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Identity and Interpretation: Receptions of Toulouse-Lautrec's *Reine de joie* Poster in the 1890s

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Abstract:

This essay analyzes the critical reception of Toulouse-Lautrec's poster, *Reine de joie*, which depicts a Jewish banker in the arms of a courtesan. Comparing a review by Thadée Natanson, an assimilated Jew, with the writings of other French critics, it demonstrates how commentaries on works of art, even when made in the same historical moment, are bound up in questions of identity.

Identity and Interpretation: Receptions of Toulouse-Lautrec's *Reine de joie* Poster in the 1890s

by Ruth E. Iskin

The ideology of the inexhaustible work of art, or of “reading” as re-creation, masks—through the quasi-exposure which is often seen in matters of faith—the fact that the work is indeed made not twice, but a hundred times, by all those who are interested in it, who find a material or symbolic profit in reading it, classifying it, deciphering it, commenting on it, combating it, knowing it, possessing it.

Pierre Bourdieu.[1]

Toulouse-Lautrec's 1892 poster *Reine de joie*, which promoted a novel by that name, represents an elderly banker as a lascivious, balding, pot-bellied Jew whose ethnic nose is pinned down by a vigorous kiss from a dark-haired, red-lipped courtesan (fig. 1).[2] The focus of the present article is on the reception of the *Reine de joie* poster close to the time in which it was made.[3] This article seeks to understand the “symbolic profit” produced by critics' comments within the context of Paris in the 1890s, the Dreyfus decade in which anti-Semitic rhetoric soared, and gives priority to that historical framework over theories although the latter, particularly Bourdieu's, have given this article its impetus. It presents a historically specific case study of reception in the hope it may contribute to broader issues of reception and identity in visual culture.



Fig. 1, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Reine de Joie*, 1892. Lithograph, 136.5 x 93.3 cm. [\[larger image\]](#)

After introductory remarks that highlight certain differences between Lautrec's representation of figures in the *Reine de joie* poster and the novel for which he made it the article examines 1890s reviews of Lautrec's poster by several French critics who were not Jewish. It argues that with the possible exception of Félix Fénéon they re-produced social/ethnic hierarchies through a double strategy of elaborating on the stereotype of the degraded Jewish banker, and claiming a position of moral superiority for the artist, critic, spectator, and reader. It then examines this argument by analyzing critics' positions on Lautrec's representation of the “vice” of prostitution, in comparison to their positions on the “vice” of Jewishness. This is followed by demonstrating the difference between the reviews of French critics who were not Jewish and that of Thadée Natanson, an assimilated

Jew who was a key member of the Parisian avant-garde of the 1890s. The article analyzes Natanson's review through a close reading and by contextualizing it within his family background, social position, and the 1890s anti-Semitic climate. It concludes with comments on identity and interpretation.

The *Reine de joie* Poster and Novel

Lautrec's striking large-scale poster advertised the novel *Reine de joie, moeurs du demi-monde* (*Queen of Joy, The World of Easy Virtue*) by the now forgotten author Victor Joze.[4] The bold aesthetics of Lautrec's avant-garde lithograph presents a radically flattened space, figures with virtually no graduated shading, Japanese-inspired simplifications, clear silhouettes, and stark colors. Coming on the heels of his *Moulin Rouge* poster published in the previous year, *Reine de joie* was one of the arresting works that helped establish Lautrec's reputation as an avant-garde artist noted for original posters and mordant portrayals of Parisian life. The poster attracted the interest of collectors and was almost instantly available at Sagot's (at a low price, like Joze's novel itself).[5] That the poster was designed as an advertisement explains the prominent compositional placement of Lautrec's bold lettering—loosely drawn olive green letters sprawling across the lower part of the poster, superimposed on the flattened table facing the spectator. They announce: "*Reine de joie/ par /Victor Joze/ chez/ tous les/ libraires*" ("*Reine de joie/ by /Victor Joze/ at all/ book stores*").

The poster depicts a scene that involved the novel's character Baron de Rozenfeld, a Jewish banker—and an allusion to the French Baron Alphonse de Rothschild—although he was not a central figure in the book.[6] The novel centers on a Parisian courtesan named Alice Lamy, who mingled in the high society of aristocrats and very wealthy bourgeois. Prior to the scene depicted by Lautrec, the banker had struck a deal to engage Alice (at the price of fifty thousand francs a month in addition to gifts of jewelry and a large townhouse). Lautrec shows the dinner that the banker arranged with Lamy and three of his male friends in a private room in the Café Anglais. Alice has unfolded the napkin where the banker had discreetly placed a million-franc bill-of-sale for a townhouse on the avenue du Bois de Boulogne. The poster depicts the next moment: "She rises suddenly, embraces the Baron with her bare arms, and as her lips slide towards the old man's mouth, she encounters an obstacle in the form of his large hooked Semitic nose and there she plants her kiss." [7]

Lautrec's portrayal of the undignified, coarse-featured banker was only partially modeled after the stereotype of the Jewish financier briefly described in Joze's novel as an aging "Semitic type," very bald, with black-colored whiskers. These features along with the stereotyped Semitic nose are visible in the poster. Lautrec, however, is not faithful to Joze's description of the banker as "an impassive figure of a man who knows his power." [8] Instead, Lautrec's representation is of a short, overweight, sunken figure of a man who indulges in what money can buy and whose own passive body language does not suggest a consciousness of his own power. Furthermore, the poster contrasts the banker with his guest, the red-haired, blue-eyed, young English "Lord of Bath," who was one of the three guests invited to witness the "deal." The lord's physiognomy, impeccable appearance, and upright pose accentuate the dilapidation of the aging banker who is sinking into the courtesan's paid embrace. [9] His averted gaze reflects his good breeding and, as we shall see, the higher moral ground implied in the lord's aloofness is something that many a critic during the 1890s would claim in their comments on Lautrec's poster.

Spectatorial Position and Stereotype in the Reception of Lautrec's Poster

Homi K. Bhabha's insights about the stereotype as the "major discursive strategy" of a racializing colonial discourse are apt for the Jewish stereotype:

[The stereotype] is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always "in place", already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated ... as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual licence of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved. It is this process of *ambivalence* ... that gives the colonial stereotype its currency: ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalization; produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in *excess* of what can be empirically proved or logically construed.[10]

Bhabha's insights into the construction of the colonial subject in discourse and the exercise of power through discourse can illuminate the production of knowledge/power in visual culture. His critique of the stereotype, showing that it does not offer "a *secure* point of identification,"[11] provides a framework within which we can understand that not only art and visual culture artifacts but also criticism play a crucial role in constructing stereotypes. Critics responding to viewing the stereotype of the Jewish banker in Lautrec's poster rearticulated it in their elaborate descriptions, charting their point of view, and placing themselves on a higher moral plane. In doing so, they actively participated in constructing the stereotyped subject in discourse and in the exercise of power through discourse.

Several French critics writing in the 1890s about Lautrec's *Reine de joie* established a clear hierarchy of moral values, social status, and knowledge/power through critic/artist/spectator/reader positioning. They elaborately described the Jewish banker in the arms of the courtesan as repulsive, further dehumanizing him, and defining him as the "other." Furthermore, they asserted that the artist, and implicitly the critic, spectator and reader, were distinct from the low subject matter, namely the Jewish banker and courtesan.

The well-known architect and critic Frantz Jourdain, who discussed the poster in his 1893 article "L'Affiche Moderne et Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec" ("The Modern Poster and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec") in *La Plume*, amplified the Jewish banker's degradation:

In the background is an ossified figure of a man-about-town who has been reduced to a zombie-like state by the imbecility of his life. One senses his being proud of being sufficiently amused, to the point of no longer having any human sensibility; his brain has been reduced to its simplest expression. But he is only a foil, an accessory to this magnificently disgusting picture. The aged, played out prostitute loved for her very depravity and squalor, sprawls in an abject and shameless manner in the embrace of the pot-bellied, shady but enormously rich banker ("*très millionnaire*"). How admirably drawn is the doddering figure of the lustful old man who pays a woman to dribble a kiss on his worn, flabby flesh. Beneath the lips of the brute, in this sordid embrace, his fat repulsive flesh lets itself dissolve into a gelatinous mass. Yet while his gaze loses all its life under the heavy inert eyelids, a quiver of life still stirs beneath the flabby

skin, and in the throes of bestial passion the stupidity of the old man becomes an agreeable beatitude.[12]

Like most critics, Jourdain does not explicitly note that the millionaire is Jewish but this could not have been missed by the viewers of the poster because of the visual features of the stereotype. (*La Plume* also included a black and white reproduction of the *Reine de joie* poster).[13] Jourdain's description dehumanizes the Jewish banker and sharpens the degradation by contrasting him with the artist. The banker's gaze has virtually no life in it. Lautrec, on the other hand, the article goes on to say, has an elevated intellectual, philosophical, and psychological gaze. Furthermore, Lautrec's posters are proof of the artist's "high intellectuality" ("*haute intellectuality*").[14] His *Reine de joie* poster is a "superb example of psychology" of high society. At the end of the essay (referring to all the posters discussed) Jourdain calls attention to Lautrec's mastery, his "execution, the quality of art," declaring that Lautrec's work is defined by "his vision of our humanity," which "is all philosophical." [15] Jourdain sets up two opposing poles: the intellectual and fine human qualities of the artist—and implicitly of the critic and reader—are all contained in "*our* humanity." [16] In contrast, the Jewish banker is the "other" who lacks humanity. This man no longer has any "human sensibility." He is an almost brain-dead lump of flabby flesh, which "dissolves into a gelatinous mass." Nonetheless, he is bestial, referring to another trait of the nineteenth-century stereotype of the Jew, namely his excessive sexual desires.

The landmark 1896 volume *Les Affiches illustrées (1886–1895)* by Ernest Maindron, a foremost authority on posters, described Lautrec's *Reine de joie* in these terms:

The man, a repellent abject type, is the shady financier who pays without counting and wants it known; the despicable way in which he sprawls, this vile personage, is imprinted on his face, at once the mark of profound mindless stupidity and self-satisfaction. The woman is a sordid creature aged by vice; she is shamelessly willing to supply all his sickening male fantasies to double her wage.[17]

Here, too, the description of the "mindless stupidity" of the "shady financier" diminishes the Jewish banker's humanity. A high moral tone pervades the description of the "repellent" man and shameless woman, a "sordid creature aged by vice."

A similar moral tone characterizes the writing of the prolific late nineteenth-century author Octave Uzanne about Lautrec's poster. Writing in 1896, he referred to the banker and courtesan as "degenerates":

Do you care to see among a group of degenerates the couplings of a man humbly paying for sensual pleasure and the poor woman who does it for a living? Look at the announcement for *Reine de joie*, the novel by Victor Joze, a poster which came out almost four years ago. Seated at a simple table, you will see an old man still handsome, a typical sad-looking Jewish stockbroker, an old lecher who is shown in a state of ruin caused by his debauchery, and his dining companion, a cynical whore, provocative in her formidable and triumphant crassness. It conveys the stultifying, moronic effects of a life of pleasure, the stupidity and vulgarity of it all, and the lassitude of the instantaneous partners. You can see it in their postures and sketched physiognomies, which are drawn in broad strokes and vibrant patches of color. The

whore, barely indicated by means of highlights; her scarlet lips and her lying eyes, deposits a false kiss on the flushed face of the apoplectic old man.[18]

Uzanne stands out by explicitly remarking that the man in *Reine de joie* is Jewish. Although he initially refers to him as a “typical sad-looking Jewish stockbroker,”[19] appearing to express some sympathy for the banker, he proceeds with a harsher tone, describing him as “an old lecher weakened by debauchery.” Similarly, Uzanne at first refers to the prostitute in relatively mild terms as the poor woman who engages in commerce for her survival, but quickly changes to condemnation: “a cynical whore, provocative in her formidable and triumphant crassness.” A superior moral tone characterizes Uzanne’s description of the scene as a whole: “the stultifying, moronic effects of a life of pleasure, the stupidity and vulgarity of it all.”

Unlike the French critics discussed thus far, Félix Fénéon did not elaborate on the degradation of the banker or dwell on his stereotypically Jewish characteristics. Fénéon’s review in *Le Chat noir* (April 22, 1893) mentioned *Reine de joie* as an example of the “fierce extremism” and “lasting vigour” of Lautrec’s posters.[20] Writing in the slang style of the anarchist journal *Le Père Peinard* (April 30, 1893) Fénéon praised Lautrec’s posters for their style and sharp critical view and briefly mentioned *Reine de joie*:

That Lautrec’s got a hell of a nerve, and no mistake. No half measures, the way he draws, or the way he colours either. Great flat dollops of white, black and red—forms all simplified—that’s all there is to it. He’s got them off to a tee, those gaga old capitalists, completely past it, sitting at tables with clever little tarts who lick their snouts to get cash out of them. There’s *La Goulue*, *Reine de joie*, *Le Divan Japonais*, and two of a publican by the name of Bruant. That’s all he’s done in the poster line, but what’s so fantastic is the single-minded way he does it, the bare-faced cheek of it, the humour. It’s one in the eye for all those halfwits who can never bear to taste anything stronger than marshmallow.[21]

Fénéon’s general comment does not portray the banker in *Reine de joie* as Jewish, but certainly implies degeneracy. A central figure in the avant-garde of the 1890s, Fénéon was an anarchist, journalist, and critic and the “literary counselor” and editorial secretary of *La Revue blanche*, the avant-garde literary and art journal founded and published by Thadée Natanson and his brothers. Fénéon, who served in this role from 1895 to 1903, played an important part in the pro-Dreyfus position the journal adopted in 1898 after Zola published *J'accuse*. [22] Fénéon, the anarchist, does not seem to be as complicit with prejudices common at the time nor does he appear to judge the artist’s depictions primarily in terms of a moral position on “vice.”

Critics’ Position on Lautrec’s Representation of “Vice”

The term “Vice” appeared frequently in late nineteenth-century critical writing on Lautrec’s art. Most often it referred to Lautrec’s depiction of prostitutes and other poor women of Montmartre. For example, Jean-Louis Renaud wrote of Lautrec’s “vice-ridden woman of the streets, prostitutes, dancers at the Moulin-Rouge, those who lived lives of poverty.”[23] Writing about Lautrec’s lithographic album *Elles*, which represented prostitutes, Renaud stated, “He has portrayed Vice...in its cruel necessity, without kindness, without irony, without commentary, banal human and sad!”[24] Depicting the Jewish banker in the arms of

a courtesan was part of Lautrec's depiction of "vice" and intersected with his theme of portraying women who sell sex. But late nineteenth-century Jews in Paris were themselves identified with "vice" in a particular way.

Hannah Arendt analyzes "the transformation of the 'crime' of Judaism into the fashionable 'vice' of Jewishness."^[25] She explains that exclusive Parisian salons (as described by Proust), "attracted" by what they "judged to be a vice," admitted both inverts and Jews.^[26] Arendt notes, "In both cases, society was far from being prompted by a revision of prejudices. They did not doubt that homosexuals were 'criminals' or that Jews were 'traitors'; they only revised their attitude toward crime and treason."^[27] Jews were admitted to salons to entertain as the exotic, the strange, and the monstrous—roles that could be best played by those in the first stage of their assimilation.^[28] According to Arendt, "Jewish origin, without religious and political connotation, became everywhere a psychological quality, was changed into 'Jewishness,' and from then on could be considered only in the categories of virtue and vice."^[29] The representation of the Jewish banker in Lautrec's avant-garde poster could be seen as a manifestation of this change, namely representing him as "vice." The superior position from which critics discussed his representation ensured a hierarchy of the viewer vs. the "vice" viewed.

The kind of superior position critics claimed for the artist and critic in the case of *Reine de joie* also appears in writings on Lautrec's representations of Montmartre women, including the dancer La Goulue and prostitutes. Yet there are some differences. Unlike critics discussing *Reine de joie*, those who wrote on Lautrec's representations of prostitutes tended to keep their comments general, rather than amplify the sub-human status of a particular figure in Lautrec's works. For example, in an 1899 article in *Le Figaro*, Arsène Alexandre wrote that Lautrec's work,

[D]oes not show the beautiful side of human nature; it is full of wretchedness and brutishness, and it captures in unadulterated fashion those who are called with such bitter irony *des filles de joie* ["daughters of joy," i.e. prostitutes] as they are in real life in all their sadness and ugliness.^[30]

Another difference was that, in contrast to their writing about the Jewish banker, critics writing about Lautrec's representations of prostitutes tended to express some sympathy, recognizing both "sadness and ugliness."^[31] Some, like Arthur Symons, saw Lautrec's depiction of prostitutes as "sordid" but also "tragic," "human," and evoking "pity." Following his description of Lautrec's representation of "a depraved girl" Symons writes, "to me his vision of her is so intense that what is sordid in her becomes tragic; he even makes me pity her—he has made her so human, and yet, so lost a woman."^[32]

These differences notwithstanding, there was a common ground in critics' treatment of Lautrec's depiction of "vice," which included prostitutes and the Jewish banker along with other "degenerates." The common strategy was to establish a higher moral ground for the artist and, by implication, for the critic. For example, addressing Lautrec's preoccupation with themes of degradation, especially prostitution, the critic Gustave Geffroy, writing in 1893 in the left-wing journal *La Justice*, charts a clear hierarchy between low subject and high observation:

[H]e remains a sincere artist, his pitiless observation is aware of the beauty of life, and the philosophy of vice which he sometimes proclaims with irritating ostentation nevertheless acquires, by the power of his drawing and the depth of his probing, the value, for purposes of demonstration, of a lesson in moral surgery.[33]

Some critics like André Mellerio argued that Lautrec derived some pleasure from the corruption he chose to depict: Lautrec “smells a vague stench of moral corruption and captures its effect without naming it, and does it without seeming to place the blame. One almost gets the feeling he experiences a kind of bitter pleasure from soaking up this aroma.”[34] Yet Mellerio defended the artist by elevating him above the low subject through his perceptive analysis of vice: “If M. de Toulouse-Lautrec’s art is not uplifting in terms of virtue overcoming vice, at least he has analyzed vice with a highly unusual degree of perceptiveness.”[35]

Many critics who defended Lautrec against accusations of moral corruption established the artist’s higher position vis-à-vis his depiction of “vice” by invoking the tradition of artists who represent similar subject matter. For example, Jourdain’s *La Plume* article of 1893, before discussing *Reine de joie*’s zombie-like banker, legitimized Lautrec’s status as an artist by situating him within a tradition of Daumier, Guys and Degas.[36] Jourdain establishes the hierarchical distance between the “masterful” artist and his low subject matter by writing that Lautrec “had observed and studied what are commonly known as the dregs of society (*les bas-fonds de la société*) and enjoys telling us about them with his impeccable mastery and with all the candor and sincerity of a philosopher.”[37] Maindron’s 1896 book likewise stresses Lautrec’s “undeniable mastery” and contrasts the artist’s position as an artist philosopher with the crudeness of “prostitutes and degenerates” whom he depicts. Lautrec’s “new language” is that of a philosopher. “He has observed those worn-out prostitutes plastered with make-up whom he shows us, who are like the living wounds of the evil society we must live with. Rather than hiding these wounds he displays them for all to see and exposes them in all their crudeness.”[38]

Also writing in 1896, the art critic André Mellerio elevated Lautrec by stressing his “practiced eye and his all encompassing intellectuality,” which he felt were evident in Lautrec’s portrayal of “The *Moulin Rouge* and other places of promiscuity.”[39] Mellerio distanced the artist from his low subject matter, stating that Lautrec “deserves to be considered a genuine artist, elevating the status of vile, revolting, and completely lecherous characters.”[40] He emphasized Lautrec’s qualities as an artist who “possesses an elegant style...an inherited *je ne sais quoi*” and who imparts “distinction to brutal or even hopeless reality.”[41] Whereas critics who defended Lautrec’s representation of vice generally established a difference, a distance, and a hierarchy between the subject matter and the high position of the artist and his art, others eliminated any distance, claiming that Lautrec’s art was “corrupt and decadent” like the vice it portrayed.[42]

Thadée Natanson, the Assimilated “Other” and the Avant-Garde

What position, one wonders, could an assimilated Jewish critic occupy when writing on the poster that depicted a Jewish banker? What “symbolic profit” would he find or reject in Lautrec’s poster, in view of Arendt’s insight on the position of the assimilated Jew in Paris who himself could only be considered “in the categories of virtue and vice” once his Jewish

origin was emptied of religious and political connotation and changed into “a psychological quality” of “Jewishness”?^[43] A review in *La Revue blanche* by Thadée Natanson of Lautrec’s 1893 one-person exhibition, offers an opportunity to consider how an assimilated Jew closely identified with the avant-garde of the 1890s responded to *Reine de joie*.^[44]

La Revue blanche was a magnet for 1890s avant-garde artists and authors with which Lautrec, along with Bonnard, Vuillard and others, was closely associated.^[45] Natanson commissioned Lautrec and other artists to illustrate its articles and poems, and to make posters promoting the journal. He commissioned prints from Vuillard, Bonnard, Redon, and others for the frontispieces, and published lithographs separately for collectors. Moreover, he held art exhibitions in the journal’s offices and he and his wife Misia were important patrons and collectors.^[46]

Lautrec became closely associated with the Natansons and *La Revue blanche* from about 1894.^[47] He continued the association throughout the divisive Dreyfus Affair years, thus taking a different path from Degas, who cut off his long-term friendships with Jewish friends.^[48] As Natanson wrote in his memoirs, Lautrec wanted to be able to “continue to live without making distinctions (*indistinctement*) between those whom he liked.”^[49] Throughout the Dreyfus years, Lautrec frequently visited the Natansons’ Paris home and, with Bonnard, Vuillard and some others, regularly spent long weekends in their country house, La Grangette, in the village of Valvins, near Fontainebleau. An 1897 letter by Vuillard, written at the height of the Dreyfus Affair, confirms Lautrec’s close relationship with the Natansons during this period: “Lautrec is here... and is really very attached to Thadée and his wife.”^[50] Misia Natanson was the Russian-born daughter of the successful Polish sculptor Cyprien Godebski. She was a talented pianist who was at the center of the Natansons’ Paris salon, which attracted many leading avant-garde artists and writers during the 1890s. Lautrec portrayed her in several of his works, including on a poster promoting *La Revue blanche*.

Thadée Natanson was the art critic for *La Revue blanche*. When he reviewed Lautrec’s exhibition in 1893 he was already on friendly terms with the artist, although their closer personal relationship developed in the next year or two. Seeing the image of the abject Jewish banker in Lautrec’s poster likely placed the critic in an uncomfortable position for several reasons. His own father, Adam Natanson, was a wealthy Polish-born banker who had moved his family from Warsaw to France in 1878 when Thadée was ten years old. Thadée received an elite education at the Lycée Condorcet in Paris, a school known for excellence which attracted wealthy Jewish families seeking assimilation.^[51] When Thadée moved *La Revue blanche* from Liège (where it had been launched in 1889) to Paris in 1891, he did so with the financial help of his father and brother.^[52]

The relentless anti-Semitic attacks from Edouard Drumont in his 1886 book *La France Juive*, (Jewish France) and during the 1890s in his newspaper *La libre parole*, both of which virulently assaulted Jewish bankers in general and the Baron Alphonse de Rothschild in particular, must have affected how Natanson viewed a Jewish stereotype—especially one of a Jewish banker. Furthermore, the Natansons and *La Revue blanche* were the subject of anti-Semitic attacks. Known for cosmopolitanism rather than for focusing on a national school of French literature, *La Revue blanche* published leading French authors including Flaubert, Mallarmé, Proust, Gide, and Stendhal, as well as translations of foreign authors including

Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, Anton Chekhov, Leo Tolstoi, Gabriele d'Annunzio, Jane Austen, and (Hongjun) Laozu. This cosmopolitanism, along with the Natanson brothers' Jewish origin, gave rise to accusations that *La Revue blanche* was diluting France's literary heritage and to anti-Semitic attacks in the press.[53] Furthermore, becoming a staunch pro-Dreyfus publication in 1898, the journal was a target for the Right nationalist press and endured numerous attacks for "Jewishness." [54] As Janis Bergman-Carton has demonstrated, *La Revue blanche* was increasingly stigmatized for commercializing publishing through its strategies of entrepreneurship, art commissions and exhibitions, despite the fact that in the late nineteenth century these strategies were not unique to *La Revue blanche*. [55]

Edmond de Goncourt's 1896 journal entry attributed the Natansons' motivation in founding the journal to the "Jewish" vice of greed, and warned that Jews were about to control the world of French literature:

We were speaking today of N...[Natanson], where *le tout Paris* goes to dinner...At a certain moment, when the theatre was the only branch of literature where one could make money, the only Jewish writers were playwrights...But now the young generation of Jews has understood the all-powerful weight of criticism and the kind of blackmail that critics can exert on theatres and publishers and has founded *La Revue blanche*, which is a real nest of "Yids." One can well imagine that with the help of their elders, who provide the money for almost all newspapers, they will control French literature within twenty-five years. [56]

Even in the pro-Dreyfus camp, Thadée found himself in the midst of prejudices, however mild. This is evident in the memoirs of his wife Misia who was not Jewish. She described the consensus of the Natansons' circle about Dreyfus in this way:

The comic part of it was that, as a human specimen, the little Jewish Captain for whom we were all ready to murder our parents represented everything we most disliked. But his cause was so manifestly the cause of justice that all we could do was to embrace it totally. [57]

The anti-Semitic climate of France in the 1890s, the stigmatization of *La Revue blanche*, and Thadée's background were the context that made his viewing of Lautrec's representation of the Jewish banker highly charged.

Thadée Natanson, who was twenty-five years old in 1893 when he wrote the review of Lautrec's exhibition, was already a sensitive critic whose deepest sympathies were with avant-garde art. [58] Although his review is usually summed up as glowing, a close reading reveals its complexity and considers Natanson's ambiguous position in Paris of the 1890s. The *Reine de joie* poster likely challenged the coexistence of two major components of Thadée Natanson's identity—his staunch support of avant-garde art and his Jewish background. His wholehearted commitment to the Parisian avant-garde circle, particularly to the artists and authors associated with *La Revue blanche*, reinforced his assimilated identity and constituted his social belonging within Paris of the 1890s. [59] As we shall see, he admired Lautrec's poster for its aesthetic qualities, but the representation of the Jewish banker in a compromising scene were likely problematic for him.

Natanson's review stands out for evading any mention of the theme of the poster, and thus is quite different from the comments of most other critics, who amplified the banker's degradation. It also differs from the review by Fénéon who, while not hinting at the Jewish identity of the man, defines him as a drunk capitalist indulging with prostitutes. Seeing the stereotype of the Jewish banker in Lautrec's poster would have likely disturbed Natanson's sense of belonging, so passionately cultivated through *La Revue blanche* and through his and his wife's salon. He admired Lautrec's work, yet could not ignore his own Jewish origin. This contributed to a more complex subject position which precluded his identification with the superior position of critics who claimed a higher moral ground for the artist, themselves, and their readers while expanding on the banker's humiliation. For Natanson, Lautrec's *Reine de joie* could not be taken as a moral lesson, but was a troubling representation. As will be demonstrated, his discussion shows traces of his troubled reaction surfacing between lines of praise, betraying his deep ambivalence.

Most revealing of the critic's uneasy response is the fact that the word "*inquiétante*" (disturbing) appears twice, and "*troublé*" (troubled) and "*troublant*" (troubling) four times. Natanson begins his review by saying, "The posters that have exploded, these days, on to the walls of Paris... have surprised, troubled, delighted us." After briefly referring to the "unforgettable" posters of the Moulin Rouge and the "magisterial portrait" of Bruant, Natanson singles out the *Reine de joie*: "But, above all, the last one has given us a shudder of delight: this delicious *Reine de joie*, bright, pretty, exquisitely perverse." His choice of word combinations "shudder of delight" and "exquisitely perverse" clearly expresses his ambiguity. In using the latter, he may have also taken refuge in a cliché typical of the contemporary discourse on decadence.

In contrast to the critics who detailed the degradation of the banker, Natanson seems to brush aside the very existence of a Jewish stereotype in the poster. He minimizes the importance of physiognomy in *Reine de joie*:

The same gaiety of bright colors, and of masses of somber intensity, the same expressive value, even more in the forms than in the physiognomies, and that same troubling perversity force us to pay attention to this ensemble of quite diverse works.

Natanson's concentration on the formal qualities of the poster as opposed to its content, may suggest a repression of the disturbing effect of his seeing a Jewish person caricatured by an artist whom he admired. He speaks of "the additional pleasure of following the progress of the artist towards a surer mastery of expression, a most graceful ease of drawing, a lightness of the touch in his colors and a refinement of perversity..." He praises the poster *Reine de joie* and "the small pale and painted woman with troubled eyes and her oh-so decorative hairdo."

The text expresses ambivalence throughout, but a shift occurs in the concluding sentence. Here, Natanson expresses a full, if pained, appreciation of the disturbing qualities of Lautrec's work. To make the point, he contrasts Toulouse-Lautrec's posters with those of Chéret. Looking at the "thoughtless joyous colors" of the latter's posters "the eyes...avidly search to recover in their troubling memories the exquisite emotion of art that M. Toulouse-Lautrec's disturbing intentions have made almost piercing."

In his concluding comment, Natanson speaks explicitly of “troubling memories,” possibly referring to his own past. But, at the same time, he pursues another direction in a “search to recover” the “exquisite emotion” aroused by Lautrec’s art, an art whose “disturbing intentions” appears to have been piercingly painful to the critic. Natanson’s admiration for the aesthetic qualities of Lautrec’s poster seems to have been at odds with the intensity of emotions stimulated by the subject matter, but in the end he recognizes the mark of superior art in Lautrec’s evoking “disturbing intentions” in contrast to the vapid brightness of Chéret’s posters.

Natanson’s ambivalence is also hinted at by the brevity of his review, whose single page is in sharp contrast to the seven-pages devoted to Utamaro and Hiroshige. The first phrase of Natanson’s Lautrec exhibition review includes a self-conscious remark about its brevity. He explains the brevity: “I would have liked to speak at much greater length about this painter, but, as large as the space might have been, it could not have measured up to the intensity of the experienced emotion.” Rather than claiming a higher moral ground, Natanson’s position as an observer is characterized by openness, even vulnerability. He recognizes the value of Lautrec’s art, including the *Reine de joie* poster, not only for its aesthetic qualities, but also for its power to evoke emotional responses. But as he praises Lautrec, he must overcome a conflict absent from his other art criticism published in *La Revue blanche*. For example, the decorative plastic harmonies and formal qualities of the art of Japanese prints neither evoke emotions nor create conflicts for him as a viewer, a point he makes at the end of his review of Utamaro and Hiroshige. In its last sentence, which leads into his review on Lautrec, Natanson comments on the difference between the Japanese prints, which are admirable in their calm decorative harmonies, and Lautrec’s art, which is not exclusively preoccupied with plastic qualities, hinting at its “disturbing” characteristics.

Producing Art and Identity in Interpretation

The difference in the reviews of Natanson and other French critics in the 1890s is a good example of Bourdieu’s insight that the work of art is remade in interpretation “by all those who are interested in it, who find a material or symbolic profit in reading it, classifying it, deciphering it, commenting on it, combating it, knowing it, possessing it.”^[60] Although there are degrees of vehemence in the anti-Semitic descriptions of the Jewish banker, most French critics in the 1890s took similar positions in their writing about the banker in the poster. Unlike them, Natanson did not find “symbolic profit” in elaborating on the banker’s degradation. Indeed, he used several strategies to dismiss it—by writing a very short review, by focusing on the formal qualities of the poster, by avoiding any discussion of its very obvious and forcefully stated subject matter, and by stating explicitly that physiognomies are less important than form.

Contemporary critics of Lautrec’s poster who positioned themselves and the artist as morally superior saw themselves as performing a public type of looking, which was antithetical to the voyeur’s viewpoint.^[61] Unlike Natanson, who avoided a moralistic stance by using a proto-modernist discourse of pure formalism, these critics “produced” Lautrec’s poster as part of the discourse of the Jewish “other” vs. the superior “pure” norm of artist/critic/spectator/reader.^[62] While their comments were mild in comparison with the raging and explicit anti-Semitism of Drumont and the vicious caricatures of Jews circulating at the time—many of which included bankers—they elaborated on the stereotype of the Jewish

banker and set up hierarchies of high and low moralities in their texts. In Homi K. Bhabha's terms, they intervened in constructing and anxiously repeating the stereotype in discourse.

Producing "symbolic profit" by claiming a high moral position towards "degenerate" subjects in avant-garde art took a different turn a few decades after French critics positioned Lautrec's art as occupying a superior moral ground in contrast to the themes it depicted. The National Socialist regime eliminated the distinction between the high ground of the artist and the low subject matter of the artwork when it deemed avant-garde artists to be degenerate and their work to be "Degenerate Art" (*Entartete Kunst*). In 1944 (just months before the collapse of the Vichy regime) the prolific French critic and journalist Camille Mauclair positioned himself on a high moral ground when measured not against the subject matter or the artist, but against the commercialization of art, the origin of which he attributed to the Natansons' 1890s *La Revue blanche*.^[63]

The analysis of responses to Toulouse-Lautrec's *Reine de joie* poster in Paris of the 1890s may serve to demonstrate how commentary on works of art, even when made in the same historical moment and nation, is influenced by, and reinforces identities.^[64] It also highlights the importance of the often-overlooked historical context of critics' interpretations, and demonstrates that not art alone, but also its interpretations, play an active role in the "battlefield of representations."^[65]

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Notes

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[1] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods," in *The Field of Cultural Production*, Randal Johnson, ed. and trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 111.

[2] Art historian Gale B. Murray investigated whether Lautrec and his representations of Jewish stereotypes were anti-Semitic, concluding that anti-Semitism was not a "central motivating force" of the artist, who apparently accepted and perpetuated "the negative stereotypes of the texts he illustrated." Gale B. Murray, "Toulouse-Lautrec's Illustrations for Victor Joze and Georges Clemenceau and their Relationship to French Anti-Semitism of the 1890s," in *The Jew in the Text: Modernity and the Construction of Identity*, ed. Linda Nochlin and Tamar Garb (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995), 57–82, at 82. The essay discusses Lautrec's cover and illustrations for Clemenceau's book *Au pied du Sinai*, 1898, and a dust jacket for Victor Joze's novel, *La Tribu d'Isidore*, 1897, as well as the poster *Reine de joie*; Julia Frey discusses the question of anti-Semitism in *Toulouse-Lautrec: A Life* (New York: Viking, 1994), 396–99. On anti-Semitic representations in French visual culture of the 1890s, see Phillip Dennis Cate, "The Paris Cry: Graphic Artists and the Dreyfus Affair," in *The Dreyfus Affair: Art*,

Truth and Justice, ed. Norman L. Kleeblatt, exh. cat., The Jewish Museum (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1987), 62–95; and Norman L. Kleeblatt, “The Dreyfus Affair: A Visual Record,” in Kleeblatt, *Dreyfus Affair*, 1–24. On Alphonse de Rothschild’s response to Lautrec’s representation of the banker in *Reine de Joie*, see Ruth E. Iskin, “Relational Media: Jewish Responses to the Jewish Banker Stereotype in 1890s Paris and 1955 Israel,” in *Jewish Images in the Media*, Special Issue of “Relation: Communication Research in Comparative Perspective,” ed. Martin Liepach, Gabriele Meliscek, and Josef Seethaler (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2007), 177–202.

[3] The analysis of images of the Jew in nineteenth-century art and visual culture is outside the scope of the present article.

[4] Victor Joze, *La Ménagerie sociale: Reine de joie, moeurs du demi-monde* (Paris: Julien, 1892). Victor Joze was the *nom de plume* of the Polish-named Dobrsky de Zastzebiec. In addition to the commission from Lautrec, Joze also commissioned Pierre Bonnard to design the novel’s dust jacket, and Georges Seurat (in 1890) to do a poster for another novel.

[5] Sagot’s bookshop sold posters. Its catalogue of July 1892 lists Lautrec’s *Reine de Joie* for sale for 3–4 francs. See Phillip Dennis Cate, “The Popularization of Toulouse-Lautrec,” in *Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec: Images of the 1890s*, ed. Riva Castleman and Wolfgang Wittrock, exh. cat., The Museum of Modern Art, New York (Boston: New York Graphic Society 1985), 82.

[6] The Rothschild family was the main subject of a later novel by Victor Joze, *Les Rozenfeld, histoire d’une famille juive: La Tribu d’Isidore* (Paris: Antony, 1897). Unlike Joze’s novel *Reine de Joie*, his *La Tribu d’Isidore* was blatantly anti-Semitic. See Cate, “Paris Cry,” 70–71. Alphonse de Rothschild supposedly attempted to suppress Lautrec’s *Reine de joie* poster, but this claim is based on shaky evidence. See, Iskin, “Relational Media: Jewish Responses to the Jewish Banker Stereotype in 1890s Paris and 1955 Israel.”

[7] Joze, *Reine de Joie*, 159.

[8] *Ibid.*, 143. On the Jewish stereotype, see Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), and Sander L. Gilman, *The Jew’s Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

[9] With the exception of the British critic Charles Hyatt, who included the Lord of Bath in his writing on the “vehemence of the expression of the faces of the three people,” critics focused primarily on the banker and courtesan. Charles Hyatt, *Picture Posters: A Short History of the Illustrated Placard* (1895; repr., East Ardsley: E. P. Publishing, 1976), 62.

[10] Homi K. Bhabha, “The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism,” in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 66–84 at 66.

[11] *Ibid.*, 70.

[12] Frantz Jourdain, “L’Affiche Moderne et Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec,” *La Plume*, no. 110 (November 15, 1893), 488–93 at 490. Translation adapted from André Fermigier, *Toulouse-Lautrec*, trans. Paul Stevenson (London: Pall Mall, 1969), 107–9.

[13] *La Plume*, no. 110 (November 15, 1893), 480.

[14] Jourdain, “L’Affiche Moderne,” 490.

[15] *Ibid.*, 493.

[16] My emphasis.

[17] Ernest Maindron, *Les Affiches illustrées (1886–1895)* (Paris: G. Boudet, 1896), 108–13, reproduced in Maurice Joyant, *Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1927; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1968), 113. Citation to the Arno Press edition.

[18] Octave Uzanne, *Les Maîtres de l’estampe et l’affiche* (Paris, 1896), 819–26, translation adapted from Gale B. Murray ed., *Toulouse-Lautrec: A Retrospective* (New York: Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, 1992), 235–45, at 236. Hereafter referred to as Murray, *Retrospective*.

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] Félix Fénéon, *Oeuvres plus que complètes*, Joan U. Halperin, ed., vol. 1 (Geneva: Droz, 1970), 220, cited and translated in the catalogue entry on *Reine de joie* in Claire Frèches-Thory, Anne Roquebert, and Richard Thomson, *Toulouse-Lautrec*, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 378.

[21] Fénéon, *Oeuvres*, 230; Frèches-Thory, Roquebert, and Thomson, *Toulouse-Lautrec*, 378.

[22] On Fénéon’s association with *La Revue blanche*, see Joan U. Halperin, *Félix Fénéon: Aesthete & Anarchist in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 299–323.

[23] Jean-Louis Renaud, “Obituary,” *Le Télégramme de Toulouse*, September 15/16, 1901, trans. in Murray, *Retrospective*, 322–25, at 325

- [24] Ibid.
- [25] Hannah Arendt, *Antisemitism, Part One of the Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 87.
- [26] Ibid., 81
- [27] Ibid.
- [28] Ibid., 82.
- [29] Ibid., 83.
- [30] Arsène Alexandre, "Une guérison," *Le Figaro*, March 30, 1899, trans. in Murray, *Retrospective*, 291–95, at 293.
- [31] Ibid.
- [32] Arthur Symons, "Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec," in *From Toulouse-Lautrec to Rodin* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1929), 5.
- [33] Gustave Geffroy, "Exposition Toulouse-Lautrec, Boulevard Montmartre" *La Justice*, February 15, 1893, trans. in Murray, *Retrospective*, 158–59, at 159.
- [34] André Mellerio, *Le Mouvement Idéaliste en peinture* (Paris: Floury, 1896), 35–36, trans. in Murray, *Retrospective*, 248–49, at 249.
- [35] Ibid.
- [36] Jourdain, "L’Affiche Moderne," 489.
- [37] Ibid., 489–90.
- [38] Maindron, *Les Affiches*, 112.
- [39] Mellerio, *Le Mouvement Idéaliste*, 34–35, trans. in Murray, *Retrospective*, 248–49.
- [40] Ibid.
- [41] Ibid.
- [42] Charles Donos, "Toulouse Lautrec," *Les Hommes d’aujourd’hui* 9, no. 460 ([1897/98]), trans. in Murray, *Retrospective*, 251–52, at 252. Donos states he has "no admiration whatsoever for the decadence of false art germinated by the gutters and cabarets of Montmartre." Ibid.
- On differences between critics focusing on Lautrec’s biography, particularly his physical deformity and moral decay, vs. those who defended his work as a Naturalist vision and social critique, see Thomson, "Rethinking Toulouse-Lautrec," in Frèches-Thory, Roquebert, and Thomson, *Toulouse-Lautrec*, 13–14, 20–27. On the reception of Lautrec’s art by detractors and supporters as shaping approaches to Lautrec’s art and reputation, see Claire Frèches-Thory, "Toulouse-Lautrec: The Posthumous Reputation," in Frèches-Thory, Roquebert, and Thomson, *Toulouse-Lautrec*, 43–53; Murray, "Introduction," in *Retrospective*, 25–31.
- [43] Arendt, *Antisemitism*, 83.
- [44] Lautrec’s exhibition was held in the gallery of Boussod and Valladon.
- [45] Artists associated with *La Revue blanche* included, in addition to Toulouse-Lautrec, Paul Sérusier, Maurice Denis, Edouard Vuillard, Pierre Bonnard, Charles Cottet, Paul Ranson, Henri-Georges Ibels, Ker-Xavier Roussel, Félix Vallotton and Odilon Redon. On *La Revue blanche*, see Fritz Hermann, *Die Revue blanche und die Nabis* (Munich: Mikrokopie, 1959); Arthur Basil Jackson, *La Revue blanche, 1899–1903: Origine, influence, bibliographie* (Paris: Lettres modernes, 1960); Georges Bernier, *La Revue blanche: Paris in the Days of Post-Impressionism and Symbolism*, exh. cat. (New York: Wildenstein, 1983); Bret Waller and Grace Seiberling, *Artists of La Revue blanche: Bonnard, Toulouse-Lautrec, Vallotton, Vuillard*, exh. cat. (Rochester: University of Rochester Memorial Art Gallery, 1984).
- [46] On the Natansons’ patronage, see Gloria Groom, *Edouard Vuillard, Painter-Decorator: Patrons and Projects, 1892–1912* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), and Gloria Groom, *Beyond the Easel: Decorative Painting by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis, and Roussel, 1890–1930*, The Art Institute of Chicago; exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).
- [47] Waller and Seiberling, *Artists of La Revue blanche*, 23.
- [48] On Degas and anti-Semitism, see Linda Nochlin, "Degas and the Dreyfus Affair: A Portrait of the Artist as an Anti-Semite," in Kleeblatt, *Dreyfus Affair*, 96–116.
- [49] Thadée Natanson, *Un Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec* (Geneva: Pierre Cailler, 1951), 275. Natanson noted that Lautrec’s upbringing might quite likely have caused him to be anti-Semitic and anti-Dreyfus, yet the artist had numerous pro-Dreyfus friends, including Claude Monet, Georges Clemenceau, Gustave Geffroy, Arsène Alexandre and Natanson himself, while

continuing to have friends in the other camp, to which Edgar Degas and Jean-Louis Forain belonged.

[50] Vuillard to Vallotton, July 20, 1897, in Arthur Gold and Robert Fizdale, *Misia: The Life of Misia Sert* (New York: Knopf, 1980), 69.

[51] Among the artists and writers who attended the Lycée Condorcet and later were associated with *La Revue blanche* were Marcel Proust, Maurice Denis, Edouard Vuillard, and Lautrec (till age twelve). Mallarmé taught English there for a few years. Waller and Seiberling, *Artists of La Revue blanche*, 10.

[52] Gold and Fizdale, *Misia*, 47.

[53] For an analysis of the publication practices of *La Revue blanche*, late nineteenth-century anti-Semitic attacks on it and early twentieth-century anti-Semitic narratives about it, see Janis Bergman-Carton, "La Revue Blanche: Art, Commerce, and Culture in the French Fin-de-Siècle," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 30, no. 2 (June 2008): 167–89.

[54] The nationalist Right *La Revue de l'Action française* was founded to counter the pro-Dreyfus polemics of the *La Revue blanche*, *ibid.*, 172.

[55] Bergman-Carton, "La Revue Blanche." On the commercialization of art criticism and journals in late nineteenth-century France, see Martha Ward, "From Art Criticism to Art News: Journalistic Reviewing in Late-Nineteenth-Century Paris," in *Art Criticism and its Institutions in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. Michael R. Orwicz (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1994), 162–81.

[56] Edmond de Goncourt, *Journal des Goncourts: Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, January 26, 1896, vol. 4 (Paris: Fasquelle and Flammarion, 1956), 627, as cited and translated in Gold and Fizdale, *Misia*, 30.

[57] Misia Sert, *Misia and the Muses: The Memoirs of Misia Sert*, trans. Moura Budberg (New York: J. Day Co. [1953]), 46.

[58] Natanson, *La Revue blanche* no. 16 (February 1893), 146. The quotations from the review are all from this page. Following is the text of the full review:

On aimerait à parler de ce peintre beaucoup plus longuement, mais, si grande qu'aurait été la place, on ne saurait sans doute la proportionner à l'intensité de l'émotion éprouvée. Les affiches qui ont éclaté, ces temps-ci, sur les murs de Paris, ou les illustrent encore, ont surpris, troublé, ravi. Et la foule noire qui grouillait autour de la danseuse, ses jupes troussées et son étonnant danseur au premier plan; le magistral portrait de Bruant, sont inoubliables. Mais surtout, la dernière a fait frissonner: cette délicieuse *Reine de Joie*, claire, jolie, exquisément perverse. La même joie des couleurs claires, et des ensembles de sombre intensité, la même valeur d'expression, plus encore des formes que des physionomies et cette même troublante perversité ravissent à considérer cet ensemble d'oeuvres plus diverses. Mais c'est ici le plaisir en plus de suivre le progrès de l'artiste vers une plus sûre maîtrise de l'expression, la plus grande aisance de grâce du dessin, la légèreté de touche des couleurs et le raffinement de perversité à passer de ce bal de barrières à cet autre qui lui fait face, des premiers portraits à cette inquiétante petite femme pâle et fardée, aux yeux troublés sous sa coiffure si décorative et des épreuves de *Reine de joie* à l'affiche merveilleuse de *Divan Japonais* où serpente ce noir corps de femme, comme encuirassé, tendant la pâleur aigue de son profil, aux lèvres sanglantes, sous un casque de cheveux d'or. Les yeux délicieusement émus ont eu beau s'arrêter à la devanture, au joyeux coloris insouciant d'un Chéret, ils cherchent avidement à retrouver dans leurs troublants souvenirs l'exquise émotion d'art que les inquiétantes intentions de M. Toulouse-Lautrec ont faite presque cuisante.

[59] On the Jew and social belonging see Arendt, *Antisemitism*, 54–88; Julia Kristeva, "Proust: In Search of Identity," trans. Claire Pajaczkowska, in Nochlin and Garb, *Jew in the Text*, 140–55.

[60] Bourdieu, "The Production of Belief," 111. My discussion of the interpretations of Natanson and other critics does not imply a simple assertion that a work of art can be interpreted in different and even contradictory ways. Rather, as Bourdieu says, the "ideology of the inexhaustible work of art," or of interpretation as re-creating art, "masks" the role of cultural mediators whose discourse does not merely "assist its perception and appreciation, but [is] a stage in the production of the work, of its meaning and value." (*Ibid.*, 110.) Bourdieu's remark is made in a different context of legitimization of works as "Art" through critical interpretation, within the artistic field, including institutions and publications. Nonetheless, it is useful in approaching issues of interpretation in the cultural/social and political sphere.

[61] Anthea Callen observes that Degas's monotypes of brothel scenes include clients whose facial features are recognizably Jewish and proposes that in these works Degas's spectator is

positioned as a voyeur “since identification with a client thus caricatured would have been problematic for a ‘Frenchman.’” *The Spectacular Body: Science, Method, and Meaning in the Work of Degas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 107–8.

[62] Callen notes that Degas’s condemning a type of debauchery portrayed as stereotypically Jewish absolved the “Francophile-voyeur.” *Ibid.*, 108. Part of Callen’s argument about Degas—that “in such images the Jew is constituted as a racially impure ‘other,’” securing the spectator “as the ‘pure’ norm”—is relevant to my analysis of the critics’ positions towards Lautrec’s work on “vice.” *Ibid.*

[63]

1891 marks the first intervention of Jews in defense of avant-garde art in *La Revue Blanche*, where everybody was Jewish, starting with the three Natanson brothers... and where anarchism, anti-militarism, trendy scepticism were cultivated and where modern painting was defended in tandem with the dealers. The house critic [Félix Fénéon] became a salesman in a Jewish gallery [Bernheim-Jeune]...All Jewish galleries are finally closed! All the Jewish critics excluded from the newspapers. All of this is excellent! Yet the purge is far from over. The Jewish poison will only dissolve itself slowly.

Camille Mauclair, *La Crise de l’art moderne* (Paris: C.E.A, 1944), 10. Mauclair’s pamphlet was aptly described by Romy Golan as “his swan song and vile saga of the ‘other’” in “From Fin-de-Siècle to Vichy: The Cultural Hygienics of Camille (Faust) Mauclair,” in Nochlin and Garb, *Jew in the Text*, 156–73, at 156–57.

[64] For an analysis of the differing receptions in Britain by critics of Sargent’s portraits of the Wertheimer family, and by the Wertheimer family, which was Jewish, see Kathleen Adler, “John Singer Sargent’s Portraits of the Wertheimer Family,” in Nochlin and Garb, *Jew in the Text*, 83–96.

[65] T. J. Clark uses this term in *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 6.

Illustrations



Fig. 1, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Reine de Joie*, 1892. Lithograph, 136.5 x 93.3 cm. [\[return to text\]](#)