

DONALD CRAFTON

Emile Cohl, Caricature, and Film



PRINCETON LEGACY LIBRARY

EMILE COHL, CARICATURE, AND FILM



Frontispiece. Emile Cohl, ca. 1895.

**EMILE COHL,
CARICATURE,
AND FILM**

DONALD CRAFTON

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

Copyright © 1990 by Princeton University Press
Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540
In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, Oxford

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Crafton, Donald.

Emile Cohl, caricature, and film / Donald Crafton.

p. cm.

Filmography: p.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-691-05581-5 (alk. paper)

1. Cohl, Emile, 1857-1938. 2. Animators—France—Biography.

3. Cartoonists—France—Biography. I. Title.

NC1766.F82C6433 1990

741.5'092—dc20 89-31015

Publication of this book has been aided by a grant from the
Paul Mellon Fund of Princeton University Press

This book has been composed in Linotron Caledonia

*Clothbound editions of Princeton University Press books are printed on acid-free paper,
binding materials are chosen for strength and durability.
Paperbacks, although satisfactory for personal collections, are not usually suitable
for library rebinding*

Printed in the United States of America by
Princeton University Press,
Princeton, New Jersey

To Marilyn

CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	ix
LIST OF CHARTS AND DIAGRAM	xvii
PHOTOGRAPHIC SOURCES	xix
PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xxi
PART ONE: The “Caricaturiste”	
CHAPTER ONE: A Caricaturist’s Life	3
CHAPTER TWO: Art for Two Sous	43
PART TWO: The “Cinématographiste”	
CHAPTER THREE: The Moving Image	91
CHAPTER FOUR: Cinema chez Gaumont	115
CHAPTER FIVE: “Hollywood” in France and New Jersey	153
CHAPTER SIX: The Father of the Animated Film	198
PART THREE: Toward an “Incoherent Cinema”	
CHAPTER SEVEN: Graphic Humor and Early Cinema	221
CHAPTER EIGHT: “Incoherent Cinema”	257
NOTES	313
CATALOGUE OF FILMS	341
BIBLIOGRAPHY	377
INDEX	397

ILLUSTRATIONS

Frontispiece. Emile Cohl, ca. 1895.

1. Félix Régamey: "La Rue du Croissant," 1868.
2. André Gill: "La Délivrance," *L'Eclipse*, August 4, 1874.
3. André Gill: "Bonjour! — Bonsoir!" *La Lune Rousse*, December 24, 1876.
4. Emile Cohl: "Grand Bazar génois," *La Nouvelle Lune*, June 5, 1881. (Hereafter works for which no artist is cited are by Emile Cohl.)
5. "Le Baron de San Malato contre Edouard Philippe," *La Nouvelle Lune*, March 6, 1881.
6. "Les Poupées de l'infante," *La Nouvelle Lune*, May 8, 1881.
7. "Serment aujourd'hui, serrement demain," *La Nouvelle Lune*, January 16, 1881.
8. "Souffle toujours," *La Nouvelle Lune*, July 24, 1881.
9. "Que d'or! Que d'or! Que d'or!" *La Nouvelle Lune*, September 3, 1882.
10. "Rentrée du grand Jules," *La Nouvelle Lune*, February 25, 1883.
11. "Les Auteurs de Vièrge," *La Nouvelle Lune*, May 31, 1884.
12. "Actualité," *La Nouvelle Lune*, August 15, 1880.
13. "M. René Langlois," *La Nouvelle Lune*, April 17, 1881.
14. "Vêtement de saison," *La Nouvelle Lune*, August 28, 1881.
15. "Vue du Ministère Duclerc, de la lune," *La Nouvelle Lune*, August 20, 1882.
16. "Les Prétendants du carnaval," *La Nouvelle Lune*, January 28, 1883.
17. "Le Député de la bouillabaisse," *La Nouvelle Lune*, March 5, 1882.
18. "L'Indépendant," *La Nouvelle Lune*, January 20, 1880.
19. "La Rédaction du *Tam-Tam*," *La Nouvelle Lune*, May 29, 1881.
20. "Tapons dans le tas," *La Nouvelle Lune*, January 8, 1882.
21. "Le Ciel et l'enfer en 1881," *La Nouvelle Lune*, December 22, 1881.
22. "Une Dernière Ressource!" *Le Carillon*, October 11, 1879.
23. "Alfred Delilia," *L'Hydropathe*, October 28, 1879.
24. Cabriol (Georges Lorin): "L'Hydropathe Emile Cohl," *L'Hydropathe*, April 5, 1880.
25. "Démissionnariat d'un an," *Tout-Paris*, June 13, 1880.
26. "Gill et le Luxembourg," *Tout-Paris*, June 26, 1880.
27. "Les Prix de *la Nouvelle Lune*," *La Nouvelle Lune*, August 22, 1880.
28. "Progrès!" *L'Auberge des Adrets*, December 26, 1885.
29. "Ah quel nez!!!" *Le Bon Bock*, April 18, 1885.
30. "Lunes politiques et incohérentes," *Le Charivari*, October 25, 1883.
31. "Un Voyage chez les Incohérents," *Le Charivari*, October 25, 1883.
32. An Incoherent outing in 1884.
33. "Chez les Incohérents," *Le Charivari*, October 30, 1884.
34. "La Salle Graffard," *Catalogue illustré de l'exposition des arts incohérents*, 1884.
35. "Le Pauvre Pêcheur dans l'embaras," *Catalogue illustré de l'exposition des arts incohérents*, 1884.
36. Albert Robida: "Réveillon des artistes incohérents," *La Caricature*, December 27, 1884.
37. "Jules Lévy, le père des Incohérents, dessiné incohérentement par Emile Cohl," *Le Courrier Français*, March 12, 1885.

38. Portrait of André Gill at Charenton, January 26, 1883.
39. André Gill: "Nouveaux Croquis" (three portraits of Emile Cohl), *La Nouvelle Lune*, March 4, 1883.
40. Charles Studio: Photograph of Cohl and Gill.
41. André Gill (or Emile Cohl): "En attendant," *La Nouvelle Lune*, December 15, 1883.
42. Albert Robida: "A l'exposition des oeuvres d'André Gill," *La Caricature*, December 29, 1883.
43. Uzès (A. Lemot): Portrait of Emile Cohl, *Le Courrier Français*, September 12, 1885.
44. "André Gill," *La Nouvelle Lune*, May 15–31, 1885.
45. Self-photograph, 1885.
46. Photograph of Edouard Norès, 1885.
47. Photograph of Jean Moréas.
48. Photograph of Emile Goudeau.
49. Photograph of Paul Verlaine.
- 50. Photograph of "Léon Cladel."
51. "Edouard Philippe," *La Nouvelle Lune*, February 12, 1881.
52. Adrien Marie: "Souvenirs du bal des Incohérents," *Le Monde Illustré*, April 17, 1886.
53. Carte d'exposant, Incoherent Exhibition, 1886.
54. Anon.: Portrait of Emile Cohl, *Catalogue de l'exposition*, 1886.
55. "L'Enterrement de l'Incohérence," *La Nouvelle Lune*, March 13, 1887.
56. Jules Chéret: Cover for *Catalogue illustré de l'exposition des arts incohérents*, 1889.
57. "Francisque Sarcey," *Catalogue illustré de l'exposition des arts incohérents*, 1889.
58. "Quelques Envois au Salon (Section de sculptures)," *Le Charivari*, April 26, 1886.
59. "La Poésie en 1886," *Le Charivari*, June 17, 1886.
60. Moloch (B. Colomb): "Au bal costumé," *La Chronique Parisienne*, January 23, 1887 (detail).
61. "Grande Revue des peintres passée par Gustave Boulanger," *La Caricature*, May 21, 1887.
62. "Félicien Champsaur," *Les Hommes d'Aujourd'hui* no. 327.
63. "Albert Robida," *Les Hommes d'Aujourd'hui*, March 27, 1897.
64. "De Toulouse-Lautrec," *Les Hommes d'Aujourd'hui* no. 460, 1898.
65. a) Uzès (A. Lemot): "Emile Cohl," *Les Hommes d'Aujourd'hui* no. 288, 1886.
b) Uzès (A. Lemot): Original drawing for above.
66. *Les Chambres Comiques*, October 26, 1886.
67. *Les Chambres Comiques*, November 16, 1886.
68. *Les Chambres Comiques*, January 11, 1887.
69. *Les Chambres Comiques*, October 12, 1886.
70. Illustration for Jules Lermina, *L'Auberge des adrets*, 1887.
71. Portraits of Jules Lermina and Cohl from *L'Auberge des adrets*, 1887.
72. Cover for Félix Galipaux, *Encore des Galipettes*, 1889.
73. Illustration for Coquelin cadet, *Pirouettes*, 1888.
74. "Les Deux Salons," from Jules Oudot, *Chansons fin de siècle*, 1891.
75. "Edouard Drumont réglant la question du Panama," *La Libre Parole Illustré*, September 25, 1897.
76. View from the studio on Lisle Street, London, 1895.
77. "Partage de la galette des rois . . . du cycle," *Le Vélo Illustré*, ca. 1900.
78. "Le Meilleur Moyen pour prendre beaucoup de poissons," *Le Grand Illustré*, 1906.

79. "Chez le coiffeur," *Polichinelle*, May 30, 1897.
80. "Les Avirons de Paris," *La Caricature*, August 13, 1887.
81. "Le Rêve de Félix," *La Libre Parole Illustrée*, August 28, 1897.
82. "An Absorbed Reader," *Pick Me Up*, October 3, 1891.
83. "Schampoing nouveau," *L'Illustré Soleil du Dimanche*, March 4, 1900.
84. "Le Bottier," *L'Illustré National*, January 8, 1899.
85. "Big Bait for Big Fish," *Judy*, March 18, 1896.
86. "Un Remarquable Ronfleur," *L'Illustré National*, March 19, 1899.
87. Strip containing self-portrait, *Judy*, January 15, 1896.
88. "The Dog-Hater and the Busby," *Pick Me Up*, November 28, 1891.
89. "An Improvised Mortar," *Pick Me Up*, January 23, 1892.
90. "L'Ombre," *L'Illustré National*, September 3, 1899.
91. "Wringing his Nose," *Pick Me Up*, June 6, 1891.
92. "Jeux de Clowns," *L'Illustré National*, January 22, 1899.
93. "La Perruque," *La Caricature*, May 21, 1897.
94. "Encore une invention américaine," *L'Illustré National*, December 25, 1898.
95. "Syncopation," *Judy*, February 5, 1896.
96. "Dentist," *Judy*, February 5, 1896.
97. "Penny in the Slot," *Judy*, January 15, 1896.
98. "Le Nègre blanc," *La Chronique Parisienne*, May 8, 1887.
99. "Le Voleur volé," *L'Illustré National*, April 9, 1899.
100. "Un Voleur malin," *L'Illustré National*, September 17, 1898.
101. "La Malheureuse Aventure du Beau Gontran," *L'Illustré National*, November 26, 1899.
102. "Une Mauvaise Farce," *Polichinelle*, January 23, 1898.
103. "Comment sans le faire exprès M. Bonneau arriva dans la lune . . .," *L'Illustré National*, January 22, 1899.
104. "Les Suites d'un souper," *La Chronique Parisienne*, January 30, 1887.
105. "No. 999," *Judy*, March 11, 1896.
106. *Judy*, February 26, 1896.
107. "Un Beau Coup de ligne," *La Caricature*, June 16, 1888.
108. "Never Satisfied," *Judy*, January 22, 1896.
109. "Une Douche soignée," *L'Illustré National*, December 17, 1899.
110. "Musique et littérature," *L'Illustré National*, February 19, 1899.
111. "Comment on fait les jésuites," *La Nouvelle Lune*, May 2, 1880.
112. "Distant Lens Enchantment to the View," *Judy*, February 12, 1896.
113. *Judy*, February 29, 1896.
114. "Photographie d'après nature d'un représentant du peuple," *Les Chambres Comiques*, November 30, 1886.
115. "The Tale of a Shirt," *Judy*, January 22, 1896.
116. "Conseils aux cyclistes qui commencent," *Le Journal pour Tous*, May 29, 1895.
117. "Trop de zèle," page from *L'Illustré National*, February 5, 1899.
118. Scenes from *Mademoiselle Fifi*, *L'Illustré Théâtral*, 1896.
119. Four "Cartophilatélie" postcards, Lemaire, 1905.
120. "Un Conseil sérieux en riant," *La Nouvelle Lune*, August 27, 1882.
121. Maze, *Nos Loisirs*, October 15, 1906.
122. Sketches for shadow puppets, ca. 1900.
123. "Enveloppe mystérieuse," ca. 1905.

124. "ABCD à la ficelle," 1907.
125. "Le Jeu des allumettes bougie," *L'Illustré National*, March 18, 1900.
126. "Amusement for the Winter Evenings," *Judy*, January 29, 1896.
127. "Les Têtes de pipe," advertisement in *Nos Loisirs*, 1908.
128. Léonce Burret: "Humoristes," *Le Rire*, January 11, 1908.
129. "The Thin Ceiling; or, —A Lodging-House Mishap," *Pick Me Up*, June 20, 1891.
130. "Le Matelas à pattes," *La Caricature*, March 24, 1888.
131. Georges Hatot: *Le Matelas de la mariée*, Pathé, 1906.
132. "Les Facteurs en automobile," *Polichinelle*, January 6, 1901.
133. Cover of *L'Illustration*, March 28, 1908.
134. Moloch (B. Colomb): "Le Mouton enragé," *La Chronique Parisienne*, July 27, 1883.
135. Les Grands Magasins Dufayel, ca. 1905.
136. Omnia-Pathé, 1914.
137. Hippodrome, after it became the Gaumont-Palace, 1911.
138. Etienne Arnaud (?): *Police magnétique*, Gaumont, August 1908.
139. Etienne Arnaud (?): *Le Ski*, Gaumont, March 1908.
140. *Porcelaines tendres* (cat. 31), 1909.
141. *Moderne Ecole* (cat. 26), 1909.
142. Emile Reynaud: "Théâtre optique," *La Nature*, July 23, 1892.
143. "Dessins animés," *Larousse Mensuel*, 1925.
144. "Dessins animés," *Larousse Mensuel*, 1925.
145. "Dessins animés," *Larousse Mensuel*, 1925.
146. "Dessins animés," *Larousse Mensuel*, 1925.
147. Flip book, "Premier cigar," ca. 1909.
148. J. Stuart Blackton, ca. 1908.
149. Hippodrome program, ca. 1907.
150. J. Stuart Blackton: *Work Made Easy*, 1907.
151. J. Stuart Blackton: *A Midwinter Night's Dream*, 1906.
152. Segundo de Chomón and Gaston Velle (?): *Bob's Electric Theater*, Pathé.
153. Walter R. Booth: *The Sorcerer's Scissors*, Urban, 1907.
154. Cohl and assistant working on *La Bataille d'Austerlitz*, Gaumont studios, May 1909.
155. *La Bataille d'Austerlitz* (cat. 30), 1909.
156. *Monsieur Clown chez les lilliputiens* (cat. 28), 1909.
157. "La Nouvelle Marguerite," *La Nouvelle Lune*, March 19, 1882.
158. Sets for *Le Tout Petit Faust* (cat. 60), 1910.
159. a) Cohl working on *Le Tout Petit Faust*, April 1910.
b) Cohl with puppets, ca. 1924.
160. *En route* (cat. 50), 1910.
161. Cutouts for *Le Peintre néo-impressionniste*.
162. *Le Peintre néo-impressionniste* (cat. 58), 1910.
163. *Les Locataires d'à côté* (cat. 24), 1909.
164. Cohl at animation stand, ca. 1909.
165. Drawings for shutter-tripping mechanism, with translucent overlay.
166. Chart showing length, exposures, projection time, and number of revolutions required for various animated sequences.
167. *Le Retapeur de cervelles* (cat. 80), 1911.
168. *Le Cheveu délateur* (cat. 83), 1911.
169. *Les Fantaisies d'Agénor Maltracé* (cat. 97), 1911.

170. *Les Bestioles artistes* (cat. 84), 1911.
171. *Le Musée des grotesques* (cat. 82), 1911.
172. *La Revanche des esprits* (cat. 98), 1911.
173. Cohl in Fort Lee, 1913.
174. Trick photograph, New York, 1913.
175. Cohl with Suzanne and André in Fort Lee, 1912.
176. George McManus: French version of "The Newlyweds" in *Nos Loisirs*, April 26, 1908.
177. George McManus: Self-portrait with "The Newlyweds," 1908.
178. Stills from "The Newlyweds," 1913.
179. *He Loves to Be Amused* (cat. 160), 1913.
180. *He Doesn't Care to Be Photographed* (cat. 164), 1914.
181. *He Poses for His Portrait* (cat. 153), 1913.
182. *A Vegetarian's Dream* (cat. 159), 1913.
183. Theodore Huff and Mark Borgatta: *Ghost Town: The Story of Fort Lee*, ca. 1935 (frame enlargement).
184. Cohl and Eclair staff, Epinay, August 4, 1914.
185. Winsor McCay: *Little Nemo*, Vitagraph, 1911.
186. Raoul Barré: "Quatre-vingt-treize," *Le Sifflet*, March 3, 1898.
187. Raoul Barré: "The Kelly Kid's Bathing Adventure," in *Cartoons on the Beach*, 1915.
188. Raoul Barré: "A Sand Microbe Flirtation," in *Cartoons on the Beach*, 1915.
189. Eclair identification card.
190. Gaumont publicity materials for "Les Dessins animés de Raoul Barré," 1916.
191. Pierre de Léka: *Blagford et le serpent boa*, 1916.
192. Benjamin Rabier and "Flambeau."
193. Benjamin Rabier: "Une Portée musicale," *Sans-Gêne*, 1904.
194. René Navarre, 1917.
195. Benjamin Rabier: Advertisement for the "Flambeau" series.
196. Benjamin Rabier at work on a Pathé film using his homemade animation stand, ca. 1920.
197. Benjamin Rabier: Drawings and sketches for *Les Fiançailles de Flambeau*.
198. *L'Avenir dévoilé par les lignes des pieds* (cat. 170), 1917.
199. *Filochard se distingue* (*Pieds Nickelés* no. 4; cat. 221), 1918.
200. Unidentified films in the "Pieds Nickelés" series.
201. Cohl as U.S. Army volunteer, 1918.
202. Advertisement for Chaplin series animated by Otto Messmer, 1916.
203. Advertisement for *Pages d'histoire*.
204. Project for *La Circulation du sang chez l'homme*, ca. 1921.
205. O'Galop (Marius Rossillon): "Le Distributeur automatique fin de siècle et la pièce fausse," *La Caricature* no. 647, 1892.
206. O'Galop (Marius Rossillon): *Le Circuit de l'alcool*, 1912.
207. Josbert Lormard, caricature of Lortac (Robert Collard).
208. Lortac Studio: *La Tuberculose menace tout le monde*, ca. 1912.
209. Albert Mourlan (with assistant), ca. 1921.
210. Cohl with Lo Duca and Pierre Bourgeon (center) at DAE studio, 1935.
211. Cohl with his grandchildren, Suzanne and Pierre, ca. 1936.
212. a) Cohl drawing a stick figure, ca. 1937.
b) Publicity drawing for *La Cinématographie Française*, September 26, 1936.
213. Cohl (right) visiting Georges Méliès at Orly, 1937.

214. Cohl hospitalized at Villejuif, 1937.
215. Amerigo Montagutelli: Model for a Cohl-Méliès monument, 1938.
216. Square Emile-Cohl, 12th arrondissement, Paris.
217. Self-portrait, *Le Chat Noir*, May 4, 1895.
218. "On Fire," *Pick Me Up*, May 23, 1891.
219. Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen: "Puisqu'ils ne veulent pas se laisser manger, 'suicidons-les!'" *Le Chat Noir*, June 28, 1884.
220. Kober, "Une Petite Femme passe dans la rue," *Le Rire*, September 19, 1908.
221. "Up in a Balloon; or, —A Miraculous Voyage," *Pick Me Up*, August 15, 1891.
222. Albert Robida: "Nana-Revue," *La Caricature*, January 3, 1880.
223. Caran d'Ache: "Une Poule survint," *La Vie Militaire*, April 26, 1884.
224. Caran d'Ache: "Aux Prises avec trois jeunes anarchistes," *La Caricature*, January 3, 1885.
225. Caran D'Ache: "Les Hussards allemands," *La Caricature*, January 10, 1885.
226. Moloch (B. Colomb): "Courses de propriétaires," *La Chronique Parisienne*, April 26, 1885.
227. O'Galop (Marius Rossillon): "Voilà comme nous tirons . . . à Toulouse!!" *La Caricature* no. 647, 1892.
228. Etienne-Jules Marey: "L'Escrime français," *Paris-Photographe*, 1891.
229. "A Phenomenal Weight," *Pick Me Up*, August 22, 1891.
230. Draner (Jules Renard): "Les Panoramas automatiques," *Le Charivari*, January 13, 1899.
231. Louis Lumière: *Le Déjeuner de Bébé*, 1895, from the Georges Colomb (Christophe) article cited.
232. Henriot (Henri Maigrot): *L'Illustration*, February 22, 1896.
233. Anon.: "Le Reportage au cinéματο," *La Caricature*, July 31, 1897.
234. Henri Somm: "Cinématographomanie," *Le Rire*, February 22, 1902.
235. Pathé: *Le Bain des dames de la cour*, ca. 1906.
236. Henri Avelot: "La Lanterne magique améliorée ou cinématographe," *Le Rire*, July 28, 1906.
237. Louis Lumière: *Une Charge de cuirassiers*, 1896.
238. Georges Hatot: *Coucher de la mariée*, Pathé, ca. 1906.
239. Jean Frinot: "Les Merveilles du cinématographe," *La Caricature*, January 12, 1901.
240. Destez: "Cinématographe," *Le Sourire*, February 8, 1908.
241. S. d'Alba: "Le Cinématographe," *Polichinelle*, January 13, 1907.
242. W. Tilly: "Au Palais de Glace," *Le Courrier Français*, February 6, 1898.
243. Henri Avelot: "Les Grands Boulevards," *Le Rire*, June 29, 1901.
244. Jacques Villon: "Au Cabaret du Néant," *Le Courrier Français*, October 10, 1897.
245. Noël Dorville: "Dans les fumeurs," *La Caricature*, January 9, 1897.
246. Jean Frinot: "Un Mariage manqué," *La Caricature*, September 1, 1900.
247. Maurice Radiguet: "Prix au piège," *La Caricature*, September 17, 1898.
248. O'Galop (Marius Rossillon): "En Découverte," *L'Illustré National*, August 6, 1899.
249. Henri Avelot: "Croquis des trains et des gares," *Le Rire*, January 26, 1901.
250. Markous (Louis Marcoussis), *Le Rire*, June 27, 1908.
251. Gino: "Termes nautiques," *La Caricature*, January 18, 1890.
252. M. Mauricio: "La Sonnerie révélatrice," *La Caricature*, October 21, 1892.
253. Georges Méliès: *Les Voisins irascibles*.
254. A. Sorel: "Fait Divers," *La Caricature*, March 12, 1887.
255. Christophe (Georges Colomb): "Un Arroseur public," *Le Petit Français Illustré*, August 3, 1889.

256. Louis Lumière: *L'Arroseur arrosé*, 1895.
257. Nicholson: "Après le grand prix," *L'Eclipse*, June 25, 1896.
258. *L'Agent a le bras long*, Gaumont, 1909.
259. *Police magnétique*, Gaumont, 1908.
260. Deslaw, "La Musique adoucit les moeurs," *L'Illustré National*, July 31, 1898.
261. "Aux Arts incohérents," *La Nouvelle Lune*, November 1, 1884.
262. Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen: "Le Palais incohérent," illustration for Charles Joliet, *Le Roman incohérent*, 1887.
263. *Fantasmagorie* (cat. 1), 1908.
264. Drawing after *Le Cauchemar du fantoche*.
265. "Abus des métaphores," *Catalogue illustré de l'exposition des arts incohérents*, 1886.
266. *Songe du garçon de café* (cat. 53), 1910.
267. *Clair de lune espagnol* (cat. 23), 1909.
268. "Une Aventure incroyable," *L'Illustré National*, May 7, 1899.
269. D'Yvrony, "Fantaisie lunaire," *La Chronique Parisienne*, December 2, 1886.
270. Jules Chéret: Cover for *Catalogue illustré de l'exposition des arts incohérents*, 1886.
271. Mastheads for *La Nouvelle Lune*.
272. "Page de dessins trouvée dans la case d'un député," *Les Chambres Comiques*, January 4, 1887.
273. "Les Allumettes animées," unidentified clipping, ca. 1899.
274. Bainsin: "Fantaisie japonaise," *La Chronique Parisienne*, November 1, 1885.
275. *He Poses for His Portrait* (cat. 153), 1913.
276. "Fantoche" puppets, *Le Pierrot*, 1903.
277. *Le Théâtre des fantoches parisiens*, Pathé, ca. 1906.
278. Louis Feuillade and Cohl: *Les Chefs-d'oeuvres de Bébé* (cat. 75), 1910, with René Abelard.
279. Cul-de-lampe figures, *Tout-Paris*, 1880.
280. "Tata" (Emile Cohl?): "Explication difficile," *Polichinelle*, May 30, 1897.
281. J.-J. Grandville: from *Cent Proverbs*, 1845.
282. Unidentified film in the "Pieds Nickelés" series.
283. "La Rédaction du Tam-Tam," *La Nouvelle Lune*, May 29, 1881 (detail).
284. Self-portrait, *Les Chambres Comiques*, October 12, 1886.
285. Untitled drawing, *Les Chambres Comiques*, January 4, 1887.
286. "Paris sans eau," *La Nouvelle Lune*, July 31, 1881.
287. "Les Gaietés de l'actualité," *L'Illustré National*, December 25, 1898.
288. *L'Hôtel du silence* (cat. S-9), 1908.
289. "Nos Grandes Inventions: Le Lit réveil-matin," *L'Illustré National*, February 11, 1900.
290. Albert Robida: "La Bonne à tout faire," *Le Vingtième Siècle; la vie électrique*, 1892.
291. "A Diagnosis; or, Looking for a Bacillus," *Judy*, March 11, 1896.
292. *Les Joyeux Microbes* (cat. 22), 1909.
293. Draner (Jules Renard): "L'Age du microbe," *Le Charivari*, November 15, 1883.
294. Albert Robida: "Découverte du bacille de la santé," *Le Vingtième Siècle; la vie électrique*, 1892.
295. Henri Somm: "Chez le docteur Doyen," *Le Rire*, March 25, 1905.
296. *Rien n'est impossible à l'homme* (cat. 69), 1910.
297. *Le Peintre néo-impressionniste* (cat. 58), 1910.
298. Paul Bilhaud: "L'Art appliquée à l'industrie," 1884 Incoherents Exhibition.
299. "Pourquoi M. Duputois n'aime pas les peintres," *La Chronique Parisienne*, November 14 1886.
300. "Une Epreuve concluante," *L'Illustré National*, November 14, 1899.

301. "L'Assemblée était suspendu à ses lèvres, il avait l'oreille de la Chambre," 1884 Incoherents Exhibition.
302. "Un général hors cadre," 1886 Incoherents Exhibition.
303. Paul Le Bouillant: "Vitrail opaque pour décoration de chambre d'aveugle," 1884 Incoherents Exhibition.
304. Draner (Jules Renard): "Arts incohérents," *Le Charivari*, October 30, 1884.
305. "Essais d'impressionnisme," *Le Courrier Français*, August 9, 1885.
306. "Fantaisies," *Le Courrier Français*, September 13, 1885.
307. *Le Retapeur de cervelles* (cat. 80), 1911.
308. *Les Joyeux Microbes*. Enlargement of 35mm strip showing frames of a transformation sequence.
309. *Génération spontanée* (cat. 36), 1909.
310. "Portrait garanti ressemblant," 1884 Incoherents Exhibition.
311. Eugène (?) Habert: "Effets de l'Incohérence," 1886 Incoherents Exhibition.
312. *Le Placier est tenace* (cat. 65), 1910.
313. *He Poses for His Portrait* (cat. 153), 1913.
314. *Le Binettoscope* (cat. 47), 1910.
315. *Les Beaux-Arts mystérieux* (cat. 63), 1910.
316. *Le Binettoscope* (cat. 47), 1910.
317. Max and Dave Fleischer: *The Awful Fly* ("Out of the Inkwell" series), ca. 1920.
318. Jean Vigo and Boris Kaufman: *Zéro de conduite*, 1932.
319. Medallion presented to Cohl by the Société d'encouragement pour l'industrie nationale, 1936.
320. Page from Gaumont's catalogue, "Nouveautés Cinématographiques."
321. Emile Cohl, ca. 1895.

CHARTS AND DIAGRAMS

Chart 1. Advertised Cinema Exhibitions in Paris, 1906–1908.	102
Chart 2. Number of New Releases in Paris, Week of August 15, 1908.	108
Diagram 1. Showing How Matte Effects Were Made in <i>Clair de lune espagnol</i> , Using Two Exposures.	149

PHOTOGRAPHIC SOURCES

PERMISSION to reprint photographs is gratefully acknowledged to:

The Courtet-Cohl family (figs. 53, 65b, 76, 77, 78, 118, 119, 122, 123, 124, 127, 147, 154, 155, 158, 159, 165, 166, 173, 174, 175, 184, 197, 201, 202, 210, 211, 212a, 215, 278);

La Gazette des Beaux-Arts (1, 32);

Raymond Maillet (196, 207, 209, 214);

The British Museum (82, 85, 87, 88, 89, 91, 95, 96, 97, 105, 106, 108, 112, 113, 115, 126, 129, 148, 221, 229);

The British Film Institute, National Film Archive (138, 153, 160, 259);

Cinémathèque Gaumont-Actualités (140, 141, 156, 162, 163, 258, 266, 288, 292, 309, 312, 314, 315, 316);

Library of Congress (267);

George Eastman House (151, 263);

Cinémathèque Française (167, 307, 308);

Centre Culturel Américain (317);

Centre National de la Cinématographie, Service des Archives du Film (168, 169, 170, 171, 189, 199, 200, 208, 282);

New York Public Library (177, 178, 179, 180, 182);

The Museum of Modern Art (181, 275, 313);

Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research (152, 183, 185, 187, 188, 206, 237, 256, 318);

Bibliothèque Nationale (all remaining photos).

P R E F A C E A N D A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

ON SATURDAY mornings when our children turn on the television to watch the networks' two or three hours of cartoons, or when they (or we) pick up the comic section in the next day's paper, it is not likely to occur to us that these entertainments have a history. Since the chronological development of cartoons and comics and the causes and ramifications of that development have seldom been the subject of academic discourse—if we bother to think about it at all—it is easy to jump to the conclusion that these trifling, even juvenile, distractions and their histories are not worth studying. Yet, like all institutions, these media are the products (and not necessarily the end products) of many years of constant industrial and social forces. Visual humor is deeply embedded in the thicket of chronological, social, textual, artistic, psychological, ideological and technological tangles that make up the unexplored underbrush of modern culture.

This study seeks to trace one somewhat gnarled strand of this cultural network, typified in the life and work of the French artist Emile Cohl, who lived from 1857 to 1938. He was an innovative contributor to one institution—popular graphic humor—at a critical moment in its history when it changed from traditional caricature to narrativized visual exposition. He was also a progenitor of another institution—the animated film.

In some ways this book is a conventional biography; it attempts to assimilate all the retrievable pertinent facts about the artist's life into a chronicle and to set them within the context of his times. With Emile Cohl we are more fortunate than the academic protagonist of Robertson Davies's novel *Leaven of Malice*, who is faced with writing the biography of the obscure playwright Charles Heavysege. "I'll make it appear that little Heavysege hopped right into the middle of a very interesting time, which is a lie, but absolutely vital to any scholarly biography."¹ Not only was Cohl born into Paris, "the capital of the nineteenth century," but he was an active participant in its popular culture and was in turn an influence on his milieu. His life was amazingly varied, tinged with politics, art, invention, romance, duels, mirth, and tragedy—the stuff that biographers and authors of made-for-TV-movie scripts yearn for. Davies's would-be biographer continues, "What happened between 1816 and 1853, when Heavysege came to Canada, I don't know, but I'll fake up something." Again, we are lucky. Unlike Davies's fictional biographer, we do not have to fake up a record. Finding our way is facilitated by Cohl's own notes and clipping files, corroborated by the paper trail made possible by the rise of trade journalism in the early twentieth century and the guidance provided by Cohl's extant films. These provide the armature for his life story. Still there are gaps, but the portrait that emerges is that of a complicated, gentle but stubborn individualist pursuing whatever fanciful turn his fertile imagination took.

I have also tried to avoid the traditional role of the biographer who defends the subject as a Great Man; Cohl's works, though sometimes masterful contributions to film history, are not necessarily Masterpieces. Rather than insist on the artist's singularity, I have chosen to monitor more closely than usual the context of his various productions, pointing out how he was in sync with other artists and filmmakers of his time. Thus speculations concerning Cohl's social and intellectual milieu are augmented by analyses of popular graphics drawn by others who may or may not have influenced him, but whose works are part of his background, and by a discussion of the early film industry in France and the United States.

Since Cohl was prolific in popular graphic humor and cinema, the reader necessarily will learn about both domains as they were during the period between the mid-1880s and World War I. Therefore this can be regarded, using Robert C. Allen's useful phrase, as a study in media interaction, with Emile Cohl as the link between media.

It was Cohl's lot in life (shared by many at the turn of the twentieth century) to be directly affected by the dynamic technological changes that transformed virtually every Western urban environment at the time. Mass culture, then as now, was especially sensitive to the influence of new communications technologies. First lithographic, then photoengraved printing processes increased the manufacturing capacity for producing drawings. Rail lines and highways, and improved vehicles to ply them, made possible distribution on a national—even international—scale. New cameras, projectors, and emulsions made moving pictures possible, while receptive mass audiences for new media made them economically rewarding for entrepreneurs (though not necessarily for their workers). Cohl was deeply committed to the technologies of printing and cinema and attempted to adapt his own work habits and interests to them in a way that would satisfy his *bricoleur* instincts (his insatiable drive to tinker) while gaining a livelihood. He was one of the heretofore unsung pioneers of the comic strip. And he became the father of the animated cartoon, an epithet conferred upon him late in life by his appreciative professional colleagues, which he quickly appended to his developing biographical legend.

While Emile Cohl was exploring and contributing to these new technologies, to some extent he was also becoming their victim. The comic strip, which would eventually make the old style of caricature commercially obsolete, would become dominant in the United States rather than France. Films would quickly become studio-made mass-produced commodities, subordinating the role of the individual creator. The time of the lone genius gave way to the era of the assembly-line system.

Writing just after the animator's death in 1938, Jean Renoir remarked, "At first the Mélièses, the Cohls, then the Max Linders, the Rigadins, and the Joë Hammans occupied the screens of the whole world, from Siberia to Colorado, by way of Andalusia. Since then, dishonest industrialists have sold out the French cinema—piecemeal, wholesale and retail—to their rich foreign competitors."² Renoir's nostalgic looking

back to a golden age of prewar cinema was jaundiced by his pessimistic view of a national industry in disarray in the late 1930s, as he was about to embark on *Rules of the Game*. But in fact the industry of Cohl's epoch was every bit as insecure as later, although the specific threats were different. Competition was ruthless among domestic producers attempting to regulate the market to serve their own interests while resisting the invasion of foreign imports. The business in Cohl's time was also undergoing a change in artistic and economic conception (the two always being related) on the part of producers and audiences—a new orientation that was as cataclysmic as the coming of sound would be around 1930, or the failure of the great French studios in the late thirties.

Although it is commonplace to conceive of everything before 1915 as “early” or “primitive” cinema, without national distinction, the various film industries developed distinctive forms of production and exhibition in each country. Unlike the earliest dominant American viewing apparatus, Edison's Kinetoscope, which linked film conceptually to the peep show and its aim of attracting droves of individual spectators, French cinema from the start was an outgrowth of a much stronger tradition of audience-oriented projected spectacle. Furthermore, unlike the heterogeneous American market, French cinema was always aimed at a middle-class audience. The “lower class” depiction of early French cinema was generally a distortion, first by uplifters, then later by populist and socialist commentators. But French producers made their fortunes exploiting the crowds of families that flocked to the traveling fairs and carnivals sponsored by provincial church parishes and by filling the leisure hours of urban bourgeois families. Unlike the United States, France experienced no great waves of immigrants at the turn of the century (at least none that film producers wished to entertain), and the domestic audience for film throughout Cohl's period was much more homogeneous than in America.

Cohl's films illustrate the industry's desire to annex as much of this expanding middle-class market as possible. His producers' encouragement, or at least tolerance, of Cohl's experiments in animation reflects a desire to sustain the interest of an implied audience of literate bourgeois spectators. The market was not just theatergoers but also family consumers of mass-circulation humor magazines. From the producers' viewpoint, the value of Cohl's roots in caricature was obvious; the intertextuality of popular graphic humor and film was not fortuitous but rather the result of calculated experimentation. In the end, however, Cohl's work inevitably will be seen as unique, not fitting comfortably into any preexisting genre or within one model of reception such as “primitive” or “institutional.” While this does give Cohl considerable authorial status for us retrospective historians, for him at the time, practically speaking, his position of marginality in the industry made it difficult to maintain employment. And eventually it led to his involuntary withdrawal from animation practice.

Chapters One and Two recount the particular biographical details of Cohl's early life

and formative years as a caricaturist when he worked with André Gill and then developed his own idiosyncratic style. The chief intellectual influences on his art as he grew into a kind of boulevard-culture jack-of-all-trades are discussed. Chapters Three, Four, and Five reconstruct Cohl's first film work, his position within a major French growth industry, and the influence of his work on the new art of the animated film.

In Chapter Six we see how Cohl attempted to create and bolster his own legend as his career ended and his life approached its tragic finale. His promotional efforts indirectly provided some of the earliest cogent writing on the techniques and generic definitions of animation. Chapters Seven and Eight are more theoretically oriented speculations on the aesthetic roots of Cohl's art and its intertextual fabric.

ONE wonders how scholars in Emile Cohl's day, armed only with a Waterman pen and a ream of foolscap, published anything at all. My work of tracing Cohl's life and career was aided by numerous highly technological aids yet still took a long time to complete. It would never have reached this state were it not for the experts and the artist's surviving relatives who assisted me. Most of the gathering of data was done in Paris with the warmth, generosity, and cooperation of Emile Cohl's daughter-in-law, Mme. André Courtet-Cohl, and his grandchildren, Pierre and Suzanne Courtet-Cohl. They gave me access to Cohl's papers and will find many of their family mementos reproduced in my illustrations. Michel Legros, Cohl's great-grandson, also provided me with valuable information.

At Gaumont, Messrs. Loubeau and Petiot allowed me to look through the old records of their company and gave me permission to use the corporate archive in Joinville-le-Pont, La Cinémathèque Gaumont-Actualités. At that time Mlle. Mathieu reigned as directrice, ably accompanied by her little white poodle. She allowed me to examine all the films that remain that were made by Cohl for Gaumont. I viewed these in the form of duplicate camera negatives that ran on a specially converted Steenbeck table equipped with a video system for reversing the polarity of the image, changing negative to positive. Later Laure Forestier of Gaumont struck new positives from these when they generously assisted me in the various retrospectives of Cohl's work in which I have participated. The quality of these new 35mm prints is astonishing. They capture the brilliance and clarity of Cohl's films as they appeared to audiences before World War I.

I owe a special and heartfelt debt to Jacques Deslandes, historian of the French cinema, who befriended me, loaned me rare original documents from his extensive collection, and pored over my catalogue in its earliest form. Frantz and Nicole Schmitt screened many films for me at the Archives du Film in Bois d'Arcy and provided me with important documentation. Raymond Maillet, director of the Association Française du Cinéma d'Animation gave me free access to his files.

My research began at the Cinémathèque Française during a low ebb in that institution's history. While I was attempting to work there, I resented Henri Langlois's apparent lack of interest and assistance. But since his death, and the publication of biographies of Langlois by Richard Roud and by Georges Patrick Langlois and Glenn Myrent, I have grown to appreciate Langlois's difficulties at the time I met him.

I will always be grateful to Lotte Eisner, who at last provided my "open sesame" to the Cinémathèque's treasures, and to Marie Epstein. Retrospectively I am also glad to have had the opportunity for many interesting discussions with Mary Meerson.

I benefited from the encouragement of Jean Adhémar (Bibliothèque Nationale), Mme. Charron (Cinémathèque Pathé-Journal), Charles Ford, A. Haigron (Société d'encouragement pour l'industrie nationale), M. d'Aubarède (Concours Lépine), the librarians of the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal and the Bibliothèque de l'IDNEC.

Geneviève Acker, director of the Commission Franco-Américaine, my Fulbright-Hays sponsor in France, facilitated my research and my life in many ways. Maurice Delavier contributed, during our long and pleasant conversations, more toward my education than any landlord is required to do.

Others who helped as much as they could include Jeremy Boulton, Jacques Ledoux, Jan de Vaal, Torsten Jungstedt, and Colette Borde.

For their guidance, sharing of information, loans of prints, and/or general enthusiasm, I am grateful to Anne Carré, Jon Gartenberg, Charles Silver, Ron Magliozzi, Ted Perry, Paul Spehr, Patrick Sheehan, Patrick Loughney, Barbara Humphrys, Emily Seeger, Anthony Slide, Harvey Deneroff, Mike Barrier, Louise Beaudet, David Shepard, David R. Smith, Marshall Deutelbaum, and Jan-Christopher Horak.

John Canemaker, historian and animator, has been an intelligent and sympathetic critic of my work since its inception. I am lucky to have his expertise available.

Eileen Bowser, of the Museum of Modern Art, frequently offered her advice and generously loaned prints to me. I am grateful for her constant encouragement and kindness.

Kristin Thompson, Richard Abel, Alan Williams, Robert Herbert, and Jean Gaudon carefully read the manuscript and made many suggestions—filmographic, bibliographic, stylistic, and linguistic—which I have incorporated as fully as possible. My dissertation adviser, Anne Hanson, helped to transform my data into prose. I appreciate the effort and advice expended on my behalf by Standish Lawder and David Cast. Dudley Andrew has always inspired me as a professor and as a friend.

Linda Henzl contributed many services and her considerable erudition in Amcan literature. Peter Schofer assisted with poetry translations. Robert Goldstein offered valuable advice. Barbara Adams and Nancy Walchli stood by me like guardian angels during the years this was in the works. Doug Riblet and Mary Carbine assisted in preparing the manuscript.

I am very grateful to the Swann Foundation for Caricature and Cartoon, Henry J. Goldschmidt, president, for continuing support of this project and for my first book on animation.

The dedication of this book to Marilyn Crafton is not just a sentimental gesture but a sign of her real contribution during the decade of support, research and writing that the book has entailed.

*Madison, Wisconsin
April 26, 1988*

The “Caricaturiste”

Va, frère, va, camarade,
Fais le diable, bats l'estrade
Dans ton rêve et sur Paris,
Et par le monde, et sois l'âme
Vile, haute, noble, infâme
De nos innocents esprits!

Grandis, car c'est la coutume,
Cube ta riche amertume,
Exagère ta gaieté
Caricature, auréole,
La grimace et le symbole
De notre simplicité

*Paul Verlaine, from
“Pierrot Gamin,” ca.1886*

A Caricaturist's Life

EMILE COHL claimed to be the oldest Parisian. That impulse by itself indicates something about the person, his perception of his place in a particular culture, and his desire to let others know of it. To substantiate his claim he produced a meticulously researched genealogy showing that, since 1292, his family had been living in the vicinity of what eventually became the Bourse neighborhood.¹ There were some lacunae in the older branches of the family, but the post-revolutionary descendants were easily traced as far back as his paternal grandfather, Jean Eustache François Courtet (1795–1875), and his grandmother, Rosalie Elisabeth Clotilde Aubert (1798–1830). Their son, Elie Courtet, was born in 1821 and married Emilie Laure Coulon in 1853. Four years later their only child was born on January 4, 1857, and was christened Emile Eugène Jean Louis Courtet. Later he called himself Emile Cohl, and he would grow up to be one of the best-known Parisian caricaturists of his day, one of the pioneers of the comic strip, and, even later in life, the creator of the animated cartoon film. At the time of his birth, the family lived at 20, rue Cadet in the ninth arrondissement (not far from the present site of the Folies-Bergères).

Emile Courtet's birthplace would have telegraphed essential information to his fellow Parisians in the nineteenth century. As inhabitants of the Faubourg Montmartre, his family would have been categorized as bourgeois with upwardly mobile aspirations. Elie Courtet, a stereotypical *faubourien*, was a salesman representing his great-uncle Alexandre Aubert's rubber-manufacturing plant in Grenelle. Mme. Courtet supplemented the family income as a linen seamstress. Their fortunes were linked, as were those of many others in the Industrial Revolution, to the fortunes of the plant and the fluctuating economy in general. Courtet's rising and falling resources necessitated many moves, first to rue Lamartine, then back to rue Cadet in 1859.²

As a baby, Emile was frail and overprotected by his mother. He suffered occasional convulsions and carried a permanent scar from an injury he received during one of them. Later in life, when he set down notes for an autobiography, his earliest memories were vivid images: the swallows departing in autumn, a horse pawing in the courtyard, soldiers marching down boulevard Poissonnière. He recalled attacking his mother's sewing table with a toy saw and could remember his older cousin dressed up as Pierrot. Once someone gave him some paints.

I see myself sitting in a chair before a table, having before me a box of colors and a big glass of water and smearing drawings (?). I must have been desperate because I see vague forms agitating all around me.

He was first sent to school about 1861. There a magician with shiny copper instruments fascinated him on the first day, but the party ended and “I began my battle with the alphabet.” At year’s end there was a class play:

It was in a little theater inside the elementary school in the rue de la Tour d’Auvergne. We were all over the stage and in the bleachers. The set represented a forest, or at least some foliage. At one point I started to cry. Everyone came at me: “What’s the matter?” I peed, and continued to cry. There was wild laughter everywhere. It was the only time I ever provoked laughter in a theater. . . . Let’s go on.

There were few recollections of his father, except for his Garde Nationale uniform, rifle, and bright buttons. But he had warm memories of his mother. Unfortunately she had never recovered from a fall during her pregnancy, and her condition grew worse. His worried father sent Emile to stay with his maternal grandmother Coulon in Montreuil-sous-Bois, then still a village outside Paris. He had become excessively shy and was teased at school. Once he was punished for falling into the public drinking fountain and again for pinching brussels sprouts belonging to the village constable.

Mme. Courtet died in 1863. Emile’s father entrusted the six-year-old to the Parrotte family, tie manufacturers in Les Lilas (Romainville). Their next-door neighbor in this area, near what is now the nineteenth arrondissement, was Paul-Charles de Kock (1794–1871), the author of spicy romantic novels whom the neighbors regarded as a cranky old man, but who would reward Emile’s stories of the day at school with two sous and laugh when addressed as “Monsieur Poil de Coq” (Mr. Rooster-Hair). Once he intervened on behalf of the young pupil when he was unjustly punished by a teacher “with a quick hand.” De Kock was frequently the butt of caricaturists—Nadar was the most famous—and one naturally wonders whether the youthful Emile was exposed to any of these drawings.

In 1864 Courtet enrolled his son at the Ecole professionnelle de Pantin, a boarding school more commonly called the Institut Vaudron after its director. At first he was placed in the lower division because of his inability to perform during the initial examination, but soon it was realized that he was simply too timid and frightened, and by the third day he had moved up to the first division. Two days later there was another triumph when it was time for drawing lessons:

They set before me a model taken from the notebooks of Monzocq (all the schoolchildren of my day will recognize it). It was a picture of a thatched roof and I sketched it in five secs flat, before the master returned. “He draws! Go get M. Vaudron.” He arrived a few minutes later. “What, what, he knows how to draw?” You could say that

I was a phenomenon. “Yes, and he can read and count. . . .” “And can he do fractions?” That doused it. “No, Monsieur, not yet.” And I put my head down on my desk.

Despite his ignorance of fractions, he was promoted, and the teacher, Vaudron’s alcoholic son, let him draw in class as much as he wished.

Emile Courtet’s early education at père Vaudron’s, which apparently left him to his own devices, helped to channel his compulsive doodling into natural drawing talent. He had even more time to practice in 1865 when he was confined to his father’s apartment (now on rue d’Enghien) with a serious cold. Drawing was his only distraction until the housekeeper gave him all the beautiful stamps from the letters of her relatives in Martinique. Little did she know that she was kindling a stamp-collecting passion that would burn all his life. His father encouraged this new interest by contributing stamps from the daily business mail and taking him to visit Arthur Maury’s stamp shop, one of the largest, in the heart of Paris’s stamp-trading district, across from the Théâtre Français.³

Cured and returned to school in Pantin, he was allowed to draw caricatures on the walls, a large map of France, and some pictures of locomotives. He easily became first in school in drawing and in 1869 earned the duty of teaching the “dolors of the alphabet” to younger children.

In 1870, still at Vaudron’s, there were two candidates for the honor of singing the *Marseillaise* at the August awards ceremony. Emile won. (The loser, Lédart, later became the director of the Théâtre de Montmartre.) However, the declaration of war against Prussia dispersed the class, and the ceremony never took place. This time M. Courtet sent his son to live with the family of a cousin who owned a greengrocery on the avenue des Ternes.

He returned to live with his father after the fall of the Second Empire on September 4, 1870. One immediate result of the social turmoil following the war was brought home when Uncle Alexandre Aubert was forced to give up his interest in the rubber-manufacturing plant, leaving an uncertain future facing Elie Courtet and his young family.

CARICATURE: THE IMAGE OF OPPOSITION

The economic and political upheaval that formed the backdrop of Emile Courtet’s youth coincided with the rise of what Richard Terdiman, in his account of journalism in the nineteenth century, has called “newspaper culture.”⁴ Emile’s was in fact the second generation to grow up in the age of lithography—the process that enabled images drawn by the artist’s own hand to be reproduced and disseminated by the hundreds or thousands only a few hours after being sketched on the printing stone. While the process had its utilitarian and decorative uses, it also made possible the spread of overtly

oppositional political imagery to an extent that would have been inconceivable in the previous century. It was Emile Courtet's fortune to grow up in the midst of an eruption of satirical cartooning. While important in its own right—Cohl would have warranted a biography as a caricaturist even had he not found the cinema—his involvement with caricature, with its connotations of marginality, will become especially pertinent during his later career in film.

As soon as he could afford it, Elie Courtet enrolled Emile in another school, the *Ecole Turgot*. There the boy quickly excelled in drawing, but he was still too distracted by events in the streets to be interested in anything else. During the Siege he picked up his allotted piece of horse meat and straw bread. His father could not stand the meat, so he gave his share to Emile and instead ate the bread, which had to be soaked in oil, rubbed with garlic, and fried to make it palatable. With no heat, Emile suffered frequently from colds and chilblains. When he was well, he played with his friends in the streets and watched the soldiers at the barricades. Once he saw Rochefort make an inspection of the lines while he was headquartered on rue Cadet. According to a biographical sketch written in 1886, it was during the Commune (March–May 1871) that he was first exposed to political caricatures.

On March 17, the stripes of the Commune officers and the parades of soldiers held a disturbing fascination for him and distracted him from his school work. He took advantage of these troubled times when the teachers had other cats to skin besides their undisciplined pupils. Like a real Paris urchin, he spent his days hanging out in the streets, stopping for a long time in front of the bookstore windows where so many infantile caricatures were shown off during these feverish days.⁵

He was becoming aware, through these anarchic drawings, of an aspect of the visual environment that had been increasingly evident since the first third of the century. Two factors in particular stimulated his interest in the art of caricature.

The first was his physical proximity to rue du Croissant, the “Fleet Street of caricature.”⁶ The editorial offices of most of the satirical publications were centered around this narrow street, just across boulevard Poissonnière from the Courtets' Faubourg Montmartre. The electric atmosphere of the street on Saturdays when the latest issues of *Le Charivari*, *L'Eclipse*, and *Le Journal Amusant* were hawked was captured in a print by Régamey (fig. 1).

The second factor was the sheer quantity of caricatural images that covered the walls and saturated the streets and cafés in defiance of all attempts at control. Many commentators, such as Duranty, mentioned “the innumerable comic papers that abounded in Paris during this epoch.”⁷ Throughout most of the Second Empire Napoleon III had attempted to suppress all political caricature by enforcing strict censorship. When he was overthrown in 1870, the streets erupted with blistering posters and broadsheets



1. Félix Régamey: "La Rue du Croissant," 1868.

pillorying the regime. During the Franco-Prussian War, the Siege, and peaking during the Commune, there was an enormous outpouring of vicious and hateful imagery directed toward various rapidly changing enemies.⁸ These were not the established illustrated papers, all of which had ceased publication during the turmoil, but crudely printed *feuilles volantes*. These broadsheets, literally "flying leaves," were often illustrated by anonymous hacks who wished to communicate their inflammatory messages directly to the public.⁹ Albums of anti-Commune caricatures circulated freely and replaced the bitter anti-Prussian broadsheets.¹⁰ It was this type of imagery that first caught the eye of the street urchin Emile Courtet.

After the boy finished his schoolwork at the Ecole Turgot, presumably around 1872, his father obtained a three-year apprenticeship for him with a jeweler. Emile tried to relieve the monotony of the job by joining a magician's act, but, according to an account apparently written by Cohl himself in 1890, "He only dreamed of drawing, or rather, of caricature, and sketched everything he saw."¹¹ He continued to caricature passionately after he had finished the dull apprenticeship and enlisted for voluntary service with a Cherbourg regiment.

Then the philatelist Maury hired him to work in his shop and design his albums, a sideline that would continue until 1889 when they argued over wages.¹² His father still hoped that his son would seek a commercial career and found him a fifty-franc-a-month position with a maritime insurance broker. But this, too, was intolerable.

All of a sudden, one fine day, abandoning his appointments, our caricaturist made a clean break with his papa and declared that henceforth he would live off his pencil—an ultimatum that immediately introduced him to *la vache enragée*.¹³

The final phrase was slang for going hungry. But as Jerrold Seigel has noted, the term was also a contemporary euphemism that indicated to readers that Emile Cohl was venturing into the realm of Bohemia.¹⁴

The aspiring caricaturist was somehow able to obtain a letter of recommendation from Etienne Carjat, an important photographer who was best known for his portraits of the actor Frédérick Lemaître. But he was also a painter and a caricaturist. Carjat referred him to his close friend and former collaborator, André Gill, the best-known caricaturist of the day. Cohl's biographers, writing as "Pierre et Paul," described this momentous day in his life with florid and fanciful prose:

On a beautiful morning in the month of October 1878—it begins like a novel by Montepin—a solid young blond man strode feverishly up and down the sidewalk of rue d'Enfer, since changed by an administrative pun into Denfert-Rochereau, finally stopping at number 89. The traces of violent interior emotions could be read on his juvenile face upon which long practice at living had not yet imposed the impenetrable mask of impavidity. And under the rule of this emotion that he was trying in vain to master, a little quiver agitated the upper lip of our hero, imprinting an undulating motion to his fine blond moustache, the points of which fluttered, musketeer fashion, while his right hand nervously crumpled the letter that was concealed in the pocket of his jacket.

After a long hesitation which had already been preceded by two or three attempts, the young man plucked up his courage, lifted the heavy door knocker and let it fall back with a dull thud.

"Enter!" responded a heavy voice from inside, which, far from reassuring our timid visitor, made him tremble all the more.

However, in spite of the shivering that this imperative injunction had induced, he resolutely pushed open the door. He found himself at the foot of a steep staircase whose steps, quickly skipped, led to the half-opened door of a big room cluttered with easels on which were displayed canvases containing rough outlines. A drawing board hung from the ceiling and at it sat a man, a kind of Hercules in shirt sleeves, before a table overloaded with scraps and sketches. He was drawing and from time to time he would wipe the point of his pen on his fingertips which he would then run through his leonine hair, the jet black ink mixing with a few streaks of silver, then he would throw his mane back with a brisk movement of his head.

This Hercules was André Gill.¹⁵

The young man displayed some natural talent and was admitted into the Gill atelier. Although the details of Gill's working habits are unknown, it seems certain that the large number of "pupils" who frequented the studio actually worked as Gill's assistants. Life there was a swirl of activity and excitement punctuated by the famous caricaturist's soirées. Emile Courtet was absorbed into the circle, and most of his new acquaintances

remained personal friends until their deaths. There was dramatist François Coppée, the actors Daubray and Gil-Naza (David-Antoine Chapoulade), Constant Coquelin cadet and aîné (junior and senior). The poet-politician Gustave Rivet recited there. Sculptor Jean Chapuy, musician Olivier Metra, and painter H. C. Delpy joined some of the best-known caricaturists, including Sapeck (Marie-Félicien Bataille), Paul Hellé, Adolphe Willette, and Georges Lorin. Ernest d'Hervilly, Cattelain ("engraver, furniture mover and pianist"), and the *café-concert* proprietor Théodore Bullier also attended.¹⁶

The central attraction was, of course, André Gill (born Louis-Alexandre Gosset de Guines). At this time, in 1878, he was the preeminent caricaturist of France, owing largely to his daring attacks in the illustrated press against the Second Empire, openly defying the censors and earning a reputation for personally revitalizing the underground art of political caricature.

The days of relatively free political expression enjoyed by Daumier's generation from 1830 to 1835 had vanished by 1859, when Gill's first drawing appeared in *Le Journal Amusant*. Hired in 1865 by the courageous publisher François Polo to illustrate his new satirical journal *La Lune*, Gill was frequently the target of attempts by Emperor Napoleon III to suppress political caricature. In spite of this, the paper had a circulation of 500,000 by 1867. Gill constantly tested the limits of a censorship apparatus that forbade not only unauthorized representations of the government but allegorical content as well. "The Masked Wrestlers" of November 3, 1867, was taken to be an antipapist statement, although it showed only two wrestlers, one wearing a red mask, the other in black. It was enough, in December when the case was tried before a magistrate, to send Polo to jail with a stiff fine and meant the end of *La Lune*. Meanwhile, the provocative skirmishes continued. On November 17, 1867, Gill attacked the emperor directly with his "Authentic Portrait of Rocambole." He gave the dandyish fictional character the unmistakable features of Napoleon III. The suppression of *La Lune* became a cause célèbre that contributed further to the swaying of public opinion against the Second Empire.¹⁷

Eight days after the last *La Lune*, Polo started a new paper to replace it and petulantly called it *L'Eclipse*. In the issue of August 9, 1868, he published Gill's "Monsieur X...?", a drawing of a melon with a slice removed. The features of a magistrate could be recognized among the bumps on its surface. When the issue was restrained from circulation, Gill was charged with obscenity instead of the expected grounds of unauthorized political caricature. The charge mystified everyone (and still does). Gill was livid and wrote in a front-page letter to the editor of *Le Temps*, "My drawings have often had a mischievous intention, but never an obscene intention. . . . If *L'Eclipse* must be prosecuted, let it be for the intentions that it has, not for those attributed to it."¹⁸ We presume that the government felt that it could argue a case for the "slice" in the drawing as a vaginal image. But the ploy backfired. Hawkers scalped the issue in the streets

and a boisterous trial ensued that received extensive press coverage. The obscenity charge was dropped after Gill effectively argued that obscenity was in the eye of the beholder, but the paper was fined nevertheless. Once again, the empire was held up to public ridicule. Although seizures of *L'Eclipse* continued routinely, the growing weakness of the government allowed less stringent enforcement of the censorship laws. Eventually *Le Journal Amusant*, *Le Petit Journal pour Rire*, *La Vie Parisienne*, and *Le Charivari* all became bolder. Gill was generally credited with the new freedom of expression, and his name was familiar to those Parisians of Republican sentiment who browsed through the journals in the streets and cafés.

During the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871, Gill ceased drawing in order to join the defense against the Prussian Siege.¹⁹ On April 17, 1871, he was elected to the Commune-endorsed Fédération des Artistes de Paris, chaired by Gustave Courbet, and was assigned the duty of protecting and organizing the Luxembourg Museum. One month later he was named its “provisional administrator.”²⁰ After the bloody suppression of the Commune, Gill narrowly avoided the condemnation meted out to Courbet and others associated with it.

L'Eclipse resumed in June 1871. With the return of peace, the satiric press, despite censorship, continued the expansion that had begun in the final months of the Second Empire. Among the many new political papers was *La Lune Rousse*, founded by Gill in December 1876, in which some of his best work appeared. When Emile Courtet met him in 1878, Gill had become an almost legendary figure. Although not well known today outside of France, to his contemporaries and to later historians he was the heritor of Daumier’s talent and social position of a generation earlier. Other artists respected Gill for his politics, his courage, and his art. When Camille Pissarro, for example, painted his *Portrait of Paul Cézanne*, he pictured his friend haloed by a little caricature of Courbet and a drawing by Gill from *L'Eclipse* (fig. 2).²¹

Gill’s career is exemplary of the practice of “symbolic resistance,” as discussed by Terdiman.²² Like Daumier before him, Gill was profoundly committed to caricature as oppositional, not just to specific individuals but to what they stood for—the domination of society by conformist bourgeois values. Caricature then was primarily an ideological weapon, not merely a vehicle for the artist’s style or wit. As Terdiman argues, “The nineteenth century is no doubt the counter-discourse’s classic moment. The open and virulent anger felt by the antibourgeois for the bourgeois can rarely have been more evident or more focused.”²³ Yet at the time when Cohl was entering the studio, the opposition was beginning to lose its unified front. The old issues were becoming blurred, and former enemies (such as Patrice de MacMahon, forced to resign as president of France in 1879) were not as menacing. Gill was frequently depressed and nearly penniless. *La Lune Rousse* went out of business in December 1879.²⁴

Cohl’s first works may be seen as typical of the period—transitional, moving away from the ferocity of old-style Republicanism (which he could not have known except

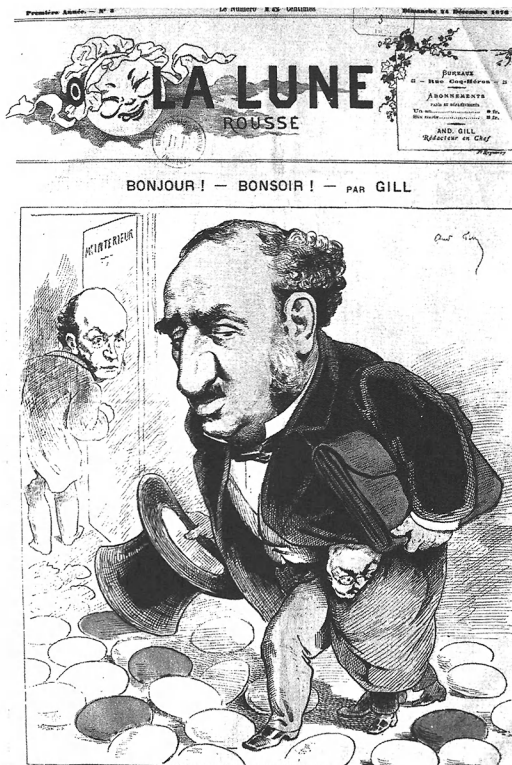


2. André Gill: "La Délivrance," *L'Eclipse*, August 4, 1874.

vicariously) and toward an increasing awareness of style and composition. At a time when Gill felt abandoned by his old friends, he became strongly attached to his new generation of admirers, of whom Cohl was by far the most ardent. It was around 1879 that the apprentice caricaturist adopted his foreign-sounding pseudonym. Why he chose "Cohl" has never been explained. Perhaps it had something to do with the pigment kohl, but more likely it was a pun that signaled his intention to stick to his master like glue ("colle").²⁵

Not surprisingly, Cohl's first caricatures were closely patterned on Gill's style. Since the 1860s, Gill had mastered the *portrait-charge*, the practice of drawing a large caricatural head on a squat comic torso.²⁶ But he had transformed the stiff, repetitious forms of many of his predecessors into a highly refined mode of representation marked by individuality, life, and motion (fig. 3). Cohl learned his techniques firsthand in the atelier, where he was probably assigned the completion of the backgrounds and other finishing touches before the drawings were rushed off to the engraver Lefman. Some of the drawings signed by Gill may have been executed entirely by Uzès (A. Lemot), Georges Lorin, Bataille, or Cohl.

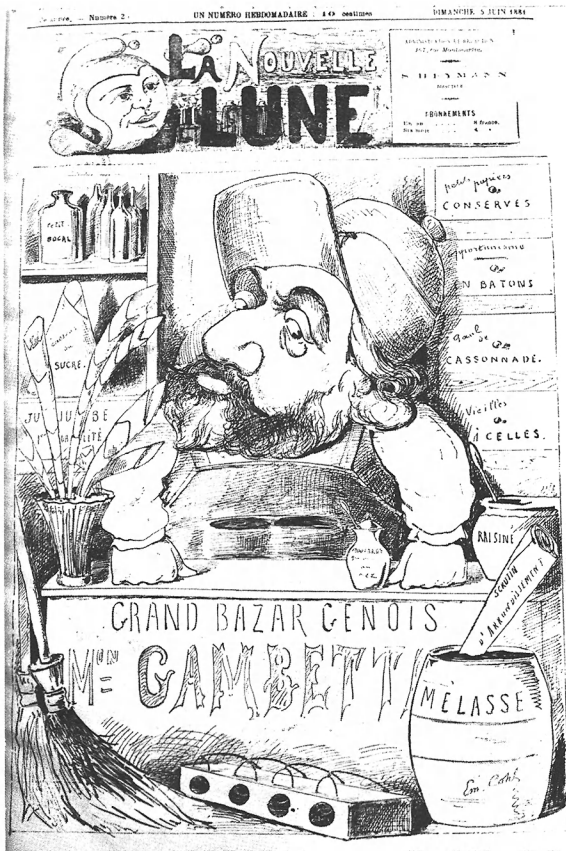
An 1881 caricature of statesman Léon Gambetta by Cohl shows that he was not



3. André Gill: “Bonjour! — Bonsoir!” *La Lune Rousse*, December 24, 1876.

extraordinarily precocious, but that Gill’s lessons were learned well (fig. 4). The large head sits upon the stocky, disproportionately small body, modeled by quick cross-hatching strokes. The figure fits neatly into the space on the page, and the composition is enclosed by a rectangular frame. But Cohl’s drawing lacks the balance and discipline visible in Gill’s best work. There is a tendency toward clutter in the composition, and Gill’s linear clarity is missing. Nevertheless, Cohl’s caricature projects a strong sense of Gambetta’s personality. Casting him as the proprietor of a boutique was ingenious and, on the whole, the drawing compares favorably with those by other artists of Gill’s “school,” such as Pépin (Edouard Guillaumin) or Alfred Le Petit.

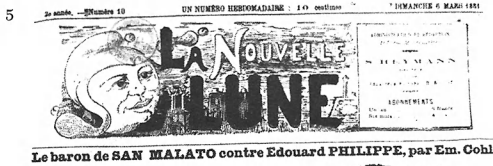
Despite Gill’s strong influence, Cohl began to show certain maverick tendencies that identified his personal style even in his earliest works. His figures often overstepped the boundaries of their frame, or the hair or a limb would extend past the margin. Usually this was done to introduce the idea of a figure in motion (fig. 5). Another unusual characteristic was that, more than any other caricaturist, Cohl was attracted to the puppet stage for inspiration. Occasionally, as in “Les Poupées de l’infante” (The Infante’s Dolls, fig. 6), the *guignol* iconography is explicit. In other works, such as “Serment aujourd’hui, serrement demain” (Oath Today, Handshake Tomorrow, fig. 7), it is implicit in the doll-like figures, especially the sergeant.



4. Emile Cohl: "Grand Bazar génois," *La Nouvelle Lune*, June 5, 1881. (Hereinafter works for whom no other artist is cited are by Emile Cohl.)

5. "Le Baron de San Malato contre Edouard Philippe," *La Nouvelle Lune*, March 6, 1881.

6. "Les Poupées de l'infante," *La Nouvelle Lune*, May 8, 1881.



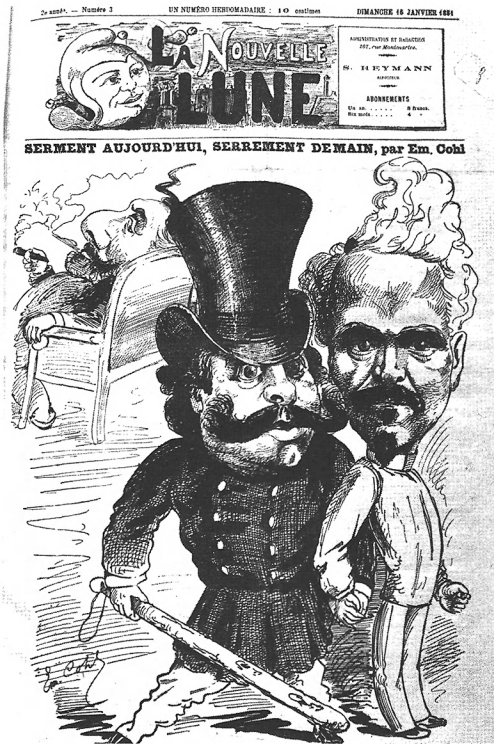
Le baron de SAN MALATO contre Edouard PHILIPPE, par Em. Cohl



LES POUPEES DE L'INFANTE



Aux Folies-Dramatiques, par Em. Cohl.



7. “Serment aujourd’hui, serrement demain,”
La Nouvelle Lune, January 16, 1881.

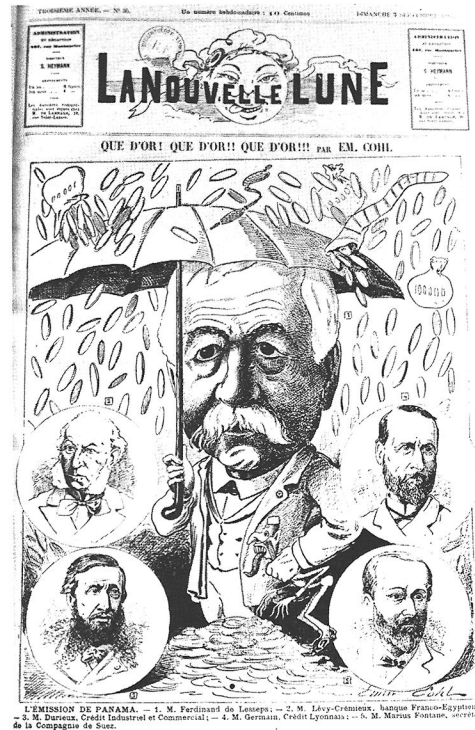
At first it seemed as though Cohl were trying to fill up the simplified backgrounds that had marked the best of Gill’s work. “Souffle toujours” (Keep Blowing, fig. 8) has a bold black-and-white patterned background made from the arrangement of lanterns. “Que d’or! Que d’or! Que d’or!” (Gold! Gold! Gold!, fig. 9) also shows his readiness to fill backgrounds with decorative detail. He later reversed this tendency by eliminating the background altogether, as well as the “frame” (figs. 10–11). This style typifies some of Cohl’s best graphic work, but ironically some of his least inspired in terms of wittiness of characterization.

Cohl was attempting to introduce some of his own innovations in the *portrait-charge* as defined by Gill. There are spontaneous and subtle humorous touches that one finds infrequently in the older caricaturist’s more careful, restrained work. Once Cohl represented Gambetta by drawing only his famous silhouette and a beckoning hand (fig. 12). Little touches such as the faces on the fencing masks in “Le Baron de San Malato contre Edouard Philippe” (fig. 5) and the diva’s caricature in the profile of the Gymnase Theater in “M. René Langlois” (fig. 13) add to the ingenuity of the drawings, though possibly distracting from the overall compositional impact.

There was also a marked propensity for grotesque physical distortion—over and above that to be found in other caricature of the time. Elongated noses were a favorite joke (fig. 14), and there were several distorted balloon-men (fig. 15).



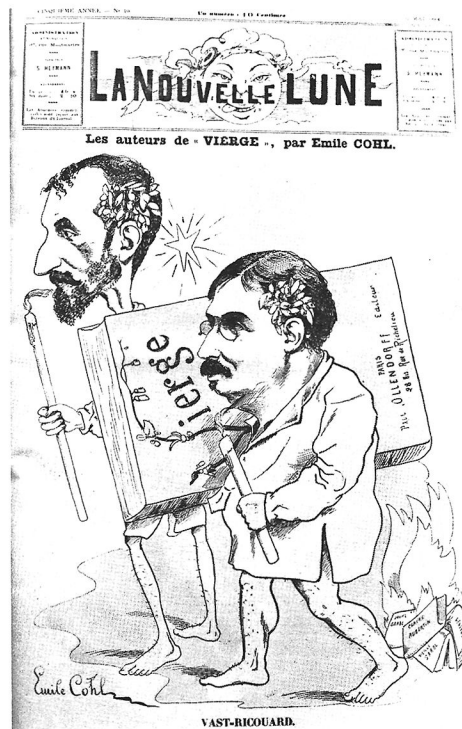
8. "Souffle toujours," *La Nouvelle Lune*, July 24, 1881.



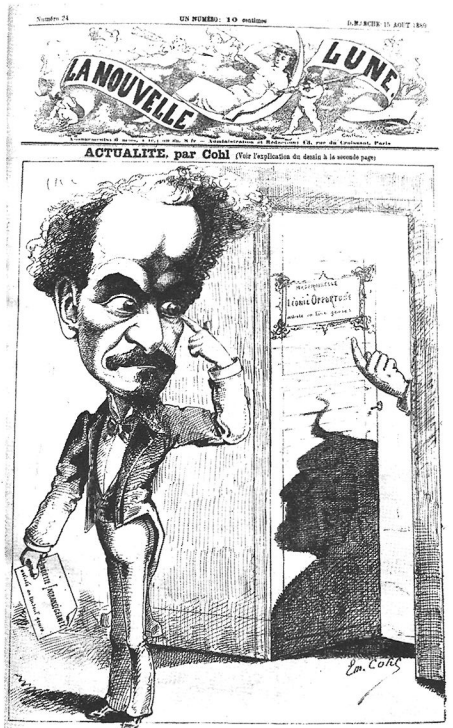
9. "Que d'or! Que d'or! Que d'or!" *La Nouvelle Lune*, September 3, 1882.



10. "Rentrée du grand Jules," *La Nouvelle Lune*, February 25, 1883.



11. "Les Auteurs de Vièrge," *La Nouvelle Lune*, May 31, 1884.



12. "Actualité," *La Nouvelle Lune*, August 15, 1880.



13. "M. René Langlois," *La Nouvelle Lune*, April 17, 1881.



14. "Vêtement de saison," *La Nouvelle Lune*, August 28, 1881.

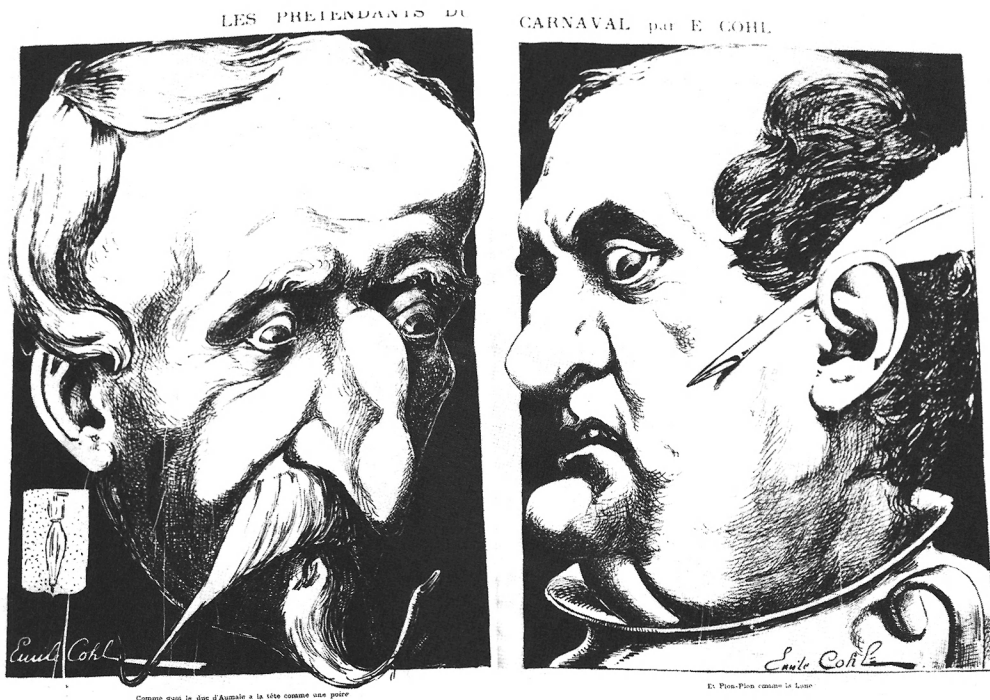


15. "Vue du Ministère Duclerc, de la lune," *La Nouvelle Lune*, August 20, 1882.

Cohl's most unusual experiments were some full-page facial portraits in which the heads were so large that they swelled over the margins of the folio-sized pages (figs. 16–17). The portrait of “Plon-Plon” transforms the subject's chin into buttocks and his shoulders into a chamber pot. The portrait of Gill's friend Clovis Hugues is especially effective because the open mouth and speech balloon suggest the Marseillais's garlic-laden breath. His pockmarks give the viewer the impression of uncomfortable proximity to the huge face.

Cohl's group caricatures show the same innovative approach. Instead of arranging the staff of *L'Indépendant* in a procession—standard since Nadar's *Panthéon*—he pictured them as five puppets on a stage against a backdrop emblazoned with sketches of the other contributors (fig. 18). “La Rédaction du *Tam-Tam*” (Staff of the *Tam-Tam*, fig. 19) caricatures some of the staff as puppets and others as childish sketches. In “Tapons dans le tas” (fig. 20) a hand offers the reader a ball to throw at the “dolls” representing journalists or papers. Cohl's most ambitious group caricature was “Le Ciel et l'enfer en 1881” (Heaven and Hell in 1881, fig. 21), in which he assigned over fifty political figures to heaven (presided over by Jules Grévy) or to hell (ruled over by the devil Henri de Rochefort). The two-page supplement to *La Nouvelle Lune* was intended to be sold separately for ten centimes.

In only a few years Cohl had become part of the “counter-discourse” of caricatural representation. His contributions to these Republican periodicals indicate that he



16. “Les Prétendants du carnaval,” *La Nouvelle Lune*, January 28, 1883.