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# Vallotton, Fénéon, and the Legacy of the Commune in Fin-de-siècle France

BRIDGET ALSDORF

This article explores the Paris Commune's conflicted legacy in fin-de-siècle France through a set of portraits by the Franco-Swiss artist Félix Vallotton. In 1897 the critic and anarchist Félix Fénéon published a questionnaire about the Commune in *La Revue blanche* with responses from a wide range of surviving participants and eyewitnesses. Vallotton supplemented these reflections with drawings of leaders, many of whom were long dead, from both sides of the barricades. These portrait heads, and their placement vis-à-vis the text, capture the complexity of the Commune's ideological afterlife in deceptively simple form, showing Vallotton's keen sensitivity to the political debates and uncertainties of his time. Like many of the artist's politically charged prints published throughout the 1890s, these portraits convey profound ambivalence about the relationship between the Parisian people and the state.

In the 1890s Félix Vallotton became known for his depictions of crowds, right at the time when written debates about crowd psychology reached a fever pitch. A painter who moved to Paris from his native Lausanne at the age of sixteen, Vallotton seized on the opportunities afforded by the press to make himself known and earn a living. He placed his woodcuts, lithographs, and drawings in a variety of newspapers and magazines, generating a body of work that examines the crowd as both a subject and audience for art. And yet when asked to contribute illustrations to a publication on the afterlife of the Paris Commune, the radical socialist insurrection that ruled Paris for a little over two months in the Spring of 1871, Vallotton left the crowd out. His portrait heads represent a more oblique and individuated approach to picturing protest, violence, and suppression than the politically charged woodcuts that made him well known. The question, then, is not so much why he took this approach, which we cannot resolve, but what did it mean?

One of the richest resources we have about the legacy of the Commune in fin-de-siècle France is a questionnaire, published by *La Revue blanche* in 1897 by the critic and anarchist Félix Fénéon and illustrated by Vallotton. The questionnaire was inspired, at least in part, by the wave of anarchist bombings and assassinations that swept France in the 1890s, a period that made the question of revolutionary violence newly urgent.[1] It was also an effort to keep the Commune alive in contemporary memory, and to preserve the memories of its key witnesses in print.[2] Vallotton, a regular contributor to *La Revue blanche* who became its chief illustrator in 1895 – the same year that Fénéon became editor-in-chief – produced fifteen portraits for the project, depicting many of the major figures of the Commune from both sides of the barricades.[3] His bold, black-and-white ink drawings represent the height of his powers as a caricaturist, and echo his by-then famous "brutaliste" woodcut style.[4] Together, the portraits constitute another set of responses to Fénéon's questions, representing individuals who had not survived and could not respond themselves. Almost all of Vallotton's subjects were deceased in 1897, having died either during the Commune or in the twenty-six years since.[5]

"Enquête sur la Commune de Paris" first appeared in two subsequent issues of *La Revue blanche* (March and April 1897), a leading avant-garde magazine of arts and letters with a strong leftward tilt.[6] In May 1897 *La Revue blanche* published the responses in their entirety as a stand-alone plaquette, giving Vallotton's portraits more prominence and advertising his contribution on the cover (Fig. 1). (Fénéon withholds his name entirely, presenting the responses with an editorial "nous.") Titled *1871: Enquête sur la Commune de Paris* and sold for 1 franc, the plaquette has a blood-red cover featuring Vallotton's triple portrait of the men who led the military suppression (more on this later).[7] The rest of Vallotton's portraits appear inside as isolated, disembodied heads, and their form as well as their placement communicate profound doubt about the events they represent. Centered on blank pages rather than wedged into columns of text, the portraits assume a role co-equal to the written responses.[8] Gone are four portrait heads by Maximilien Luce, a neo-impressionist and committed anarchist long championed by Fénéon, that appeared in the enquête's original publication in *La Revue blanche*.[9] We do not know why Luce's illustrations were removed while Vallotton's were each given a full page, but the result is that the artist who dominates the enquête in its final form can only be called ambivalent in his association with the anarchist left.

Vallotton was a reserved, laconic man, and we have very little documentation of his political views. He contributed to a number of anarchist-socialist publications and his intellectual circle was, for the most part, far left.[10] But the politics of his art is elusive: no one is a hero in his famous woodcuts *L'Anarchiste*, 1892, *La Foule à Paris*, 1892, and *La Manifestation*, 1893, and he offers the viewer no clue of what

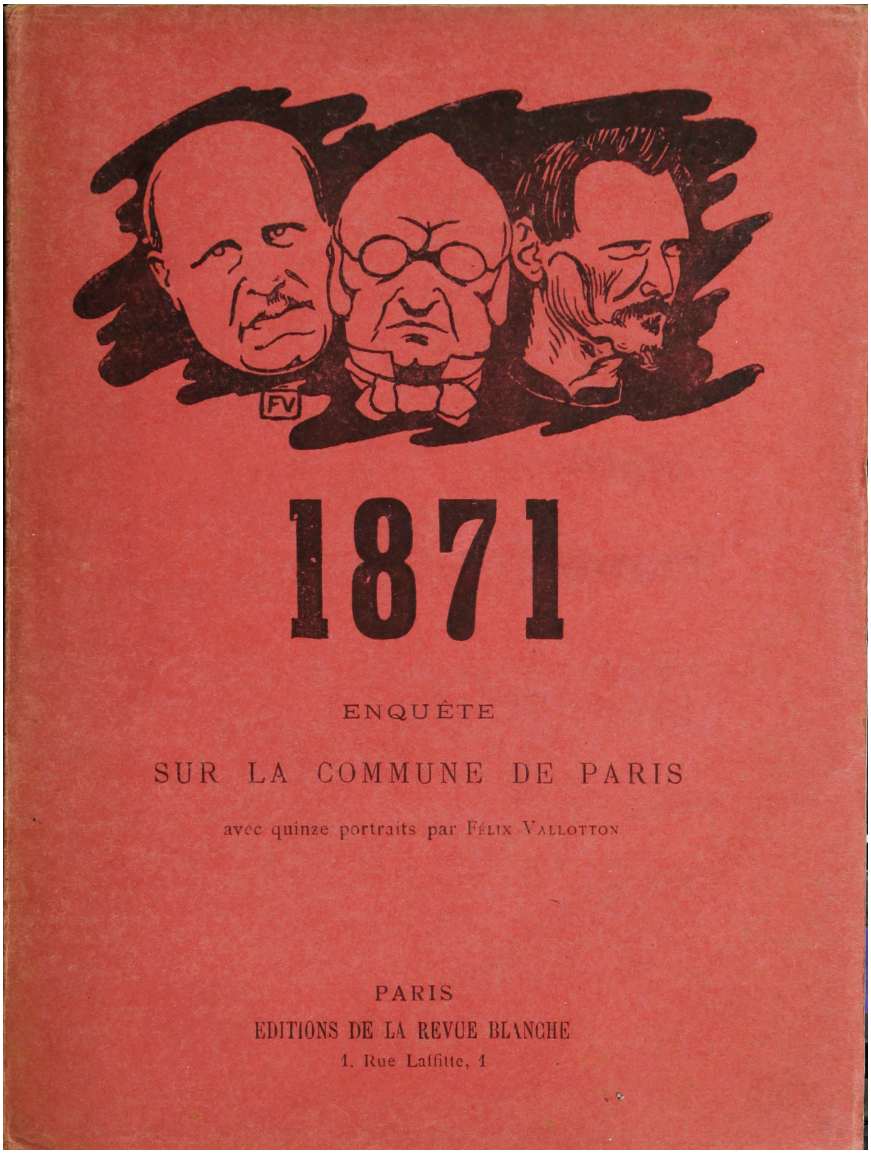


Fig. 1. *1871 – Enquête sur la Commune de Paris, avec quinze portraits par Félix Vallotton*. Paris: Editions de La Revue blanche, 1897. Image: Northwestern University Library.

these people are gathering for.[11] The details surrounding his commission for the enquête are unknown. Were the identities of Vallotton's portraits dictated by Fénéon, or did the editor give the artist freedom to pick his subjects? What about the other illustrations that were not newly commissioned by Fénéon: a frontispiece from the radical revolutionary newspaper *Le Père Duchesne*, 1871; two allegorical engravings by Walter Crane (*Vive la Commune*, 1888, and *In Memory of the Paris Commune*, 1891); and two Commune-related works by Édouard Manet, a portrait sketch in oil (*Olivier Pain*, 1881, study for *L'Évasion de Rochefort*, ca. 1881) and a morbid lithograph (*Guerre civile*, 1871)?[12] (Manet's works, like Luce's, were removed for the plaquette, for reasons unknown.) We do not know who selected these remarkable illustrations – Fénéon, Vallotton, or both – and who decided where each of them would go.

Vallotton's portraits illustrate the introduction and one fourth of the survey's responses.[13] In most cases the portrait has a clear relationship to the specific response it accompanies, representing a person that the respondent mentions in his/her account of the Commune's events. Indeed, Vallotton may have found inspiration for these portraits – both whom to draw, and how – in the responses themselves. In other cases, there is no evident relationship between text and image at all.[14] No documentation has surfaced to indicate how closely Fénéon and Vallotton collaborated on these and other aesthetic and political decisions while putting the enquête into print; but given Vallotton's longstanding relationship with *La Revue blanche*, it is reasonable to assume he played a substantial role.[15]

The timing of the enquête was based on the premise that enough time had passed since the Commune to "calm the passions" of both sides, but not so much time that many of the key participants were no longer alive (5). The moment was ripe, then, to look back on the devastating episode and take stock, yet also to look to the new century ahead and consider whether the Commune still had ideological force. The survey consisted of three basic questions:

1. Quel a été votre rôle du 18 mars à la fin de mai 1871?
2. Quelle est votre opinion sur le mouvement insurrectionnel de la Commune, et que pensez-vous, notamment, de son organisation: parlementaire? militaire? financière? administrative?
3. Quelle a pu être, à votre avis, l'influence de la Commune, alors et depuis, sur les événements et sur les idées? (5-6)

Forty-six responses from participants and eyewitnesses to the Commune were published, detailing the reflections of people from a broad range of backgrounds and political persuasions: journalists and writers who had reported on the Commune; leading members of the Communard government and supporting groups, including the militant anarchist Louise Michel; high-ranking officers of

the French army that led the Commune's suppression, including the notorious General Gallifet; activists like Jean Grave, who had no part in the events of 1871 but offered the perspective of a present revolutionary on revolutionaries of the past; conservative republican politicians like the former state prosecutor and Prefect of Police Louis Andrieux; and other key witnesses, including a Dr. Blanchon, who tended to the wounded, the famous photographer, Nadar, and a decorated sculptor, Comte Anatole Marquet de Vasselot, who led the Artists Federation of the Paris Commune. Vasselot notably resists political commentary in his response, demurring that "le cerveau de l'artiste n'est pas fait . . . pour se lancer dans les combinaisons politiques" (113). For political commentary from an artist's point-of-view, readers had to look at the illustrations, but Vallotton's are difficult to read.

Like *La Revue blanche* as a whole, the enquête strove to be inclusive of various points-of-view, but the range of replies demonstrates widespread regret, including on the radical left, about the Commune's legacy. Indeed, the Commune remained a taboo subject in the fin-de-siècle press. "Il n'est plus permis d'y parler hautement," wrote Michel in 1898 (Michel, "Dédicace," n.p.). To generate discussion about it in a high-profile magazine and represent its major actors in artistic form was an audacious and arguably dangerous move. There was little argument as to whether the Commune was a failure, or that the bloodshed was appallingly tragic. But opinions over *why* the Commune failed, how noble or shameful its failure was, and what could be learned from it were various: the central committee was too disorganized and divided (see the responses of Ernest Daudet, Henry Maret, Édouard Lockroy, Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, Georges Renard, Vaillant, and Edmond Bailly); the Communards made a terrible mistake in not holding the Bank of France hostage (Allemane, Dr. Louis Fiaux, Lissagaray, Grave, Dereure, Champy, Ranc, Vésinier, Louise Michel, and Alphonse Humbert); revolution and government of any kind are antithetical (Grave, Lefrançais, and Pindy); the Communards were not sufficiently violent, or simply "pas assez révolutionnaire" (Grave, Dereure, Melliet, Ranc, and Victor Jaclard). The anarchist writer Élisée Reclus describes the Commune's leaders as shamefully incompetent, but praises the people as the future of revolution – "Ce que ne firent pas les chefs, la foule sans nom sut le faire" (56) – expressing ambivalence not only about the Commune but also about the role of individual leaders in determining its results.

When re-publishing the survey as a plaquette, Fénéon added a set of concluding "observations" to give the responses shape: first, the "presque unanimité" that the Commune was instrumental in helping France to preserve the republic; second, the opinion (again, "à peu près unanime") among former Communards that the Commune was not sufficiently radical in its tactics and aims; third, the round refusal of the myth that the Communards fled the barricades once

their defeat was clear, with multiple eyewitnesses attesting to their enduring bravery throughout the suppression; and fourth, total agreement that the violent suppression of the Commune was "atroce" (155-56). Fénéon's strong rhetoric of unanimity – however tempered by revealing qualifiers like "presque" and "à peu près" – and of an unflattering myth "détruite" signals his editorial spin, indicating his desire to present the survey results in the strongest possible terms for the anarchist cause. In fact, the responses are not as almost-unanimous as he suggests, even among respondents who participated in the Commune and were most invested in its legacy.[16] Even Fénéon, evidently trying to shape the history of the Commune through *La Revue blanche*, allows the ambivalence to show. Vallotton's portraits amplify this conflicted legacy in visual form.

## THE COMMUNE IN PORTRAITS

From die-hard leaders of the Parisian insurrection, to President Thiers and his right-hand men in its brutal suppression, to figures who were caught in the crosshairs of both, Vallotton's portraits populate Fénéon's survey with figures that span the political spectrum. The drawing illustrating Fénéon's introduction as well as the cover of the plaquette is a triple portrait of Colonel Merlin, President Thiers, and Commandant Gaveau (left to right, Fig. 1), the men who led the government's suppression of the Commune and directed the trials that followed. Vallotton adjoins the portraits to create a kind of three-headed monster, set against an ink-black mass that seeps like a pool of blood. None of the three meet the viewer's gaze: Merlin looks in apparent exasperation over our left shoulder; Gaveau peers off to our right with a vengeful stare and a sharp, jagged jawline; while Thiers, who faces us directly, is obscured by an opaque pair of glasses, the comic effect of which is enhanced by the prominent cone shape of his head.[17] The overall effect is to make any visual connection between these men and the viewer impossible, an evasion that communicates indifference or determined avoidance. But is this effect in contrast to the Communard portraits that follow elsewhere in the survey? Sometimes, yes, but not consistently so. Vallotton gives the same bespectacled blindness to Raoul Rigault, the ruthless leader of the Commune's police force described as a "fanfaron de perversité" and "un aristocrate de la voyoucratie" (Délion, 190-92).[18] The choice to picture such a reviled figure of the Commune's leadership is notable in itself in the context of Fénéon's presentation. Vallotton and his editor must have agreed to a multi-sided view, in portraits and in text.

Several of the Communard portraits *are* markedly more sympathetic, and less comical, than the portrait of Rigault, which is what we would expect given Vallotton's left-leaning views. The portrait of Auguste Vermorel, a journalist and socialist propogandist who served on several of the Commune's committees and

Fig. 2. Félix Vallotton, *Vermorel*, 1897. Ink on paper, photomechanically reproduced in Fénéon, Félix, ed. *1871 – Enquête sur la Commune de Paris*. Paris: Editions de La Revue blanche, 1897. Image: Goldsmiths' Library of Economic Literature, Senate House Library, University of London.

fought on the barricades (he died as a prisoner in Versailles), is more streamlined portrait than caricature, and steadily meets our gaze (Fig. 2). The bold tonal contrasts and economy of line characteristic of Vallotton's style further dignify the calm defiance of his expression. The face of Eugène Varlin, a painter and bookbinder by trade who became a pioneer of the French syndicalist movement, is likewise more strengthened than mocked by Vallotton's bold and summary rendering (Fig. 3). A member of the National Guard's Central Committee during the Franco-Prussian War, his power was revoked by President Thiers after he participated in the insurrection of October 31st, 1870. He became a leading member of the Commune, serving as commissioner of finance and later

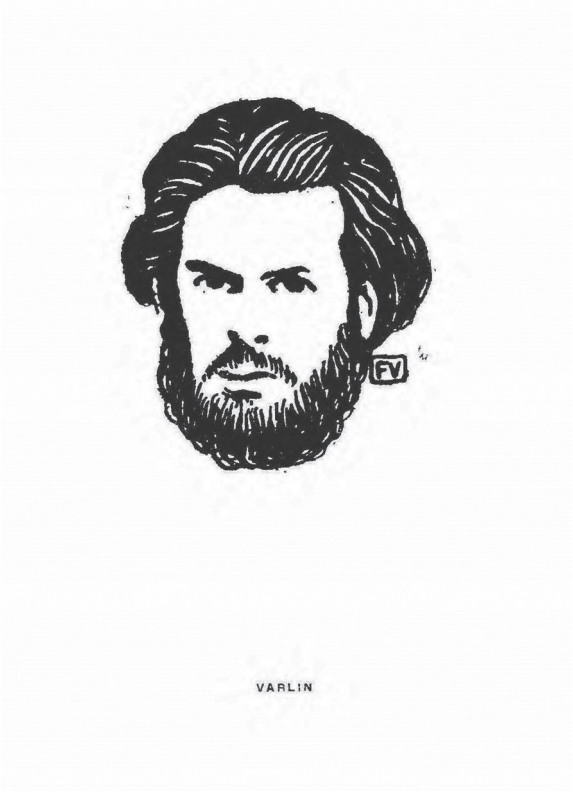


Fig. 3. Félix Vallotton, *Varlin*, 1897. Ink on paper, photomechanically reproduced in Fénéon, Félix, ed. *1871 – Enquête sur la Commune de Paris*. Paris: Editions de La Revue blanche, 1897. Image: Goldsmiths' Library of Economic Literature, Senate House Library, University of London.

delegate of war, and remained a strong advocate for workers' rights. During La Semaine sanglante he was brutally tortured and killed in the streets by Versaillais soldiers, egged on by an angry mob of "reactionary" onlookers emboldened by the Commune's defeat. Lissagaray's vivid account of Varlin's torture, re-published just a year before Fénéon and Vallotton's enquête, makes his head a grisly symbol of youth and intelligence destroyed: "sa jeune tête méditative qui n'avait jamais eu que des pensées fraternelles, devint un hâchis de chairs, l'oeil pendant hors de l'orbite" (389).[19] Vallotton, working from a photograph, accentuates the anger of Varlin's piercing stare by angling his eyebrows down in the center and straightening his head.[20] In his portrait of Théophile Ferré, who was briefly in

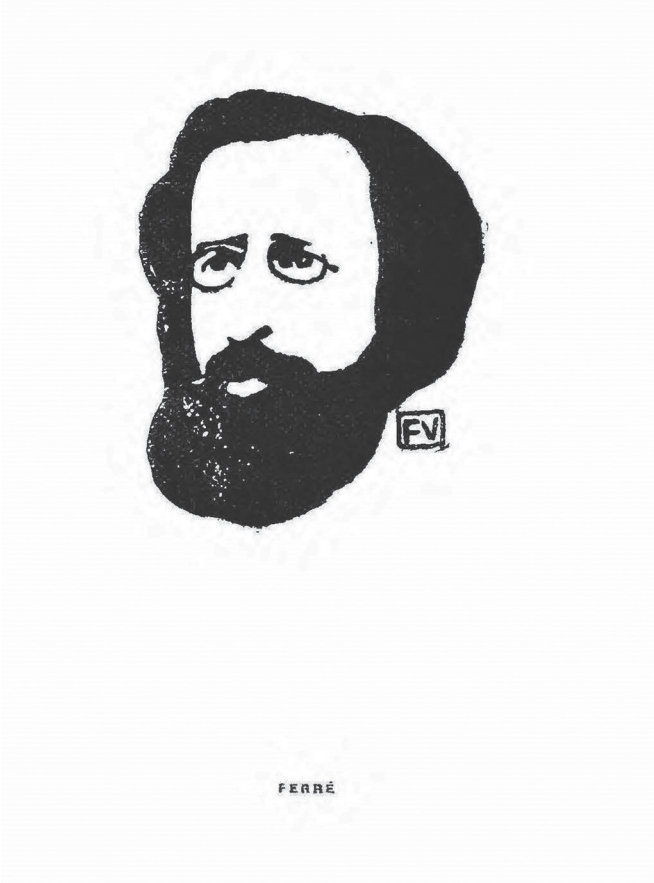


Fig. 4. Félix Vallotton, *Ferré*, 1897. Ink on paper, photomechanically reproduced in Fénéon, Félix, ed. *1871 – Enquête sur la Commune de Paris*. Paris: Editions de La Revue blanche, 1897. Image: Goldsmiths' Library of Economic Literature, Senate House Library, University of London.

charge of the Commune's police force and served on its Committee of Public Safety, authorizing various executions (including the controversial killing of the archbishop of Paris), Vallotton angles the brows up in the center. This accentuates the look of pained resolution in the source photograph by Eugène Appert, who took prison portraits of Communards that he commercialized as cartes-de-visite. Appert also inserted their heads, and only their heads, into propagandistic photomontages that vilified them as brutal criminals.[21] Vallotton's *Ferré* resists propaganda for or against (Fig. 4).

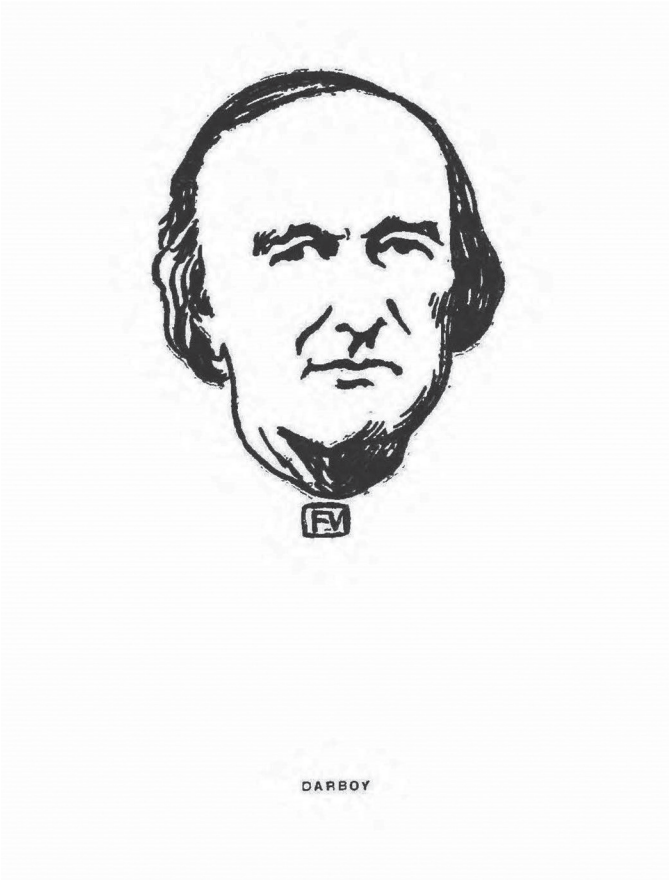


Fig. 5. Félix Vallotton, *Darboy*, 1897. Ink on paper, photomechanically reproduced in Fénéon, Félix, ed. *1871 – Enquête sur la Commune de Paris*. Paris: Editions de La Revue blanche, 1897. Image: Goldsmiths' Library of Economic Literature, Senate House Library, University of London.

Communards like Ferré presented a problem for Vallotton, who was passionately anti-police and possibly anti-execution.[22] So did figures like Darboy, the archbishop condemned to death by Ferré, because he was famous for orchestrating care for the wounded – on both sides – during the Commune (Fig. 5). Darboy was an obvious target of the Commune's anticlerical views, views that remained strong in fin-de-siècle France and that Vallotton seems to have shared,[23] but he was also seen as a martyr for his heroic devotion to Paris and its people throughout *l'année terrible*. Indeed, Darboy's portrait is one of the most

difficult to read: thoughtful, with an elegant likeness without the contortions of caricature, he wears, nonetheless, a shifty expression, one eye aimed at the viewer while the other veers off to the side; one side of his mouth curled down while the other side curls slightly up; one side of his face and neck falling into shadow, the other clearly delineated in light. Isolating each side of Darboy's face by covering the other gives the impression of two completely different portraits. Viewers either register the misalignment or see what they wish to see.

*Le Spectateur catholique*, a monthly magazine of "Art, Science, and Religious Judgment," saw only the good. A reproduction of Vallotton's portrait of Darboy appears in the issue of August 1897, presented as a challenge to the Commune's vilification of the Church. Darboy's "rondeur apostolique," "la fine caresse de ses yeux," and "la bienveillance de ses longues mèches bouclées" are given as evidence of his inner goodness, a moral contrast to the "ultramontaine" clergy (Bruijn, 98bis-99).[24] But this very contrast can be found within the lines of his face. Darboy's heterotropia conveys Vallotton's ambivalence about the Commune's radical violence and terrible end, an ambivalence echoed by its placement in the text by Doctor Blanchon. Physician to Paris's firefighters during the Commune, Blanchon answers Fénéon's questions with such evident self-consciousness about not taking sides – Rigault who, with Ferré, ordered Darboy's death was "d'ailleurs, un garçon très sympathique" (!), and the firemen Blanchon treated fought blazes started by nationalists and Communards alike (110-12) – that one wonders whether Fénéon's known anarchism and the related activism of the 1890s stymied certain respondents, some of whom Fénéon seems to have interviewed in person.[25]

Other portraits are even more perplexing: General Dombrowski, the exiled Polish nobleman and radical activist who became Commander-in-Chief of the Commune forces, died of wounds sustained on the barricades amidst rumors that he was bribed to surrender Paris to Versailles. Vallotton draws him in profile with small, vaguely menacing features (Fig. 6) – a pointed chin like Gaveau, sharp high cheekbone, and beady eye – in contrast to the elegant man with a handlebar moustache in surviving photographs.[26] A caricature published on the cover of the revolutionary newspaper *Le Fils du Père Duchêne illustré* on April 30th, 1871, captures the conflicted feelings surrounding Dombrowski during the Commune: the General is a mad-eyed giant running down the Versaillais soldiers with a saber.[27] With a nod to Dombrowski's detractors, the caption reads "un bon bougre! . . . Nom de Dieu!", a rebuttal to the "monarchistes, bonapartistes, et reactionnaires" who called him a traitor (4). The cover is followed by a three-page biography of Dombrowski promoting his radical republican bona fides (1-4). Vallotton evokes the disagreement over his character with cutting precision.

Altogether, the political charge of the portraits is difficult to parse. As a group they are characteristically ambivalent in their assessment of the Commune's key

Fig. 6. Félix Vallotton, *Dombrowski*, 1897. Ink on paper, photomechanically reproduced in Fénéon, Félix, ed. *1871 – Enquête sur la Commune de Paris*. Paris: Editions de La Revue blanche, 1897. Image: Goldsmiths' Library of Economic Literature, Senate House Library, University of London.

actors, suggesting Vallotton struggled to come to terms with the Commune's legacy much like the respondents to the enquête. Although historians generally assume that Vallotton had anarchist sympathies, his work can be unfriendly to radicals as well as police. In *L'Anarchiste* no one comes off well: the anarchist is a dandyish youth doing nothing but getting caught, a Rimbaldian antihero squirming and glowering in the street. The surrounding police are either mindless oafs watching dumbstruck at a distance or sightless zombies who grope the young

man as two bourgeois gawkers look on. The print is evidently anti-police, but hardly hopeful about an anarchist resistance.

## MASKS

Beyond their political inflections, Vallotton's portraits were an important addition to Fénéon's enquête, incorporating key figures who were deceased and giving the publication the luster of avant-garde art. As an artist known for his politically charged prints who had also proven himself in the genre of celebrity portraiture, Vallotton was the obvious man for the job. In 1896 Stéphane Mallarmé flattered him by writing "vous seul pouvez, avec le portrait connu, faire quelque chose d'original" (1427). Vallotton had been drawing portrait heads for *La Revue blanche* since 1894, and in 1896 he illustrated Rémy de Gourmont's *Livre des masques*, a collection of short essays on major literary figures associated with Symbolism. Gourmont's preface characterizes his essays as "portraits," announcing a kinship between his approach and Vallotton's (14-15). The title of the volume blurs the distinction between picture and text: *Le Livre des masques: Portraits symbolistes* presents itself as a compilation of literary effigies in two forms: Gourmont's textual portraits accompanied by thirty pictorial "masques . . . dessinés par F. Vallotton."

Both Gourmont and Vallotton were aiming for a form of Symbolist portraiture, rejecting the naturalist demand for profuse mimetic detail. Both valued concision and psychological suggestion as the most powerful approach to homage. Gourmont describes his literary portraits as intentionally "brefs" and "incomplets" (15), much like Vallotton's spare, simplified floating heads. And both avoid the fawning, worshipful tone one might expect from such a project, which amounts to a collective apotheosis of Symbolist literature. In Gourmont's preface to the second volume of 1898, to which Vallotton contributed twenty-three more portrait heads, he hedges on whether his essays count as literary criticism at all. Although he does not believe in effusive praise ("la critique negative est necessaire," 7), he also chastises critics as smug judges waiting for the executioner to carry out their sentences ("Nous allons faire un feu de joie et danser autour des cendres de nos amours!" 8). Gourmont characterizes his literary portraits as a form of "analyse psychologique ou littéraire" (8), not criticism per se, an approach focused on the emotional and physical effects of a writer's work on the reader.

Vallotton's approach as Gourmont's illustrator is similarly psychological with a critical edge, but his portraits almost invariably include an element of humor as well. His portrait of Paul Verlaine is one of many examples proving his willingness to inject notes of mockery into portraits of people he greatly admired. The poet appears in profile as a charmingly scruffy old man, his features disappearing behind his white beard, glasses, and bowler hat.[28] Vallotton devoted

his very first woodcut to Verlaine in 1891, a portrait of stubborn intellectual intensity that he would reprise in oil in 1902. (Both woodcut and painting bear a prominent dedication, *A Paul Verlaine*).[29] In the woodcut, Vallotton's wit is in Verlaine's glowing, protuberant skull, visibly swirling with passionate thought. The later portrait for the *Livre des masques* is feebler, still irritable but withdrawn, an intelligent, world-weary face that gets a sympathetic laugh. Gourmont echoes Vallotton's approach in his text on Verlaine's "nature . . . indéfinissable" when he writes: "en France, le génie semble toujours un peu ridicule" (250-52). As in Fénéon's survey, the power of Vallotton's celebrity portraits is in the way they take criticism and adulation into account. He may not be dancing around Verlaine's ashes, but he is not worshipping them either.

Paul-Henri Bourrelier has argued that Vallotton's portraits for the enquête humanize the Communards and mock the other side (20), and although this is true in several cases they are not at all so clear-cut as a group (witness Dombrowski and Rigault). In 1898 the German critic and Vallotton champion Julius Meier-Graefe described the artist's portrait of Napoleon, a woodcut made in 1897, as a marked departure from the romantic, heroic image typical of the time: "le visage révèle aucune trace de la certitude de la victoire, ou du lourd pressentiment, plus fameux encore" (32). Instead, Vallotton presents the general at work, looking through his lorgnette – watching, waiting, observing.[30] Depicting a Napoleon that does not show his cards, Vallotton refuses to show his own.

His crowd scenes are similarly withholding. Vallotton pictured revolutionary action and authoritarian suppression throughout the 1890s, a subject still tied to memories of the Commune and its horrific demise. His crowd scenes evidence a broad uncertainty about the Commune's afterlife in fin-de-siècle France and challenge the mythical concept of "la foule" as a politicized, emotionally unified mass. These pictures, however leftist at first glance, tend to straddle two or more political perspectives, making him one of the most thought-provoking commentators on the masses in this period of modern crowd psychology's birth.

In *La Charge*, 1893, Vallotton satirizes the relationship between the Parisian people and the police (Fig. 7).[31] A black swarm of a dozen *gendarmes* waving swords and fists at cowering civilians abuts a field of flattened victims lying in the open space behind. Who is the violent mob in this civil war? In the foreground a policeman yanks so hard on a young man's hair that he pulls his eyebrows toward the crown of his head. Other victims of the violence are invisible, fallen between the layers of black, merely inferred by belligerent gestures. There is little question whose side Vallotton is on: the civilians are rendered as helpless, faceless, or with panicked expressions, while the sharply angled brows and exaggerated jaws of the officers convey a boorish cruelty. And yet there is one officer who looks uncertain, standing frozen behind the pack. The only policeman not actively taking part in the brawl, he maintains his distance from the violence with a look of helpless

Fig. 7. Félix Vallotton, *La Charge*, 1893, woodcut, 20 × 26 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Image: Art Resource, NY.

astonishment, echoing that of the young man pulled by the hair. This figure of ambivalence is central to Vallotton's work in this period, and embodies the conflicted anarchist spirit of his art.

Vallotton's pictorial approach to the crowd was forged amid an explosion of historical, sociological, and philosophical interest in the subject. From 1876 to 1894 Hippolyte Taine published a six-volume account of French history since the 1789 Revolution. *Les Origines de la France contemporaine* is laced with hostility toward—and sensational descriptions of—the unruly crowds that propelled this period of radical change. Taine describes the crowd as "un animal primitif," a thoughtless force of destructive anarchy (vol. 3 [1878], 70).[32] Drawing on Taine, sociologists Gabriel Tarde and Gustave Le Bon (among others) made crowd psychology a new branch of scientific inquiry. Tarde, an original philosophical thinker, saw the crowd as an aggregate of imitative individuals, each of whom bears the potential for sympathy and innovation as well as conformity and irrational violence. Le Bon, who popularized Tarde's ideas, doubled down on the negative view. His notorious best-seller, *La Psychologie des foules* (1895), describes

the crowd as dumb and dangerous yet manipulable by a charismatic leader, especially if that leader wields power in the form of images. Rational individuals transform through collective contagion, mutually intoxicated by "l'impulsivité, l'irritabilité, l'incapacité de raisonner, l'absence de jugement et d'esprit critique, l'exagération des sentiments" (24).

Vallotton's vision of the crowd could be called Tardian in its contradictions, but with a leftist bent. His ambivalent figures frequently look out as if to hook our attention, soliciting the viewer's identification with their dilemma. In *La Charge* we are addressed by the passive policeman and the young dissident, who stares straight ahead with one policeman grabbing his neck and another about to strike his head with a fist. Whose side are *you* on, Vallotton seems to ask, and what will you do from where you stand? Other prints by the artist from the early to mid 1890s—depicting suicide, capital punishment, political protest, and public brawls—similarly place the viewer in uncomfortable positions of political fence-sitting and ethical doubt.[33]

## "TOUT LE MONDE ÉTAIT COUPABLE"

Overall, it is the deeply conflicted legacy of the Commune that emerges from Fénéon and Vallotton's enquête, and the choice to remember the event through individual voices and faces. The textual responses represented those still alive to remember, while the portraits added many of the Commune's most important casualties to the mix—disembodied, austere, rendered with elegant economy and individual specificity. This approach was in contrast to recent historical, socio-philosophical, and literary accounts that described the revolutions of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in terms of the physical crowd and its laws of contagion.[34] It was also in contrast to another belated remembrance of the Commune: Luce's wretched pile of bodies in *Une rue de Paris en mai 1871*, 1903-05, a painting that echoes the grim view of Manet's lithograph, *Guerre civile*, in vivid, neo-impressionist color.[35] In contrast to Manet and Luce—and to Crane, whose angel of war "In Memory of the Paris Commune" stands on top of the world—Vallotton and Fénéon avoided brutalized bodies and heroic idealism, presenting the Commune as a tangle of past and present personalities and political perspectives. They gave every respondent a say without rejoinder and set every portrait in a sea of blank space.

By re-assessing the Commune through an anthology of individual views and portrait heads (the isolation of the head further resists the base bodily metaphors for the Commune crowd), and by encouraging critical retrospection (Fénéon's second question, prompting criticism of the Commune's organization, is echoed in the critical eye Vallotton brings to some of its heroes), the enquête presented a textured view of a traumatic historical episode that holds the crowd at arm's

length. Although the crowd is invoked in the responses again and again, it always appears through the narration of a named individual who gives it a particular character, emotional valence, and role. Simon Dereure and Maxime Vuillaume describe la foule as the Commune's most tragic victim, suffering unspeakable violence to become a horrific sea of cadavers (74, 136-37), while Champy emphasizes the thousands of brave fédérés who fought for the cause and "ont en general fait tout leur devoir" (80-82). For Gaston Da Costa, la foule is a rabid, mostly female crowd calling for the lynching of hostages (104), in sharp contrast to Alphonse Humbert's heroic "foule anonyme" of fighters (128). These are just a few of the crowds brought back to life by these memories, not just the Communards on the barricades but the terrified spectators, the callous bystanders, the fédérés and the Versaillais.

Fénéon and Vallotton presented the Commune as multivalent, multi-sided, and internally varied, rather than mythically singular, whether positively or negatively so. By personalizing the Commune's politics, their enquête represented a kaleidoscope of perspectives much more complex than Commune vs. Versailles. Juxtapositions of text and image further refracted the Commune's legacy: a portrait of the Comte de Chambord, pretender to the throne in 1871, presides as a symbol of royalist conspiracy over the response of Louis Fiaux, a physician and radical-socialist politician who published a history of the Commune based on his own eyewitness notes (Fiaux, ii-iii); and the portrait of Varlin, hailed as a martyred Communard hero, appears in an account that blames him for not weaponizing the Banque de France.

"Qu'importe d'ailleurs les aventures particulières au milieu d'une catastrophe générale?," asks the politician Édouard Lockroy at the start of his response (21). And yet personal experiences and opinions were precisely what the enquête was designed to provide—anecdotes and editorials in contrast to the wide-angle perspective and objectivity that professional historical writing presumed. *La Revue blanche* gave graphic emphasis to the singularity of each response by reproducing a handwritten signature—often large and flamboyant—at the end of each. Although Fénéon's approach was akin to the eyewitness histories that proliferated in the four decades after the Commune (no less than ten of Fénéon's respondents published books of this kind), the enquête diverged from these accounts in its plural form, anthologizing a wide range of perspectives framed by Fénéon's questions and synthetic remarks. It also made powerful use of art.

One of the most impassioned responses Fénéon received was from the celebrity photographer and caricaturist Nadar, who paints an unforgettable verbal picture from the Commune's final days. Nadar played no active role in the Commune; he was just an eyewitness, and his response makes the most of this bystander point-of-view.[36] He describes a scene that unfolded outside his window in 1871: a parade of prisoners forced to march through the streets surrounded by the deafening

cries of people shouting "'A mort! – Ici! – Tout de suite!'" Most of the prisoners, Nadar writes, were young soldiers from the Versaillais army, abandoned by their generals and trapped in Paris with no leadership or protection. Nadar is moved by their predicament—left by their leaders, vilified by the Commune—and he is disturbed by the crowd's ferocity in condemning them to death. His description of the soldiers emphasizes the uncertainty surrounding their allegiance:

> Quels étaient précisément ceux-là qui défilaient sous nos yeux, dégradés pour l'heure, -- en attendant le reste? . . . / Lesquels d'entre eux, fidèles; lesquels ennemis? Qu'importait! Ils marchaient d'un pas rapide, poussés, la tête basse pour la plupart, et avec eux un pêle-mêle sans fin d'autres prisonniers de toutes provenances et de toutes tenues, gardes fédérés, ouvriers, bourgeois . . . Des messieurs bien vêtus, des "dames" se heurtaient, se poussaient pour injurier de plus près les prisonniers, -- ces prisonniers non condamnés, non jugés, non entendus . . . Nous entendîmes une voix stridente entre toutes, une voix de femme, glapissant en fausset suraigu, vers les nuages: -- '*Arrachez-leur les ongles!*' Oui, voilà ce que j'ai vu, voilà ce que j'ai entendu, en plein centre de Paris, centre de la civilisation humaine . . . (152-53)

We can hear Nadar sighing, shaking his head.

Nadar's account of this horrifying procession is given pride of place at the end of the enquête and makes vivid the widespread confusion that defined the Commune for many years to come, a confusion not only about leadership and strategy but also about punishment and blame. Peter Starr has argued that confusion was a key theme in literary, historical, and philosophical texts about the Commune written in its aftermath. Fénéon and Vallotton's project would make a fascinating addition to Starr's study, but what they propose about the Commune's moral and political afterlife is less the enduring power of confusion as a fuel for revolution than the lasting burden of ambivalence about a series of events that will never be clarified or turned to good. Starr would see the conflicts and vacillations of the 1897 enquête as essential to its significance, and rightly so, but confusion here seems to have curdled into disagreement and doubt. The respondents—even some of the most committed Communards among them—worry over the Commune's political and moral legacy at this fragile fin-de-siècle moment and show no clear consensus over whom or what to blame for its disastrous end. Vallotton's portraits echo and amplify this ambivalence, not only in their range of subjects but also in their alternately (or in some cases, simultaneously) dignifying and mocking approach. By illustrating the enquête with individual faces rather than the crowd scenes that established his reputation—crowd scenes that would have resonated so well with the subject in question—Vallotton found another way to challenge the anti-crowd attitudes

that the Commune had spawned, attitudes of fear and hostility that were central to the development of crowd theory in France and beyond. He represented the Commune as a collection of portraits, with each individual face inflecting the textual account it accompanies. Dialogues between the dead and the living, the left and the right, optimist and pessimist, young and old, gain volume and texture as we progress through the pages, yet with no clear result.

One final detail from Nadar's narrative: he opens his story by pointing to the power of moral contagion in the crowd.[37] The only reason he sees the parade in the first place is because others in his apartment rush to the windows to look, and he follows, spurred by "une contagion de curiosité malsaine qui se trouva punie" (151). Like Vallotton, Nadar folds himself and his readers into the moral dilemmas of revolutionary violence and authoritarian suppression he describes, expiating a bit of his bourgeois guilt for watching the tragedy unfold. Whether a fighter, a solitary bystander, or someone caught up in the crowd, everyone played a part. In this sense his account echoes the infamous declaration "A Paris, tout le monde était coupable!" but with a different meaning: he turns the accusation on himself.[38]

Drawing on the discourse of contagion surrounding the crowd in fin-de-siècle literature and social theory, Nadar gives us, nonetheless, his singular point-of-view. Because to remember the Commune only as a movement of the masses is to deny that every mass is a collection of individuals, each with his/her own motivations, emotions, choices, and personal consequences. Likewise, in Vallotton's illustrations the legacy of the Commune is not a mythical abstraction or a hypnotized mob. Neither is it a revolutionary crowd, but something much less determined: the accumulated perceptions of the choices and interactions of individuals, whose multiplicity and ambivalence resist the paranoid pronouncements of Le Bonian theory. It was often art, in this twilight era before the painterly abstraction of the early twentieth century, that captured this ambivalence best, perhaps because art like Vallotton's and magazines like *La Revue blanche* were—however radical intellectually—fundamentally bourgeois. Vallotton's political works—both the crowds and the Commune portraits—remind his (mostly bourgeois) viewers that they play a part, that the crimes of the Commune taint every Parisian, even if their crime is merely looking, unable to decide what to do.

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NOTES

For their enthusiasm and constructive criticism, I wish to thank the editors of this special issue, the C19 Working Group at Dartmouth College, audiences at Princeton University and the Courtauld Institute of Art, and the anonymous reader for *NCFS*, all of whom furthered my thinking and improved the text. Due to limits on illustrations, links to online reproductions of several referenced artworks are provided in the notes.

1. On the influence of the Commune on anarchist organization in fin-de-siècle France, especially Paris, see John Merriman, "The Spectre of the Commune and French Anarchism in the 1890s," in Carl Levy and Matthew Adams, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 343-52. On the influence of the Commune on fin-de-siècle anarchist theory more broadly, see Richard Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin-de-siècle France*, University of Nebraska Press, 1989; John Merriman, *The Dynamite Club: How a Bombing in Fin-de-siècle Paris Ignited the Age of Modern Terror*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009; Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune*, Verso, 2016; and Louis Chevalier, *Montmartre du plaisir et du crime*, La Fabrique, 2016.

2. These aims—to link contemporary anarchism to the Commune, and to preserve the Commune's memory—went hand in hand. Was Fénéon driven by an apologist impulse? An archival one? A defiant one? (My sense is all three.) Fénéon's epigram from the sixteenth-century poet Agrippa d'Aubigné suggests his archival intention: "Et où sont aujourd'hui ceux à qui les actions, les factions & les choses monstrueuses de ce temps là sont connuës, sinon à fort peu, & dans peu de jours à nul?" "Aux Lecteurs," *Les Tragiques* (1616), in Eug. Réaume and de Caussade, eds., *Œuvres complètes de Théodore Agrippa d'Aubigné*, vol. 4, Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1877, p. 4.

3. Two of the fifteen portraits—of General von Bismarck and the Comte de Chambord—were recycled from previous issues of *La Revue blanche* (1 Feb. and 1 Dec. 1895). The other thirteen portraits were newly created to accompany the survey. Vallotton regularly contributed portraits to *La Revue blanche* from 1894 until 1899.

4. The portraits are photomechanically reproduced drawings but look like woodcuts, or drawings made for translation into woodcut. Octave Uzanne refers to Vallotton's "estampes brutalistes" in his preface to *Badauderies parisiennes: Rassemblements, physiologies de la rue*, Paris: H. Floury, 1896, p. v.

5. Dates of death for three of Vallotton's portrait subjects—Colonel Merlin, Commandant Gaveau, and Tranquille Huet—are unknown, but all were likely deceased. (Tranquille Huet is pictured as an elderly man in his National Guard cap.) A fourth portrait subject, Prussian Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, would die in 1898.

6. Questionnaires led by celebrities became a common feature in the turn-of-the-century press and *La Revue blanche* published several. Vallotton himself responded to the "Enquête sur l'éducation," *La Revue blanche*, 1 June 1902, pp. 179-80, and the "Enquête sur les tendances actuelles des arts plastiques," *Mercure de France*, 1 Aug. 1905, pp. 358-59.

7. All citations from the enquête will be from the plaquette, for the sake of consistency and concision and because it was Fénéon's final version.

8. The portrait heads appear alongside the text in the initial (March and April 1897) issues of *La Revue blanche*.

9. Luce contributed portraits of Walery Antoni Wróblewski, Alexis Louis Trinquet, General Galliffet, and Mme Marie Leroy. The caricaturist Georges Pilotell contributed a portrait sketch of Gustave Maroteau as an illustration for his own response to the enquête. This illustration was also cut for the plaquette.

10. In addition to *La Revue blanche*, Vallotton contributed to several other *anarchisant* publications in the 1890s including *L'Assiette au beurre, Le Père peinard, Les Temps nouveaux*, and *La Revue anarchiste*.

11. See: https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1946.185 (*L'Anarchiste*); https://artmuseum.princeton.edu/collections/objects/41443 (*La Foule à Paris*); https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/prints/collection/p1098V2000 (*La Manifestation*).

12. See: https://www.marxists.org/subject/art/visual_arts/satire/crane/ (Crane) and https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/337625 (Manet). Both works by Manet were removed for the plaquette, for reasons unknown. The *Père Duchesne* frontispiece and the works by Crane were retained.

13. Twelve of the forty-six responses include a portrait drawing by Vallotton.

14. See, for example, the arbitrary relationship between Vallotton's portrait of Fortuné Henry, a Communard sentenced to death for disobedience, and the text it accompanies, a particularly important response by the radical journalist and former political exile Henri Rochefort. Rochefort's response is the first to appear in the plaquette, along with the portrait of Fortuné Henry. This portrait has a more modest placement in the survey's original publication in *La Revue blanche* (in the middle of the second installment of April 1897, p. 365). Jean Baronnet speculates that the prime placement in the plaquette had to do with Fénéon's relationship with Henry's son, Émile Henry, with whom he had directed the anarchist magazine *L'En dehors* in 1892-93, and who was guillotined in 1894 for throwing a bomb into a Parisian brasserie (13-14). This change suggests Fénéon gave considerable political thought to the layout of the plaquette.

15. Vallotton's correspondence in this period is minimal. Nowhere does he describe this assignment or his process in completing it. Gilbert Guisan and Doris Jakubec, *Félix Vallotton: documents pour une biographie et pour l'histoire d'une œuvre*, vol. 1, Bibliothèque des arts, 1973.

16. Louis Fiaux says the Commune weakened the Republic. Jean-Louis Pindy sees the Commune as an ignoble failure. Henry Maret and Georges Renard argue that it created an unbridgeable gulf between the working class and the bourgeoisie. Renard further argues that what the Commune needed was a broader and more organized coalition across France, not more radical tactics. Many respondents do not address Fénéon's summary points at all, further diluting his assertion of virtual unanimity.

17. Here Vallotton may be drawing on the many caricatures of King Louis-Philippe

as a pear (French slang for "simpleton" or "fool") with a pointed head. See, for example, Charles Philippon, *Les Poires*, lithograph published in *La Caricature*, 1831.

18. See: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Raoul_Rigault_by_Vallotton.jpg. Note that Vallotton depicts other figures with glasses without obscuring their eyes beneath, e.g. Théophile Ferré (Fig. 4).

19. Lissagaray does not specify the constituents of this mob, but Louise Michel characterizes it as "tout le Paris réactionnaire et badaud," and estimates its size at about 2000 people (Michel 280-81).

20. Vallotton seems to have used available photographs as models for these portraits when possible. We cannot be sure of the specific source image for all of them, nor is there space to detail each possible source image here, but the photographic source for the portrait of Varlin is clear. See: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Varlin-eugene.jpg.

21. Vallotton must have been working from the carte-de-visite photograph of Ferré by Eugène Appert, 1871, in the Musée Carnavalet, Paris (inv. PH22217): https://www.parismuseescollections.paris.fr/de/node/575082#infos-principales. On Appert's prison photographs and photography's insidious role in manipulating the Commune's legacy, see Jeannene Przyblyski, "Revolution at a Standstill: Photography and the Paris Commune of 1871," *Yale French Studies*, no. 101, 2001, pp. 54-78, and "Moving Pictures: Photography, Narrative, and the Paris Commune of 1871," in Vanessa Schwartz and Leo Charney, eds., *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, University of California Press, 1995, pp. 253-78.

22. There is ample evidence of Vallotton's distaste for police in his prints from the 1890s, e.g. *L'Anarchiste*, 1892, and *La Charge*, 1893. His woodcut, *L'Exécution*, 1894, conveys sympathy for the prisoner.

23. In response to a questionnaire on education, Vallotton wrote "Je suis hostile à l'enseignement religieux, violemment." His response is followed by that of Zola, who expresses the same opinion. *La Revue blanche*, 1 June 1902, p. 180.

24. Bruijn cites Fiaux's claim in his response that Darboy paid for the sins of corrupt clergy in league with a murderous regime. He is the scapegoat for "L'Église dominante, l'ultramontaine." *1871*, pp. 40-41.

25. I have not found firm evidence that Fénéon conducted interviews in person, but the fact that some of the responses read more like conversations – with many more questions inserted beyond the standard set of questions sent to everyone – suggests it. This is true of Blanchon's response. *La Revue blanche* did conduct live interviews for later enquêtes, for example, the "Enquête sur l'Éducation" to which Vallotton responded.

26. See, for example, the photographs and drawings of Dombrowski in Jerzy Zdadra, *Jaroslaw Dabrowski, 1836-1871*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1973, frontispiece and figs. 58-61.

27. See: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1513691g.item.

28. See: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k81601v.texteImage, p. 250.

29. For the woodcut, see: https://www.moma.org/collection/works/65718. The painting was part of a series of "portraits décoratifs" of famous writers Vallotton made

in 1901-02, including Baudelaire, Dostoyevsky, Hugo, Mirbeau, Poe, de Vigny, and Zola. Ducrey, vol. 2, p. 223.

30. See: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Napoleon-1897.jpg.

31. See: https://www.moma.org/collection/works/64129.

32. The classic Jacobin critique of Taine's account of revolutionary crowds is Georges Lefebvre, "Foules révolutionnaires," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, no. 61, Jan.-Feb. 1934, pp. 1-26.

33. Cf. *Le Suicide*, 1894, woodcut; *L'Exécution*, 1894, woodcut; *La Manifestation*, 1893, woodcut; *Au Violon*, 1893, zincograph; *La Rixe*, 1892, woodcut.

34. Classic studies of this topic, too large to address here, include Susanna Barrows, *Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth-Century France*, Yale University Press, 1981; Naomi Schor, *Zola's Crowds*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978; and Ross, *Communal Luxury*, a book whose approach wonderfully mirrors that of Fénéon and Vallotton as I aim to characterize it here. Arthur Rimbaud's poetic evocations of the crowd and the swarm are shot through with bodily metaphors. See also Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune*, University of Minnesota Press, 1988; and Robert St. Clair, *Poetry, Politics, and the Body in Rimbaud: Lyrical Material*, Oxford University Press, 2018, especially Chapter 4 on "Le Forgeron."

35. Alastair Wright has convincingly argued that Luce's painting shows the difficulty of picturing the Commune, perhaps especially for those on the left, not only because of its brutal, bloody end but also because of the inadequacy of traditional history painting to capture its complex political and emotional legacy. Wright discusses Fénéon's enquête to flesh out the conflicted "mindset of Luce's colleagues" vis-à-vis the Commune around the turn of the century, pointing out the challenge of painting a picture as powerful as these textual accounts. Wright, "Mourning, Painting, and the Commune: Maximilien Luce's *A Paris Street in 1871*," *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2009, pp. 223-42.

36. André Rouillé examines Nadar's ahistorical approach to history, privileging the witness over the historian (just like Fénéon's enquête), in "*When I was a Photographer*: The Anatomy of a Myth," in Hambourg, Maria Morris, et al, *Nadar*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995, pp. 107-14.

37. On moral contagion, see Jan Goldstein, "'Moral Contagion': A Professional Ideology of Medicine and Psychiatry in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century France," in *Professions and the French State, 1700-1900*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984, pp. 181-222; and Christopher E. Forth, "Moral Contagion and the Will: The Crisis of Masculinity in Fin-de-siècle France," in Alison Bashford and Claire Hooker, eds., *Contagion: Historical and Cultural Studies*, Routledge, 2014, pp. 61-75.

38. When a military prosecutor declared "A Paris, tout le monde était coupable!" he pronounced the guilt of every working-class person in Paris, Communard or not, simply for being part of the proletariat, without the means or the connections to leave town. See Merriman, *Massacre: The Life and Death of the Paris Commune*, Basic Books, 2014, p. 255.

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