is universally and "uncritically" enjoyed, while the truly new is "criticized with aversion." Based on this we can deduce that for Benjamin the mass produced poster did not have social significance as an art form, however, as a novelty it was at once more subject to the scrutiny of critics and more enjoyed by the public.

Eugenia Herbert explores the relations between the anarchist sympathies of the neo-Impressionists and their choice of subjects in her book *The Artist and Social Reform: France and Belgium 1885-1898,* paying particular attention to drawings and lithographs that artists contributed to the anarchist press. She states that, although the illustrations in *Le Père Peinard* were rough in technique and militantly unsubtle in their message, they

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[221] Walter Benjamin, (Hannah Arendt, Ed.) *Illuminations*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968. (Essay iii)

could at other times show considerable quality, especially when realized by Ibels, Adolphe Willette and Lucien Pissarro who were frequent contributors.[222] Félix Dubois, in his exposé on anarchism, talked about the value and effectiveness of this form of propaganda and affirmed that a good number of these prints rose above the level of common caricature, and were incontestably works of art.[223]

Ibels generally supplied at least a portion of his work to the press and became in consequence an interpreter of contemporary life. He followed in the steps of Daumier and Gavarni who had raised this form of caricature to the unquestioned rank of art. Caricature became a real counter-power, at the very same time as journals were becoming a favorite place for the art criticism that was being fully developed.

The majority of Ibels's artistic output dealt with a range of human types - soldiers, peasants, workers, vagabonds, all captured sur le vif. Besides *le Père Peinard* and *L'Escarmouche*, he supplied numerous illustration to *La Révolte*, *Le Cri de Paris*, *Le Courrier Francais*, *L'Echo de Paris*, *La Revue Blanche*, his brother André's *La Revue Anarchiste*, and *Le Sifflet*, which he created solely for the purpose of defending Captain Alfred Dreyfus. In the drawings he submitted, he combined aesthetic with political radicalism without hampering the autonomy of either. He knew that only through his graphic art work, designing posters and illustrations in the popular press or of anarchist "chansons," would he be able to succeed in reaching a mass audience. It has indeed been noted that French anarchists were far more successful in promoting art as an ally of revolution than socialists.[224] In terms of artistic expression, Ibels joined the anarchist

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[222] Eugenia Herbert 62.

[223] "Le Petit Anarchiste," as quoted in Eugenia Herbert,*Artists and Anarchism*, p. 109.

[224] A.B. Jackson, *La Revue Blanche 1889-1903;Origine, influence, bibliographie*, Paris: M.J. Minard,1960.

movement at a time when there were contrasting views of artists and other activists regarding the purpose of artistic images. Anarchist leaders were primarily interested in the propagandistic value of art, and in art that showed subjects in a realistic manner in order to draw the attention of a sympathetic audience. Ibels sought to persuade readers through the immediacy of visual images, but also remained dedicated to his aesthetic pursuit and creativity. He was highly conscious of his position as an artist to further its goals in his work. He saw himself as a not so common participant engaged in a struggle leading to the revolutionary demolition of the capitalist order, and was aware of his position within an artistic revolution, which he, along with the rest of the Nabis, perceived as a liberation from the rigid, oppressive forces of traditional standards.

The Dreyfus Affair

During the 1890s France was swept by waves of anti-Semitism, nationalism and neo-Catholicism. On November 1, 1894, the anti-Semitic journal *La Libre Parole* announced that Alfred Dreyfus, a junior staff officer in the French Ministry of War, and a Jew of Alsatian origin, was found guilty of treason.[225] He was accused of having sent a handwritten schedule (*bordereau*) that contained secret French documents to the Major Max von Schwartzkoppen, who was a German military attaché in Paris. The French army that was a bastion of anti-Semitism, monarchism and Catholicism, rushed to find the traitor, and soon the suspicion fell on Dreyfus. In December of the same year he was

[225] On the political history of anti-Semitism in the nineteen-century France, see Robert Byrnes, *Anti-Semitism in Modern France*, Vol 1, *The Prologue to the Dreyfus Affair*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1950; Raoul Girardet, *Le Nationalisme français: 1871-1914*, Paris: Seuil, 1983; and on the topic of French intellectuals and their role during the Affair, see Pascal Ory and Jean-François Sirinelli, *Les Intellectuels en France, de l'Affaire Dreyfus à nos jours*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1986; Christophe Prochasson, *Les Années éléctriques, 1880-1910*. Paris: Editions de la Découverte, 1991; Also by Prochasson, *Les Intellectuels, le socialisme et la guerre, 1900-1938*. Paris: Seuil, 1993.

condemned, and in February 1895 deported for life to Devil's Island, a small rocky islet in the Atlantic Ocean, northern French Guyana. The conviction was generally supported by the public that soon lost interest in the case. The Affair came out in the open again in 1896 when the chief of the intelligence section, Colonel Georges Picquart discovered evidence that indicated the real author of the *bordereau*, chief of the intelligence Major Ferdinand Walsin Esterhazy. After numerous attempts to convince the Deputy Chief of the General Staff, General Gonse, of Dreyfus' innocence, Picquart was silenced as someone who could only bring embarassment to the Army and General Staff with his insistence on reopening the investigation. Dreyfus's brother Mathieu, who made the same discovery as Picquart, soon put pressure on the authorities to reopen the case. Esterhazy was tried in 1898 but soon acquited of all charges. The new Dreyfus trial took place in Rennes, Brittany, on August 7, 1899. Once again, after one month of deliberatios, Dreyfus was found guilty on September 9, and was condemned to ten years of detention. This verdict caused an uproar, and as a result, ten days later, President Loubet signed Dreyfus's pardon with the proviso that he can continue his fight to prove his innocence. This was a turning point in the Affair, which now became a tool for politicians on both Republican and Conservative side in their effort to defame one another. Another aspect, mentioned earlier, was the instability of the Third Republic which saw many Presidents and ministries during the very short period between 1893 and 1899. The Governement was unable to create long-range and long-term goals, which cause distrust among many. One might wonder why a Jewish Colonel was chosen as a scapegoat and not someone else. Norman Kleeblat states that late nineteenth-century France was going through a demographic decline and, as a result, saw a rise of immigration of many "races," the Jews

being the most evidently alien, mostly "concentrated in Paris where national papers were written and national politics waged."[226] He further states

> Explanation of anti-Semitism come from as many directions as do rationalizations of anti-Semitism. None seems to me as forceful as the fact that history and cultural tradition made Jews the resident aliens par excellence. In a country obsessed by the ideal of cultural unity, the Jewish community […] was caught in a bind between patriotic assimilation (of which the Dreyfus family provides one exemple among many) and persistent particularism, irrigated by immigration and confirmed by traditional stereotypes.[227]

The entry of Jews into public life of France was part of many important changes in France in this period. The country still struggled with memories of the defeat in the Franco-Prussian war and the loss of national honor. The war changed the attitude of the state and its people toward Germany, and caused a change in attitudes toward foreign cultures in general.

Artists and writers documented the contemporary fear associated with the manifestations of modernity, especially the rise of the working class and the emergence of mass democracy. These artists and writers created a base for a newly-emerging national figure - the intellectual. Georges Clemenceau named the "intellectual" all those who participated in the struggle for truth and justice during the Affair, and who, thus, sacrificed their artistic, literary and scholarly reputations for the cause. Those who were living by their intellect were joined in this collective struggle using as a means of action, primarily the medium of petition. Cahm states

> Generally speaking, the committed intellectual is placed […] outside the power structures of his society, and he gives his opinion in the name of high ethical or intellectual principles, without regard to official truths, and to the constraints and

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[226] Norman Kleeblat,*The Dreyfus Affair: Art,Truth and Justice*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

[227] Kleeblat xxvii.

> compromises inherent in action carried on within those structures. Thus, during the Affair, the intellectuals insisted that the search for truth must be carried on in a totally independent manner, in accordance with the rigorous principles governing scientific research.[228]

A serious clash took place in Parliament and in the press between those who demanded the revision of the trial, and anti-revisionists, those who opposed it. Soon this clash was seen in the streets as well: duels, demonstrations, brawls rocked all of Paris. In addition to this, there were other reasons for fear, and a deep feeling of instability pervaded French society. As the secretary of the president of the Republic described it, the "structure of the state was unstable and precarious."[229] Kleeblat has stated that in this situation it was to be expected that the enemies of the Republic would find it necessary to "seize on the business of Dreyfus as an opportunity to discredit the regime, and perhaps to topple it."[230]

Ibels and the rest of the Nabis maintained close personal and professional ties with the circle of Jewish intellectuals at *La Revue Blanche*. Headed by the Polish-Jewish Natanson brothers, the journal attracted some of the finest Jewish writers of the decade including Léon Blum, Romain Coolus, Lucien Muhlfeld, Julien Bends and Bernard Lazare.[231] Older Nabis Vuillard and Bonnard were part of the intimate group surrounding Thadée Natanson and his wife Misia, while Ibels and Vallotton were frequently asked to contribute to their journal.[232] These ties were close, and at the time, seemed unbreakable. However, Maurice Denis, seems to have wavered in his attitude towards anti-

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[228] Eric Cahm. *The Dreyfus Affair in French Society and Politics*. London and New York: Longman, 1994. P. 69.

[229] Charles Braibant, *Félix Faure à L'Élysee*. Paris: Hachette, 1963, p. 59.

[230] Kleeblat xxvii.

[231] Jackson 89.

[232] Many of Vuillard's important large scale commissions came from the Natanson family.

Semitism.[233] At times, he defended his Jewish friends, yet he joined the Action Française in the late 1890, a movement which drew its political philosophy from anti-Semites such as Charles Maurras. Other Nabis remained silent during the Affair or showed a deep confusion. Vuillard wept when he heard the guilty verdict of 9 September 1899 but declared that he did not "give a damn about Dreyfus; it's my country that I weep for."[234] Camille Mauclair observed that this was the generation deeply affected by the Dreyfus Affair, and it was inevitable to see it divided into two hostile camps which were also indicative of their preexisting aesthetic divisions – proponents of "elitist" and "social" art. Jane Fulcher explains that, predictably, it is the former group that became anti-Dreyfusard who repudiated their former fascination with non-French art and turned almost obsessively to the criterion of the "purely French."[235] Fulcher further states that "Mauclair pointedly observed," that these "reactionaries" were motivated by fear of "déracinement," and their absorbtion with "origins," and" race."[236]

Nearly everybody had an opinion about Dreyfus, even the pioneers of that seemingly apolitical artistic movement, impressionism. As French historian Bertrand Tillier recounts in his book *Les Artistes et l'Affaire Dreyfus, 1898-1908*, Dreyfusards such as Pissarro, Monet and Luce found themselves at "pallet-knife's point" with anti-Dreyfusards including Degas, Renoir and Cézanne, while a few colleagues, notably

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[233] Maurice Denis, *Journal*, Paris: La Colombe, 1957, p. 59.

[234] As quoted in John Russel*, Edouard Vuillard: 1868-1940*. Book published on the occasion of the Edouard Vuillard exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1971. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1971. p. 111.

[235] Jane Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 113.

[236] Fulcher 113.

Rodin, struggled to stay neutral.[237] Tillier's vivid accounts of the artists' quarrels show how deeply the nation was divided by the Dreyfus case. Ibels's anarchist friends too, hesitated to get involved because they did not see how it could help their cause. Emile Pouget thought that since the Affair concerned only the bourgeoisie, it was up to that class to settle it.[238] This indifference of anarchists lies in their analysis of the Affair: for them this was only a dispute among the bourgeois military, an argument that was supposed to leave the 'defenders of the people' indifferent. That is why, at least until the beginning of 1898, a majority of anarchists believed in the guilt of the "traitor." On January 13, 1898, the newspaper "l'Aurore" published on its front page Zola's open letter to the President of the Republic, Felix Faure. In this letter titled "J'accuse", Zola accused the military in the highest ranks of the French Army of antisemitism and obstruction of justice for having imprisoned Alfred Dreyfus.

Zola was brought to trial for criminal libel on February 7, 1898, conviced and removed from the Legion of Honor. The Dreyfusards needed to come together. Starting with the end of February 1898 when Republican Senator Ludovic Trarieux formed *La Ligue des droits de l'Homme* (The Ligue was officially registered in June of the same year), they contributed more to the rehabilitation of Dreyfus. In 1898 The Ligue had less than 300 members, mostly comprised of Dreyfusards, and Ibels was one of the first artists to join. He was also part of the committee of the founders.[239] Ibels's immediate involvement showed the continuity in his association with anarchist causes and his claim on the future. For him this was a matter of taking a political and ethical position, of redefining the relationship between the individual and society.

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[237] Tillier 173.
[238] *Le Père Peinard*, Paris (November 21, 1897): 4.
[239] Tillier 158.

Ibels the Dreyfusard

At the very beginning of the Affair, two distinctly opposite sides formed: "On était dreyfusard ou on ne L'Était pas," recounted Léon Blum in his *Souvenirs sur l'Affaire*, written thirty-five years after the end of the Affair:[240]

> [...] pendant deux interminables années, entre le début de la campagne de révision et la grâce, la vie s'est trouvée comme suspendue […] L'Affaire fut une crise humaine, moins étendue et moins longtemps prolongée mais aussi violente que la Révolution française ou que la Grande Guerre.

The two sides intervened symetrically on the different levels of the Affair: the Dreyfusards were attacking collective entities such as the church, the army, army generals, while the nationalists or the anti-Semites and anti-Dreyfusards were attacking the Jews and the intellectuals. On another level, they would attack a personality on whom they could focus – for the Dreyfusards: Esterhazy, and for the Anti-Dreyfusards - Zola, Dreyfus or Picquart. Images were recognized as a powerful tool in the hands of both sides. Where photography was not allowed, the "artist's impression" could have a tremendous impact. Thus, Grand-Carteret wrote:

"[...] l'image crie, assourdit, attaque, accuse, grossit, exagère. [...] C'est [...] le commencement de la folie furieuse dont se trouvent atteints, tôt ou tard, tous les peuples qui, comme nous, se laissent prendre à de mensongères fictions.241

Grand-Carteret here reduces the caricaturists to slaves of politics. He says that there are violent journals, moderate, passionate and even neutral ones. In order to convey ideas to the masses clearly, in a way that would be easy for them to comprehend, these journals had to find a common visual language. Thus, Esterhazy was represented as a 'uhlan,' Zola as a collaborator of "la

[240] Léon Blum, *Souvenirs sur l'Affaire*, Paris: Gallimard, 1935, p.98.
[241] John Grand-Carteret, *L'Affaire Dreyfus et l'image*, Paris: Flammarion, 1898, p. 18.

Triplice," Rochefort as a "phare lumineux."242 While the majority of the public believed firmly in the guilt of Captain Dreyfus, artists and intellectuals were equally strong in their Dreyfusard support. The favored form of expression of intellectuals during the Affair was that of the political exposé, using the constitutional right to petition for Dreyfus's release. Also, artists used these rights either to defend the interests of their own field or to become associated with larger initiatives and mobilizations. Thus Hoffman calls the Affair "a crusade of journalists,"243 since all the endless discussions, the decisions and actions took place in the offices of Paris daily newspapers such as *L'Aurore*, *La Fronde*, *Le Siècle*, *Le Radical*, *La Petite République*, *La Lanterne* and others. He also says that the categories "intellectual," "journalist" and "politician" overlapped so much that they were at times indistinguishable. Intellectuals were considered a particular social category since they joined this political battle as such. Ibels joined the cause without any hesitation at the very beginning of the Affair, with the revisionists who sought to reopen the case and vindicate Dreyfus. Along with him, among others, the Dreyfusard camp included his close friends Quillard, Fénéon, Kahn, Pissarro, Luce, Mirbeau, Signac, Vallotton, and Steinlen. The only one in this radical group of painters who joined the anti-Dreyfusards was Forain, who was more antibourgeois in his professed radicalism than sympathetic to doctrines of reform.

It has often been remarked that Dreyfus and his personal views became an insignificant element in the Affair, and that, in fact, the latter had little in common with those of his most ardent supporters. As Quillard declared frankly - and his views were typical of other radical artists - he did not care about Dreyfus, the well-to-do army officer. The artists cared instead about using the opportunity to address all the issues of the unstable society they were living in. To begin with, the anarchists were angered by government threats to individual freedoms, and by the way their colleagues were tried before the courts. Quillard acknowledged that no one could know with certainty in the opening months of 1898 whether Dreyfus was innocent or guilty. But the cause was one

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[242] Carteret 28.

[243] Robert L. Hoffman, *More than a Trial*. *The Struggle over Captain Dreyfus*, New York: The Free Press, 1980, p.97.

had to fight for precisely because it demonstrated the "present social rottenness."[244] It illustrated the degree to which the most elementary liberties were sacrificed to the uncertain *raison d'état*.[245] In his book *La Vérité en marche*, Zola called the Affair "le plus grand bien qui pouvait arriver à la France," and added that without the Affair, France would still have been in the hands of the reactionaries.[246] Zola and Ibels were close collaborators. In 1897 Ibels illustrated the entire collection of Zola's *Les Rougon-Macquart* for Les Éditions Parisiennes, among which the image illustrating the cover of *La Terre* was the most often reproduced. In an undated letter, he wrote to Zola:

> À vous et à votre femme, je souhaite la joie de voir triompher la Vérité, dont vous vous êtes fait le courageux champion. [...] vous défendez en Dreyfus une cause humaine comme il y a trente ans vous défendiez en Manet une cause artistique. […]
> Aujourd'hui, vous joignez à l'autorité de votre nom, l'autorité morale de ceux qui vous accompagnent, l'autorité intellectuelle de ceux qui vous suivent, avec de pareilles forces, il vous sera moins difficile de vaincre l'opinion de la foule, injuste, passionnée, mais pas indifférente, heureusement! [247]

This letter shows his admiration for Zola whom he considered an extraordinary writer and citizen. In these passionate circumstances, Zola was paving the road for all the artists, in both pro and anti Dreyfus camps, and Ibels appreciated the specificity of his involvement in the Affair.

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[244] Eugenia Herbert 204.

[245] There is a plethora of works on Dreyfus Affair. Sources used for this study include: Louis Leblois, *L'Affaire Dreyfus. L'Iniquité. La Réparation*, Paris: Librairie Aristide Quillet, 1929; Pierre Birnbaum, *L'Affaire Dreyfus La République en péril*, Paris: Gallimard, 1994; Antoinette Blum, "Portrait of an Intellectual: Lucien Herr and the Dreyfus Affair," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies,*18 (Fall 1989); Patrice Boussel, *L'Affaire Dreyfus et la presse*, Paris: A. Colin, 1960; Jean-Denis Bredin, *The Affair:The Case of Alfred Dreyfus*, New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1983; Vincent Duclert, *L'Affaire Dreyfus*, Paris: Éditions la Découverte, 2006; Michel Drouin (dir.), *L'Affaire Dreyfus de A à Z*, Paris: Flammarion, 1994; Vincent Duclert, *L'Affaire Dreyfus*, Paris: Éditions la Découverte, 2006, and others.

[246] This book was published in 1901 by Charpentier-Fasquelle.

[247] Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Mss Nafr 24520, fol. 425-426. *La Terre* contains 18 lithographs by Ibels.

In 1895 Ibels found himself in the army, precisely under the command of Esterhazy. When the pro-anarchist writer and art critic Jean Ajalbert (1863-1947) publicly declared : " Que les honnêtes gens parlent haut; qu'ils jettent leur pensée à la foule avide de vérité...,"[248] Ibels responded with a letter that was very quickly picked up by the press. [249]

> Mon cher Ajalbert,
> Monsieur Estehrhazy:
>
> J'ai servi sous ses ordres à Evreux en 1895.
>
> Dans cette courte histoire qui semblait devoir tenir tant de place dans l'Histoire, il y eut une figure bien curieuse sinon bien intéressante, celle du commandant Esterhazy, le véritable traître. Je l'ai connu. [...]Sur ma parole d'honneur civil, j'affirme que, conformément aux renseignements du Figaro, dans de récentes interviews, le commandant Esterhazy était l'objet de suspicion et du mépris de tous les officiers du 74e, sans exception.
> Soldats, nous nous étonnions des étranges propos de notre chef Esterhazy - retrouvés, depuis, dans les lettres à Mme de Boulancy. Devant les derniers triomphes de M. Esterhazy, j'ai cru de mon devoir d'apporter ce témoignage, d'un contrôle plus facile que les vaines et coupables assertions de MM. de Pailleux et Boisdeffre.
> Cordialement.
>
> H.G. Ibels, Artiste peintre, Officier d'Académie
> 21 février 1898

Ibels wanted to shed more light on the personality of Esterhazy, and also affirm the culpability of the deliberate architects of the conspiracy against Captain Dreyfus, who were among the highest ranks in the army.[250] In his Souvenirs autour de 1900 he went back to those days and reminisced about the particular circumstances under which he was

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[248] Ajalbert was himself pro-anarchist and someone who grew up in the shadow of the Commune.

[249] Tillier 151.

[250] One of those "deliberate conspirators" Ibels mentions in this letter is Chief of the Army General Staff, General de Boisdeffre.

able to approach and evaluate Esterhazy.[251] Later on when he joined the Dreyfus cause, Ibels made Esterhazy his main target: "Knowing him well," he said,

> Je réussis plus facilement à représenter la longue silhouette agressive et décharnée d'oiseau de proie de ce traître de race hongroise [...] transformant sa pratique de la caricature en une sorte de témoignage investi de souvenirs personnels mis au service des exigences de la polémique du combat.[252]

While through his attack on Esterhazy Ibels confirms an admirable aspect of his true democratic spirit, in his attack on the same "traitor," as a person of "Hungarian race," a representative of an "alien race residing in France," he shows the underlying xenophobic concern for ethnic purity and a radicalizing tendency towards nationalist ethnoracial intolerance that was only too common in France in his day, including among intellectuals, and that was to worsen in the first decades of the twentieth century. This radicalizing tendency among leftists and ex-Communards was discussed in *Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery*, by Wolfgang Schivelbusch who talks about the merging of ex-Communards, anti-Semites, and leftist Ligue Nationaliste into a radical Right. He states that anti-Semites shared with the ex-Communards the conviction that Jewish-controlled France was in reality a France controlled by Germany through French Jewish middlemen. This new "right," is called by historian Zeev Sternhell a "revolutionary right."[253]

The Art of the Political and Social Caricature

During the Affair, many artists created political, Dreyfusard and anti-Dreyfusard images - Ibels, Hermann-Paul, Maximilien Luce, Félix Vallotton, on one side and Forain

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[251] Ibels, Souvenirs autour de 1900, p.17.

[252] Cited in Tillier, 153.

[253] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat:On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005, p. 152.

and Caran d'Ache on the other. The events that surrounded the Affair gave Ibels the freedom to convey his ideas in the form of political satire. Lithography, through which he expressed himself as a caricaturist, constituted a main axis of his work.

Indeed, from the very beginning of his career, caricature had offered Ibels an alternative involvement with art. Caricature exemplifies at once the satirical function of his drawings and their artistic and political ones. During the Affair, established artists such as Vallotton, Forain and Ibels in particular, believed in the power of persuasion and even conversion in the middle of the battle of images. The number and importance of the journals that appeared was such that John Grand-Carteret found it necessary to publish a book on images and the Dreyfus Affair in 1898, in the middle of the events. *L'Affaire Dreyfus et l'image* was a collection of 266 French and foreign caricatures. Carteret claimed that he did not want to advocate for or against Dreyfus, for or against Esterhazy, for or against Zola.

> C'est simplement la réunion des images parues à l'occasion de ces différentes affaires; ce sont des documents graphiques destinés à montrer au public français les motifs qui ont fait agir les crayons étrangers, au public étranger les productions de la caricature française.[254]

This dimension of providing a "document of the art history" of the moment also preoccupied Ibels, who, on several occasions assembled his drawings on the Affair in anthologies/collections and also created some more for a collection by René Dubreuil. [255] What is almost completely unknown today is that Grand-Carteret, in his *L'Affaire et l'image,* reproduced seven of Ibels's illustrations without the author's permission. Two

[254] Grand-Carteret 17.

[255] René Dubreuil, *L'Affaire Dreyfus devant la cour de cassation*, Édition populaire illustrée par H.-G. Ibels, Couturier and Léon Ruffe, Paris: P.-V. Stock, 1899. Also, *Les Légendes du Siècle, Album de dessins par H.-G. Ibels*, Paris: Le Siècle, 1899.

years later, on November 30, 1900, Ibels took him to court for infringement of his rights as an author.[256] Ibels was represented by Fernand-Gustave Labori (1860-1917), who was also known for representing Captain Dreyfus, as well as many anarchists, including in 1893-94, Auguste Vaillant, who had thrown a bomb into the French Chamber of Deputies, injuring many people.[257]

The Court concluded that Grand-Carteret, as well as journal *Le Siècle* which published his book, infringed upon the rights of Ibels as an author. The polemics concerned whether an author had the rights to his illustrations if they were shown in an album, such as *L'Affaire Dreyfus et l'image*, whose publication, claimed Grand-Carteret, was solely for he purpose of analyzing historical events. The Court further formulated the notion of a drawing as an "œuvre indivisible," that should always preserve its individuality, whether shown in association with works of other artists or by itself, and the journal *Le Siècle* was ordered to compensate Ibels with 100 francs.[258]

In its February 1912 issue, *La Revue Artistique* published a drawing that represented a public auction of a painting. The caption read: « Le Commissaire-priseur: Adjugé pour 25000 Francs.- La veuve: On le lui avait payé 50 francs et nous étions moins malheureux que maintenant. » This drawing commented on the issue of the rights of the author, which affected the lives of artists, and on which Ibels had worked tirelessly for over a decade. As I just mentioned, his interest in this problem (and subsequent project)

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[256] *Annales de la propriété industrielle, artistique et littéraire*, Vol. 66-67. Paris: Association des ingénieurs-conseils en matière de propriété industrielle (France), Compagnie des ingénieurs-conseils en propriété idustrielle, p. 24.

[257] "The Guillotine's Sure Work: Details of the Execution of Vaillant, the Anarchist, " *The New York Times* (February 6, 1894).

[258] The newly-revised law was unofficially called "La loi Ibels," and guaranteed artists and their heirs to receive a fee on the resale of their works of art.

was sparked by Grand-Carteret's unauthorized publication of seven of his illustrations. The incident spurred him to pursue this cause further, beginning in 1903. This was a long, and tireless commitment for Ibels that lasted more than a decade. Nine years later everybody was talking about it. *La Revue Artistique* in its above-mentioned issue, published different commentaries, for instance, by Steinlen, who supported the project and said that he gave his vote to the "projet Ibels," which to him seemed practical and just. Charles Cottet added that there was no reason not to give artists, painters, draftsmen, and sculptors, the same rights and advantages that writers held. Adolphe Willette added "Au juste et généraux projet d'Ibels, je donne mon adhésion." The project was discussed at numerous sessions, at different levels of the legislative system and of government.
In a book published the same year as the article in *La Revue Artistique*, in 1912, historian François Laurentie said that many projects on this issue, prepared and brought to the Parliament for review, were absurd. He stressed the importance of Ibels's involvement.

> l'un des plus importants (projets)- et d'ailleurs le premier en date - est l'ancien projet de M. H.-G. Ibels (31 octobre, 1903), qui combine le droit de suite et la garantie d'authenticité.[259]

The law was supposed to be enforced by the placing on the back of the work of a "timbre artistique mobile," issued by the State to the buyer or to the seller, and which guaranteed

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[259] François Laurentie, *Les Artistes et Droit d'Auteur*, Paris: Louis de Soye,1912, p. 12. He further cites Ibels as he summarizes the clause that represents the change in the law and that he suggested as follows: "Chaque fois qu'un artiste aura exécuté une œuvre, il conservera sur cette œuvre un droit de propriété, proportionnel et imprescriptible. Chaque fois qu'une œuvre d'un artiste vivant ou mort depuis moins de cinquante ans sera objet d'une spéculation quelconque, l'artiste créateur ou sa descendance touchera 10 ou 15 pour 100 sur le prix de vente, quel qu'il soit, et cela pendant toute sa vie, et pour ces héritiers pendant une période de cinquante années après sa mort."

the rights of the author, in the same way the "timbre-quittance," that guarantees the rights of the merchant. The price of the stamp was to be 10 centimes per 100 francs.[260]

Even though Ibels's involvement started as a personal issue ultimately rewarding him a compensation of 100 francs, he continued to challenge the system, as he did during the Dreyfus Affair, with his fight for the rights of the individual – in this case, the artist's rights.

The Battle of Images: Le Sifflet and Le Psst...!

The street played a major role in spreading of images- it became an important political stage where different and violently contradictory opinions circulated, while the image ruled in the press of the time, having more impact on a mass audience than the written text. It was visible even to those who did not buy papers and journals - in the store windows and kiosks, on the sidewalks in the hand of sellers, or "vendeurs à la criée."

The first issue of Forain and Caran d'Ache's *Psst...!* appeared on Feb 5 1898, three weeks after the publication of Zola's J'accuse...! Twelve days later, on February 17, Ibels published the first issue of an illustrated journal he founded in collaboration with the publisher Pierre-Victor Stock in order to defend Dreyfus - *Le Sifflet* - which was distributed in kiosks, by street hawkers, and by subscription. It had an army of "crieurs," "une armée parlante." Carteret noted : "ses vendeurs vous assourdissent à coups de sifflet."[261] The battle of journals had begun and there was no call for gloves in the

[260] Laurentie 13.
[261] Grand-Carteret 31.

struggle to reach the goal of convincing the readership. Grand-Carteret noted that "les crayons connus" contributed for *Le Sifflet*. He added :

> Toutefois, ce ne sont point uniquement images jetées au vent, en ce *Sifflet* apparaît la vraie caricature de circonstance [...] la caricature qui plane, la caricature qui remonte à la source, qui s'attaque au mal lui-même; au lieu de tomber uniquement sur tel personnage en bouc émissaire.

While the only contributors to *Psst...*! were Caran d'Ache and Forain, *Le Sifflet* attracted a number of artists who executed drawings for the journal.[262] There were 72 issues until June 19, 1899. In total some 216 images were produced by eight artists. Some of them did only one drawing. Fernand Gottlob, Félix Vallotton and Marcel Contal did only one plate, while the Quebecois Raoul Barré and Hermann-Paul published three and two plates respectively. Ibels was the principal creator and he designed all of the covers – a total of 72. The two inside pages were given to Vallotton and Hermann-Paul with whom Ibels collaborated in 1893-1894 for Georges Darien's *L'Escarmouche.* The journal was edited by Pierre-Victor Stock (1861-1943),[263] who was already the editor of many anarchist theoreticians, such as Malato, Louise Michel, Bakounine, and Jean Grave, whose essays he published in his collections "Bibliothèque des anarchistes," "Bibliothèque de recherches sociales," and "Bibliothèque sociologique."[264] In his memoirs, Stock remembered his decision to publish a journal as a response to Forain's *Psst...!* edited by Plon: two to three thousand subscription pamphlets were sent out but they had only six subscribers:

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[262] Raymond, "L'Affaire Dreyfus en images," *Le Collectionneur français*, (September, 1995 to January 1996): 7.

[263] Stock published many essays on the Dreyfus affair, including Alfred Dreyfus's Lettres d'un innocent. In his memoir Mémorandum d'un éditeur, Pierre-Victor Stock claimed that his company had published around 150 works connected with the Affair.

[264] Pierre-Victor Stock, Mémorandum d'un éditeur, cited in Tillier, p. 205.

> Pour faire pièce au pamphlet hebdomadaire de Psst...!, de Forain et Caran d'Ache, j'ai publié un pamphlet qui en était la réplique avec comme collaborateurs les dessinateurs : H.-G. Ibels [...] L. Chevalier and Couturier. Au bout de dix-huit mois, lassé de perdre pas mal d'argent avec ce périodique, j'ai voulu trouver des souscripteurs à raison de 50 francs par souscription. [265]

Tillier commented that « la rareté actuelle du *Sifflet* semble le confirmer, tandis que *Psst...!* est plus courant. » He added:

À l'ordure et l'injure que maniaient Forain et Caran d'Ache au fil des pages du Psst...!, le Sifflet opposa une solide connaissance de l'affaire nourrie de révélations, d'analyses et de démonstrations visant à établir des responsabilités. En tous points, le Sifflet dreyfusard chercha moins à ferrailler pour le seul jeu de la polémique avec son adversaire, qu'à lui donner la réplique presque point par point.

Initially, the journal was sold on Thursdays, one week behind *Psst...!* which appeared on Saturdays. This was the case for the first 11 issues. During the following two weeks, it appeared on Sundays and Thursdays - (from number 12 to 15, from May 1- 12, 1898) in order to catch up with and be ahead of *Le Psst...!.* Starting with issue 37 (December 14, 1898), it appeared on Fridays. The two journals had the same format, the same periodicity, the same price (10 centimes), and were inspired by illustrated flyers that had already existed in Germany.[266] Most often, *Le Sifflet* used the same or almost the same imagery as that appearing in *Le Psst...!* for which Forain created most of the cover page illustrations because his drawings were considered more "blessants." However, Caran d'Ache produced one of the most vicious drawings for the issue that appeared on June 10, 1899 - *La vérité sortant de son puits,* which shows Zola appearing from a hole of an

[265] Stock, cited in Tillier, 206.
[266] Tillier 206.

outhouse, carrying, in one hand a puppet that represents Zola, and toilet paper in the other.

In the first issue of *Le Sifflet*, Ibels showed Esterhazy in his uniform, holding his sword with a caption that said Esterhazy Ier! Pourquoi pas? showing cleverly who he thought was the real traitor, and implying Esterhazy's influence on the high Command of the army. Forain's first cover was considered more injurious. *Le Psst...!* showed a Jewish man covered in a wide coat, and with the caption "Ch'accuse...! insinuating a German accent. Lethève claims that *Le Sifflet* was less efficient because Ibels and his collaborators almost always used the same image that *Psst...!* had published in their latest issue. He attributes this to a "lack of creativity" which resulted in a message that was less biting that the one of *Le Psst...!*[267] This claim was repeated by Tillier who says that the journals competed with "un talent inégal."[268] However, these critics did not take into consideration that Ibels considered this battle of images a debate in which, by repeating the same images of well-known political figures, he directly commented on what the other journal stated a few days earlier. He realized that the image-text connection was already established in the minds of the readers. Once the language was established, there was less need for explications. He knew that images were difficult to decode outside of a contextual ensemble. The readership was also already educated as to know how to read the caricatures, and the visual, political, and social commentaries, whose interpretation was based on the counterpoint of text and image. The illustrations that appeared in *Le Psst…!* already carried the code for the main protagonists. Ibels's commentary was thus a response to Caran D'Ache's illustrations, and it sufficed for him to change a few things in

[267] Jacques Lethève, *La Caricature et la presse sous la III^e République*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1961, p. 148.

[268] Tillier 41.

the image in order to get his commentary across, while the readers still had the previous image in mind. For instance, after an issue of *Le Psst...!* in which appeared an image of a magistrate kicking an officer's hat, *Le Sifflet* published an issue with a similar image except that the magistrate was now kicking the scale of Justice. Similarly, *Le Psst...!* published an issue with a cover that showed a bomb with the word "Révision" on it that Dreyfusards were trying to set off. Five days later, Ibels showed his own bomb, called "l'Affaire Dreyfus," about to explode.

In one of his drawing with a Christian inspiration, titled, "Pitié: Le Coup de l'éponge"[269] (figure 28) Ibels depicted Dreyfus as Christ. It was published several times in several slightly different versions.[270] For instance, Dreyfus was shown dressed in a torn uniform. Another drawing, inspired by The Gospel of Saint Matthew (27, 48) showed general Mercier offering Dreyfus with a tip of his sword a sponge dipped in vinegar, similar to one that Roman soldiers throw at Christ at the end of a reed. It is widely known that Dreyfus was frequently depicted as "Judas" after being found guilty of treason and this label recurred throughout the entire affair. One cannot thus deny the subversive quality of this drawing, for in a conflict where large segments of the opposing camp operated under the sign of traditional Catholic values, Ibels's substitution of "Christ" for "Judas" was in itself an act of radical militancy. Christopher E. Forth states that

> the figure of Dreyfus-Christ may also be seen as a rhetorical mechanism displacing a series of anxieties that had particular relevance for representations of the modern intellectual of this period, concerning, above all, the masculinity of

[269] Henri-Gabriel Ibels, *Allons-y, Histoire contemporaine (1re partie) / racontée et dessinée par H.-G. Ibels*, Paris, P.-V. Stock éd., 1898.

[270] In H.-G. Ibels, *Les Légendes du Siècle*, p. 42.

> the Dreyfusards and the Jewish bodies with which they had become so closely and problematically involved. [271]

Ibels received a great deal of praise from his contemporaries for his work on *Le Sifflet* and many collected it as a document of the Affair. The former Minister and political director of *Le Siècle*, Yves Guyot complimented him on the importance of his contribution to the fight:[272]

> Vous avez des pages épiques [...] Je vous félicite d'avoir sauvé le bon renom de la caricature française que galvaudaient honteusement Forain et Caran d'Ache. Ils oubliaient que son honneur a toujours été d'être du côté de la vérité et de la justice. Vous êtes notre Daumier et vous avez des pages immortelles comme son cadavre de la rue Transnonain.

When Ibels published his collection *Allons-y*, he offered some of the original drawings that appeared in the press to some Dreyfus supporters and their families. One of those was a drawing of Alfred Dreyfus holding his two children that became famous and iconic among the Dreyfusards. It was dedicated to Scheurer-Kestner, a famous Dreyfusard who died on September 15, 1899, the same day as the acquittal of Alfred Dreyfus.[273] The caption says: *À la gloire de Scheurer-Kestner*. The recipient of the drawing, the daughter of Senator Scheurer-Kestner, Jeanne Marcellin Pilhes, commented:[274]

> Je serai heureuse de pouvoir joindre à la collection que m'a laissée mon père le beau et touchant dessin que vous avez fait paraître dans *Le Siècle* et qui symbolise

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[271] Christopher E. Forth, "Bodies of Christ: Gender, Jewishness and Religious Imagery in the Dreyfus Affair," *History Workshop Journal*, 48 (Autumn, 1999): 16-39.

[272] Tillier 193.

[273] Starting with 1897 when he met with Dreyfusard Sebastien Faure, he repeatedly contacted the War Minister, and submitted as evidence letters that incriminated Esterhazy as an enemy of France. Even though these attempts were unsucessful he continued his fight for justice and legitimate investigation through the media, mostly journal *Le temps* for which he wrote about the existence of documents that proved Dreyfus's innocence.

[274] Raymond, *Le Catalogue des journaux satiriques*, Cited in Tillier, 322.

> si parfaitement à mes yeux de femme et de mère la gloire de celui qui ne chercha jamais que la justice et les droits les plus purs.

Both *Le Sifflet* and *Le Psst...!* ceased publication after the trial in Rennes. Ibels continued to support Dreyfus in *Le Siècle*. He and his artists colleagues were what Jean-François Sirinelli and Pascal Ory call, "metteurs en forme" of the Affair, because the images they produced contributed to the way people saw the events and their perception[275]

People collected the images of the Affair represented by both Dreyfusard and anti-Dreyfusard camps. Even Esterhazy, who was regularly attacked by Ibels in his *Le Sifflet*, collected Ibels's caricatures. His daughter, who was after the Affair introduced to Ibels by the writer Ernest La Jeunesse (1874-1917) said to Ibels: "Oh, je vous connais bien! [...], la chambre de mon père est tapissée de vos caricatures! "After this conversation with Esterhazy's daughter, Ibels tried to imagine the room she mentioned, and the posters:

> Dans cette chambre misérable, ce condottière d'un autre âge est mort, méprisé, abandonné de tous. Peut-être a-t-il jeté son dernier regard sur ces dessins représentant les épisodes de la grande bataille livrée et perdue. [276]

To depict the defeat of the État-major and of Esterhazy, Ibels re-created "Le Radeau de la Méduse by Gericault (Louvre, 1817-1819), and suggested a newer version, Le Nouveau Radeau de la Méduse," which he used for the cover of issue No. 12 of *le Sifflet*, that appeared on April 21, 1899. He re-actualized it by showing the Affair as a wild sea drowning the anti-Dreyfusards. Ibels often used images that were already present in the minds of people who knew their significance and the narrative sub-tending them. Using

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[275] Pascal Ory, Jean-François Sirinelli, *Les Intellectuels en France: De l'Affaire Dreyfus à nos jours*, Paris: Armand Colin, 2002, p. 32.

[276] Ibels, *Promenades*, 2.

the known narrative of the medusa raft, Ibels emphasized the dramatic as well as the satiric, and even comical, side of the issue.

During the Dreyfus Affair, both the functions and forms of the work of art in general were constantly reevaluated. In this renewed configuration, Ibels looked for fresh ways to attract the interest of the public to his ideas, as well as to his style. What is particularly interesting in his case is the autonomy he assigned himself in the Affair, so that, at the end, he decided to "change sides," and reconnect with his former enemies. Disappointed by this fact, artist Francis Jourdain (1876-1958) thus remembered how Forain and Ibels, who were in opposing camps, reunited after the Affair:

> Je n'avais pas oublié l'accueil qu'adolescent j'avais reçu de lui. La similitude de nos opinions avait vite transformé en une véritable amitié, les relations que les circonstances nous avaient ensuite empêché d'entretenir. [...] Ibels avait gardé la causticité de jadis. Il me confia cependant quelle douleur lui avait causé la mort d'un de ses fils: Effondré, il avait été bien près de céder aux instances de Forain qui l'avait poussé à chercher la consolation dans le giron de l'Église. Car, après l'affaire Dreyfus, les deux adversaires s'étaient réconciliés, chacun rendant hommage à la sincérité de l'autre. [277]

It was Caran d'Ache, Forain's close collaborator at *Le Psst...!* who facilitated this reunion, after he had, himself, reconciled with his former enemy Ibels. Jourdain added that Ibels never changed his opinion about the main issue of the Affair, the innocence of Alfred Dreyfus, but did not hesitate to question the judiciousness behind his involvement:

> Pas question de contester l'évidente innocence du soi-disant traître, mais je me demande parfois si la monstruosité de l'erreur et l'excellence de nos intentions suffisaient à justifier notre agitation. Avions-nous, fût-ce pour sauver une victime, le droit de bouleverser le pays? [278]

This feeling was shared by many. Moderate Dreyfusards had used this argument

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[277] Francis Jourdain, *Né en 76*, Paris: Les Éditions du Pavillon, 1951, p. 270.
[278] *The New York Times* (December 5,1901) NP.

before. Many of them believed in Dreyfus's innocence, however, they found it acceptable to sacrifice him rather than placing the country in a state of upheaval.

This "sacrilegious" statement shocked Jourdain, who concluded that it was Ibels's grieving, and a period of detachment from the matters of the Affair that made him forget the real character of the cause:

> Ces regrets ridicules ne diminuent pas la portée d'un geste dont il reste qu'il fut, à son origine, généreusement spontané. C'est de cette générosité initiale que nous devons nous souvenir, Ibels, et du splendide élan qu'elle a provoqué.[279]

However, in 1901, Ibels publicly denounced his involvement in the Affair in two letters he sent to Edouard Drumont's (1844-1917) ardently anti-Dreyfusard and anti-Semitic *La Libre Parole*, in the hope that they would be published, which Drumont was certainly happy to do.[280] One letter was addressed to Messieurs Bernheim, the owners of one of the oldest galleries in Paris - Bernheim-Jeune, and the other one to the Editor *of La Libre Parole*, and, hence, to its readership. In his letter to the gallery owners, Ibels expressed anger about one of his paintings having been sold for 12 francs, while, he claimed, the frame alone was worth 100. Angry about the art dealers' action, he went with some of his friends to the gallery to complain about it. In these letters Ibels mentioned the sacrifices he made during the Affair in order to defend Dreyfus. He established a parallel between them and the rising influence of the merchants who owned very important galleries where artist such as himself sold and showed their art. While at the beginning of his career, he resented the bourgeoisie for its strong influence on art just as it controlled trade. He now turned his resentment against Jewish merchants in particular.

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[279] Jourdain 271.

[280] *La Libre Parole*, December 3, 1901; Claude Digeon, *La Crise allemande de la pensée française, 1870-1914*, Paris: Presses universitaires, 1992, p. 1-8.

In the United States, at the time very anti-Semitic *The New York Times* picked up the story, and in its December 5, 1901 issue, with an article titled "Dreyfusards Quarreling" (subtitle: Various Accusations and Counter-Accusations) evoked several incidents which, while not affecting the question of the innocence of Dreyfus, shed light on the subsequent relations of the chief Dreyfusards with each other :

> Now comes M. Ibels, a caricaturist, who supported Dreyfus's cause with a series of cartoons, and who declares that the Reinach party has discarded, insulted and injured him, and that by supporting Dreyfus he lost his livelihood. He says Zola, Labori, Picquart, and Clemenceau had unconsciously helped Reinach to power. Of Dreyfus he says: "Dreyfus who found time to write long letters to rich bankers, had no thought of sending me a word of thanks. He is a monster!

This article refers to an undated interview with the *Écho de Paris*. Salomon Reinach (1858-1932), thus impugned by Ibels, was an archeologist and the president of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, a Paris-based Jewish organization, founded in 1860 with the goal to protect the human rights of Jews around the world. Reinach saw Jews as the creators of the "foundations of universal morality and justice."[281] Recent research has considerably revised perceptions of inaction among French Jews during the Affair, and especially among Jewish leaders who supposedly did not get involved. In fact, when they were involved, it was not in the name of particular collectivity as Jews, but as French citizens.[282] This universalism, however, did not necessarily entail passivity. Reinach was a pro-Dreyfusard from the very beginning, just like Ibels, but now that Ibels had switched sides, for Ibels, he merely represented an archetypal Jewish alien.

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[281] Kathleen P. Long, *Religious Differences in France: Past and Present*, Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State University Press, 2006, p. xxvii.

[282] Long 167.

France was stirred up for years because of the Affair. Many Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards complained that, in one way or the other, their involvement cost them their livelihood. Ibels, groused that he simply did not have time to devote to looking for more lucrative jobs he needed to feed his family. Joseph Reinach, writer and politician, replying to a charge that he wanted to live off the Affair, declared that his connections with the case, in fact, cost him almost his entire practice, which only began to pick up after the amnesty was granted to Dreyfus on June 2, 1900.[283] On the anti-Dreyfusard side, Major Carrière, who was the prosecutor at the Rennes court-martial, was forced into retirement, and deplored that he had not received an appointment as Magistrate or as officer of the Legion of Honor because he summed up the argument against Dreyfus, although he had received orders to the contrary.[284] Ibels was not the only artist who switched sides. During the Affair, Herman Paul (René Georges Hermann-Paul, 1864 – 1940) was considered to be the "Forain of the Left," and contributed illustrations to many journals in favor of Dreyfus, such as *Le Figaro*, *Le Cri de Paris*, and *Le Sifflet*. He also published several compilations of his pro-Dreyfusard illustrations, and continued extending his support up to the beginning of World War I. The war ended his career and created a dramatic switch in his political views, a fact which can be observed in several of his anti-Semitic drawings. Another artist who "switched camps" was Henri de Groux (1866-1930). During the Affair he was a passionate follower of Zola and a Dreyfusard. However, this was short-lived, since he was always an anti-Semite and had always

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[283] Dreyfus and his supporters were not satisfied with the amnesty. They wanted the Court to admit his innocence, which was finally affirmed by Jaurès who was able to demonstrate this before the Court on April 7, 1903. The Government opened an administrative inquiry, which was followed by Dreyfus's filing of a report on the Affair on February 1, 1904. His innocence was finally proclaimed on July 12, 1906 in the Court of Cassation's decree.

[284] Jourdain 271.

blamed Jews for, among other things, the corruption of modern society. He quickly proclaimed that his following of Zola was an "idolatrie de l'instinct."[285] It is possible that he shared the opinion of many French intellectuals who readily switched camps once the reason for fighting against the army and the bourgeoisie was gone. While during the Affair there were attempts towards unified action of all forms of the arts, this period inevitably saw the particularities and singularities of the artists unfurl. Artists were all conscious of the historic role that their involvement could play, and relied on their art as a mode of propaganda and a way of action, that, they believed, was capable of changing the world.

Ibels's Involvement After the Affair - "Guillaume le Maudit"

During World War I, Ibels created numerous drawings on the issue of the German attack on France, and on the role of Kaiser Wilhelm II, the much reviled German emperor. After the German invasion in 1914 through neutral Belgium and northern France, numerous atrocities against civilians were committed. French media began to report about German numerous atrocities against French civilians, including rapes and murders. The blame was placed on the Kaiser, whom the French hated since the defeat of 1870 and the annexing of Alsace. Ibels's lithograph"Comme elles tombent tôt, les feuilles, cette année!" describes the very optimistic views of Wilhelm II concerning a rapid victory over the French "before the fall of autumn leaves."[286] Illustrated journal *La Baïonette*, dedicated its issue of July 8, 1915 to the theme "Kaiser Rouge." In his caricature for this issue, Ibels gives the emperor the traits of Anti Pitié: Le Coup de

[285] Tillier 330.
[286] This lithograph is part of the University of Kansas, the Spencer museum collection.

l'éponge with the caption: *L'Antéchrist perdra sa couronne et mourra dans la solitude et la démence*.[287] (figure 29) It shows the Kaiser dressed in a long undershirt dripping with blood, his hands and feet also covered in blood, with an insane look on his face. Ibels is clearly taking a stand against the "Huns" and against their slaughtering of the French and Belgian civilians.

Ibels joins others in exploring the "German question" that dominated French national discourse for decades, from the Franco-Prussian war to World War I.[288] In his book *La Crise allemande de la pensée française, 1870-1914*, Claude Digeon discusses the "German question," and says that it dominated French national discourse from the Franco-Prussian War to World War I.[289]

Venita Datta states that after 1870, French men and women, especially intellectuals, had a hard time defining French national identity, and often did so "via their representations of Germans and Germany."[290] Thus their eyes were always turned toward Germany, with a rising tendency to compare their respective industrial output to the fear inspired by the German population explosion.[291] The defeat, along the mass industrialization of French society, contributed to a sense of moral crisis among many French intellectuals at this time.[292]

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[287] *La Baïonette*, (Jully 8, 1915): 239.

[288] *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* devoted its entire January 1921 issue to the war caricature between 1914 and 1918. It stated: "L'image la plus populaire fut celle de M. Ibels: "Attila ou l'impérial Bonnot," dans laquelle Kaiser est déguisé en apache et en souteneur. Elle date de la victoire de la Marne."

[289] Claude Digeon, *La Crise allemande de la pensée française*, 1870-1914, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959, (re-ed.1992), p. 1-8.

[290] Datta 43.

[291] Between 1872 and 1911, the French population increased by 10 percent while the German population increased by 58 percent. Robert A. Nye, Crime, *Madness and Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 133.

[292] Datta 43.

It is well-known, however, that the anarchists generally refused to take sides during the war. Like his idol Jean Grave who supported France during World War I, we see Ibels's departing from anarchist principles and adopting nationalistic ones. At the beginning of the war, he volunteered in the Army supply corps and spent several months at Meaux as a simple soldier. He probably wore the cross of the Legion of Honor presented to him in 1913 by his friend, President of the Council and Minister of the Interior and Worship, Aristide Briand. From his letters to André Antoine, we see how much he worried about his younger son Robert, who like his father, had volunteered in the army, and who was killed on August 19, 1917 in a battle at the Poivre, close to Verdun, in the Meuse department in Lorraine. Although heartbroken, Ibels continued to create illustrations, mostly for the journal *La Baïonnette* that published articles and illustrations in support of the troops. In a colorful lithograph for the September 20, 1917 issue, with a legend that says *Nous là-haut, quand on monte en "première, on ne paie pas de supplément* - Ibels shows a soldier on a train standing in front of a young woman - controller, waiting for his ticket to be written. Ibels's friends tried to justify his "switching sides" and his growing nationalist support of the army, as well as his anti-Semitism. They attributed this to his son's death, after which he continued to work but got detached from the anarchist circles, their cause, and friends in general.

Nonetheless, Ibels's art overall can be construed as subversive in an anarchist sense. Outside of those that refer to war, his images centralize his characters in the urban environment, investing them with an appearance of individuality, traditionally reserved for the rich and famous, which sets him apart from other artists. A particular kind of "ugliness" in his characters and in the modern world had the ability to offend and shock.

This reality of the unremarkable moments of daily life in a modest working-class world was omnipresent in his entire oeuvre. His images did not comment critically upon the condition of the French poor, but neither did they bypass, embellish, ignore or romanticize it. This was not an art of direct propaganda - he understood that for art to be a social force, it had to have a wide audience and the social world as its subject, therefore he adopted the demands of the anarchist aesthetics that art illuminate social relationships and help people recognize and change social reality.

Ibels was by no means dogmatic in his beliefs, and rather, emphasized elements that are more commonly shared than divisive. His interest in the lowly inhabitants of Paris was authentic and above all artistic, and his countless lithographs, etchings, ink and pencil drawings are a true monument to them. The Dreyfus Affair brought the ferment of ideas of the preceding decade to a boil and offered Ibels and other artists a much larger scope of activity. During the Affair, he did not see the immediate social transformation (except for the acquittal of Dreyfus) that he and others were hoping for. Although he was disappointed in Dreyfus's neglect of those who helped him be acquitted (especially the artists), and he publicly complained about it, Ibels never denied the innocence of Captain Dreyfus. His art had its roots in contemporary society and mirrored its struggles and evolution. However, as the events around the Affair intensified, fractures in the characters of many became visible, even of the most ardent Dreyfusards such as Ibels, under the pressure of the constant polemics, heightened individualisms, rise of Catholicism, different responses to materialism, and above all increased nationalism.

In his art Ibels did not intend to create enduring stereotypes. Generally there was no anger in his images, and no evocation of vengeance, such as in Maximilian Luce's

images for the cover of the *Almanach du Père Peinard* (for 1898 and 1899), for instance, in which a worker is whipping and kicking a bourgeois who is crawling on the floor on his stomach and knees. These images reinforce the anger and resentment that the working classes felt toward the rich. Ibels's images, however, often display humor. Workers are represented neither in heroic nor in defeated poses. The poor are depicted in a familiar setting, and the members of working class either as bar tenders, shopkeepers, or factory workers going to or from work, whom he paints with a great degree of sympathy. However, he shows the act of violence when depicting spousal batteries and violence on children. For instance, for Semiane's song "Amoureuse" (1893), he created an image in which a half-naked woman on the floor, with a terrified look on her face, tries to protect her face from the strong fist of a man who is standing above her. Ibels identifies them by their clothes as a working class couple. This view of family problems keeps to the spirit of Zola's naturalistic representations in *Germinal* and other works. This image, like many others, was intended to provoke among viewers a strong desire to end injustice.[293] As mentioned in the previous chapter, with his social commentaries on prostitution (in the June 26, 1906 issue of *L'Assiette au Beurre*), child abuse (his book cover for *Émile ou de l'Education*, 1893) by Jean-Jacques Rousselot [sic.], Ibels joins the battle to change society by addressing the violence against women and children, and bringing this issue out in the open. This was the only way for the society to transition to modernity, and

[293] It is well-documented that there was a movement in nineteenth-century France against corporal punishment of women and children. For further reading on this topic, see Eliza Earle Ferguson, "Judicial Authority and Popular Justice: Crimes of Passion in Fin-de-Siècle Paris," *Journal of Social History*, vol. 40 no.2 (Winter 2006): pp. 293-315; Also, Jean-Clode Caron, *À L'École de la violence: châtiments et sévices dans l'institution scolaire au XIX^e siècle*, Paris: Aubier, 1999.

slowly break the boundaries between public and private that had been present for centuries.

At the turn of the century, we see Ibels's different preoccupations to start to alienate him from his friends the Nabis. *Le Sifflet* stopped being published for financial reasons, and Ibels started writing his own plays, and working more actively in the theater, collaborating mostly with Antoine and Firmin Gémier.

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CHAPTER IV

Ibels and Theater

Although expressed in varying ways at different times, Ibels's involvement with the theater is like a thread running through his entire oeuvre, and therefore has to be approached in the context of his art as a whole, and not as a sideline or as a separate genre. Those familiar with Ibels and his work often identify him with the figures of itinerant showmen, Harlequins, Pierrots and saltimbanques. What is almost completely unknown is the importance of his own theatrical engagement, as he wrote his own plays, designed costumes, stage sets, and accessories, and taught the history of the theater in Parisian schools, especially the famous École du Louvre. This involvement lasted his entire adult life and had a direct effect on the course of his art, while contributing to his self-realization as an artist.

It seems that any type of spectacle was a source of inspiration for Ibels, who found his subject matter all at once in the cabaret, the circus, the music-hall, and the theater. He created posters for the galvanizing performances by cabaret singers Yvette Guilbert and Milly-Meyer, by actors like Mévisto and many others, including André Antoine, representing them both on and backstage. These posters reveal that Ibels did not satisfy himself with the blasé superficiality of the spectacle, but rather, responded to a more deeply felt need to capture the "real," the "ugly," the "grotesque," and the "artificial." In his numerous lithographs and drawings, an impression is created that one is witnessing

scenes that he captured *sur le vif*, which makes them so vibrantly alive. In Ibels, we see an artist at work who was never detached from his subject matter but rather deeply involved with the lives, on and off stage, of the characters in a spectacle.

Ibels worked in every two and three-dimensional artistic medium available at his time, and it was thus to be expected that he would want to work in the theater. His unpublished letters to André Antoine, director of the Théâtre Libre and the Odéon are testimony to an engagement and dialogue with this famous theater director, as well as to Ibels's collaboration and encounters with other artists, writers, and theater directors.[294] These letters show that his versatility as a theater designer did not affect his integrity as an artist, as he understood that there was a parallel between the theater and painting – in that they both create an illusory world and are supposed to, in their respective ways, help us understand the world we live in.

The starting point for my research on Ibels's theatrical engagement was the work of two prominent scholars: Geneviève Aitken and Patricia Eckert Boyer. In her dissertation written in 1978 on artists and avant-garde theaters, and in her essay for the catalogue of Samuel Joefowitz's collection of theater programs, published in 1991 under the title *Artistes et théâtres d'Avant-Garde*, Geneviève Aitken was the first to catalogue the programs designed by artists for the Théâtre Libre, Théâtre de l'Oeuvre and Théâtre D'Art. Also, Patricia Eckert Boyer's book that accompanied the exhibition, Artists and the Avant-Garde Theater in Paris, 1887-1900 at the national Gallery of Art, Washington,

[294] Ibels's letters to Antoine can be consulted at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Arts du Spectacle. Inventaire Collection Rondell R-101606. (Microform) There is also a 418-page book of Antoine's letters that does not contain a single letter to an artist, edited by James B. Sanders, *La Correspondance d' André Antoine. Le Théâtre Libre*, Paris: Éditions du Préambule, 1987.

DC, devoted 16 pages to Ibels, including 12 full-page images of his programs for the Théâtre Libre.[295] Eckert-Boyer also wrote extensively on original printmaking and the revival of decorative art in nineteenth-century France.[296]

Although the research done for the purpose of writing this dissertation has revealed that Ibels was omnipresent in the theater world in the last decade of the nineteenth century and first two decades of the twentieth century, my investigations could not decisively establish a complete record of all of his work for the theater. Because the information on his work is scattered and usually limited to a line or two, all the productions in which he collaborated will not be mentioned here, but rather, in this chapter I will try to offer some insights regarding his subject matter and style in both biographical and art historical terms.

The theatrical environment in which Ibels worked presented a series of characteristics. When he began his theatrical career, the French theater was in a state of a deep crisis. On one side, there were supporters of the conventional theater - directors who were eager to satisfy the public taste for naturalistic, boulevard plays, to the detriment of artistic expression. As a result, the theater became more and more an object of commerce. On the other side, there was a theatrical avant-garde, similar to the one active in painting

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[295] See also, Patricia Eckert Boyer, "The Artist as Illustrator in Fin-de-Siècle Paris," in Phillip Dennis Cate, ed., *The Graphic Arts and French Society 1871-1914*. New Brunswick, 1988, 145-158.

[296] Patricia Eckert Boyer, "L'Estampe originale and the Revival of Decorative Arts and Crafts in Late Nineteenth-Century France," in Patricia Eckert Boyer and Phillip Dennis Cate, *L'Estampe originale: Artistic Printmaking in France, 1893-1895* [exh. cat., Rijksmuseum Vincent Van Gogh] (Amsterdam, 1991) 26-49.

or literature, which dreamed of a "pure" theater, free of naturalistic representations - the symbolist theater.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, French theater had seen several important changes. First, institutional barriers were removed in Paris as well as in the provinces. The loosening of censorship on dramatic presentations began with the first five years of the July Monarchy; however, although there were several propositions for its elimination during the 1880-1890 decade, censorship remained strong until 1906. The comings and goings of theater censorship were referred to by historian Odile Krakovitch as the "strange ballet" of the fears and concerns of the many regimes that ruled in France during the period between 1815 and 1914.[297] These fears clearly show that the theater had the power to influence the course of political events. Yet, this censorship was never entirely effective, and in fact, in many cases it drew even more attention to plays and theaters that often tended to disregard it.[298]

Another important change was that, because of new and faster networks of communication, mainly the railroad and the press, the public in the provinces was now rapidly informed about what was taking place in Paris. Parisian actors would travel to provinces to perform, and the audience from the provinces would go to Paris to see plays. The audience quickly became more educated and more demanding, and running a theater became increasingly costly, since additional technical progress made the use of special

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[297] Odile Krakovitch, *Censure des Répertoires des Grands Théâtres Parisiens (1835-1906),* Paris: Centre Historique des Archives Nationales, 2003.

[298] For more on XIXth century French theater and censorship, see Christophe Charle, *Théâtres en capitales. Naissance de la société du spectacle à Paris, Berlin, Londres et Vienne, 1860-1914*, Paris: Albin Michel, 2008.

effects, stagehands, and artificial lighting (first with gas and later electricity) both possible and expected. An additional costly burden was to protect theaters from the fires that had been quite frequent in previous decades. Thus, in order for a theater to be profitable, it needed to have a more rigorous organization, which further raised its ticket prices. Consequently, the audience was divided along socioeconomic lines, while at the same time, other forms of entertainment such as the circus, café-concerts, and fairgrounds, offered cheap entertainment for an audience with modest means. As a result, unable to sustain the high costs of operation, many theaters were short-lived, and many had to turn to popular repertories –such as music halls, café-concerts and revues to survive.[299]

Several theaters were founded at the end of the 19th century with an avant-garde vision of dramatic art: Antoine's Théâtre Libre (1887-1896), which was considered the the most important group in the first avant-garde, and which very soon drifted into naturalism; Paul Fort's Théâtre d'Art (1890-1892), which was more symbolist in its spirit than the Théâtre Libre; and the short-lived Théâtre des Arts (1910-1913), whose director, Jacques Rouche, spread the ideas of foreign theoreticians, especially in the field of scenic design. When Paul Fort retired from the theater, Lugné-Poë founded the Théâtre de l'Œuvre in 1893, which further established the symbolist theater.[300] This theatrical avant-garde fought primarily against the previously dominant naturalism which practiced a very

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[299] For more on the popular theater of this period see John A. Henderson, *The First Avant-Garde, 1887-1894: Sources of the Modern French Theatre*, London: George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd.1971, pp. 20-26; also see Charles Rearick. *Pleasures of the Belle Epoque: Entertainment & Festivity in Turn-of-the-Century France,* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.

[300] On the origins of the Symbolist theater, see Frantisek Deak, *Symbolist Theater: The Formation of an Avant-Garde*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

limited reconstruction of reality, and claimed that contemporary theater had lost all contact with its origins and that it was reduced to the simple function of entertainment. In the years between the opening of the Théâtre Libre in 1886, and the official end of theater censorship in 1906, these visionaries transformed French theater.

Reformers of the theater also thought of a theater that would be more open to the people, the same way libraries and museums are – a theater that would become a powerful tool in educating masses, a theater that would adapt a natural, secular morality. Pascal Ory stated that this period would see a theater that is "Une métonymie du Peuple dans son ensemble, reuni dans une émotion commune, un lieu ou tout un chacun s'en va "reprendre son âme." (Michelet)[301] This *théâtre du peuple* offered new, original plays which were a complete opposite of the bourgeois theater, and its goal was democratization of French high culture as well as seeking to elevate the culture of the people. One of the directors who made this theater popular was Gémier, who thought that the true role of the theater was to "render a better society."[302]

Beyond the rejection of a strict adherence to naturalistic expression, the crisis in the theater also helped erase the gaps between the arts. The activity of Ibels and the Nabis fits perfectly into this approach. Young Ibels understood that the theater was the domain of a privileged artistic activity, and by associating with other artists, composers, poets and writers, he tried to find answers to his own aspirations. This idea of "total theater," which closely associated action, costumes, decor, and music, opened the door to the active

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[301] Chantal Meyer-Plantureux. *Théâtre populaire, enjeux politiques. De Jaurès à Malraux*. Paris: Éditions Complexe, 2006. p. 14.

[302] Firmin Gémier. *Le Théâtre*. Paris: Grasset, 1925. pp. 20-21.

participation of painters such as himself and enticed them for the first time to share their work as a form of theatrical expression which worked together with new styles of acting, directing and playwriting that were seen in the theater. Ibels actively participated in the spirit of the time that sought to spread the application of painting in all possible domains.

For the young artists, love of the arts had to transcend all other considerations such as money and fame. Camille Mauclair, for instance, celebrated their "noble pauvreté" and the "magnifique mépris de l'argent."[303] The artists helped each other with their financial struggles: Paul Fort organized a representation at the Théâtre d'Art in order to support both Verlaine and Gauguin. Part of that money was supposed to help Gauguin pay for his trip to Tahiti. Ibels, in particular, was known to be resourceful and to find jobs for himself as well as for his comrades.

Ibels was interested in innovation and experimentation, and was eager to present to the public his original aesthetic ideas in the visual arts. In his letter to André Antoine on September 1, 1904, he thus defines where his originality lies:

> Mon originalité consiste à entreprendre beaucoup de choses, c'est mon tempérament qui m'y pousse, et je me laisse aller, mais je n'ai jamais rien entrepris sans savoir où j'allais - et plus j'ai des choses à faire, mieux je les fais.[304]

In effect, Ibels's originality comes partly from the fact that he situated himself at the confluence of different movements, between symbolism, naturalism, and anarchism. Indeed, he very often was called upon to take a position on a political level and openly support anarchist causes. His contribution to avant-garde theatre was decisive, diverse,

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[303] Camille Mauclair, *Mallarmé chez lui*, Paris: B. Grasset, 1935, p. 89.
[304] Ibels's letters to Antoine, BNF, Rondell R-101606.

and vast. Decisive, if we consider, for instance, his participation in plays of great quality, such as *Les Tisserands* by Hauptman, or *Berthe au Grand Pié* by André Ivoire and *Pélléas et Mélisande* by Maeterlinck. Diverse and vast, in that he worked on a large number of plays for all the previously mentioned theaters and many other Parisian venues. In so doing, he tested the limits of painting in space, and enjoyed a sense of collaboration.

Ibels created set decorations for numerous productions for all the above-mentioned theaters. Some of the renderings and photographs have survived; however, any scenery from an actual production was painted over or destroyed at the end of a run so we have no surviving examples of his sets. He also gave lectures at different theaters throughout the country, most often at the Théâtre des Variétés in Toulouse and the Théâtre des Arts in Bordeaux, and taught the history of the theater at the École du Louvre. To that end, he would, on occasion, borrow costumes from the theater of the Odéon to show to his students. In a letter to Antoine dated February 25, 1911, he wrote that his courses were very popular and that they doubled in size from the previous year. Even though he was busy teaching, painting, working for the theater and press, and helping his friends find jobs, he found time to help the poor, as when he single-handedly organized a series of productions at the Théâtre Libre and the Théâtre français to benefit orphans.[305]

It was in Ibels's relationship to the Symbolist Theater, however, that he plunged into an artistic revolution without compromise. At the beginning of 1893, Le Théâtre d'Art became Le Théâtre de l'Œuvre under the direction of Lugné-Poë. It was a real

[305] Letter to Antoine, June 14, 1905. Ibels's unpublished letters to Antoine. R-101606.

theatrical laboratory in which Ibels played a very important and influential role. Lugné-Poë and the Nabis were old friends from the Lycée Condorcet, and together they rented a studio in the beginning of 1890 at 28, Rue Pigalle. Poë was not a painter but this collaboration changed Ibels's life by opening doors to the avant -garde theatre milieu. According to him and his Nabi friends, the theater could no longer be a pure "bavardage littéraire". The new aesthetic language had to touch directly, without an intermediary, the heart of the spectator. The set decoration and costumes also had to become more autonomous. For Ibels, this was a time to take risks and challenge himself, and to look for a new decorative formula for the mise-en scène. In his book on Lugné-Poë, Richard Duppierreux thus commented on this search for new theatrical representations:

> On comprend qu'il existait, entre l'âme de cette dramaturgie nouvelle et les méthodes scéniques [...], une disparité qui désorientait tous ceux qui sentaient flotter dans l'air comme une odeur de révolte. On n'était nulle part encore, mais on cherchait.[306]

In *Artistes et théâtres d'avant-garde: programmes de théâtre illustrés, Paris, 1890-1900,* Geneviève Aitken states that the artists all agreed that the theater should associate elements of "real" and "surreal," so that the spectator could start from the familiar world of appearances to be then transported into a universe of "vérités universelles." The artists thus introduced two important elements: suggestion and continuity.[307] They talked about a total show, "spectacle total", where all direct references about the world of reality are forbidden and give place to a language capable of suggesting a notion of the absolute through a system of symbols. The artist is supposed to present the Idea, and not the sterile

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[306] Richard Duppierreux, *Lugné-Poë, homme de théâtre*, Paris: O. Lieutier, (1949): 28.

[307] Geneviève, Aitken, *Artistes et théâtres d'avant-garde: programmes de théâtre illustrés, Paris, 1890-1900*. Pont-Aven: Musée de Pont-Aven, 1991: 3.

reproduction of reality. As mentioned previously, the shared sentiment was a dislike of the naturalist theater. Even Antoine's Théâtre Libre looked elsewhere for new plays. Yet, it was Zola who brought to him Ibsen's *Les Revenants*, a play that deeply disturbed everyone, and a little later, *Le Canard Sauvage*.

Symbolist Decor and Costumes by Ibels

For Ibels, the creation of décor and costumes for the symbolist theater was above all a new experience. He certainly agreed with Lugné-Poë's statement that "le meilleur décor est comme le meilleur ménage, celui dont on parle le moins."[308] As for colors, Cogniat describes the ideas of the symbolist theater that Ibels shared:

> [les] Couleurs doivent être allégées en fonction des mouvements des personnages. De même, le décor se soumet aux lois d'une perspective qui noie les contours et associe les tons. En fait, le spectateur ne perçoit que des taches colorées.[309]

Thus, avoiding complicated and extravagant scenery and placing the emphasis on suggestion was an imperative. Ibels and Vuillard collaborated in that spirit on creating a decor for *Berthe au Grand Pié*, by André Ivoire (1892). They chose a violet color for the backdrop cloth, with violet rocks and golden rain. Gauze was supposed to make the scene behind it look like a dream world, separated from the audience and its world of crude reality. For the play *Roland* (1892), Ibels and Sérusier chose a green and violet-mauve colors for the scene, with golden rain and golden warriors. As for Sérusier and Ibels's work on *Geste du Roy* (1892), a green shade was chosen for the gauze screen which, in relationship to the colors around it, created an unearthly effect. The play was presented in

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[308] Raymond Cogniat, *Les décorateurs de théâtre: Cinquante ans de spectacles en France*, Paris: Librairie théâtrale, (1955): 22.

[309] Cogniat 24.

three successive sets of symbolic scenery.[310] For Bonnard and Ibels's play *Fierabras* (1892), the verses by Mauclair were recited in an orange-colored scenery, that hue chosen as evoking an exaltation of heroism.[311] In the tradition of the Pont-Aven School, the artists took complete liberty in their choice of colors, without worrying about the corresponding shades in "reality." The color choice and the unusual style conferred on these decors an effect of interiority and a psychological dimension. This innovation consisted primarily in expressive nuance in decor so that it retained a role in the play, and when the curtain was raised, there was no dissonance that would shock the eyes of the audience. In that regard, Ibels completely conformed to the spirit of symbolist poetics, and his conception of theatrical decoration responded to the norms of the symbolist mise en scène and the union of the arts. For him, harmony did not concern only the background but also costumes and accessories that evoked a dreamlike world and opened up the imagination.

This union of the arts was what made these productions most memorable: the decor, costumes, music, choreography, and lighting were combined into a production of pure sensation. For the Théâtre d'Art's play *Song of Songs* for which Ibels realized the decor, the poet Roissard accompanied the representation with a quadruple orchestration of verse, perfume, music, and color. The tonality of the scenery was bright orange, the musical symphony was in the key of D major; the vowels 'i', 'e' and 'o' had a special value in the declamation of the verse, and the theater was perfumed with a spray of white violets.

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[310] *The New York Times*, "Live Musical Topics", January 17, 1892. (*The New York Times* archives provide a copy of the article with no page numbers)

[311] All of the above-mentioned plays were staged at the Théâtre d'Art.

During the scene when the Queen and the King meet, the scenery was purple, the symphony in C, and the perfume of the theater incense. Then, in succession, there were other colors corresponding to other perfumes - pale green and lilies, bright blue and acacia, purple and jasmin, indigo and lily of the valley, and very light purple and jasmin. The actors were all dressed in white. A gauze curtain in the middle of the stage was framed to the right and the left by a cedar and a cypress that joined their branches at the top, one figuring incorruptibility and the other immortality. Behind this gauze curtain one could see a scene against which were placed triangularly, in groups of three, twenty-one lilies, which were supposed to exude perfume, and also, to remind the audience of the ternary and quaternary numbers comprised in the candlestick of the Temple of Jerusalem.[312]

Harmony was an essential trait of Ibels's aesthetic and the aesthetic shared by the rest of the Nabis, which was of highest importance because it started the process of change in the way people thought about the art of the theater.

Ibels and the Théâtre Libre: An Enduring Collaboration

The collaboration between Ibels and André Antoine started very early in Ibels's career. Antoine was a founder of the Théâtre Libre (March 30, 1887), and to this day, is considered the father of modern stage direction. His theater put on many plays that other theaters would not, such as Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts,* which had been banned in most of Europe. What attracted Ibels to the Théâtre Libre were the energy of the theater and the overwhelming sense of discovery that one derived from the confidence of the writers who

[312] *The New York Times*. "Live Musical Topics," (January 17, 1892.)

believed in their freedom of expression as well as from the urgency of the theater's productions. Although Antoine saw set decorations, actors' play, lighting and costumes in a more realistic perspective, he tended to set plays in an indeterminate period, a technique that Ibels readily used in many plays. It is, in fact, difficult to determine if this idea came first from Ibels or from Antoine. Many of Ibels's letters show that it was he who suggested combining, for instance, elements of Roman costume with Greek or Egyptian ones, probably in order to offset Antoine's naturalist tendencies, and since the majority of playwrights that were presented at the Théâtre Libre were of naturalist or realist tendencies – such as Romain Coolus, Edmond de Goncourt, and Courteline.

The collaboration between Ibels and Antoine started when the very young and confident Ibels walked into Antoine's office and suggested that he create theater programs for the Théâtre Libre. The theater had been in existence for over five years when Ibels met Antoine in 1892, at the age of 25.[313] Perhaps it was the way that Antoine greeted Ibels when they first met (Qu'est-ce qu'il y a? - the sound of which seemed to Ibels like a "coup de scie sur la pierre",)[314] and what happened in the next five minutes of their meeting, that characterized their relationship throughout the decades of their collaboration. There was an unrefined directness about Antoine that always bothered Ibels, but the opportunity for work and innovation, combined with Antoine's powerful strength and energy drew him to his theater.

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[313] In "Carrière d'Antoine," *Je Sais Tout* (15 May 1914): 649 - 653, Ibels said he was 22 when he met Antoine, however, from the context of this four-page text, we can see that he met him just a few months before the first program for the Théâtre Libre, executed by Ibels, appeared. See also Marie El Caïdi, "Les programmes de théâtre illustrés par les Nabis. Les Nabis et le théâtre d'avant-garde, 1890-1900." Monography presented at the École du Louvre, 2000-20001.

[314] Henri-Gabriel Ibels, "La Carrière d'Antoine," p. 649.

In *Carrière d'Antoine*, Ibels explained how he presented the idea of theater programs to Antoine, and the impact this exposure had on his career.

> J'explique à Monsieur Antoine que je désire illustrer de lithographies variées, les programmes de la saison et n'ayant aucun rapport, naturellement, avec les pièces qu'il jouera [...] - C'est entendu Monsieur! - [...] Six mois après je n'étais plus un inconnu. Les abonnés, au contact de ces lithographies fraîchement imprimées, ont sali assez de paires de gants pour que le nom de leur auteur reste imprimé dans leur mémoire.[315]

All of the programs that Ibels submitted shortly afterwards were accepted by Antoine and transferred onto lithographical stone. Their instant success was the reason why Ibels's presence at the Théâtre Libre was more durable than that of any other artist that worked for this theater, most of whom produced only one or two programs. In fact, Ibels's eight programs were assembled into a book in 1894, for which he illustrated a cover with Antoine on it as the Old Hilse, from the play Les Tisserands. This was printed in 100 copies by Kleinmann in a luxury edition.[316]

While the collaboration between Antoine and Ibels was fruitful, it was, however, not an easy one. In his letter of November 6, 1896 to Antoine, Ibels writes: " Il y a des jours où c'est rudement mauvais d'être de tes amis mais il y a d'autres jours, où, l'on est rudement heureux de faire partie de ta vieille garde.[317]

The Théâtre Libre quickly became famous in France and abroad but encountered monetary problems that were never overcome. This uncertainty and worry marked much of Antoine's relationship with Ibels who worked hard on many plays for which Antoine

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[315] "La Carrière d'Antoine," p. 649.

[316] Anne-Marie Sauvage, "Henri-Gabriel Ibels, le 'nabi journaliste': L'oeuvre graphique des années 1890," *Nouvelles de l'estampe*, May 1993, p 30.

[317] Ibels's Letters to Antoine, BNF, Rt-101606.

took credit almost entirely, because the press rarely mentioned his collaborators. In his Mémoires, Antoine wrote about the money issues during the tour in Italy in 1894:

> [...] parti sept ans auparavant de ma mansarde de la rue de Dunkerke avec quarante sous dans la poche, pour aller répéter notre premier spectacle chez le petit marchand de vin de la rue des Abbesses, je me retrouve à Rome avec la même somme dans mon gousset, entouré d'une quinzaine de camarades déconfits autant que moi, avec cent mille franc de dettes qui m'attendent à Paris, sans savoir ce que nous ferons demain. [318]

Ibels's letters to Antoine reveal the constant pressure from Antoine to save money. He reproached Ibels on several occasions that he, as an artist, was insufficiently savvy about the cold realities of the business. Further in this chapter we will see how much effort Ibels invested in trying to save money when asked to create costumes and decor, while trying all along not to compromise his artistic integrity and the quality of the plays.

Theater Programs

Although his style was different from that of the rest of the Nabis, like them, Ibels used techniques that he was already familiar with, such as lithography and photolithography. He also used the brush and spatter technique on all of these programs, the technique he had used previously for the execution of his posters. The programs were simple, consisting of a single folded sheet of paper, usually in one color and printed only on one side. They listed the title of the play, the playwright's name, and, in very small type, the names of the performers. With a new production due every four weeks, it was grueling work. Ibels reworked his existing illustrations into compositions that were bolder and more simplified in representation. However, many people complained about

[318] André Antoine, *Mes souvenirs sur le Théâtre Libre*, Tusson: Du Lérot, 2009, p. 38.

the gap between the plays and the programs. In response, in his article on Ibels in the 1893 issue of *La Plume*, the art critic Charles Saunier explained that Ibels intended the programs to be autonomous:

> Chose voulue par l'artiste qui se défend ainsi: "L'intrigue est déjà illustrée par les acteurs évoluant sur une scène munie de décors anecdotiques. Quel intêret peut alors avoir une seconde intérpretation?" M. Ibels veut seulement rendre en leur milieu une série de types qui seront appelés à paraître dans les diverses œuvres que représente chaque année le Théâtre Libre. Cette baigneuse, ce gommeux ne sont pas Mme ou M*** mais bien des types caractéristiques de baigneuse, de gommeux. Parallèlement donc les programmes duThéâtre Libre ne sont pas destinés à illustrer tel drame ou telle comédie, mais à évoquer les êtres qui peuvent figurer dans toutes les pièces représentées. [319]

When the audience of the Théâtre Libre realized that discursive and figural aspects of the images on the programs did not support the plot of the plays, they were puzzled and more likely to remember the images of the "types" that, Ibels said, were supposed to evoke almost any character presented in all of the plays staged at the Théâtre Libre. All the images for these programs were ones that Ibels either used before or used later. In his programs, he subordinated the text to image, and liberated the image from, to borrow Norman Bryson's term, the "repression of the textual."[320] They were also printed in a separate edition before text was added, on off-white laid paper, and were intended for individual sale.

The first program Ibels created for Antoine's theater was for *Le Grappin* (November 3, 1892), a comedy in three acts by Georges Salandri, and for *l'Affranchie*, a comedy in 3 acts by Maurice Biollay. (figure 30) These two plays were shown on the

[319] Charles Saunier, "Henri-Gabriel Ibels," *La Plume* (15 January 1893): 35.

[320] Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983. p.127.

same evening and with the same program at the Théâtre des Menus-Plaisirs.[321] The program was in green, yellow and red on laid paper, and showed a group of itinerant circus performers, or forains, who participated in Parisian street fairs. A variation of this image appeared under the title "Modestie Foraine" in the August 6, 1893 issue of *l'Echo de Paris*. Ibels's fascination with the *forains* is evident in his early illustrations, posters, and lithographs. *Forains* were considered social outsiders who were struggling to survive. It is quite possible that Ibels identified with their marginalized life, harsh realities, and their artistry in producing a spectacle with limited means. We find a large number of his drawings and engravings with them at rest or performing. He also created an album of seventeen etchings in 1895, called *Les Forains*, in which he showed these performers in spectacles and during their off-stage moments. In *Le Grappin* the performers are seemingly bored - a rugged and overweight athlete with legs crossed observes the passers-by, as are two girls, dancers standing with their arms crossed, while nobody around them seems to pay attention to them.

The second program was for *Les Fossiles* (a play in 4 acts by François de Curel - November 29, 1892). (figure 31) Another drawing with the same image had appeared previously, although in a slightly different form, in the May 24, 1891 issue of *le Messager Français*. Both lithographs follow the same Japanese-inspired perspective, with the diagonal division of the paper to show the notion of horizon. The figures of two

[321] All the plays of the season 1892-1893 were shown at the Théâtre des Menus-Plaisirs. This 800-seat theater was located on the boulevard de Strasbourg, in the 10th arrondissement of Paris. Since its foundation in 1866 it functioned under several different names: Théâtre des Menus-Plaisirs (1866-1874; 1877-1879; 1882-1888); Théâtre des Arts (1874-1876, 1879-1881); Opéra Bouffe (1876-1877), and the Comédie Parisienne (1881). In 1888, when Antoine took over, it became the Théâtre Libre, an enterprise that ended in 1896, after eight years of financial struggles.

bourgeois women, a servant, and three children were silhouetted against a background of yellow sand and green sea. The third program was for *À bas le progrès* (a satiric buffoonery in one act by Edmond de Goncourt - January 16, 1893), *Mademoiselle Julie* (tragedy by Swedish playwright Auguste Strindberg), and *Le Ménage Brésile* (one-act play by Romain Coolus), all combined in one. (figure 32) The lithograph is in blue, yellow, black and red on laid paper. It shows foot soldiers either leaving or going back to their barracks.

Goncourt complained that the theater in France had become an imitation of the Russian and Scandinavian theater, and wrote *À bas le Progrès* as a satirical farce and as a "purely French play," with what he called French wit and ideas, in this "brève, claire et fusillante forme française." [322] In his Journal entry of April 23, 1894, Goncourt thus recalls meeting Ibels during the rehearsal of *À bas le Progrès* (Monday, April 23, 1894):

> Répétition chez Frantz Jourdan de À bas le progrès jouée par Janvier, Mlle Valdey, qui l'a déjà jouée au Théâtre Libre, et Darras, de l'Odéon.
> Un programme a été lithographié par Ibels. J'allais sortir quand il arrive. On me le présente et il me raconte ceci. Son père s'est battu à la première *d'Henriette Maréchal*, et lui, juste vingt ans après, s'est cogné à la seconde de *Germinie Lacerteux* et a cassé un petit banc sur la tête d'un Normalien de sa connaissance, avec lequel il était venu à l'Odéon.[323]

The fourth program was for *Le Devoir*, a play in four acts by Louis Bruyère, staged on February 15, 1893. (figure 33) The lithograph is in black, yellow, blue and brown on laid paper. It shows a scene in a bar with figures of a patron and two workers, all engaged in talk about current events. Ibels used the image of the same place, but from a slightly

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[322] Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, *Journal. Mémoires de la vie littéraire, 1891-1896*. Tome IV, Paris: Fasquelle et Flammarion, 1956, p.149.

[323] De Goncourt 558.

different angle, for the cover of the January 2, 1890 *L'Escarmouche* issue on anarchy. In place of the marching soldiers and the patron's wife that appeared on the cover of *L'Escarmouche*, now stood the names of the actors and characters. Ibels skillfully arranged the text on both sides of the image. The fifth production was *Les Mirages* (March 27,1893), a play in five acts by Georges Lecomte. (figure 34) The lithograph was in yellow, green, black and red on laid paper. An article in the *Journal of the Print World* (May1 - Aug 3, 2002 issue), mentions this particular program as an example of the influence of Toulouse-Lautrec on Ibels. This is one of many mentions of Ibels in comparison with Toulouse-Lautrec that wrongly states that his technique and subject matter are all due to Toulouse-Lautrec's influence. Indeed, the authors of these articles did not take into consideration that it was, in fact, Ibels who introduced Lautrec to the lithographic technique and to the world of the café-concerts. He was very skilled in marketing his work and that of his friends, and many of the latter relied on his ideas for finding new opportunities for artistic endeavors and jobs. The two artists collaborated actively and exchanged ideas about their work on an almost daily basis. Together, they worked on the "crachis" or the "spatter technique" which added another dimension to poster art, an invention that many attribute today to Toulouse-Lautrec. In fact, Ibels used this technique on all of his theater programs for the 1892-1893 season.[324] In a letter to his mother, dated November 1893, Toulouse-Lautrec talked about this technique and his hope of capitalizing on it.[325] In his *Promenades aux environs de 1900*, Ibels, trying to

[324] The technique consists of painting the image directly onto the lithographic stone with a lithographic crayon or a liquid stain. The colors and textures are added with the "spatter" - scraping of ink across a metal grille.

[325] Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Unpublished Correspondence*, London: Phaidon, 1969, p. 168.

clarify for posterity his role in Lautrec's exposure to the Parisian art scene, as well as important printers, quoted Gustave Coquiot as saying:

> Lautrec eut bientôt de nombreuses estampes en train; mais ici rendons à César ce qui est à César! Ce fut Ibels, et pas un autre, qui réussit à convaincre l'éditeur Georges Ondet qu'il valait [sic.] faire illustrer les couvertures des chansons de Café Concert par des artistes, plutôt que de s'adresser aux specialistes ordinaires - et ainsi, sur sa proposition, Lautrec, Walloton, Bonnard, Vuillard, Willette et Ibels lithographient ces attachantes couvertures de chansons, dont on tirait une centaine d'épreuves avant la lettre, épreuves que les marchands Kleinmann, Sagot et Arnauld achetaient et vendaient à part. [326]

Lautrec probably received the commission to work for Antoine's theater through Ibels, who was always happy to recommend his artist colleagues.[327] Lautrec devised the set for the November 8, 1893 productions of *Une faillite* by Norwegian writer Björnstjerne Björnson and *Le Poète et le financier* by Maurice Vaucaire.

Ibels envisioned the scene for *Les Mirages* from the perspective of the audience, intensifying the sense of spectacle and drawing attention to his own role as an observer of Parisian life. The perspective, in fact, shifts from the audience that is sitting in the orchestra, to the audience sitting in the balcony, and up to the stage. The audience is shown as purple figures and the people closest to the artist are in black, as characters in a shadow theater.[328] On the stage, a couple is singing and three dancers are waiting in the wings for their entrance cues. The sixth program was for the April 27, 1893 production of *Boubouroche*, a play in two acts by Georges Courteline, and *Valet de Coeur*, a comedy in three acts by Maurice Vaucaire. (figure 35) The lithograph is in yellow, green, red and

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[326] Ibels, *Promenades*, p. 18.

[327] Boyer, *Artists and the Avant-Garde Theater in Paris 1887-1900*, p. 61.

[328] For more on the influence of the shadow theater on the Nabis, see Patricia Eckert Boyer, ed., *The Nabis and the Parisian Avant-Garde*, New Brusnwick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988, p. 53-75.

black on laid paper. The program shows workers towing the line from the barge to the dock or shoveling coal into railroad carts.

The year 1893 was an important one for the socialist theater in France. Several successful plays were produced that treated the topic of the working class, and their writers wrote directly for the people. Antoine produced, as the Théâtre Libre's 7th production, Gerhard Hauptman's *Les Tisserands*, a drama in five acts (May 29, 1893). (figure 36) It was a tremendous success but provoked just as much of a scandal. Francis Pruner says that the union activist play was, at first, banned by the Censure but later allowed to be represented under the threat of Antoine being brought in for questioning.[329] Since *La Puissance des Ténèbres* (1887) by Tolstoï, this was the only foreign play presented at the Théâtre Libre that was met with great enthusiasm. The play was about the exploited working class, the poor Silesian weavers, following their unsuccessful revolt against their oppressors in 1844. In his book *Théâtre Libre d'Antoine*, Pruner states:

> Les Tisserands arrivaient d'Allemagne avec le prestige d'opposition, interdite par le régime impérial qui depuis deux ans mettait son veto à toute représentation publique - honorée même, si j'ose dire, de l'hostilité déclarée du jeune empereur Guillaume II.

However, the subscribers of the Théâtre Libre did not belong to the working class, and some bourgeois critics commented ironically on that incongruity:

> La salle était, hier soir, remplie de très riches bourgeois, étrangers, à coup sûr, aux beautés du collectivisme. À quatre ou cinq reprises, les dits repus,

[329] Francis Pruner*, Le théâtre Libre d'Antoine. Le répertoire étranger*, Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1958, p. 144.

> emballés par le fracas des mots, ont applaudi aux plus farouches menaces des miséreux.[330]

Among the attendees, Pruner further states, was a French Socialist leader, Jean Jaurès,[331] who wrote to Antoine following the performance that "such a production accomplished more than any political campaign or discussions."

Romain Rolland, novelist, essayist, dramatist claimed that the purpose of art was to participate in the struggle to bring enlghtement to people. However, he disputed the idea that the plays of this *théâtre populaire* were written directly, and only for the working class:

> Les œuvres comme *Les Tisserands* ou *La Puissance des Ténèbres*, sont de longs cris de misère, ou de lugubres récits, dont la menace et le désespoir semblent plutôt faits pour réveiller la conscience des riches, que pour soutenir ou distraire de pauvres gens, déjà trop accablés par la vie. Tout au plus s'addressent-ils à une poignée d'entre eux, à l'élite révolutionnaire, aux chefs de la future révolte.

Ibels created his 8th program for the three June 12, 1893 plays, all combined in one: *La Belle au bois rêvant*, a comedy in verse by Fernand Mazade, *Mariage d'argent*, a study of peasants in one act by Eugène Bourgeois, and *Ahasvère*, a drama in one act by H. Heyermans. (figure 37) This program shows three well-to-do gentlemen in a Parisian bistro reading their journals with great interest. The lithograph is in yellow, black, red, and white, on laid paper. Ibels created a drawing titled "Entendu," with a similar scene for the Labor Day issue of *La Plume*. Here he also showed two gentlemen discussing the news in a busy café and the caption read: "Mais il en faut, Monsieur, des gens qui meurent de faim! Car si tout le monde mangeait...la valeur de l'argent baisserait et

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[330] Pruner 145.

[331] He participated in founding of the Partu Socialiste Français that coalesced around the government of Waldeck-Rousseau and separated from the more radical Parti Socialiste de France.

alors.... ce serait... terrible...! Mossieu! TERRIBLE!!!"[332] In 1895, he did the program for the Théâtre Libre play by Claude Berton, *Défunt Grand-Papa*, a three-act play in prose presented on June 13. The lithograph, in black on laid paper, shows two women standing over the body of a deceased person. Young and self-assured, Ibels predicted the popularity of these programs, and knew that they would entice curiosity, and that this exposure would secure him more work. He was able to meet many famous actors for whom he created numerous lithographs illustrating their song sheets and their performances at the café-concerts. Among them was Auguste Wisteaux (Mévisto), who frequently performed at the Théâtre Libre, and who sang of the plight of working people.

The Théâtre Libre closed its doors in 1896, and the following year, Antoine opened the Théâtre Antoine, where, after the last showing of the play *Repas du lion*, in 1898, he largely staged revivals of the plays previously shown at the Théâtre Libre.[333] The two noteworthy plays during this period were his staging of Zola's *L'Assomoir* (1900) and *La Terre* in 1902. It is quite possible that Ibels influenced Antoine in choosing these plays because he and Zola had often collaborated during this period. Right after the publication of the latest volume of the *Rougon-Macquarts* in 1893, Zola asked Ibels to illustrate all twenty volumes for Les Éditions Parisiennes. Ibels continued to work for the Théâtre Antoine under the direction of Antoine, and, later on, Firmin Gémier.

Ibels and the Odéon

[332] *La Plume*, 97 (1893): 201.

[333] François Vicomte de Curel's play *Repas du lion* was filled with provocative social comment and dealt with the two opposing concepts of tradition and progress, as well as relations between labor and capital.

It was Ibels who encouraged Antoine to take over L'Odéon, and he actively worked on his behalf through his connections in the government. In his letter of January 15, 1904, he wrote to Antoine:

> Le père Combes (Emile Combes)[334] est venu nous interrompre; rapidement, en quelques mots, je le mis au courant. "Antoine ! Mais certainement [...] il aura l'Odéon dans deux ans, si je suis encore président du Conseil", ajouta-t-il finement.[335]

In *La Carrière d'Antoine* (1914), Ibels thus evoked the period that immediately preceeded Antoine's appointment at the Odéon: "Nous sommes en 1895. Antoine a mérité l'Odéon. Toute la presse l'impose au ministre. Un soir Antoine nous dit :" - Je vais être nommé à l'Odéon, allons voir comment ça va là-bas."[336] The two of them went to L'Odéon, sat in the orchestra and observed the stage and the entire theater. To Antoine, the theater looked old, dirty, sad and uncomfortable, and he said that he would "change all that." He immediately envisioned more comfortable chairs instead of the existing wooden ones, new dressing rooms, at a cost of at least 250 000 francs, unaware that he would be paying it off for the rest of his stay at the Odéon. A year later, in 1896, the government officially named him director of the Odéon, along with Paul Ginesty. Ibels reminisces of the first days at the Odéon in his letter to Antoine of July 1906:

> Au navire qui emmenait Antoine et sa fortune, j'ai attaché avec confiance ma petite barque de pêcheur, et à travers les bourrasques, les tempêtes, petite barque solidement attachée bondissait dans le sillage écumant.

This 'navire' became the state theater, and Antoine set out immediately to get rid of the myth of an inaccessible and remote Odéon. However, their first play *La Préférée* (1904)

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[334] Emile Combes was a powerful statesman who led the cabinet of Bloc des gauches from June 1902 to January 1905.
[335] Ibels's Letters to Antoine, Rt-101606
[336] Ibels, "La Carrière d'Antoine," *Je sais tout*, p. 649.

by Lucien Descaves, with the old actor Tailhade was a failure - it was shown only for 17 days. In his 1906 article for the *Revue Politique et Littéraire: Revue Bleue*, theater critic Paul Flat reminisced on Antoine's first days at the Odéon, and attributed this failure mainly to Antoine's poor choice of play, stating that *La Préféreé* is Descaves's work of the poorest quality.[337] Ibels, however, attributed the failure to Antoine's overspending, a pattern that Ibels would observe over and over throughout the years. Among Antoine's other extravagances, was a daily fee of 150 francs he paid to Tailhade, who was elsewhere paid a single louis at boui-bouis on the boulevard Barbès. [338]

In 1904, Ibels had worked at the Théâtre Antoine on a play that turned out to be a huge success: Shakespeare's *King Lear*. To accommodate Antoine's request to create an impression of a distant past with rich and flowing fabrics, Ibels created costumes and furnishings that looked more romantic and storybook medieval than authentically medieval English. The *Encyclopédie du Théâtre Contemporain* describes the costumes as "très stylisés pour l'époque."[339] The play was later staged at the Odéon (1906), which had an awkward stage that presented a problem to Antoine and Juseaume, who designed the decor.[340] His previous work and the care with which Ibels researched historical detail helped Antoine make an informed choice about what to use and what to adapt. The public

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[337] Paul Flat, *Revue Politique et Littéraire: Revue Bleue*, 18.VI (November 3, 1906): 573. The critic also suggested that Antoine was new to the Odéon, and that he needed some time to get better organized, to find a way to bring to the theater what was expected from him - a new, modern way of theatrical representation, different from what he had done at the Menus-Plaisirs. The critic stated:" M. Antoine vient à peine d'entrer à l'Odéon: il lui faut le temps d'organiser sa troupe, de trouver des interprètes qui nous donnent une traduction du Moderne différente de celle que nous avons eue au boulevard de Strasbourg. Ce sera là son principal effort et sa plus intéressante tentative. Il sait mieux que personne comment il pourra mener à bien." (p. 575.)

[338] Ibels, "La Carrière d'Antoine." 650.

[339] *L'Encyclopédie du Théâtre Contemporain*, Volume I : 1850-1914, Paris: Les Publications de France, 1957, p. 44.

[340] Jean Chothia, *André Antoine*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

and the critics responded positively. As Gaston Sorbet wrote: "And it is now to the Odéon that the worshipers of Shakespeare from England and Germany must come to celebrate their cult." [341]

In his letter to Antoine, dated (illegible) 17, 1905, Ibels thus described his work on costumes for the play *Chatterton* by Alfred de Vigny, first produced at the Odéon in 1835:

> Maintenant une chose importante: Chatterton est mort en 1770 la même année que Louis XV. C'est donc dans la mode de cette époque qu'il faut composer les costumes - hommes et femmes - j'ai passé en revue tous les costumes. Il n'y a pas de Louis XV proprement dit. Néanmoins pour les hommes on arrangera facilement les costumes - sans frais - pour le costume Bellanger, c'est plus grave! Celui dont tu as donné le dessin est trop Louis XVI. Ou, nous pouvons être antérieur à 1770 - mais il est impossible d'être postérieur. Avec l'éoffe que j'ai commandée on arrangera facilement du reste un costume anglais Louis XV d'après les gravures et les dessins que j'ai.[342]

Ibels knew that he had to work within a certain budget, but most of all, he continued to insist on the mode of representation that exposed the artificial nature of a situation. What may have appealed to him was the symbolic significance of representing various elements in a theatrical mode, of borrowing elements belonging to a shared repertory of images inherited from a long tradition of which the theater of this period was also a part. According to him, the "real" should be allowed to take on a variety of guises, based on the variations of the story line or the ideas of the set designer. In this manner, the costumes would function easily within the overall space. This theory also consisted of mixing the elements of representation dating from the time of the events and

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[341] "Jules César au théâtre de l'Odéon," *L'illustration théâtrale* (December 1906). Translated in Chothia, p. 122.

[342] Ibels's Letters to Antoine, Rt-101606.

from the time of the writing of the work. It is possible that this "blurring" of the distinctions between "real" and illusory was his way of cleverly adding innovation to Antoine's naturalistic approach. Costumes are supposed to appear to the audience in a more stylized, rather than veridical manner. Aside from the fact that Ibels's method suggested that reality could be interchanged and assembled in different ways, that styles and contexts could be switched, there was a playfulness that was an essential part of his working strategy. This process, which was a part of his relentless search for a distinct form of expression, and was at the very core of his artistic strategy, is evident in his letter to Antoine dated October 30, 1906, regarding the production of *Andromaque*. For this production Ibels studied not only 17th century costumes at the Bibliothèque Nationale, the Musée Carnavalet, and the library of the Théâtre Français, but he also studied the gesture, courtly speech and style of the era. He decided to use 17th century wigs and costumes, but also togas and leather battle skirts that represent the ancient world. In this letter he said:

> La cuirasse est un corps de brocart, les knémydes sont des brodequins de soie brodée s'adaptant sur des souliers à talons rouges... par dessus tout cela la cravate à nœud de satin et la perruque Louis XIV.[343]

Ibels replaced the warrior helmet for *Andromaque*, used in previous productions at the Odéon, with a "chapeau de cour avec double rangée de plumes écarlates." He used the costumes from their Molière repertory for the court scenes, and from the Roman repertory, he took the costumes for the characters of Cyrrhus, Oreste, Pylade, and others. His idea for decor was "l'éternel décor mexicain de Montézuma représentant une salle de palais ouverte sur un jardin." In his letter, Ibels further mentioned that he expected fierce

[343] Ibels's Letters to Antoine. Bibliothèque Nationale, Rt-101606

opposition, but that the reconstitution would be interesting despite "acteurs et détracteurs." He suggests that there would be very little or no cost at all for the costumes. This divine inspiration was not, however, quite completely realized. The play was first shown in mid February 1909 and was considered mediocre. The newspaper reviews were critical and contemptuous: "On ne répète pas assez le répertoire classique à l'Odéon," wrote theater critic Pawlowski. The critics were mixed in their response. Some complained that they could not "breathe the air of Greece," and some praised the good taste and "scrupuleuse exactitude" of the costumes, but some found the costumes "invraisemblables."

> Nous devons à M. Antoine d'avoir vu, non seulement les décors du XVII siècle et les invraisemblables costumes "à l'antiquité", mais encore les grands seigneurs écoutant sur la scène même et donnant le signal des applaudissements.[...] ne devons pas considérer ces représentations comme un modèle pour toutes les représentations à venir de pièces classiques, mais comme un curieux essai de reconstitution. C'est à ce titre que M. Antoine nous les a présentées et il a pleinement satisfait notre curiosité."[344]

Ibels's inventiveness that went beyond the need for financial expediency was recognized, but Antoine, most often, received all the credit for it. From the point of view of realism, Ibels's costumes and decor seemed fictitious, but true from the point of view of theater art. They were in harmony with the reality of the presented material, and subsequently brought out the inner essence of the dramatic work. Antoine staged the play every year until 1913.[345] For the last performance of *Andromaque* at the Odéon in November of that year, the banister lights were turned off for economy. "En réalité,"

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[344] Quoted in Sanders, 151.

[345] James B. Sanders, *André Antoine directeur à l'Odéon*, Paris: Bibliothèque des Lettres Modernes, Minard, (1978), 151.

noted a critic, "nous n'avons revu que le décor - il est fort beau - et les costumes."[346] Yet, the success of the experimental *Andromaque* ultimately remained mediocre. For reasons that remain unknown to us, the production remained in the repertory for years, while the audience stayed away.

In 1907 Antoine again sought help from his devout collaborators, Ibels and Juseaume, for staging a series of Molière's plays. The collaboration began well, and their relationship found renewed excitement. Regarding *Tartuffe*, he told Ibels :

> Tartuffe, mon vieux , […] Tartuffe, c'est une comédie qui restera toujours moderne. Elle pourrait être jouée en habit; nous ferons mieux, nous allons la situer dans son véritable milieu. D'abord le jardin, pour la rentrée d'Orgon, et la sortie de Mme Pernelle. Puis le salon paré, avec la découverte du grand escalier, par lequel descendra Tartuffe au 3e acte. Hein ! Cette entrée de Tartuffe, si admirablement préparée par Molière pendant deux actes, comme elle va encore se trouver accentuée par la descente du faux dévot, dont on voit d'abord les pieds, puis le corps, puis la tête. […] [347]

For this production Ibels created the costumes, and in collaboration with Jusseaume, the decor.

In 1912, Ibels created 200 costumes for *l'Honneur japonais*, based on Japanese artefacts and prints in the Musée Guimet, "lavishly trimmed and hand-painted."[348] He achieved a simple but sumptuous-looking production by painting details on common, inexpensive, fabric. Thanks to this invention, the costumes gave the illusion of consisting of embroidery and rich fabrics. In his *Carrière d'Antoine*, he noted:

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[346] *Commœdia*, (November 21, 1913), Quoted in Sanders, p. 157.
[347] Ibels, "La Carrière d'Antoine," p. 652.
[348] Chothia 165.

> La question des costumes était assez compliquée, non pas pour les modèles - les estampes japonaises sont belles, variées, nombreuses mais pour leur réalisation. Un costumier pressenti demandait 150 francs en moyenne pour l'exécution de chaque costume: il y en avait deux cents! J'eus l'idée de peindre ces costumes sur la toile ordinaire, je la soumis à Antoine, qui toujours méfiant, voulut se rendre compte d'abord avec son costume. Je le lui montrai sur scène. - Ça y est! mon vieux, marche! [349]

Just three days later, Antoine bragged to a friend that, after seeing just one costume, he considered *l'Honneur japonais* ready. Ibels dryly remarked:"Only 200 to go." This production was an effort on Antoine's part to imitate Japanese dramatic literature, and it was an artistic success. Ibels's inventiveness saved substantial money for Antoine, when Antoine's vision always seemed to be one of 'more and more.' In fact, in his *Journal,* Edmond de Goncourt commented on Antoine's private life and his financial carelessness, and called him "un dépensier, un gâcheur d'argent extraordinaire." He wrote:

> Toudouze, qui a fait un séjour, ainsi que les autres automnes, un séjour avec lui (Antoine) à Camaret, me disait que là il tirait 200 cartouches par jour sur les oiseaux de mer et que cette année, il avait ajouté à ses distractions la photographie, qu'il déclarait devoir être faite en pleine lumière et sans qu'on fourre sa tête et ses clichés dans la nuit, et gâchait par ces nouveaux procédés une trentaine de plaques par jour.[350]

As was Antoine's habit of living beyond his means, his spending on lavish productions was also out of hand. He put a lot of pressure on his collaborators to economize but, as Ibels complained in one of his letters, the money was indispensable because the workers needed to be paid and material bought.

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[349] "La Carrière d'Antoine," p. 653.
[350] De Goncourt, *Journal,* 464.

Right after finishing the grueling work for *l'Honneur Japonais*, which was praised as a "success triomphal,"[351] Ibels continued with another highly demanding project, working on costumes for the production of Le *Malade imaginaire* which was presented on October 3, 1912. It was greeted as a grand spectacle with many embellishments: Ibels was praised for his inventiveness and sumptuous costumes. The play was called by the critics "un vrai spectacle d'art" [352] or "un spectacle d'une originalité, d'une profondeur et d'une éxecution merveilleuses."[353]

Another example of Ibels's ingenuity was his work for Antoine's staging of *Esther* (1913). He created costumes from burlap coffee bags, and then, hand-painted the decoration on them as part of this venture into stylization. He replicated the costumes and scenes of an 18th-century series of Gobelin tapestries of the story of Esther, as this was Antoine's inspiration for the mise-en-scène of the play. Paul Paquerreau did the decor.[354] The critics blasted the acting while they called the decor and costumes, a "ravissement visuel."

For *Psyché* (1671), a ballet-tragedy written by Molière in collaboration with Corneille and Phillippe Quinault, and with music composed by Lulli, Ibels designed 150 costumes from illustrations of 17th-century court entertainment, in what was to be preparation, with five tailors working eight hours a day for 124 days. In his book on André Antoine, Chothia states that this was not a play but a masque-like confection

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[351] *Annales*, (October 31, 1907)
[352] Louis Schneider, *Commoedia,* October 6, 1912.
[353] Gaston Sorbets, *Théâtre*, October 12, 1912.
[354] Sanders 154.

conceived for Louis XIV's court, which had "only been performed once since 1715.[355] Although hugely successful with the press and public, the production was, all in all, a final, overwhelming and self-destructive attempt by Antoine. He wanted to leave the theater with fanfare, but this crowning moment in all his efforts to revisit the mise en scène of the French classic plays became, ironically, his "chant du cygne." The cost of production was enormous, the very reason why no other director of that period had dared to do it. Chotia further states that Ibels tried to recreate the ambiance of Versailles, which required an enormous amount of money and work, resulting in a loss of between 1,000 and 2,000 francs per night, even though the theater was nightly filled to capacity.

During his collaboration with Antoine, Ibels put his many talents as an artist to use. His design concepts, his exhaustive research and bold new ideas of juxtaposing eras and styles, elevated Antoine's productions which, otherwise, would have been seen as traditional renditions. By painting ordinary fabrics, Ibels transformed them into rich and sumptuous looking costumes, thus saving Antoine substantial money. Nonetheless, Antoine never refrained from blaming Ibels, even publicly, for the enormous cost of his productions.[356] Hurt, Ibels responded in an undated letter to Antoine whose content expresses years of built-up frustration:

> Le terme "gaspillage" dont tu t'es servi à mon égard m'a ému. Je serai très heureux que l'administrateur que tu es, fasse le calcul et établisse la différence de ce que lui coûterait *L'Honneur Japonais*, costumes comme couleurs, ou mieux-tes ordres ont été exécutés ponctuellement - les costumes de Samourai, d'Osate.[...] Il

[355] Chothia 169.

[356] This rift between Ibels and Antoine is one of the most important aspects of revisiting Ibels and his career, and one of the great mysteries that previous scholars have not attended to.

> me semble nécessaire que tu fasses un petit effort pour vaincre ce penchant que tu as de critiquer et de blesser en même temps et toujours publiquement.[357]

What was becoming an enormous problem for Antoine was that, because the Odéon was being subsidized by the State, he felt he could justify overspending on lavish productions. His collaborators were, however, not adequately, or sometimes not at all compensated. Tireless Ibels, in his letter to Antoine on October 9, 1911, confirmed that he would work on all of the plays for the following season, "d'une façon générale et de quelques pièces particulièrement." However, he reminded Antoine that he could not continue working without any compensation, and without being able to pay his assistant-artists, and that it would be unjust that he should suffer financially once he returns to the Odéon.[358]

Years later, Ibels accused his 'patron' of ingratitude. Indeed, Antoine did not mention his name, not even once, in his book *Histoire du théâtre*. In a letter Ibels wrote to Antoine on September 14, 1934, he said:

> J'ai marronné de n'avoir pas trouvé dans ton "Histoire du théâtre", deuxième partie, un seul mot, un seul, mentionnant ma collaboration à ton oeuvre odéonienne. Et tu sembles attribuer les costumes de l'Honneur japonais - mon triomphe - à Jusseaume.

It seems that Antoine held a grudge against Ibels since their split that came up at the end of his work at the Odéon. It is true that Antoine wrote his memoirs, and *Le théâtre*, twenty years after *l'Honneur Japonais* was staged, and that, while writing these books, he relied on information from his scrapbook that contained mostly clippings of different

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[357] Ibels's unpublished letters to Antoine. R-101606
[358] Ibels's unpublished letters to Antoine.

journal articles that talked about specific plays that he had staged.[359] He made mistakes in citing the names of the plays, dates, performers and other errors, sometimes missing dates by a day or two.[360] Thirty-three volumes of Antoine's clippings were preserved at the Rondel Collection at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, and it is thus possible to double check these facts.[361] The majority of articles that reported on Antoine's plays did not mention Ibels, or any other of Antoine's collaborators for that matter. It is difficult to imagine, however, that Antoine would have been able to forget the momentous work that Ibels did for him over a period of years, and especially for *L'Honneur Japonais*, which was gigantic both in terms of the complexity of the work, and in terms of saving enormous amounts of money for Antoine and his already impoverished theater.

To conclude, there are two possible explanations for the rift as Antoine and Ibels went their separate ways. First, their initial arguments regarding Antoine's accusations that Ibels spent too much money, while, in fact, Ibels did everything to save money. On the other hand, for Antoine, a man who originally worked for the gas company and then mingled with the Goncourts and the aristocratic society of St. Germain, life took quite a considerable turn. Despite his financial troubles, he went from being a person of the lower middle class, to the upper middle class. He quickly realized his own importance in the world of modern theater, and became obsessed with it. However, Goncourt's journals reveal that people like the Goncourts always considered him lower-class. Although he

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[359] André Antoine, *Le théâtre*, Paris: Les Éditions de France, 1932.

[360] See "Translator's Preface," in Marvin Carlson,*The French Stage in the NineteenthCentury*, Metuchen:The Scarecrow Press, Inc, 1972. xi-xiv,

[361] *Recueil factice d'articles de presse biographiques sur Antoine* (1858-1943). 1 vol. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris, Rt 3679. Also*, Recueil factice d'articles de presse biographiques sur Antoine et le Théâtre (1858-1943)*.1 vol. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris, Rt 3680.

bragged about giving artists an opportunity to show their work, it was these artists, in fact, who helped to solidify his position as a leader in the avant-garde theater. However, one must remember that Antoine's innovativeness, his new techniques in staging, lighting, actor training, as well as his penchant for propaganda and controversy often worked in favor of attracting the attention of theater goers, and furthering of the avant-garde ideas.[362]

When informing its readership about Antoine's resignation from the Odéon in 1914, the *New York Times* noted:

> M. Antoine never got the public to support him, and he blames it for its indifference to refined drama. It is a fact that, though the question of producing *Psyché*" had been bruited for months, and although M. Antoine regarded it as his final effort, it was only last week that the actual date of the production leaked out. If only he had communicated the news to the Paris press months ago he would have had columns of articles about the piece, advertising it enormously in advance.[363]

Ibels's collaboration with Gémier

The second possible explanation for Ibels's rift with Antoine is his collaboration with director Firmin Gémier (1869-1933). While Ibels continued to work with Antoine, he also joined Gémier who had, some years earlier, a falling out with Antoine during their brief co-artistic direction of the Odéon, and after Gémier's taking over as director of the Théâtre Antoine. Langdon Brown calls Gémier a "sure box office draw" at the time, a

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[362] Antoine never wanted to be associated with one particular aesthetic doctrine. As a result of his eclectiveness, in his theaters we see, in the same evening, back to back productions of naturalist plays and poetic dramas. This eclecticism was a sign of modernism and helped him attract different audience that was not necessarily separated into different and aesthetically defined groups.

[363] *The New York Times*, April 12, 1914.

man who never forgot his working-class origins, who worked tirelessly on popularizing the *théâtre du peuple*, and who sought to invigorate the French theater.[364] Even while working for the theater Antoine, Gémier came up with innovations (such as removing the ramp that separated the audience from the stage) that brought the theater closer to the people.[365] He also created the Théâtre Ambulant (1911-12), with which he toured France by rail, and in 1920, became the director of the first Théâtre National Populaire.[366]

Gémier's ideas were closely aligned with Ibels's ideas regarding the purpose of the theater. Ibels worked on Gémier's most acclaimed Shakespearean adaptations, such as *The Taming of the Shrew* (1918). This play was one in the series of Gémier's successes at the Théâtre Antoine. The previous year, François Porché's *Les Butors et la Finette*, an allegorical play in verse, was considered to be a triumphal success, and admired by both the elite and "la foule." Ibels's talent as a costume designer, and the play in general, were praised as simple and original. Journalist Pierre Lafitte noted for the November 15-December 15, 1917, issue of *Je Sais Tout*: "Ce qui lui donne un caractère de profonde nouveauté, c'est le mélange qu'elle présente de symbolisme et de réalité." In the same issue, theater critic Paul Fuchs raved about the splendor of the production, and praised Ibels for creating a "fête des yeux et de l'esprit."[367]

The Taming of the Shrew was first produced in Lyon, opening on December 11, 1918, at the Salle Rameau. The reason for moving the production to Lyon was the

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[364] Langdon Brown, Firmin Gémier's Cirque d'Hiver Production of 'Oedipe roi de Thèbes,'" *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Oct., 1979), p. 372.

[365] Chantal Meyer-Plantureux 119.

[366] During the World War I (1914-1918), Gémier started the Société Shakespeare- a theater society, in order to "affermir les liens intellectuels de l'humanité, du progrès et de la civilisation. […] Meyer-Plantureux, p. 112.

[367] *Je Sais Tout*, (15 Feb.-15 Mar., 1918): 118.

German bombarding of Paris, which closed all the theaters. The production moved to the Théâtre Antoine the first week in January of 1919 where it changed over the years, to be "set" at the time when Gémier took over the directorship of the Odéon in 1922. Ibels designed the scenery for the Lyons Théâtre Antoine production. Theater historian Paul Blanchart wrote that the circumstances obliged Ibels to improvise sets and costumes with a minimum of funds.[368] He reduced the decor to its simplest expression, and created an English setting rather than Italian. This was a welcome and radical departure for Ibels, after spending years in a not always easy collaboration with Antoine who had a tendency to go overboard and give too much importance to decor as a realistic representation of the universe, to the point of being accused of having "suffocated" Shakespeare's text.

In 1919, after many years of preparations, Gémier staged *Oedipus* whose subtitle was "Spectacles Olympiques." The production was, indeed, done on a very large scale, and required an enormous effort on the part of Ibels to prepare all the costumes for an army of 200 actors. Gémier commissioned H.M. Jacquet to adapt compositions of Bach to punctuate scenes, especially those that incorporated dances choreographed by Jeanne Ronsay, and he hired Gaston Baty to design lighting and Ibels to design costumes. Ibels paid close attention to costuming the crowd, which in the end bore more than a passing resemblance to the Parisian mob of the Revolution.[369] Gémier wanted to revive the total effect of the ancient theater, and decided to place the production in a circus, Le Cirque d'Hiver. This was not a novel idea, since Lugné-Poë had already experimented with it, and German director Reinhardt had already staged *Oedipus* in Berlin in 1910 in

[368] Paul Blanchart, "Histoire de la mise en scène," PUF Que sais-je, 1948. p. 117.
[369] Langdon Brown, Firmin Gémier's Cirque d'Hiver Production of "Oedipe roi de Thèbes," *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Oct., 1979), 378.

the Schumann Circus.[370] The circus offered a place to which ordinary people were accustomed, and it was large enough to accommodate the scenes with large crowds.[371] The production was observed by the journalist Paul Gsell who reported on Ibels's frantic efforts to prepare the army of actors for the show.[372] Ibels was well versed in the philosophical conception of the production and explained that in preparing to design the costumes he spent hours reading Bouhélier's script and was inspired by its medieval quality and the beauty of the poetry. He decided to take the medieval and Renaissance style of clothing and decorate it with Greek motifs. The costumes were modeled on those of France in the 13th and 14th centuries and the motifs were taken from Greek monuments and buildings. The most exotic costume was that of Tiresias, who was conceived as a kind of medieval wizard and dressed in a conical hat and yellow robe, and decorated with a serpent taken from the designs found in the palace of Minos on Crete.[373] Ibels also paid close attention to the costumes of the crowd. He dressed men in colorful clothes and with Phrygian revolutionary bonnets, and women with large scarves that covered almost their entire upper body. Artakès, the hero, was the only character in red.[374] *Le Figaro*'s Jules Méry found the costumes to be of the most rigorous reconstruction that offered "le plus heureux bariolage de coloris."[375]

Gémier did not want to have anything to do with Antoine's famous staging of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Anthony and Cleopatra*. His

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[370] Brown 376.

[371] Photos from the production can be seen in the No. 154 issue of *l'Illustration*, December 27, 1919.

[372] See Blanchart, *Gémier*, 211-12; and Gémier, *Le Théâtre*, 115-28.

[373] Brown 379.

[374] Brown 380.

[375] *Le Figaro*, January 9, 1914.

ideas were aligned with those of Lugné-Poë concerning the reconstruction of the Elizabethan stage and its adaptation to the modern theater.[376] Also, along with Paul Ginisty, Gémier co-directed the Odéon with Antoine from June 4 to November 24, 1896, a very short period, during which their collaboration proved impossible.

Plays Written by Ibels

What is completely unknown in modern scholarship is the fact that Ibels wrote plays, several of which were a huge success, and which are discussed in this study for the first time. These plays are: *La Neige* (1903), *La Promise* (1903), and *Au coin d'un bois* (1905), La Montansier (1904). In its issue of May-June, 1905 (No. 5-6), *La Revue Méridionale*, thus commented on two of Ibels's plays:

> Ses brillantes facultés d'observation devaient réveiller en lui de précieux dons d'auteur dramatique; le Vaudeville a joué il y a deux an avec un certain succès *la Neige,* (H.G. Ibels & Pierre Morgand) et l'année dernière la Gaieté attira dans son immense salle, un public avide de connaitre *la Montansier*, aussi intéressante à la lecture, qu'à la représentation.[377]

La Neige, written in collaboration with Pierre Morgand, encompasses a variety of themes and motifs such as social frustration, adultery, friendship, cruelty, death, and it emphasizes sociopolitical change. The female protagonist challenges tradition, for which she is punished. For the stylistic and thematic character of this play, Ibels could be affiliated with contemporaries such as August Strindberg. Like Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, this is a naturalist play that deals with love, class, and the interaction among the sexes and their conflicts. It is set on a stormy winter evening in the home of Tourneau, a 60 year-

[376] See Paul Blanchart, *Firmin Gémier*, Paris: L'Arche, 1954., 211-12; and Gémier, *Le Théâtre*, 115-28.

[377] *La Revue Meridionale*, May 1905. (no page number given)

old notary, and his wife Hélène, 50, who, along with their friend Letessier, a retired commandant, are waiting for their friends to arrive for their weekly game of cards and dominoes. All the action takes place in the apartment, before, during and after the gathering of friends.The intrigue is mainly concerned with power in its various forms. Tourneau has power over Hélène who does not love him but who is in wheelchair, and is at his mercy. His power over her is granted to him, first on their wedding day, by her family who needed to be saved from financial ruin, and then, by society because he married Helene "without dowry." To that effect, he cites article 213 of the Civil Code: "La femme doit obéissance au mari." Their friend Lettessier has moral power over Tourneau - he is more generous, and more liked by people than Tourneau who tends to be 'fussy' about things. He also has Hélène's heart. They have been lovers for fifteen years. Over the course of the play, Tourneau and Letessier battle for control in a very subtle way, which swings back and forth between them until halfway through the second act when, after Hélène admits her infidelity, and Tourneau, in turn, admits that Hélène became accidentally paralyzed when, in an attempt to prevent her from running away with Letessier several years before, he unsuccessfully tried to kill her.

Ibels underlines the alternative direction taken in modern drama with the preoccupation with the existential nature of the individual. He places on stage a female character that challenges social and moral norms.[378] In the play, Hélène appears to be a

[378] Ibels was certainly not the only playwright who had in his play a female character who challenged norms of the society. Vera Starkoff, for instance, a feminist and a playwright of Russian origin wrote her first play *L'amour Libre* in 1902. In this play that depicts life of workers, she insists that it is in women's interest to avoid the trappings of a bourgeois marriage that enslave her. It is better for women, she claims, to raise her children alone than to be a victim of the bourgeois hypocrisy.

very quiet woman, and due to the nature of her illness, powerless. Yet, her enduring love for Letessier, and their remorseless affair is her way of saying 'no' to the subservient role of a woman in a relationship to her husband, her family, and society. Tourneau, her husband, who considered himself "une des colonnes de l'édifice social," represents everything that was wrong with the society of the time: its adherence to old laws and refusal to admit and examine the changes within it. Tourneau's disclosure of his psychopathic desire to murder his wife, was brought about by his overwhelming and devouring doubt in himself. In his long tirade at the end, he experiences a revelation, and exposes his dreams and unexpressed thoughts.

We see in this play the elements of Aristotelian tragedy, although the subject did not come directly from ancient mythology. The common thread is that Tourneau is not a person characterized by great virtue and character, but rather someone who has a very controversial nature: partly bad and partly good. His errors lead him to crime and misfortune. In Ibels's drama, the course of the action does not lead to catharsis or solicit feelings of compassion from the audience, but rather makes it reflect upon the nature of individuals. He delicately explores the unsettling winds within society, intimate lives, and legal constraints and the constant flux of society based primarily on an individual's learning about himself. The reader and spectator, however, have to work harder to make those connections.

For further readings on this play and *le théâtre de combat*, see Jonny Ebstein et all. *Le Théâtre de Combat*, read *Au Temps de l'Anarchie. Un Théâtre de combat,1880-1914*. Paris: Éditions Séguier, 1995. (Monique-Surel Tupin's introductory essay, p. 293.)

In 1903, Ibels started working on his play *La Promise*[379] with Pierre Morgand, about the Breton fishermen. The play treats several questions that interested Ibels - among others, the Fishermen's Union. In August of 1904 he found out from Antoine that Saint-Pol- Roux, a poet, was working on his own play with the same topic. He met with Saint-Pol-Roux in Camaret, and explained to him that he had been working on this play since 1903, that the theme of the fishermen's union was central to it, and that he would deplore having to abandon it. Saint-Pol-Roux agreed to do the necessary changes on his side. Ibels was very proud of the play and very eager to show it to Antoine.

> Je prends donc le parti de te déposer notre manuscrit de "La Promise" et je fais appel aux sentiments intimes qui justifient notre vieille amitié, pour te supplier de lire notre pièce avec attention, et de la juger impartialement.[380]

There is no evidence that Antoine responded to Ibels's request for consideration. *La Montansier* is a play in four acts, written by Ibels, Flers and Caillavet.[381] Ibels appears here as an added author, although the *La Revue Méridionale* article mentions the play as his. It was staged at the Théâtre Municipal de la Gaité, and first shown on March 24, 1904, with Réjane (stage name of Gabrielle Réju,1857-1920) as La Montansier and Coquelin Ainé (Benoît Constant Coquelin, 1841-1909) as Saint-Phar. The play was a tribute to the famous actress and theater director Maguerite Brunet (1730-1820) – whose stage name was La Montansier. In real life, she was an entrepreneurial, infatigable,

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[379] So far, I have not been able to find the text of *La Promise*.

[380] Ibels's undated letter to Antoine.

[381] For more on La Montansier as a historical figure and actresses as public figures, see Patricia Bouchenot-Déchin, *La Montansier: De Versailles au Palais-Royal, une femme d'affaire,* Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 2007; also, Lenard R. Berlanstein, *Daughters of Eve: a cultural history of French theater women from the Old Regime to the Fin-De-Siècle*.Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001.

ambitious, and passionate woman, whose life was full of hard work, love and intrigue.[382] In the play, she is called Maguerite and also La Montasier. We follow her life from the time when she decided that she wanted to run a theater. She asks her aunt to host a dinner for fifteen people from different social classes – Duc de Richelieu and the nobles, a priest, and actors, all of whom she knew in her private life. They all receive the same letter in which they are summoned to come to la Montansier's home.[383] Finally, Maguerite comes with her new lover Neuville who was famous but poor, and whom she decided to marry. She manipulates the invitees into giving her money so she can start her own theater. She even accepts two new members into her troupe, two noblemen, theater lovers, who wanted to join the theater but incognito. One of them is the Marquis de Pommeuse, whom she calls Philippe, and with whom she madly falls in love. In act two, we see that Maguerite has founded some twenty theaters and produced plays at the Court. She and Neuville are not in love anymore but remain business partners and run the theater together. In act three, we see Maguerite and her troupe on the battlefield, involved with the French military, hungry and dying, still dressed in their theater costumes.[384] After many twists and turns, during which she proclaims her love, first to Philippe and

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[382] At the age of 14, she fled to America, following a young actor who seduced her. Several years later, she ended up in Martinique, where she became mistress of the Intendant of Martinique, who helped her open a shop in St. Domingo. A few years later, she went back to Paris, bringing her servants with her. At the age of thirty-five she founded a theater, chose the repertory, organized performances, all of which brought her a great deal of fame, and made her popular at the Court. Soon she became close with Marie Antoinette, and was given a task of organizing all the balls at Versailles.

[383] La Montansier is also Maguerite's aunt's first name.

[384] In real life, La Montansier served as a French "ambassador" in Brussels. She was on a mission from the French revolutionary government, during which, through an engagement in the Théâtre de la Monnaie, she propagated French revolutionary principles. Jacqueline Letxter, "La Montansier à la Monnaie: Musical Theater as French Revolutionary Propaganda,"*Revue Belge de Musicologie*, 55 (2001): 193-208.

then to Neuville, she and Neuville finally reach their conclusion that they are in love with each other.

This play is true homage to the famous *directrice* and actress, but, at the same time, can serve as a reflection on the political and social changes that the French Revolution brought to the country. In parallel with examining the evolution of an actress, her individualism and her emancipation, it illuminates the widening of social spheres and the moving of traditionally fixed social boundaries.

The authors first gave the play to M. Porel, manager of the Vaudeville theater, under one condition - that his wife, the famous actress Réjane play the main role.[385] The actress, in the meantime, filed for divorce from M. Porel, and left the Vaudeville, so the authors then gave the play to the Théâtre Municipal de la Gaité.[386] As a result, M Porel filed a lawsuit against the authors for breach of contract, which was resolved in their favor. The play was also produced at the Prince of Wales Theater in London, June 17, 1904, a sure sign of success even on the international theater scene.

In 1903, Ibels also gave the story *Au coin d'un bois* to the poet and playwright Hugues Delorme[387] who turned it into a one-act play in verse. It is a story of a small crook who robbed people at the corner of a wood. He spared a couple of lovers but stopped a rubicund monk who turned out to have a lot of money. When the monk pleaded with the robber, and said that he did not dare to go back to the monastery without the

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[385] *Le Monde Artiste,* 52 (Dec 27, 1903): 828.

[386] *The New York Times*, Dec 11, 1903.

[387] Hugues Delorme (1868-1942) was a poet, dramaturge, and journalist who frequented cabarets, and who created popular songs, sung mostly in the cabarets of Montmartre.

money, the robber admitted that his gun was fake, and at that, the monk beat him up. The play was published in 1905 by Charpentier et Fasquelle, listing "Joeffrin" as Ibels's pseudonym. Purportedly, this was the play he had offered to Antoine two years before, and who refused it under the pretext that he "did not do one-act plays." However, shortly after, Ibels found out that that was not true.[388]

> Tu ne perds jamais une occasion de me prouver ta vieille amitié!
> "Je n'annonce jamais les pièces en un acte" me déclarais-tu
> et je lis dans le journal que tu as publié hier matin sur l'affiche qui annonce
> les pièces nouvelles en un acte, que tu comptes monter en 1903-1904.

Dauntlessly, he learned to turn his back on Antoine's constant disregard, and just moved on.

To conclude: Ibels's interest in the theater as a source of subject matter he could use in his posters and drawings was born early in his career. In these posters and drawings his recognizable style that leans on the example of Japanese posters brought him much fame at the time. When he stopped being a mere observer and ventured deeply into the world of the theater, Ibels had already been producing several series of lithographs on this topic. We see that he found inspiration in the history of the theater, as well as in world cultural history, and brought his own ideas and enthusiasm to all aspects of the production. We also see that he emphasized the importance of discovery and process as a means to generate new works.

His work in his early and formative twenties, his *forains*, his harlequins, the circus, all had a powerful influence on his self-realization as an artist. He did not want to create scenery and costumes that would look like a painting translated into three-dimensional

[388] Ibels's letter to Antoine dated June 2, 1903.

terms, but searched for new ways of exploiting the visual possibilities of the theater, while having to keep in mind limited budgets and the vision of the theater directors he worked with.

As well as being artistically challenging and rewarding, his relationship with the theater director André Antoine was also the most frustrating and painful aspect of his long career. After all, Ibels devoted the most productive years of his life to his collaboration with Antoine and his three theaters, only to be publicly humiliated by him, and repeatedly accused of "gaspillage." Added to this was the ultimate insult of the complete absence of a single mention of his work, his contributions or even his name in Antoine's books on the theater. This omission, deliberate or not, left Ibels's name out of the books that many scholars have used as a point of departure and as essential references for their research on the Théâtre Libre, Théâtre Antoine, Odéon, and on Antoine and his work in general.

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Conclusion

Writing about an artist and his work can be subjective, and riddled with prejudice. Writing about an artist who lived almost a century ago, and on whom there are only a few articles written, and no books or critical commentaries, can be a daunting task riddled with even more subjective impressions, leading to many questions, negations, and, ultimately, self-doubt. While working on this study my subjectivity, however, was never static but molded into an effort to keep my passion for my research on Ibels's art and life channeled into writing his story. This is the story of a man whose long and fruitful career as a painter, draftsman, book illustrator, teacher, theater decorator and costume designer, spanned a period of great transitions, when momentous artistic and intellectual battles were waged, and who has been almost completely disregarded by modern art historians and art critics. My examination of his work in each chapter of this dissertation is rooted primarily in the investigation of textual sources and visual images. I make no claims about the aesthetic quality of these images but try to present the breadth of Ibels's oeuvre so that the work itself attests to its significance.

The visual and textual evidence discussed and cited here constitutes a fraction of the much larger body of material that I collected. Because initially, faced with contemporary silence and disregard towards Ibels, I stressed the need to collect material, the impulse at the early stages of writing was to include as many examples as possible. That process revealed that this study posed major methodological challenges, because as a thematically-based inquiry that engages a multitude of cultural discourses, it is inherently fragmentary.

Ibels's contemporaries enjoyed his art and his talent almost on a daily basis, and critics compared his rare attention to life and movement to that of the great masters, Leonardo da Vinci and Rembrandt, as well as to his contemporaries Daumier and Degas. Actor Ernest Coquelin (1848 –1909), also known as Coquelin Cadet, who frequently purchased paintings by the Nabis painters, stated on one occasion, when he was offered to buy a painting by Bonnard, that he preferred to buy one of Ibels's drawing of *weight-lifters*, than any painting by Bonnard.[389] While this was certainly a personal choice, it shows that Ibels's contemporaries were responsive to his aesthetics and recognized that his art was representative of the new visual perspective that proved to be as significant in its own time as any other intellectual manifestation. Numerous articles and mentions from that period prove that Ibels's contemporaries also recognized his ideological and artistic contributions to the art of painting, poster design, theater, and caricature, as well as the fact that succeeding in all of these genres is reserved to only a few of the greatest talents.

Because of its esoteric nature, Ibels never took part of Symbolism as his Nabis colleagues did, which, in part, might explain the paucity of material on him in contrast to the abundance of research done on other Nabis members. While most the Nabis kept their individual styles throughout the decade of their most intensive cooperation and existence as a group, their style was characterized by the recognizable Nabis aesthetic of flat areas of pure colors, and visibly outlined forms. Although the influence of the Nabis aesthetic

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[389] Quoted in John Russell, *Edouard Vuillard, 1868-1940*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1971, p. 83.

is visible in Ibels's work, especially in his lithographs, he departed from it very early in his career and developed his own very distinct style.

While he tirelessly worked on promoting lithography as a means of artistic expression, Ibels joined the battle to change society by addressing different issues such as the exploitation of urban workers as well as peasants, prostitution, or violence against women and children, and he brought these issues out in the open. He worked on creating a new relationship between the artist and society – one of complicity that would break with the norm of passive contemplation. He involved his public in a relationship in which it was expected to react to his proposal for change, and he wanted people to reconsider their existence and the rules governing their ordinary behavior, recognizing that this was the only way for society to transition to modernity. However, he was by no means dogmatic in his beliefs, never sacrificed his art to overpowering didacticism, and thus created art with important social significance.

Everything I have accumulated regarding Ibels's oeuvre shows that he was not marginal at all during his time. Yet, modern scholars and art critics in our day are unduly influenced by the writings and the omissions of certain key figures of the time, and take their neglect of Ibels at face value. There are two major reasons for this. First, the omission of his name by André Antoine from his works on the theater, including his memoirs that are considered the starting point for many researchers on the Théâtre Antoine, Théâtre Libre and the Odéon. Although he brought his own ideas and enthusiasm to all aspects of the production and thus significantly contributed to the quality of many successful plays, Antoine never recognized Ibels's contribution, or that of any other artist for that matter. Secondly, Ibels's surprising switch from being an

ardent defender of captain Alfred Dreyfus, and being an active participant during the Affair on the side of justice, to his anti-Semitic stance that alienated him, even if temporarily, from some of his friends, and probably forever, from many Jewish art promoters and gallery owners (such as Josse and Gaston Bernheim who ran the Paris art firm Bernheim-Jeune) because of his critique of Captain Dreyfus, and his openly anti-Semitic comments. Although he never denied the innocence of Dreyfus, he called him a "monster" for not having acknowledged his support during the Affair but having found time to thank "many rich bankers."

Ibels was not the only artist who abandoned the confines of the unyielding and devitalizing classical academic tradition, and who experimented with new ideas and techniques with enthusiasm and vigor. However, very early in his career, he engaged on a course that was very much his own. He crossed the old with the modern, the peasant with the industrial, the avant-garde theater with the café-concert, and the world of forains; in his compositions, he mixed heavy and diaphanous figures. The adjectives that most of the earlier sources used for Ibels's art are "raw," "violent," "grotesque," and "primitive," but a deeper analysis of his work, coupled with the unveiling of his artistic philosophy, reveals that beyond his *forains* emerges a multitude of complex, ambiguous and significant meanings.

The contrast between his graphic work and his oil paintings is illuminating. Lithography, which constitutes a principal axis of his work, was inspired by contemporary life and abounds with subjects drawn from the spectacle of modern Paris, and commentaries on sharp conflicts intrinsic to industrialization. While his graphic work embodied current issues, his oil paintings showed nature, quiet streets, and winding

roads. From his letters to Antoine, we can see that he often retreated with this family to his summer home in Poissy, Île-de-France, near Normandy - "A trois quarts d'heure des plus jolis coins de Normandie pour mon art." While he continued to paint throughout his life, his oil paintings have not been commented on (the most substantial evidence for them so far being numerous auction catalogues) and this component of his work is dispersed and mostly in private collections.

Initially, my methodology simply involved juxtaposing documentation found on Ibels, piecing together an image of an artist who devoted his whole life to art, and making broad deductions. I sought to avoid steering the reader in one direction in my empirical writing, and to keep the latter free from hasty speculations about Ibels's life and work, which I wanted to explore in its "natural," documentable shape, while discovering my very personal relationship to the subject. The process nevertheless also involved a historical exploration of the complex social structures of his time.

My initial intent was not to present a monograph on the artist himself, however, the need was felt for assembling all of the biographical information available, because it had never been discussed before and because it established as a necessary foundation in order to uncover the socio-historical circumstances that molded his artistic sensibilities.

Forward

While my primary concern was to unveil Ibels's role and place in the history of French art of the late nineteenth century as an important player in cultural and political life, the broad spectrum of issues examined sheds new light on the complex relationship

between his art and the art of his contemporaries. Several come to mind: his relationship and sharing of aesthetic ideas with Toulouse-Lautrec, and a comparison of his rendering of female prostitutes and Daumier's unflattering portrayal of feminists and “bluestockings,” "femme d'esprit" and "amazone littéraire" as a metaphor for corrupted femininity. In his posters and caricatures Ibels explores image of women in public spaces, dangerously exposed to the direct as well as surreptitious male gaze (for instance, Ibels’s illustrations for the issue of *L’Assiette au Beurre* on prostitution). Many of his illustrations show women in “permissible” public spaces such as the theater -- women performers -- but who are never in danger of falling from the elevated social space of “femininity,”and whose presence on the stage he uses in a subversive way. These are women who have control over their own body, and are in control over their own sexuality. As seen in chapter IV, Ibels brought the same topics and concerns (women being one of the more important and original ones) to the theater.

Praised and criticized at the same time, Ibels did not leave anyone indifferent, and moved forward without many lateral negotiations, testing the uneven progress of the world around him as well as its harmonies.

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