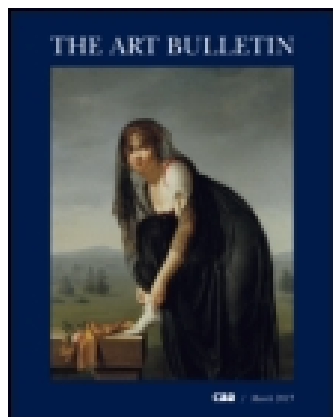


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Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



The Art Bulletin

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcab20>

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Published online: 26 May 2015.



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To cite this article: Bridget Alsdorf (2015) Félix Vallotton's Murderous Life, The Art Bulletin, 97:2, 210-228, DOI:

[10.1080/00043079.2015.979117](https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2015.979117)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2015.979117>

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Félix Vallotton's *Murderous Life*

Bridget Alsdorf

I bore death in my eyes and spread it all around [*Je portais la mort dans mes yeux et la répandais aux alentours*]. (Jacques Verdier)—Félix Vallotton, *La vie meurtrière*, 1927¹

In 1907 the Franco-Swiss artist Félix Vallotton wrote his second of three novels, *La vie meurtrière* (*The Murderous Life*), first published in 1927.² Set primarily in Paris in the 1880s and 1890s, the story is narrated by the protagonist, Jacques Verdier, a young provincial who moves to the capital to forge a career in the art world and become a writer. As the title suggests, Verdier's tale is terribly grim, turning on a series of tragic events for which he seems somehow responsible. From his first friendships as a young boy to his romantic affairs as an adult, Verdier's "murderous" effect on those he loves is both preposterous and tragic, alienating him from society and ultimately leading him to take his own life. Catastrophe follows Verdier like a contagion, a destructive force that, even if it originates outside him, works through his body and mind. The matter of his guilt is therefore difficult to parse, and it is this difficulty that constitutes much of the novel's dramatic suspense. After Verdier's transformation from an innocent yet accident-prone child into an increasingly complex and morally repugnant man, we remain uncertain if he is cursed by or complicit with the deaths he appears to cause. Whether he is responsible for these deaths or just the hapless trigger and helpless witness emerges as the novel's great unanswerable question, ultimately leading us to wonder about our own involvement in Verdier's story, as witnesses to what looks like a predetermined chain of events.

La vie meurtrière can serve as a means to deepen our understanding of Vallotton's practice as an artist, in particular, as an artist of accidents and urban crowds. In the end, both Vallotton's novel and his pictures of crowds are an investigation of the relations between guilt, responsibility, and vision.³ Although written in 1907 and published twenty years later, after Vallotton's death, *La vie meurtrière* is set in the late nineteenth century; its climactic events happen in the early 1890s. This is precisely when Vallotton built his reputation as a modern master of the woodcut through his bold and caustically comic depictions of street scenes and crowds. Vallotton's novel explores its central themes of guilt and responsibility through visual imagery, and it bears striking tropological similarities to his early pictorial art. Of course, Vallotton did not write the novel as a key to his prior artistic intentions, but the book is strong evidence that accidents, and the questions of culpability and duty surrounding them, fired his visual imagination.⁴ Readers of the novel come to understand how Vallotton narrativizes a static tableau—how he leads up to it and layers it with meaning⁵—and discover again and again how he burdens Verdier's vision with moral and affective weight. The same attention to the ethics of vision structures a significant portion of Vallotton's

fin-de-siècle drawings and prints, in which the physical and psychological pressure of human proximity is a primary theme. These artworks imply that witnessing crimes, tragedies, or cruel twists of fate can shape our perspective toward others and even impel us to act, while the message that emerges from *La vie meurtrière* is that any connection between sight and social responsibility is fleeting and shallow, until the connection erupts in suicide at the end. Finally, Vallotton's multilayered exploration of these ideas in both image and text bear striking associations with the phenomenon of the *fait divers* (brief news items with sensational themes) in late nineteenth-century French journalism, a relation illuminated by the theoretical proposals of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Roland Barthes.

La vie meurtrière declares itself a "confession" and takes the form of an elaborate suicide note, through which Verdier narrates his brief life from the perspective of its bitter end.⁶ Its rhetorical mode therefore employs both prosopopoeia and autobiography, with Vallotton acting as ghost-writer for his deceased fictional subject.⁷ In the prologue, Vallotton explains how he acquired Verdier's story, introducing the tale as a found object—a manuscript titled "Un amour"—that passed through several hands before he rescued it and published it with a more violent name.⁸ The significance of this fictional setup is that Vallotton presents his novel as a fortuitous accident and himself as a mere facilitator of its publication, rather than the author.⁹ This posture toward his text runs parallel to that of the bystander or witness to a tragic accident, a figure central to the novel's investigation.¹⁰ Just as the narrative of the novel questions the generative relationship between cause and effect, perpetrator and victim, its rhetorical structure blurs the authorial relationship between Vallotton and Verdier. Verdier is Vallotton's fictional creation, of course, but he shares many of the artist's distinguishing features and formative experiences. For example, Vallotton was the son of a pharmacist and moved to Paris from his hometown of Lausanne in 1882 at the age of sixteen. Verdier, also a pharmacist's son, moves to Paris from the fictional French town of Lormeau around the same age and year. Vallotton's description of Verdier's appearance closely matches his *Self-Portrait at Age 20* (1885), especially the phrases "delicate profile," "late-coming mustache," "sickly [eye]lids" and "weak chin."¹¹ He characterizes Verdier as withdrawn and "excessively timid,"¹² qualities that Vallotton's friends and family attributed to him.¹³ The similarities pile up as the novel moves forward, as if Vallotton were asking his readers to consider this *Murderous Life* as somehow his own. But because Vallotton identifies Verdier as both writer and narrator of his own story, Vallotton occupies an especially elusive position in relation to his text, as an author who is entirely eclipsed by his main character.

In his influential essay “Autobiography as De-Facement,” Paul de Man deconstructs the presumed identity of author and narrator in autobiography, arguing that autobiography is a form of self-portraiture with dubious legitimacy as historical fact.¹⁴ Like any form of self-understanding, it is specular in nature, requiring the author to give him/herself another voice, another face. As such, autobiography is an exemplary case of prosopopoeia (literally, the conferring of a mask), representing an absent, deceased, or imaginary person speaking or acting. Vallotton’s novel embraces de Man’s idea that the relation between autobiography and fiction is “undecidable”¹⁵ and makes literal his connection between autobiography and prosopopoeia by presenting Verdier’s story as a tale from beyond the grave. While the reader of an autobiography presumes that the author of the text and the author in the text are one and the same, in fact, as de Man insists, one is the figurative creation (via language) of the other. Vallotton’s mock autobiography pries the two authors apart as Vallotton and Verdier, making their difference explicit as if to comment on the inability of either author to transparently tell his own tale. Verdier’s self-reflections throughout the narrative likewise lead the reader to question how well he understands his own intentions and motivations at pivotal moments in his life. By making Verdier’s story an exaggerated and dramatized version of his own, Vallotton embraces not only the fictionality of autobiography but also its “de-facement.” Vallotton is increasingly brutal to his fictionalized self as the novel progresses, and from the beginning we know that the story ends with his death.

This strategy of simultaneously tightening and blurring the relationship between author and protagonist makes problems of perspective central to the novel. By “perspective,” I mean to suggest the term’s conceptual and physical dimensions, the mental and bodily coordinates of a point of view. And indeed, many of the novel’s pivotal scenes are described perspectivally. Verdier recounts in careful detail his initial view of his soon-to-be-victims, before the fatal accident or tragedy occurs. Vallotton’s writing is highly visual: key scenes emerge in pictorial relief in the reader’s mind, and vision and perspective are consistently active elements in the plot. About 1921 Vallotton added seven illustrations to the text—drawings that imitate his boldly “primitive” woodcut style—perhaps in an effort to make it more marketable (he had yet to find a publisher). The final version of the novel is structured around this series of images that punctuate and propel the narrative, and Verdier’s vision is thematized throughout.

In the opening illustration, the police inspector finds Verdier shot dead in his dark apartment (Fig. 1). His eyes and mouth appear open, his body slumped over on his desk, while the inspector laments that he did not bungle his attempt. This image of Verdier’s suicide illustrates the prologue to the novel, the only section narrated directly by the author (Vallotton), rather than channeled through Verdier’s voice. The extinguished vision of Verdier’s eyes is figured by an impenetrable blackness that fills the airless space of the image. Once Verdier’s retrospective story begins, once his (fictional) voice takes over to tell it, his vision is not only restored but also serves as the novel’s navigating force.



1 Félix Vallotton, “Ah le bougre, il ne s’est pas raté” (The poor devil, he didn’t bungle it), ca. 1921, illustration from Vallotton, *La vie meurtrière*, Lausanne: Éditions des Lettres de Lausanne, 1930, 7, photorelief, 4⅜ × 2⅞ in. (11.1 × 7.4 cm). Graphic Arts Collection, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Princeton University Library)

Violent Vision

Vision plays an active, aggressive role in *The Murderous Life*, a recurring force in the “accidental” deaths that propel the narrative. Vallotton uses this theme to cast doubt on the relations between Verdier’s body, mind, and conscience, ultimately questioning the relation between his intentions and his sense of right and wrong. Verdier’s first acts of violence happen in Lormeau (his hometown) when he is merely a child, presumably incapable of calculated malice. His first “victim” is his boyhood friend Vincent, who slips and falls off the top of a stone wall when a glimpse of the encroaching shadow of Verdier, walking directly behind him, throws him off balance. Little Vincent hits his head on a rock and survives, but he is gravely hurt. He then accuses Verdier of having pushed him, ending their friendship and tarnishing Verdier’s reputation in the small town. (We are led to believe that the accusation is false, but because Verdier tells his own story, we can never be sure.) Years later Verdier learns that



2 Félix Vallotton, "Hubertin, raide dans sa blouse noire" (Hubertin, stiff in his black smock), ca. 1921, illustration from Vallotton, *La vie meurtrière*, 1930, 25, photorelief, $4\frac{3}{8} \times 2\frac{7}{8}$ in. (11.2×7.4 cm). Graphic Arts Collection, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Princeton University Library)

Vincent died a miserable alcoholic at the age of twenty-four, a fate that Verdier blames on the childhood accident and, therefore, himself.¹⁶

Two aspects of this first accident are particularly significant in light of the novel as a whole and its relation to Vallotton's art. First, it is important that the murderous agent in this scenario is not Verdier himself but rather his *shadow*, an abstraction and distortion of his body, which wields a nefarious visual force. Vincent's accusation that Verdier pushed him is mistaken (or so we are told), but the error introduces a trope that operates powerfully in Vallotton's art: the physical density and psychological animation of shadow and negative space.¹⁷ The idea that a shadow could *push* a person, rather than just visually permeate his ambient space, metaphorizes the ambiguity of intention behind Verdier's "murderous life."¹⁸ A shadow cannot kill someone, in fact, but if it triggers an accident, is its owner somehow responsible? The shadow between Verdier and Vincent also makes Verdier's bodily position vis-à-vis his friend graphically visible. By mapping Verdier's physical orientation in the form of a dark and

ultimately dangerous projection, the shadow forecasts the link between perspective and death that the novel goes on to explore. The second significant feature of Vincent's accident is that years go by before he actually dies, thereby making his demise all the more difficult to blame on Verdier. This temporal ambiguity of cause and effect—is an accident "fatal" if so much time passes before death?—echoes the spatial ambiguity of Verdier's guilt as the source of the "murderous" shadow that triggered the fall. The ambiguity and contingency of ethical liability are the critical subtexts of Vallotton's novel and, I will argue, of many of his pictures as well.

Verdier's next "victim" is an artist, the kindly engraver Hubertin. As the Verdier family's upstairs neighbor, Hubertin is the boy's first introduction to the world of art. Verdier (at this point ten years old) decides to surprise Hubertin while the latter is working in his studio, creeping up on him from behind to then shout loudly in his ear. The joke turns tragic when Hubertin stabs his thumb to the bone with his metal burin, leading to a nasty case of gangrene and, eventually, death.¹⁹ In Vallotton's illustration of the scene (Fig. 2), uninflected black flattens Hubertin's body as if the engraver were himself carved out of the wooden boards on which he lies. His body appears built out of nothing but negative space, more like a shadow than a three-dimensional form. The black stream of blood from Hubertin's thumb pools in a knot of wood, as if he were engraving his death into the floor as the young Verdier looks over his body in shock. Although Hubertin does not die until days after the accident, Vallotton's drawing shows him lying rigid, as if already stiff with rigor mortis. Like all of the images added to the novel, the drawing does not simply illustrate Vallotton's narrative, it symbolizes deaths yet to come.

Our perspective on the image, through Verdier's eyes, is from above, but quite close—elevated, certainly, but hardly detached. It is the view of someone standing transfixed over a body stiffened in pain, a perspective whose proximity—along with Vallotton's caption: "Hubertin, stiff in his black smock"—registers a sense of horror and responsibility. In fact, this accident is more firmly Verdier's fault.²⁰ His narration of the scene implies that his guilt grows out of Hubertin's gaze: the boy stands immobilized at the foot of the engraver's "inert" body, staring at his "immense eye" that "continued to live, and fixed [him] in place."²¹ Like the shadow in the earlier incident, vision here takes on a life beyond its bearer and also acts as a material transmitter of blame: it is Hubertin's stunned, "living" eye that activates Verdier's conscience. After Verdier flees the scene—removing himself from the horrible view—he gives his parents a falsified account of what took place. His exoneration necessarily happens out of Hubertin's sight and is only possible because "there had been no witnesses" to put his story in doubt.²² Verdier's lie alerts to the reader that he should be regarded with suspicion from now on.

Next, Verdier poisons his friend Musso by giving him a toxic substance from his father's shop. Musso spots a green powder in the pharmacy window and, dazzled by it, decides he must have it to paint his birdcage. This conflation of poison and paint is significant—like the conflation of self-wounding and engraving in the case of Hubertin—signaling that the novel's outrageous plot of death and self-destruction

was linked in Vallotton's mind with the practice of art. Verdier accedes to Musso's request, eager to please his friend, but a bit of the powder accidentally finds its way into Musso's mouth, and the chemical's arsenic base takes immediate, violent effect.²³ When Verdier learns from his parents that Musso is on the point of death, he is momentarily so overcome with guilt that he feels a flash of pain and temporarily loses his sight: "I felt a whiplash in the knees, objects disappeared before my eyes, and I collapsed. . . ." "I was broken . . . I no longer knew, no longer perceived, no longer existed."²⁴ This mental, visual, and ontological blackout—however brief—is another indication that, for Vallotton, vision and remorse are tightly entwined. Throughout the novel, Verdier escapes the torment of his conscience by removing whatever disturbs it from his sight. But occasionally, as in the case of Musso, guilt accosts him aurally instead, and troubled vision becomes an *effect* of his troubled conscience rather than a cause. In this scene the fatal shadow is internal and all-consuming, overtaking not only his vision but also his sense of self—a self temporarily obliterated by guilt over the pain of another.

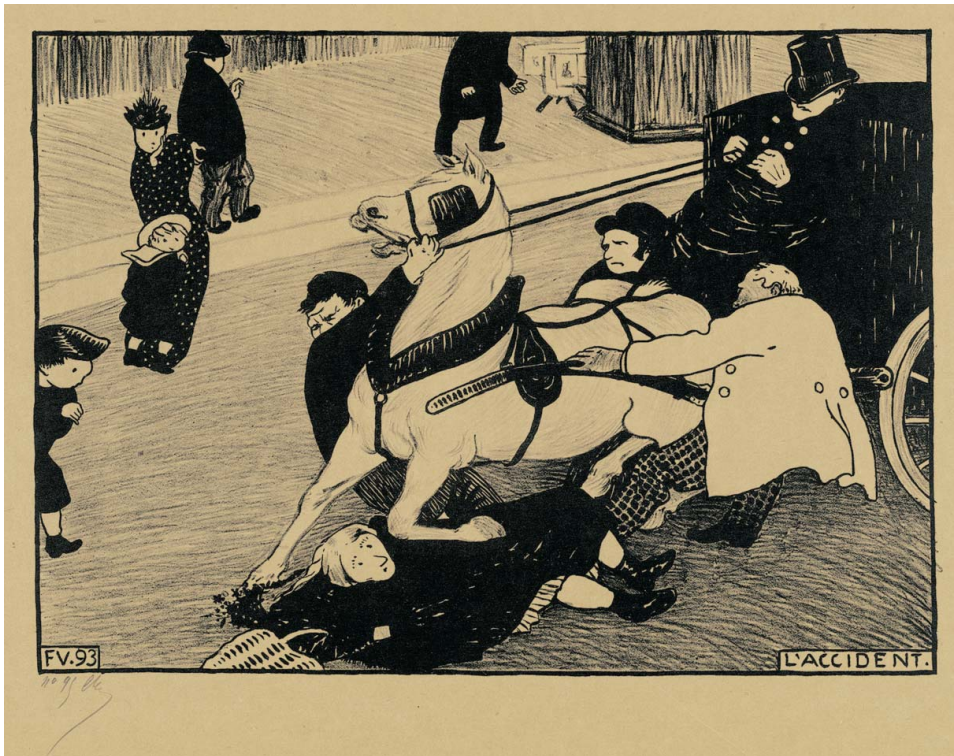
All of these deaths are supposedly accidental, but Verdier's sense of responsibility increases with each: from the unwitting effects of his shadow, to the unintended shock of his shouting voice, to the unanticipated harm of a gift passed from hand to hand. With each accident his body is more actively involved—first his vision, then his speech, and his sense of touch and hearing, too—tightening the link between guilt and sensory experience, whether that experience is voluntary or not. Vision and hearing, more than touch and taste, can be very difficult to control. Sounds and sights accost us without warning, especially on the street. Vallotton likely favors vision in his examination of bystander ethics for this reason, and, of course, as an artist, sight interested him more than sound. By invoking other forms of sensory contact in his novel, he further complicates his presentation of the relation between intentionality and culpability. As the story skips forward and Verdier becomes an adult struggling to establish himself socially and professionally in Paris, his fatal effect on others is more difficult to deny as repeated, cruel twists of chance. Verdier's actions entangle him further in the deaths he seems to cause.

Vallotton's edits to a draft of the manuscript show him trying to tone down the melodrama of the story at critical points, cutting overwrought metaphors (a "flower of love" watered by his tears) and excessively gruesome details (the smell of flesh sizzling on a stove).²⁵ Much in this vein remains, but Vallotton was at least somewhat aware that the novel is heavy-handed. (At its most dramatic moments it is hard to decide whether to gasp or to laugh.) More important, several edits reveal an effort to generate more ambiguity around the novel's central themes of accident, intentionality, and guilt, revealing how much Vallotton struggled to decide on the relative importance of chance and choice, heredity and intention as the forces behind Verdier's "murderous" effect. Perhaps inspired by Émile Zola, whose epic cycle of novels about the Rougon-Macquart family (published 1871–93) explored the problem of heredity and environment as determinants of human action (Zola termed this problem "the slow succession of accidents pertaining to the nerves

and the blood"),²⁶ Vallotton grappled with the overlapping distinctions between inheritance, agency, and choice. For example, in a passage detailing Verdier's tortured reflections on his life during a long night of aimless wandering, Vallotton revises a key sentence: "What virus . . . to what evil inheritance did I owe such a lugubrious power!" becomes "What virus infected me, and of what evil inheritance was I the instrument?"²⁷ Both sentences connect Verdier's harmful effect on others with a cruel heredity, but the first version gives Verdier agency in wielding this "power," while the second, edited version suggests he is a mere "instrument" of an evil curse. An edit later in the novel is almost the exact inverse of this one: in a passage describing Verdier's guilty reaction to a pained and reproachful letter from a friend, Vallotton crosses out "And I did this!" replacing it with "And I was responsible for this pain!"²⁸ The degree of guilt Verdier feels for an action depends on his intentions surrounding it, yet intentionality is often unknowable even to the offender himself.

Verdier's most devastating and drawn-out "murder" begins in an artist's studio in Paris. His friend Darnac, a sculptor, is working with a nude model named Jeanne when Verdier enters. Verdier's first glimpse is of the whiteness of her body "illuminating the room" from the top of a table and the slender lines of her limbs holding their pose. When the session ends, Verdier offers his hand to help Jeanne down from her perch. Missing his grip, she falls directly onto a scalding hot stove, searing her flesh with third-degree burns.²⁹ Like Vincent's fall and Hubertin's thumb, her injury results from a visual miscalculation, a problem of perspective, once again proposing a lapse of vision as a potentially fatal event. The violence of the accident is all the more awful in that it immediately follows Verdier's reflections on the sensuality of line, especially the line of the female body's silhouette. For Verdier, the "strict contour" of a woman's hip or breast—which, not incidentally, are both body parts mangled in Jeanne's fall—is as evocative as the "infinite nuances" of the flesh. Line, as well as color, has the power to evoke desire, if not more.³⁰ When the graceful lines of Jeanne's body are burned, her fate as a model and as a woman is sealed; so when Darnac asks Verdier to get help, he "happily seizes the opportunity to escape, at least visually, [the] nightmare" he feels he has caused.³¹

At this point in the story, Verdier acknowledges his curse: "I was increasingly penetrated by the belief that a principle of death resided in me, that I bore death *in my eyes* and spread it all around."³² The language here is important: Verdier feels "penetrated" by the dreadful certainty that his vision is an agent of death. The power of his perspective therefore operates in two directions: on the one hand, it radiates violence outward, causing harm to those in its range, and on the other hand, the guilt that results from this violence comes back to "penetrate" him as if from outside. His murderous vision goes both ways, for the agony of guilt is visually inflicted as well, in the sense that the sight of his victims—both his sight of them and their sight of him—constitutes a slow, psychological torture that eventually pushes Verdier to murder himself.³³ When Jeanne is out of Verdier's sight, his conscience quickly clears.³⁴ But when he finally visits her in the hospital at the reproachful urging of Darnac, he describes the



3 Félix Vallotton, *L'accident* (The Accident), 1893, from *Paris Intense*, 1894, lithograph (zinc) on yellow wove paper, 8¾ x 12¼ in. (22.2 x 31.2 cm) (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.)

experience, strangely, as “like getting struck in the eyes by a club.”³⁵ Part of the pain of the visit is visual—he sees Jeanne emaciated and haggard, still suffering and horribly maimed—but the major blow, the one he feels “in the eyes,” is when she blames him for what she sees as her inevitable death. It is as if Vallotton wants to emphasize that Verdier’s guilt and the sense of responsibility it triggers *enter through his eyes* rather than being generated from within. His ethics are erratic, bound up with the contingencies of vision. A strikingly pessimistic idea, this represents a hardening of the view given form in several of his fin-de-siècle pictures, in which the act of witnessing triggers unresolved dilemmas of social behavior. In Vallotton’s art, the ethical fallout of bearing witness to an accident or tragedy is signaled by ambiguities of perspective and gestures of action or inaction. His novel adopts a more cynical view, suggesting that the link between sight and social responsibility—at least for Verdier—is alarmingly superficial, until the accumulation and escalation of “accidental” murders reaches a tipping point, pushing him to take his own life.

The role of eyewitnesses, or the lack thereof, in the novel is subtle: Jeanne’s accident is different from the previous two because Darnac is present to see it, and because she survives, leaving two people with firsthand knowledge of the fall who make Verdier feel (intermittently) guilty. Vallotton’s final victim, his beloved Mme Montessac, dies in a carriage accident in the middle of a crowded street. There are many witnesses, but in this case none of them knows that Verdier is at fault.³⁶ Montessac is a beautiful married woman for whom Verdier pines throughout much of the novel. After prolonged resistance, she cedes to Verdier’s advances in a moment of weakness and contracts a fatal venereal disease.³⁷ (The carriage accident simply finishes her off.) At this stage of the novel the whole notion of “accident”—as unintentional and

unforeseen—has eroded. Verdier may not have self-conscious malicious intent, but both his body and his behavior clearly cause others physical harm. This accident strikes us as particularly cruel because it results from a gesture of care: in Mme Montessac’s enfeebled state, Verdier makes her promise to stay in her coach when she leaves the house to run errands. It is only because she obeys his demands that she is in the coach when a bus tips it over (her husband had encouraged her to walk).³⁸ This last accident Verdier cannot bear; once he sees Mme Montessac on her deathbed, he resolves to kill himself. Again, his guilt registers visually: when Verdier hears of his beloved’s accident or her disease he is temporarily upset, but seeing their result is what spurs him to suicide.³⁹

The Ambivalent Witness

If *La vie meurtrière* suggests that the conscience is activated by images and reciprocal vision, Vallotton’s art of the 1890s explores this entanglement of sight and social responsibility in parallel ways, but with a crucial difference: the emphasis in Vallotton’s visual art is often on the witnesses to a crime or an accident, as much as if not more than on the accident, the criminal, or the victim per se. Many of his prints depicting Parisian street scenes represent the ethical dilemma of vision, of the bystander bearing witness to something by chance. The dilemma manifests when the viewer is implicated by a scene that seems to offer a detached perspective.

In *The Accident*, for example, a lithograph made in 1893 as part of the series titled *Paris Intense*,⁴⁰ an old woman is trampled by a horse and carriage while three men attempt to save her by restraining the horse (Fig. 3). The men appear to have rushed into the street to help, while various bystanders keep their distance, scattered on the sidewalk behind. A

woman and two children look on with a mixture of fascination and fear—one child steps toward the accident to get a closer look, while the other cowers against his mother, who brings her hand to her face in shock. Directly behind them, another pedestrian continues on his way unperturbed. Together they convey the affective ambivalence that makes the picture compelling, suggesting the coexistence (albeit in separate figures) of attraction and repulsion, of an active instinctual impulse and its passive opposite.⁴¹ By populating *The Accident* with bystanders who react dramatically and viscerally or not at all, Vallotton presents the viewer with a highly conflicted perspective on the scene. We see the accident from the opposite side of the street as the bystanders, from which we have full view of the victim's terrified face. Several writers have described the elevated perspective that Vallotton typically employs in his urban scenes as a mechanism of distance and omniscience, a way for him to remove himself (and us) from the scene.⁴² Although it is true that Vallotton often establishes an emphatic distance between his crowds and the viewer, giving himself and us the privileged position of onlookers presumably invisible to the figures involved, he also manages to collapse this distance through compositional devices that implicate the viewer. In *The Accident*, Vallotton's elevated perspective is analogous to that of the driver who sits several feet off the ground, looking down on the street and making no visible effort to respond to the collision. As oblivious as his horse restrained by large blinders, with his top hat pulled over his eyes, the driver is a figure of willful and unthinking blindness, the careless, brutally oblivious cause of the crash. The theme of blindness implicates the invisible bourgeois in the carriage as well, for no one is blinder to the damage than this unseen figure in a dark, protected chamber. As in *La vie meurtrière*, Vallotton links the accident to some lapse of vision—whether blindness, darkness, or perceptual miscalculation—while also highlighting the role of the eyewitness as an actor in the scene. Ultimately, we come to realize that our perspective as viewers echoes that of the driver, but from an angle where—and this is crucial—we are well positioned to intervene. Another male figure in the background echoes this connection: his body language expresses concern but his face and eyes are invisible, for he is cropped at the neck by the incised black line of the lithograph's frame. This further reinforces the visual analogy between our vision and the driver's, for the driver's sight is cropped at the top by the black brim of his hat. Through this network of perspectival analogies, Vallotton structures the dilemma of intervention or indifference into the composition of *The Accident*, implicating the viewer as both murderer and rescuer through various points of view.

A decade later, Vallotton depicted a grisly accident in his series of color lithographs for the anarchist-socialist journal *L'Assiette au Beurre* (Fig. 4).⁴³ The series, which includes twenty-three original prints lampooning the police, the judiciary, banks, commerce, education, religion, and even parents with sardonic rage, is more overtly critical of French society and institutions of power than Vallotton's previous work.⁴⁴ In the sixth print, a woman is run over by a police car, pinned to the road under a tire with a smear of blood across her back. As in *The Accident* in *Paris Intense*, the driver is radically cropped by the edges of the frame. Once again,



4 Félix Vallotton, "Salut d'abord, c'est l'auto de la Préfecture" (Salute first, it's the Prefecture's car), in *L'Assiette au Beurre* (Paris) 48 (March 1, 1902): 763, color lithograph, 12¾ × 9½ in. (32.4 × 24 cm) (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam)

there are eyewitnesses on the sidewalk, but this time they are policemen, not random passersby. One of them stands locked in a rigid salute, while the other lunges toward the victim as if wishing to help, blocked from approaching the accident by the nonsaluting arm of his imperious companion. The duo seems to embody the incommensurability of respect for authority and concern for the powerless, a tension encapsulated in the punch-line caption: "Salute first, it's the Prefecture's car." Vallotton's print encourages two possible readings of this injunction: either the saluting policeman says it to his more empathetic partner, or (darker still) it issues from the open mouth of the lunging policeman as a heartless command to the bleeding woman, suggesting that he charges toward her out of anger, to kick her when she is down. Either way this leaves the viewer, the witness on the other side of the accident, as the only hope for this woman's rescue, but once again Vallotton confuses our perspective by aligning it with that of the policemen, looking down from above.

Vallotton's accident scenes are clear instances of his exploration of the ethics of vision—the relation between frames of viewing and the duty to act, between degrees of intention and the ethical boundaries of vision and presence. Other



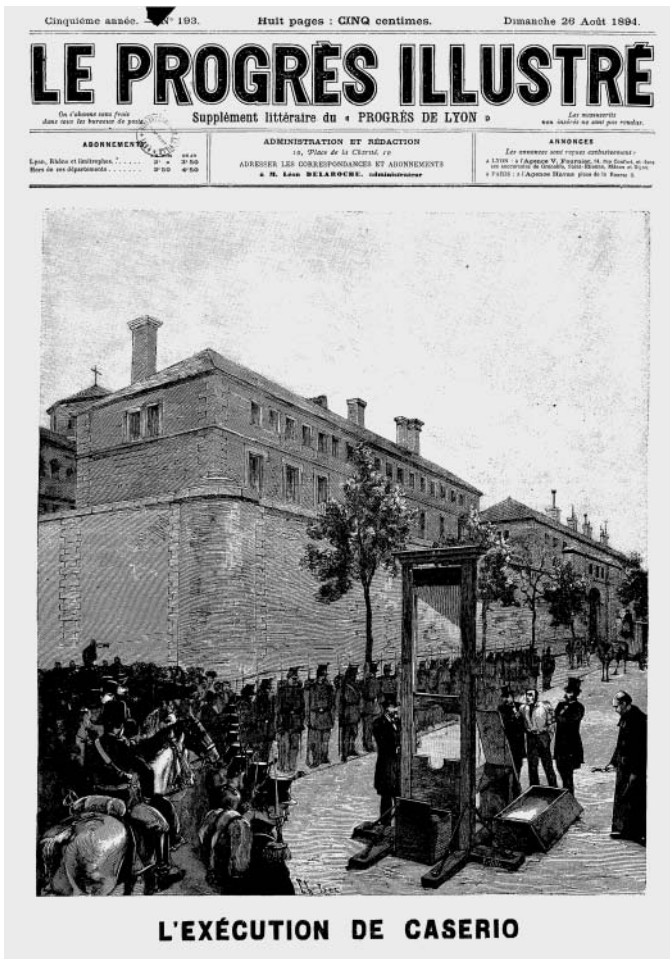
5 Félix Vallotton, *L'exécution* (The Execution), 1894, woodcut on paper, 5 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (14.9 × 24.9 cm). Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of William Rubin (artwork in the public domain; photograph © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY)

works that explore questions of vision, guilt, and responsibility in visual form include *The Execution*, a woodcut dated 1894 (Fig. 5), likely inspired by the execution of the Italian anarchist who assassinated the French president in June 1894.⁴⁵ It is unlikely that Vallotton saw the execution himself, since it happened in Lyons, so his knowledge of it probably came from eyewitness accounts and a print published on the front page of a local newspaper the Sunday after the killing (Fig. 6). Note how Vallotton's print changes the point of view to put us in the thick of the scene, on the ground in direct proximity to the executioners and the victim. Compared with the newspaper image, Vallotton's version focuses less on the apparatus and much more on the dynamics of looking and the physical coercion surrounding the convict. A cluster of three bourgeois men backed by a rigid line of soldiers watches him as he is pushed toward the guillotine; one brings his handkerchief to his mouth as if to stifle a cry. We are onlookers as well, facing this trio and the guardsmen from the opposite side of the square. We are closer to the convict than they are; in fact, the figure we are closest to is the executioner, whom we observe from behind. Our position as viewers is therefore both immersive and specular; the composition implicates us in the execution, yet still allows us to observe it passively from the outside. Blackness here is a metaphor for morbid or violent vision, uniting the guards, executioners, and onlookers in an overpowering darkness broken only by the brightly lit figure of the condemned man. To build these contrasts Vallotton shifts seamlessly between two different woodcut techniques. Much of the print is saturated in black, with the image formed by white lines carved directly into the block (this is the white-line technique, which Vallotton's oeuvre did much to revive). However, certain areas, most notably the convict's torso and head, are instead executed in the more traditional black-line technique, in which the outlines and details of forms are printed in black after the surrounding (white) areas have been carved away.

Vallotton moves fluidly between these modes—white-on-black and black-on-white—constructing a graphic equivalent for the conceptual oscillation we experience as viewers, between the perspective of the executioner and that of the spectators off to the side.

Executions are spectacles not just of suffering and death but also of political power, meant to display the sovereignty of the government and its laws. Throughout the nineteenth century European societies grew increasingly disturbed by public executions, and, in fact, France was the only nation in western Europe still performing them at the fin de siècle.⁴⁶ Vallotton's print makes the horror and moral conflict of this theatricalized death visible, provoking the question: Where exactly does Vallotton stand in relation to this execution and to the broader spectacle of death and suffering in fin-de-siècle culture? Does he stand with the convict—a political rebel who writhes in anger and fear—or with the brutish, overweight guards who grip, scowl, and push? We assume the former, given Vallotton's ties to anarchist circles,⁴⁷ but the composition places us and the artist in the position of spectator, aligned with the executioner who beckons his victim with one hand, blade poised in the other.

Vallotton may have modeled his composition after Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's lithograph poster *Read in "Le Matin": At the Foot of the Gallows; The Memoirs of Abbé Faure*, 1893 (Fig. 7), an advertisement for the memoirs of a prison chaplain who witnessed executions at the Paris prison La Roquette.⁴⁸ Between the grimacing faces of the criminal and the top-hatted man pushing him toward the guillotine, we see Abbé Faure passively observing from a distance, and although his gaze does not mirror or engage the viewer's in the way those of Vallotton's witnesses often do, the composition of the print, like that of Vallotton's *Execution*, also places us close to the executioner about to drop the blade, while simultaneously inviting us—via the poster's promotion of Faure's memoirs—to experience execution through the eyes



6 G. Giranne, *L'exécution de Caserio* (The Execution of Caserio), engraving, in *Le Progrès Illustré* 193 (August 26, 1894): 1 (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by gallica.bnf.fr)

of a more impartial, benevolent, and passive presence. Vallotton's prints regularly put himself and his viewers in uncomfortable positions like this, forcing reflection on the ethical stakes of vision.

Off to the Clink (*Au violon*), 1893 (Fig. 8), likewise explores the irresistible spectacle of crime and punishment. In this lithograph, another from the series *Paris Intense*, Vallotton represents the aftermath of a violent incident: four policemen carry away two men who bear signs of having been involved in a brawl. The bourgeois in a three-piece suit appears disgruntled and ashamed, and the exaggerated contortions of his expression indicate intoxication. His body writhes under the grip of his escorts but is not visibly harmed, while the working-class man behind him bleeds from a head wound dripping blood down his shirt. As the compositional and affective center of the composition, the bleeding man's crumpled face pleads to the workmen in the street, entreating them to bear witness to what happened, to intervene. The standing worker casts his eyes downward, evading the pleading man's gaze, while a crowd of onlookers watches and whispers as the spectacle moves past. Multiple witnesses fill the street, but no one steps forward to speak.

Our perspective on the scene hovers aboveground—contrasted with the workman peeking over the pavement from



7 Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Lire dans "Le Matin": Au pied de l'échafaud; Mémoires de l'abbé Faure* (Read in "Le Matin": At the Foot of the Gallows; The Memoirs of Abbé Faure), 1893, color lithograph poster, 32½ × 23⅞ in. (82.6 × 60.5 cm). Victoria and Albert Museum, London (artwork in the public domain; photograph © Victoria and Albert Museum, London)

inside his trench—yet we are nonetheless pinned in place by the frontal gaze of one figure: the butcher, the only one who addresses our gaze directly, with hands on hips. A heavy man standing behind the beaten man and the police, with four large animal carcasses hanging in his window, the butcher could be taken to embody various characteristics of the bystander as an urban type: complacency, inertia, and perhaps even careless brutality. Like all of the bystanders in this scene, some of whom appear much more shocked and concerned, he is a figure for the way in which witnessing violence can entangle you in that violence, ethically if not physically. Although if we take Vallotton's suggestion further, perspective makes ethics physical, defining a span of visible space for which every individual should feel partially accountable. Like Verdier, who "[bears] death in [his] eyes and spreads it all around," Vallotton's bystanders are implicated in the scenes unfolding before them. The passive look is put under pressure as potentially deadly, and the directed gaze of the butcher—our pictorial counterpart—provokes self-awareness, a sense of one's relative position or perspective vis-à-vis the scene. This is not the self-awareness of critical detachment, however. We are made aware of our complicity as spectators—of our fascination with their fascination—and therefore of Vallotton's involvement as well. Neither artist



8 Félix Vallotton, *Au violon* (Off to the Clink), 1893, from *Paris Intense*, 1894, lithograph (zinc) on yellow wove paper, $8\frac{3}{8} \times 12\frac{3}{8}$ in. (21.8 × 31.5) (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.)

nor viewer is exempt from the bystanders' ambivalence, oscillating between passivity and the impulse to act.

The message of Vallotton's prints is this: when we see accidents or crimes in the street we become witnesses, and with witnessing comes responsibility. What happens when what we see looks back, and implicates us? Is a refusal to act itself an act of brutality? Are we not *always* actors, even when we stand back and look?⁴⁹ In this sense, cannot a shadow in a crowd marking our presence be a murderous thing, a metaphor for the way one body, one presence, can touch another solely through vision, with the projections of angles of light standing in for the reach (and distortions) of perspective? There is no shadow marking our presence, or anyone else's, in *Off to the Clink*. Indeed, one of the most striking features of this lithograph is the relative absence of blackness and negative space. Vallotton reserves black for the workman's trench, the policemen, part of a shop sign, and a pair of whispering women. The relative brightness of the image (unusual for Vallotton), along with the blunt, wide-eyed stares of many of its figures, underscores the potential power of the eyewitness, as a clear-eyed counterforce to the blind prejudice of policemen.⁵⁰ The picture is ultimately pessimistic: the bystanders stare mutely at the convicts, slinking away from them or dodging their gaze. Nonetheless, Vallotton's ambivalent representations of urban street life suggest he considered the possibility of a more ethical vision, even as he struggled to depict it in his art. By using active and (more often) passive figures to appeal to his viewers' scruples, he scrutinized his own.

Gawking in Paris

Vallotton became known for his depictions of urban crowds right at the time when written debates about crowd psychology reached their peak. The last three decades of the nineteenth century in Paris witnessed tremendous population growth, along with increasing anxiety surrounding urbanization and its impact on human relations.⁵¹ A

number of fin-de-siècle writers turned to the crowd as a subject of unnerving fascination. In literature, for example, the novels of Zola made the mob a vivid figure in the public imagination.⁵² From the 1870s through the 1890s, the historian, philosopher, and critic Hippolyte Taine published a six-volume account of modern French history laced with sensational and hostile descriptions of the unruly crowds that drove it.⁵³ Drawing on Taine, sociologists Gabriel Tarde and Gustave Le Bon made crowd psychology a new branch of modern scientific inquiry.⁵⁴ Tarde argued that imitation was the foundation of all social behavior,⁵⁵ and Le Bon popularized his and others' ideas in sensationalized, reactionary prose.⁵⁶ Le Bon's deeply pessimistic, paranoid versions of his colleagues' theories were tremendously influential, mined by Sigmund Freud and many other prominent thinkers throughout the twentieth century.⁵⁷ His notorious best seller *La psychologie des foules* (*The Psychology of Crowds*), published in 1895, characterizes the crowd as dumb and dangerous yet open to manipulation by a charismatic leader, especially if that leader wields power in the form of images. For Le Bon, the crowd was defined by "impulsiveness, irritability, incapacity to reason, the absence of judgment and of the critical spirit, [and] the exaggeration of the sentiments." He associates these qualities with "inferior forms of evolution," namely, "women, savages, and children."⁵⁸ Vallotton's view of the crowd and more isolated gawkers shares Le Bon's pessimism to a degree, but the tone and structure of his visual approach involve the viewer in a visceral way. Furthermore, while Le Bon's text implies that the author and his readers are (at least potentially) superior to the masses in question,⁵⁹ Vallotton's works implicate his viewers and himself in the scenarios they depict.

Many of Vallotton's street scenes explore the fascination of gawking, or *badauderie*, a popular Parisian pastime that was frequently narrated and theorized in this fin-de-siècle

period. *Badauderie*, with its connotations of casualness and self-protecting distance, was the act of turning the life of the city into entertainment, consuming the spontaneous happenings of the street as a form of theater. Pierre Larousse's *Grand dictionnaire universel* (1867) defines the *badaud* as "curious": "he or she . . . is amazed by everything, admires everything, and passes time looking stupidly at everything he/she encounters," showing "contentment or surprise by an open, gaping mouth."⁶⁰ Émile Littré's *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (1873–77) characterizes *badauds* as typical of Paris ("les badauds de Paris") and other large cities, where "crowds rapidly gather around whatever."⁶¹ In *Ce qu'on voit dans les rues de Paris* (What One Sees in the Streets of Paris, 1858), the first sustained analytic description of the type, the literary critic and historian Victor Fournel called the *badaud* an "impersonal being." "He is no longer a man—he is the public; he is the crowd." But Fournel also argues, contra Larousse, that "an intelligent and conscientious gawker, who scrupulously fulfills his duty . . . can play a leading role in the republic of art." While the *flâneur*, or idly strolling man of leisure, "observes and reflects," retaining "full possession of his individuality," gawkers give their individuality over to the exterior world—to the spectacle and the crowd. Because of this, Fournel believes that the "passionate, naive souls" of gawkers are admirably "sincere" and "instinctively artistic."⁶²

Fournel's text shows how the *flâneur* and the *badaud* emerged alongside each other as related but contrasting consumers of the urban scene.⁶³ Yet, while the *flâneur* is one of the most studied and referenced subjects of nineteenth-century culture, the *badaud* remains remarkably obscure.⁶⁴ Perhaps this is because the *flâneur* is primarily a literary type whose characteristic drifting and interiority are difficult to define in visual art, while *badauds*, although certainly present in literature, lend themselves more readily to visual representation. In narratives or prose poems we share the *flâneur's* gaze, viewing the urban panorama from within a well-defined, individual mind. He (the *flâneur* is invariably male) is a connoisseur of the street, self-directed and self-possessed, given to incisive commentary on the scene he surveys. *Badauds*, as shown from the outside in paintings, prints, and films, are less refined onlookers. They are part of a crowd, and any individual perceptions they may have of the riveting scene are opaque. Their faces may register astonishment, puzzlement, or the undignified mug of open-mouthed gaping, but we do not look to them to *interpret* the scene on view. An early characterization in Auguste de Lacroix's *Les français peints par eux-mêmes: Encyclopédie morale du dix-neuvième siècle* (1841) states, "The *badaud* does not think; he perceives things only externally."⁶⁵ In contrast to the cool detachment and intellectual control of the *flâneur*, *badauds* are emotional, highly impressionable, and distractible. Rather than wandering, they are typically still. They can also be repellent—embodiments of our guilt when seeking entertainment in others' misfortunes—but joining their cluster and following their stare is nonetheless hard to resist. Although we may admire the elegantly expressed curiosity of the *flâneur*, we more easily (if not willingly) identify with the diversions of the *badaud*.

Vallotton's prints teem with gawkers of every age, class, and gender, staring at spectacles that range from the tragic to the comic and variations in between.⁶⁶ The fascination of these works lies in their suggestion that any audience of this form of theater is an actor as well. Ultimately, they express a fascination with fascination itself as a novel urban subject, implicating the viewer in the gawking behavior they explore.

Vallotton became an artist of Parisian streets and *badauderie* early in his career, while working as a graphic artist for the avant-garde journal *La Revue Blanche*.⁶⁷ In 1896, the writer and editor Octave Uzanne published an anthology of essays centered on Vallotton's urban scenes. *Badauderies parisiennes: Rassemblements; Physiologies de la rue*, roughly translated as "Episodes of Parisian Gawking: Gatherings; Physiologies of the Street," is a luxury book printed in 220 copies and includes thirty relief prints by Vallotton, each accompanied by a short story or narrative vignette.⁶⁸ A great admirer of Vallotton's work, especially his "rigorously synthetic" woodcuts, Uzanne asked the artist to provide him with "a series of brutalist prints on Parisian *badauderie*" that would serve as the heart of the volume.⁶⁹ The authors, who included Paul Adam, Tristan Bernard, Léon Blum, Romain Coolus, Gustave Kahn, Félix Fénéon, and Thadée Natanson, were provided with one or more of Vallotton's prints and asked to write something directly in response to each image. Vallotton's visualizations of *badauderie* were thus the driving inspiration for the texts, making the book a stunning example of modern narrative *ekphrasis* that attests not only to Vallotton's significance to the fin-de-siècle literary avant-garde but also to the centrality of *badauderie* to its view of Paris.⁷⁰ In other words, *Badauderies parisiennes* is emblematic of the way late nineteenth-century urban crowd experience was conceptualized in and through pictures like Vallotton's.

Vallotton's design for the book jacket (Fig. 9) conveys a canny self-awareness of how his prints and drawings contributed to contemporary views of Parisian life. At lower left a figure in striped pants and top hat strides into the hustle and bustle of people near the edge of the Seine. A self-portrait of the artist, he holds a large portfolio of prints under his arm, as if he were out to deliver them for a deadline, and this purpose finds echoes in the posters covering the Morris column in the background behind him. Advertising cabarets, toys, and *La Revue Blanche*, these posters hint at the commercial side of Vallotton's printmaking practice. More overt are the double-sided advertising board announcing the book itself being wheeled through the street and an ad for the publisher, Henri Floury, protruding into the lower-right corner in the form of an open newspaper. Both of these are printed in red. The picture as a whole, which testifies to the central place of advertising in fin-de-siècle French culture, even in the relatively rarefied realm of luxury books, is also a multi-layered reflection on the intersections of graphic art and advertisement in modern urban life.

Our viewpoint onto the busy scene is elevated above the street, looking down on the quai from the perspective of a first-story window. Nonetheless, the image includes us, not only because the sign advertising the book is clearly meant for our eyes but also because select members of the street scene stare back, as if aware of our gaze. Note the finely dressed young woman with the floral hat looking directly out



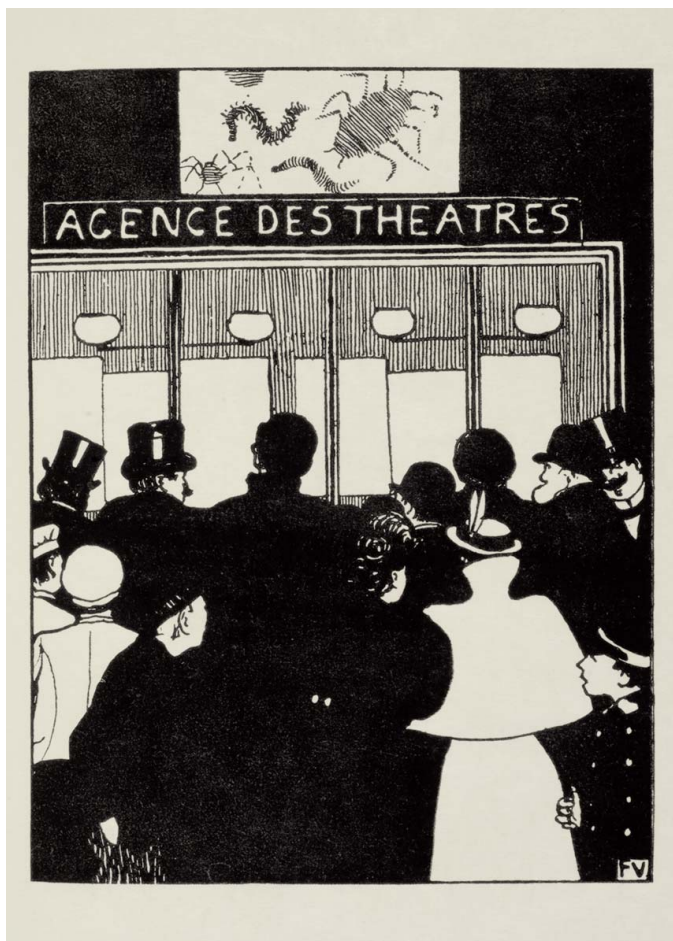
9 Félix Vallotton, book jacket for Octave Uzanne, ed., *Badauderies parisiennes: Rassemblements; Physiologies de la rue* (Paris: H. Floury, 1896), photorelief, 9¼ × 15 in. (23.4 × 38 cm). Rare Books Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Princeton University Library)

at us with a pleasant smile, and the working-class man in the center background—he has the open, gaping mouth of the *badaud*—who turns away from his view of the Seine to look back at something that has caught his eye. It is the advertising board that occupies his attention, the other side of the one we see, making him a surrogate for our viewing position. Once again we mirror the *badaud*, and the crowd's mix of social classes tells us that anyone is susceptible to gawking's appeal.

The anthology represents scenes of crowd behavior and *badauderie* in a variety of places, including bus stops, bridges, construction sites, street performances, car accidents, crime scenes, theaters, and cafés. The essays vary widely in their attitudes toward Parisian *badauds*, from contemptuous to sympathetic to cynically admiring, but almost all use Vallotton's work as a springboard for meditations on the social pressures of modern urban life. Several essays address the role of images, especially advertising posters, in attracting the gawker. In an essay titled "L'affiche moderne" (The Modern Poster), the novelist and theater critic Lucien Mühlfeld argues that images are necessary to capture the crowd's attention, to hook and hold people's vision in a world of distracting incidents.⁷¹ In a haunting essay on illuminated posters ("Les affiches lumineuses"), a novelty in the 1890s, the journalist, playwright, and poet Romain Coolus laments the visual power of these images, regretting the loss of darkness to a city that bombards its inhabitants with pictures day and

night. No longer could one return to oneself "in the perspective of a few black, pacifying hours," a period of "refreshment" when "one could wander blindly, deliciously groping one's way, without being forced to see anything. . . ."⁷² Coolus goes on to describe the ubiquitous walls covered with posters throughout Paris as a "halting screen" that "grips us as we go by," "persecuting us, hurling spectacle at us."⁷³ This violent, relentless vision interrupts the individual's "private soliloquies," forcing people out of their interiority into a collective visual experience characterized by a drunken pain. (Remarkably, Coolus became a screenwriter after the turn of the century, turning his talents to an even more dynamic, absorbing, and forcibly collective form of illuminated image.⁷⁴) In Coolus's words, passersby "imbibe" picture posters through their eyes: "if . . . one pressed their eyes like sponges, they would seep image."⁷⁵

The essay is a nightmarish account of pictorial aggression. For Coolus, illuminated posters *force* their viewers' involvement, "persecuting" them, holding them captive, invading their bodies only to exit as tears oozing from their eyes. Although Vallotton's print offers no such gruesome detail, his crowd appears to be under some kind of spell, all gathered around a theater agency's nighttime window display (Fig. 10). The posters are entirely blank, as if to underscore the superficiality of the spectacle, made brilliant only by the crude addition of gaslights; above the display looms a monstrous shadow puppet-like projection of insects, Vallotton's



10 Félix Vallotton, *Les affiches lumineuses* (Illuminated Posters), from *Badauderies parisiennes*, 1896, 114, photorelief, $5\frac{5}{8} \times 4\frac{3}{8}$ in. (14.4×11 cm). Rare Books Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Princeton University Library)

mocking metaphor for the human swarm below. The images themselves are invisible; their spectacular illumination and framing in the window are what hold the crowd.

The violent vision Coolus describes is not unlike the “penetrating” force of Verdier’s guilt, which also enters and exits through the eyes. *La vie meurtrière* develops a way of thinking about accidental vision and *badauderie* that Vallotton’s pictures of the early to mid-1890s had inspired: the idea that images can jolt the viewer out of a gawker’s trance. For Vallotton, pictures not only held the power to captivate and manipulate an unruly crowd, as recounted by Le Bon,⁷⁶ but could also link lines of sight with social responsibility. For example, in contrast to the essays on the modern poster and illuminated posters, which describe the Parisian viewer as a passive victim of oppressive images, Paul Adam’s essay, entitled “L’ivrogne” (The Drunk), represents the crowd as the persecutor of a helpless bystander. Inspired by Vallotton’s eponymous print of a mob of children taunting and tormenting a drunken old man (*L’ivrogne*, 1896), Adam’s text accosts the crowd for its “idiocy,” “baseness,” and “cruelty,” calling on the reader to stop this “murder of the weak.”⁷⁷



11 Félix Vallotton, *L’incendie* (The Fire), from *Badauderies parisiennes*, 1896, 162, photorelief, $5\frac{3}{4} \times 4\frac{1}{4}$ in. (14.5×10.9 cm). Rare Books Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Princeton University Library)

One of the book’s most disturbing chapters is a scathing essay on urban fires written by the anarchist and art critic Félix Fénéon, another author who uses Vallotton’s work as a weapon of biting social critique. Inspired by Vallotton’s image of a crowd watching an apartment building go up in flames (Fig. 11), Fénéon’s narrative condemns not only gawkers but also victims and even firefighters for turning tragedy into theater. In the text, a terse five pages dripping with Fénéon’s usual acidic wit, people watch the fire from a distance as if it were transpiring on a stage, and even those unfortunate enough to be caught in the building play up the drama with histrionic gestures. Women brandish their babies at the window, and firemen play the hero while stuffing valuables in their pockets.⁷⁸ This mocking account of firefighters and burn victims must have raised a few eyebrows, especially coming from a man charged with planting bombs around Paris.⁷⁹ Vallotton’s print does not go this far, but its juxtaposition of the static passivity of gawking with the whipping movement of the fire and the climbing firefighters seems to pass judgment, and the range of social classes seen in the crowd leaves no one off the hook. The composition also places the viewer, and therefore the artist, in a similar

position to the *badaud* at lower right, straining to look over a mass of heads and top hats in order to see. Once again, both text and image suggest the power of a spectacle to mesmerize the crowd, while also urging viewers to realize the repercussions of gawking even as they perform it.

Faits Divers

More than literature, it was journalism that put *badauderie* into words. In the last third of the nineteenth century, newspapers developed a new rubric to feature reporting of unusual accidents and crimes: *faits divers* were short, pithy accounts of exceptional events involving ordinary people. Fénéon was a master of the genre, writing more than twelve hundred of these three-line gems for the newspaper *Le Matin* between May and November 1906.⁸⁰ Like any literate Parisian, Vallotton was very familiar with *faits divers*, and as a practicing critic (most active from 1890 to 1895) he must have been especially sensitive to the ways in which journalism and art overlapped as cultural fields.⁸¹ The fundamentally narrative quality of so many of his early works, not to mention their provocative yet prosaic subject matter—ranging from scenes of urban accidents, executions, suicides, arrests, and brawls to sinister interior dramas—correspond in striking ways to the popular phenomenon of *faits divers*.⁸² Only an author steeped in the genre could have concocted the series of improbable accidents that drive *La vie meurtrière*.⁸³

The term *fait divers* first appeared in *Le grand dictionnaire universel* in 1872 with a comically broad definition: “stories of all kinds that circulate around the world: small scandals, carriage accidents, lovers’ suicides, roofers falling from the fifth floor, armed robbery, showers of locusts or toads, storms, fires, floods, comical tales, mysterious kidnappings, executions, cases of hydrophobia, cannibalism.”⁸⁴ The blithe mix of reality and fantasy, tragedy and comedy in this “definitive” description indicates the genre’s purpose was less news than entertainment. Vanessa Schwartz has aptly defined the rubric as a spectacularization of everyday life: “The newspaper *faits divers* implied that the everyday might be transformed into the shocking and sensational and ordinary people lifted from the anonymity of urban life and into the realm of spectacle.”⁸⁵ Anne-Claude Ambroise-Rendu has argued that these *histoires minuscules* revealed essential aspects of late nineteenth-century French culture, including relationships between people and institutions of power, revolutions in social behavior, and the changing role of the media vis-à-vis everyday life.⁸⁶ Dominique Kalifa has shown how this changing role was one of increasing power over public opinion, shaping “the social imaginary” in a variety of ways. Investigative reporters became popular heroes and readers became increasingly insecure about the safety and stability of society, in part because of the trumped-up connections these reporters drew between anarchism and crime.⁸⁷ The proliferation of traffic accident reports throughout the 1890s likewise made urban life seem alarmingly hazardous. Coachmen, in particular, were regularly branded reckless brutes in the press.⁸⁸ The gawkers and crowds that appear in Vallotton’s pictures as witnesses to accidents, executions, and crimes figure in fin-de-siècle *faits divers* as representatives of public opinion, characterized as either passively complicit or as active participants in the enforcement of justice. Journalists

expressed ambivalence about these vigilante viewers, worrying over the crowd’s impulsivity and capacity for violence, but overall the press was sympathetic to their cause. The reader of the *fait divers* was meant to identify with these witnesses’ visual shock and perhaps experience cathartic satisfaction from their involvement in the scene.⁸⁹ Vallotton’s works solicit the viewer in a similarly visceral yet ambivalent way.

The curiosity behind *faits divers* is what attracts *badauds*, who consume them either as astonished passersby on-site or as casual readers of the journalist’s witty report, presumably written from eyewitness accounts. Either way, *badauderie* is at root an act of seeing, a social practice that is visually driven and derived. In the street, a curious or spectacular sight triggers the behavior, hooking surrounding gawkers by catching their eyes, and their continued engagement remains, by definition, in the visual register, except perhaps for brief snatches of conversation with their fellow *badauds*. *Badauderie* does not even involve much bodily movement (as is central for the *flâneur*), let alone thoughtful reflection or interpretation. The matter of the *badaud*’s emotional engagement, though, is more complex. Indeed, *badauderie*’s central tension is between its specular detachment, on the one hand, as a way of seeing the drama from the sidelines, and its reactive emotionalism, on the other, often rooted in some form of visceral identification. Vallotton is especially adept at bringing this tension into view, with compositions that separate us from the action via an elevated or distant perspective and simultaneously entangle us in the narrative circuit of cause and effect. His pictures give form to *badauderie*’s mix of physical reserve and emotional lurch, introducing the problem of the gawker’s responsibility as well.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes the *fait divers*, despite being a journalistic genre, as fundamentally visual. His discussion transcends the newspaper medium, however, as a brilliant articulation of gawking’s strangeness as a social phenomenon:

The taste for the *fait divers* comes from the desire to see, and to see is to draw a whole world like our own from the line of a face.

But seeing is also to discover that the endless pleasures and pains that fill our lives are only a fleeting grimace for the spectator-stranger [*le spectateur étranger*]. You can see it all, and go on living afterward. Seeing is this strange way of being present while keeping our distance, of transforming others into visible things, without participating. He who sees believes himself invisible: his actions remain in the flattering light of his intentions, and he denies others this alibi, reducing them to a few words and gestures. The voyeur is sadistic.⁹⁰

What the schematic wit of the *fait divers* obscures, Merleau-Ponty continues, is “the blood, the body, the linens, the interiors of homes and lives, the canvas beneath the crumbling paint, the materials beneath that which had form, contingency, and, finally, death.”⁹¹ For him, readers of *faits divers* can be narcissistic, self-preserving, and “sadistic.” They stand back and observe spectacular happenings from a safe distance, spinning stories out of piquant visual

details refracted through their own personal fantasies and fears. In their minds newspaper reports become elaborate theatrical scenes for their entertainment, as they turn other people into “visible things” and deny them their physical, social, and spiritual substance. They are gawkers in absentia, armchair tourists of other people’s tragedies. But their curiosity also awakens in them an awareness of others’ equally superficial assessment of *their* life’s pains and pleasures through singular acts or external traces of emotion (“the line of a face”), leading them to realize how they, too, are consumed and discarded as visual objects. The pleasure of the *fait divers* cuts both ways. “These nuances in the absurd are a fascinating spectacle,” Merleau-Ponty observes, but because they are both so other-directed and so ruthlessly abridged, so limited to external reactions and contingencies, they “only teach us about our bias for seeing without understanding.”⁹² Although a textual medium, the *fait divers* conveys the danger of vision without thought and of the kind of society built on voyeurism and passive judgment. Its glib sadism forgets the humanity of its subjects, yet in doing so manages to teach us truths about ourselves and how we see. For Merleau-Ponty, “there is no *fait divers* that does not give rise to profound thoughts,” because witnessing the tragedy of another life can push us to judge our own.⁹³

What Merleau-Ponty does not fully explain is *how* the *fait divers*, as a journalistic form, is so fundamentally visual, and thereby analogous to the gawking in the street from which it derived. He asserts this, and we take it, on instinct and experience, to be true—reading *faits divers* does feel like gawking via text—but his essay stops short of theorizing the relation. It is only in works of art like Vallotton’s, including his illustrated novel *La vie meurtrière*, that we can see how the culture of the *fait divers* and the culture of *badauderie* are one and the same. The viewer of Vallotton’s prints is linked to the gawkers represented within them via devices of framing and perspective, while the reader of *La vie meurtrière* is linked to Verdier (and Vallotton) through diegetic witnesses and through metaphors of vision as a medium of guilt and death. Like Merleau-Ponty, Vallotton was fascinated by the way *faits divers* ensnare both immediate onlookers and distant viewers, philosophically as well as visually.

Responding to Merleau-Ponty, Roland Barthes theorizes the *fait divers* very differently, as “a closed structure” whose fascination is independent of external context.⁹⁴ Unlike a political assassination, the death of an ordinary person is notable for its local circumstances, not its broader impact on the world. Likewise for Barthes, the *fait divers* is primarily interesting as a semiotic construction, as “literature” in which meaning is “internal to the immediate narrative.”⁹⁵ Its “immanent” structure is defined by the surprising or disproportionate relation between the event’s cause and effect (for example, “an old man is strangled . . . by a hearing aid cord” or “a woman stabs her lover . . . during a political argument”)—a relation that might be characterized as deranged, bathetic, or absurd.⁹⁶ The meaning of the *fait divers* never clearly resolves between its unbalanced terms. Ultimately, Barthes concludes that the ambiguity and absurdity of the *fait divers* allow us to consume it as a highly constructed and autonomous “mass art”:

its role is probably to preserve at the very heart of contemporary society an ambiguity of the rational and the irrational, of the intelligible and the unfathomable, and this ambiguity is historically necessary insofar as man still must have signs (which reassure him), but also insofar as these signs must be of uncertain content (which releases him from responsibility).⁹⁷

This was not Vallotton’s view. His *faits divers* convey a searing anger about social problems, and he lets no one off the hook. Although his art demonstrates an awareness of the immanent fascination of *faits divers*, the structure of his works is actually very different from what Barthes describes. His pictures are not closed structures but open to and implicating the viewer via analogies of perspective and the strategic placement of surrogate viewers. (The confusion of perspective and authorial voice in *La vie meurtrière* is Vallotton’s literary device for the same effect.) The spectacle’s attraction to and effect on the viewer is incorporated into or mirrored by the scene. Vallotton was more interested in depicting the event along with the fascinated response to it, the accident and the gawking as all of a piece. In this way, his work mounts an ambivalent response to the pervasive consumption of everyday life as entertainment and theater, and his view is all the more affecting in that the reductive flattening and distance of which he makes us suspicious—that is, the gawker’s tendency to turn tragedy into tableau—lend themselves to his two-dimensional artistic medium, an effect that he skillfully exploits with his graphic style.

Ultimately, Vallotton’s anxiety about gawking has to do with its inherent passivity, a passivity that he ingeniously links to the way his audience views works of art. While Vallotton indicts the passive vision of the gawker, he implicates himself and the viewer in the conflict as well, trying to jolt us into awareness of vision’s ethical stakes. Whether or not he believed that active, reflective gawking was possible, his works suggest that he and his viewers could vicariously achieve it in art.

Vallotton’s exploration of the ethics of vision reaches a climactic conclusion at the end of *La vie meurtrière*. The book’s final illustration is a view of a crowd of mourners standing around an open grave, illustrating Verdier’s shattering experience at the burial of his beloved Mme Montessac (Fig. 12). In the novel, Verdier is jostled by a crowd of strangers in the funeral procession, then watches her coffin lowered into the ground.⁹⁸ Vallotton’s drawing, however, shows a different view. By repositioning Verdier’s perspective as a view from *inside* his beloved’s grave, looking up at the crowd of mourners as if he were standing beside her coffin waiting to be buried (alive) with her, Vallotton signals that Verdier can now see the world only through the lens of her death, that he has decided to leave the world with her, and that he deserves to, for her death is his fault. But the boundaries of guilt and accountability are much broader and hazier than this, and Vallotton’s drawing, with its death’s-eye perspective, strains to put them in focus. By aligning his view, as artist and author, to that of Mme Montessac as Verdier watches her descend into the grave, Vallotton captures the reciprocity of the visual violence his novel explores, as if the menace of Verdier’s vision—his literary conceit—had circled back to



12 Félix Vallotton, "Leurs silhouettes s'enlevaient..." (Their silhouettes detached...), ca. 1921, illustration from Vallotton, *La vie meurtrière*, 1930, 227, photorelief, $4\frac{3}{8} \times 2\frac{7}{8}$ in. (11.2 × 7.3 cm). Graphic Arts Collection, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Princeton University Library)

bury him. Once again, Vallotton implicates himself—as artist and author—in the murderous tale he has told, for Verdier describes this burial scene critically as a "hard" silhouette of shocking violence. The silhouettes of the gravediggers detach from the grieving crowd ("Leurs silhouettes s'enlevaient"), serving as immaterial, purely visual portents of the author's death.⁹⁹

This self-reflexive rhetoric—comparable to the artist's self-portrait on the book jacket for *Badauderies parisiennes* and, more subtly, the perspectival gestures to his own position as a *badaud* on the margins of his crowds—points to Vallotton's awareness of his participation, intentional or not, in the gawker culture he depicts. He did not place himself above the crowd the way theorists like Taine and Le Bon did. Despite his often elevated perspectives, he saw himself as thoroughly entangled in the social worlds he portrayed, and he wanted his viewers to feel this entanglement viscerally, too. This is crucial to the ethical punch of his prints. As a painter he favored still lifes, coldly erotic nudes, portraits, and intimate scenes of domestic life, the latter often

revolving around the repressed drama of sexual conflict.¹⁰⁰ All of these artistic interests appear narratively in *La vie meurtrière*, but it is the link between sight and social responsibility—with all the ambiguity of intention such a linkage implies—that drives the novel's dramatic machinery and cuts to the core of Vallotton's philosophical concerns. Likewise, it is in the fin-de-siècle street scenes with their gawkers and crowds that Vallotton most ingeniously explored dilemmas of vision and action, accident and fate. If we, as readers and viewers, take his ethics of vision to heart, we may find ourselves in the grave with him as well.

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Notes

I would like to thank Marina Ducrey and Katia Poletti at the Fondation Félix Vallotton, Lausanne, for their kind hospitality while I worked in their archives; colleagues and students at Princeton University, Emory University, and the Courtauld Institute who offered probing comments and questions about this material at various stages; and the two anonymous reviewers of this article for their generous and helpful feedback, which considerably improved the text. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

1. Félix Vallotton, *La vie meurtrière* (Paris: Circé, 1998), 69.
2. The manuscript is dated January 1907–January 1908. Vallotton tried to find a publisher in 1909, without success. He entrusted the manuscript to André Thérive in 1925, just before his death, with the hope that Thérive would find someone to publish it. The novel first appeared in serialized form in *Le Mercure de France* (January 15–March 15, 1927) and was later published by Éditions des Lettres de Lausanne, along with seven drawings by the author (done about 1921) and a preface by Thérive, in 1930. A second edition was published in 1946 by Éditions des Trois Collines, Geneva and Paris. All of my citations are drawn from the edition published by Circé, Paris, 1998. Brief extracts of the novel are reprinted in Günter Busch et al., *Vallotton* (Lausanne: La Bibliothèque des Arts, 1985), 177–84. Vallotton's other two novels are *Les soupirs de Cyprien Morus* (Geneva and Paris: Trois Collines, 1945), written about 1900, and *Corbehaut* (Lausanne: Le Livre du Mois, 1970), written in 1920. Facsimiles of Vallotton's unpublished plays are available to scholars at the Fondation Félix Vallotton, Lausanne.
3. Sasha M. Newman published a few pages on *La vie meurtrière* in Newman et al., *Félix Vallotton* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery; New York: Abbeville Press, 1991), 123–28. Newman (11, 124, 277) briefly addresses the important role of the gaze in Vallotton's art and in *La vie meurtrière* specifically, but acknowledges in a note that she does not intend "an in-depth analysis of the function of the gaze in Vallotton's work." Dominique Brachlianoff has written the most sustained analysis of the novel in her essay "Vallotton romancier et peintre ou la juste distance," in *Le très singulier Vallotton* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2001), 64–68, arguing that Vallotton's novels use various formal, iconographic, and literary conventions as a "protective screen" through which he can distance himself from his representations of the darkest depths of human nature (73). I intend here to build on Newman's observations by investigating Vallotton's metaphors of vision and perspective more thoroughly and to complicate her assertion, further developed by Brachlianoff, that "Vallotton remained always the detached observer" and "systematically disrupted traditional expectations with the insistent objectivity of a disenfranchised voyeur" (Newman et al., *Félix Vallotton*, 11, 39).
4. On the challenges inherent in using artists' writings as a source or interpretative lens for understanding their work, see Linda Goddard's special issue, "Artists' Writings: 1850 to Present," *Word & Image* 28, no. 4 (October 2012), especially Goddard's introduction, 331–34, and "Artists' Writings: Word or Image?" 409–18; and Charles Harrison, "The Trouble with Writing," in *Conceptual Art and Painting: Further Essays on Art & Language* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), 3–34. Goddard (410) and

- Harrison (12) both mention the “fictionalized autobiographical writings” of artists like Paul Gauguin and Salvador Dalí as occupying a problematic position between documentation and literature. Goddard’s approach is to see such writings as hybrid forms—blends of literature, documentation, theory, and art—rather than categorize them strictly, and to treat them as objects of analysis in their own right that can also shed light on the writer’s broader artistic practice.
5. Brachlianoff (“Vallotton romancier et peintre,” 62) has noted the fundamentally narrative basis of Vallotton’s art, describing his conception of the tableau as “a primarily narrative space.”
 6. Vallotton, *La vie meurtrière*, 224: “Ce livre veut être une confession.”
 7. On the relation between autobiography and prosopopoeia, see Paul de Man, “Autobiography as De-Facement,” *Modern Language Notes* 94, no. 5 (December 1979): 919–30.
 8. Vallotton’s title for the novel was, in fact, *Un meurtre*. Thérive and the editor of *La Mercure de France* changed the title to *La vie meurtrière* after Vallotton’s death, when it was first published. Vallotton originally titled the fictional manuscript on which the novel was based *Un amour: Récit d’une vie*, but crossed out the subtitle on his typescript. “La vie meurtrière, tapuscrit annoté 1,” 5, Fondation Félix Vallotton, Lausanne. The Fondation Vallotton possesses two annotated typescripts of the novel, and the one labeled “tapuscrit annoté 1” matches the final version published by Thérive. The typescript labeled “tapuscrit annoté 2” appears marked by at least two hands (Vallotton’s and Thérive’s?), and several of its additions and deletions do not appear in the final text, suggesting that the “tapuscrit annoté 1” was the author’s definitive edit. Thérive’s preface to the 1930 edition confirms that the published version is faithful to Vallotton’s revisions. André Thérive, preface to Félix Vallotton, *La vie meurtrière* (Lausanne: Les Lettres de Lausanne, 1930), x–xi.
 9. Vallotton, *La vie meurtrière*, 13–14.
 10. On the role of the author as witness and (sometimes unwilling) observer in autobiography, see Francis R. Hart, “Notes for an Anatomy of Modern Autobiography,” *New Literary History* 1, no. 3 (Spring 1970): 510.
 11. *Self-Portrait at Age 20*, 1885 (Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne). Vallotton, *La vie meurtrière*, 43: “un profil assez fin,” “une moustache retardataire,” “des paupières malades,” and “un tout petit menton raté, d’un mauvais petit menton de hasard, qui entache l’ensemble et le tare de sa défaillance.” The mane of brown curls differentiates Verdier from Vallotton, whose hair was straight and blond.
 12. Vallotton, *La vie meurtrière*, 47: “Une excessive timidité. . . .”
 13. In 1884 a close friend of Vallotton’s wrote to his father: “He is intelligent, diligent, and well mannered. I have only one reproach for him: a bit of timidity in his work that sometimes paralyzes his efforts. I am convinced this timidity will disappear as soon as his family demonstrates their confidence in him and encourages him. [*Il est intelligent, laborieux et bien élevé. Je n’ai qu’un seul reproche à lui adresser, c’est un peu de timidité dans le travail qui parfois paralyse ses efforts. Cette timidité disparaîtra j’en ai la conviction du jour où il sentira que sa famille a confiance en lui et l’encourage.*]” Jules Lefebvre to Adrien Vallotton, July 25, 1884, in Gilbert Guisan and Doris Jakubec, eds., *Félix Vallotton: Documents pour une biographie et pour l’histoire d’une oeuvre*, 3 vols. (Paris: La Bibliothèque des Arts, 1973), vol. 1 (1884–99), 28, quoted in Newman et al., *Félix Vallotton*, 269. Thadée Natanson also recalled the artist’s reserve; Guisan and Jakubec, vol. 1, 29. According to Jerome Hamilton Buckley, this confusion of autobiography and fiction was typical of Vallotton’s fin-de-siècle moment: “As the twentieth century approaches, it proves increasingly difficult to distinguish between the autobiography invaded by fiction and the first-person fiction involving the autobiography of the author.” Buckley, *The Turning Key: Autobiography and the Subjective Impulse since 1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 115.
 14. De Man, “Autobiography as De-Facement,” 919–30.
 15. Ibid., 921.
 16. Vallotton, *La vie meurtrière*, 23–24.
 17. For a fascinating discussion of the shadow as “an expressive entity” in itself rather than a mere accessory to form in late nineteenth-century Parisian visual culture, see Nancy Forgiione, “‘The Shadow Only’: Shadow and Silhouette in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris,” *Art Bulletin* 81, no. 3 (September 1999): 490–512.
 18. Vallotton’s novel skillfully exploits a central feature of autobiography as theorized by Hart (“Notes for an Anatomy,” 492): “Every autobiography can appropriately and usefully be viewed as in some degree a drama of intention, and its dramatic intentionality is another component of the autobiographical situation for the interpreter to attend to.”
 19. Vallotton, *La vie meurtrière*, 25–29.
 20. In his typescript, Vallotton eliminated a sentence in which Verdier announces Hubertin as his “first victim”: “Poor Hubertin! . . . And to think he was my first victim! [*Pauvre Hubertin! . . . Et dire qu’il fut ma première victime!*]” “La vie meurtrière, tapuscrit annoté 1,” chap. 1, 8. This excision suggests two possibilities: either Vallotton added the story about Vincent to an earlier draft and forgot to remove this sentence, or the sentence was there to indicate that Verdier saw Vincent’s fall as purely accidental but blamed himself for Hubertin’s death. By removing the sentence, Vallotton allows the matter of guilt and responsibility to remain ambiguous, better preserving his novel’s central source of dramatic suspense. In the same vein, he preserves the mystery of Verdier’s moral conscience by removing the damning phrase “my passive conscience was not yet quivering [*ma conscience amorphe ne vibrait pas encore*]” as well as the unnecessary clarification “No one knew the exact truth; the dead man was quite dead, and the secret stayed between him and me [*Personne ne connut l’exacte vérité; le mort est bien mort, et le secret demeure entre lui et moi*].” Ibid., chap. 1, 16.
 21. Vallotton, *La vie meurtrière*, 27: “Il demeurerait inerte, mais l’œil immense continuait à vivre, et me fixait.”
 22. Ibid., 27–29: “La chose n’ayant pas eu de témoins, rien n’autorisait à douter de ma parole. . . .”
 23. Ibid., 34–38.
 24. Ibid., 38, 40: “Je reçus un coup de fouet dans les jointures, les objets s’effacèrent devant mes yeux, et je m’écroulais. . . .” “J’étais brisé. . . je ne savais plus, je ne percevais plus, je n’existais plus.”
 25. For example, Vallotton redacts metaphors such as “the death knell of dark days began to ring again in my heart [*le glas des mauvais jours se reprit à battre dans mon cœur*],” and “on the young flower of love, I poured my first tears [*sur la jeune fleur d’amour, je versais mes premières larmes*],” as well as grisly details such as “the terrible odor, the stain of flesh sizzling on the stove [*l’odeur atroce, la tache de graisse crépitant sur le poêle*].” “La vie meurtrière, tapuscrit annoté 1,” 59, 67, 93. When these edits were made by Vallotton is unknown. He wrote the novel in 1907 and 1908, but it was not published until shortly after his death, so the changes could have been made at almost any time in the intervening years, although perhaps most likely either soon after completion or about 1921, when the illustrations were added.
 26. “La lente succession des accidents nerveux et sanguins. . . .” The quote is from Émile Zola’s preface to *La fortune des Rougons* (1871), the first novel of the twenty-novel series. For an introduction to Zola’s novels, see Brian Nelson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Zola* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
 27. Vallotton, “La vie meurtrière, tapuscrit annoté 1,” 174: “Quel virus . . . à quelles hérédités maléfiques devais-je un si lugubre pouvoir! . . .” *La vie meurtrière*, 174: “Quel virus m’infectait, et de quelles hérédités maléfiques étais-je l’instrument?”
 28. “La vie meurtrière, tapuscrit annoté 1,” 127: “Et cela, je l’avais fait!” *La vie meurtrière*, 129: “Et de cette douleur j’étais responsable, moi!” Vallotton also cuts half of the subsequent sentence, presumably to maintain some level of ambiguity surrounding Verdier’s intentionality: “So what was I worth, nothing more than a lame toy, bounced around by the least little breeze. . . . [*Que pesais-je donc de n’être ainsi qu’un jouet mauvais, balant à tous les souffles. . . .*]” (“tapuscrit annoté 1,” 127), changing it to “What diabolical curse condemned me always to harm to do evil! . . . [*Quel sort diabolique me condamnait à ~~me~~ faire le mal toujours! . . .*]” (*La vie meurtrière*, 129). Finally, an edit near the end of the novel concerns Verdier’s attempt and failure to write a confession to a woman he has infected with a fatal disease (she does not yet know why she is ill). The original sentence—“At the end of my rope, I gave myself over to Destiny, and left everything else to chance [*À bout de ressources, je m’en remis à la Destinée, et pour le reste attendis le hasard*]” (“tapuscrit annoté 1,” 226)—becomes “At the end of my rope, I tore up the paper and cast my lot with destiny [*À bout de ressources, je déchirai le papier et remis mon sort à la destinée*]” (*La vie meurtrière*, 223). The element of chance is removed. See also n. 20 above.
 29. Vallotton, *La vie meurtrière*, 63–64.
 30. For his first assignment as an art critic, Verdier describes his wish to write an essay on “the Sensuality of line. I have observed, in the course of many discussions, that painters and even sculptors seem to deny line all value other than its architectural capacity to suggest silhouettes. For them only color can awaken sensual desire, by giving represented objects or figures their substance and flesh. As if the curve of a hip or a breast were not as evocative in its defined contour as the infinite nuances of the skin! [*la Sensualité exprimée par le trait. J’avais observé, au cours de maintes discussions, que les peintres et même les sculpteurs semblaient dénier la ligne toute valeur autre qu’évocatrice de silhouettes, architecturale par conséquent. Selon eux, la couleur, en donnant aux objets ou êtres représentés leur qualité de substance et leur pulpe, avait seule pouvoir d’éveiller le désir des sens. Comme si le fléchissement d’une hanche ou d’un sein n’était pas aussi suggestif en son strict contour que les nuances, fussent-elles infinies, de la peau!*]” Ibid., 63. In 1907 Vallotton wrote on the “hypnotic and quavering line [*trait hypnotique et chevrotant*]” of Henri Matisse’s *Luxe, Calme, et Volupté*, 1904–5, exhibited at the Salon d’Automne, Paris. This is another instance of

- Vallotton transferring aspects of his life and career into Verdier's story. Vallotton, "Au Salon d'Automne," *La Grande Revue* (Paris), October 25, 1907, 920, reprinted in Rudolf Koella and Katia Poletti, eds., *Félix Vallotton, 1865–1925: Critique d'art* (Milan: 5 Continents, 2012), 132.
31. Vallotton, *La vie meurtrière*, 65: "Je saisis l'occasion, heureux, d'échapper au moins par la vue à ce cauchemar." The character of Jeanne recalls Vallotton's working-class mistress, Hélène Chatenay, a seamstress who appears in several of his paintings of the 1890s. Vallotton's nickname for Chatenay was "la petite," and Verdier refers to Jeanne as such at several points in the novel, making the link between her and his character overt. After living with Chatenay for many years, Vallotton left her to marry the wealthy widow Gabrielle Rodrigues-Henriques, of the Bernheim family of art dealers, in 1899, a crushing blow to Chatenay, who never fully recovered, emotionally or financially. Vallotton's enduring concern for Chatenay is indicated in his correspondence (he never blames himself overtly for her plight, but his mentions of her suggest considerable guilt) and was a likely source of inspiration for *The Murderous Life*. See Guisan and Jakubec, *Félix Vallotton: Documents*, vol. 1, 186–88, vol. 2, 126–28, 169; and Newman et al., *Félix Vallotton*, 33–36.
 32. Vallotton, *La vie meurtrière*, 69: "J'étais d'heure en heure plus pénétré de cette foi, qu'en moi résidait un principe de mort, que je portais la mort dans mes yeux et la répandais aux alentours" (emphasis mine).
 33. Michael Fried examines a similar association of sight lines and death in "Géricault's Romanticism," in *Géricault: Louvre conférences et colloques*, ed. Régis Michel (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1996), 649–50, 659–60 n. 4. Fried uses "the emphasis on sightlines" in Jacques-Louis David's *The Lictors Returning to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons* (1789) as a reference point for analyzing "the close association of looking with killing" explored by Théodore Géricault in his lithograph *Paralytic Woman* (1821), whose subject Fried describes as "a certain dread of looking, though as always dread implies fascination" (649). Fried interprets the woman's "haunted backward stare across the empty middle of the composition as expressing a mixture of fear of contagion-through-looking and something like guilt for what she sees: as if for Géricault in 1820–21 vision as such were essentially two-way, a source of vulnerability . . . and a channel of power, and as if the effects of seeing were therefore incalculable, contradictory, out of control" (650).
 34. Vallotton, *La vie meurtrière*, 70–73.
 35. After seeing Jeanne in great pain and hearing her not only predict her own death but also blame him for it, Verdier states (ibid., 75): "Je reçus un coup d'assommoir sur les yeux." The original typescript ("La vie meurtrière, tapuscrit annoté 1," 69) extends the sentence to directly link the visual blow to a blow to his conscience: "Je reçus un coup d'assommoir sur les yeux, et ma conscience s'écroula d'un bloc."
 36. This carriage accident echoes an earlier moment in the novel when Verdier meets a man (at Mme Montessac's home) who describes in bloody detail how he killed a young woman in a carriage accident. Verdier barely listens, bored by his chatter, reinforcing the idea that his moral sensibilities are immune to things he cannot see. Vallotton, *La vie meurtrière*, 87–88.
 37. Ibid., 209–15.
 38. Ibid., 224–31.
 39. Ibid., 231–35. Note that Vallotton's former mistress Hélène Chatenay (see n. 31 above) was hit by a car in 1907, after Vallotton had begun to write *La vie meurtrière*. The accident seems to have intensified his latent guilt over leaving her. See his letter to his brother Paul Vallotton, 1899, in Guisan and Jakubec, *Félix Vallotton: Documents*, vol. 1, 186. It seems likely that this event inspired Mme Montessac's accident at the end of the novel, adding another layer of autobiography to the story.
 40. *Paris Intense* is a series of seven lithographs published by L. Joly, Paris, in 1894. For more on this series, see Richard Field, "Exteriors and Interiors: Vallotton's Printed Oeuvre," in Newman et al., *Félix Vallotton*, 61–65. Field's fine work on Vallotton's prints has informed my thinking here.
 41. This particular definition of affective ambivalence is borrowed from Sigmund Freud, "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes" (1915), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, vol. 14 (1914–16; London: Hogarth Press, 1974), 109–40.
 42. On Vallotton's alleged detachment from his subjects, see Newman, introduction to Newman et al., *Félix Vallotton*, 11; Field, "Exteriors and Interiors," 43–44, 51, 54–55, 60–61, 68, 72–73; Linda Schädler, "L'observateur en retrait," and "Distance glaciale," in *Félix Vallotton: Idylle au bord du gouffre* (Zurich: Kunsthau Zürich, 2007), 9–18, 47–51; and Brachlianoff, "Vallotton romancier et peintre," 62–77. Vallotton's alleged coldness as an artist, in tension with the sensuality and sexual drama of much of his painted oeuvre, was the overarching theme of the recent exhibition and catalog *Félix Vallotton: Le feu sous la glace* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux–Grand Palais, 2013).
 43. *L'Assiette au Beurre* 48 (Paris, March 1, 1902). Lithographs from this series were also sold separately as a special supplement of the journal.
 44. For information on where and when Vallotton's work was published in the press, see Maxime Vallotton and Charles Goerg, *Félix Vallotton: Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre gravé et lithographié* (Geneva: Bonvent, 1972); and Mary Anne Stevens, *The Graphic Work of Félix Vallotton: 1865–1925* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1976).
 45. The assassin, Santo Caserio, was executed on August 16, 1894, in Lyons. See Laurence Madeline's discussion of this work in a catalog entry in *Crime & Châtiment*, ed. Jean Clair (Paris: Gallimard; Musée d'Orsay, 2010), 199.
 46. See Michel Foucault, "The Spectacle of the Scaffold," in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Modern Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 32–69; and Pieter Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering: Executions and the Evolution of Repression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 198. The last public execution in France took place in 1939. A guillotine did not appear in public again until 2010, as part of the exhibition *Crime & Châtiment* at the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, spearheaded by the former French justice minister Robert Badinter.
 47. In the early 1890s, when Vallotton's work was most political, he was often linked with Théophile Alexandre Steinlen, Henri Ibels, and Maximilien Luce, all artists with antimilitary anarchist-socialist views. He also contributed prints to anarchist journals such as *Le Père Peinard*, *Les Temps Nouveaux*, and *La Revue Anarchiste*, and worked for the outspoken anarchist Félix Fénéon at *La Revue Blanche*. See Newman et al., *Félix Vallotton*, 21, 72.
 48. Abbé Faure, *Au pied de l'échafaud: Souvenirs de la Roquette* (Paris: Dreyfous et Dalsace, 1896). The advertisement was for the newspaper *Le Matin*, which published Faure's book in serialized form.
 49. For a rigorous philosophical examination of the relation between individual guilt and collective responsibility, including the role of bystanders, see Christopher Kutz, *Complicity: Ethics and Law for a Collectivist Age* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
 50. A number of Vallotton's prints represent policemen as villains or forces of fear and oppression, including *The Charge* (*La charge*), 1893; *The Anarchist* (*L'anarchiste*), 1892; and *The Demonstration* (*La manifestation*), 1893.
 51. The population of Paris doubled between the mid-1870s and 1905; Louis Chevalier, *La formation de la population parisienne au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950). Theodore Zeldin provides a useful bibliography of primary sources written by doctors and social scientists "revealing the mental torments of people in this period," many of which were linked to urban life, in *France 1848–1945: Anxiety & Hypocrisy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 417.
 52. See Naomi Schor, *Zola's Crowds* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).
 53. Hippolyte Taine, *Les origines de la France contemporaine*, 6 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1876–94).
 54. Gabriel Tarde, *Les lois de l'imitation* (Paris: Alcan, 1890); and Gustave Le Bon, *La psychologie des foules* (Paris: Alcan, 1895), trans. as *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York: Dover, 2002). For an excellent history of the development of crowd psychology in France, including Le Bon's unacknowledged borrowings from Tarde and others, see Susanna Barrows, *Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); and Robert Nye, *The Origins of Crowd Psychology: Gustave Le Bon and the Crisis of Mass Democracy in the Third Republic* (London: Sage, 1975).
 55. "Society is imitation and imitation is a kind of somnambulism." Tarde, *Les lois de l'imitation*, 77.
 56. For a history of the lesser-known leftist branch of fin-de-siècle crowd psychology led by the work of the Italian Scipio Sighele, whose work—in contrast to Le Bon's—centered on an idea of the crowd as a force of social progress, see Olivier Bosc, *La foule criminelle* (Paris: Fayard, 2007).
 57. Sigmund Freud, *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse* (1921), trans. James Strachey as *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (New York: Norton, 1989). Benito Mussolini read Le Bon's text multiple times, citing it as "an excellent work to which I frequently refer" (quoted in Barrows, *Distorting Mirrors*, 179), and Edward Bernays, the founding father of modern public relations, drew heavily on Le Bon's work as well as that of Freud, his uncle, in developing theories of advertising and propaganda that are still widely used (Larry Tye, *The Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays and the Birth of Public Relations* [New York: Crown, 1998]). For a study of the broad and continuing impact of Le Bon's text on fields such as political sociology, modern marketing, and the development of media, see Jean-François Phelizon, *Relire la psychologie des foules de Gustave Le Bon* (Paris: Nuvis, 2011).
 58. Trans. in Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 16. Le Bon, *La psychologie des foules*, 24: "Parmi les caractères spéciaux des foules, il en est plusieurs, tels que l'impulsivité, l'irritabilité, l'incapacité de raisonner, l'absence de jugement et d'esprit critique, l'exagération des sentiments . . . que l'on observe également chez les êtres appartenant à des formes inférieures d'évolution, tels que la femme, le sauvage et l'enfant."

59. Le Bon preserves a rhetorical distance from the crowds he describes throughout his text as their "psychologist" (*The Crowd*, 64), and his chapter on leaders makes clear his belief that certain individuals with "prestige" can transcend crowd behavior and even manipulate it at will (Le Bon, *La psychologie des foules*, 105–27).
60. Pierre Larousse, *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle*, vol. 2, 1867, s.v. "Badaud," 39: "Celui, celle qui s'étonne de tout, qui admire tout, passe son temps à regarder naïvement tout ce qui se rencontre. . . . Le badaud est curieux . . . et il montre sa contentement ou sa surprise en tenant sa bouche ouverte, en *bayant*." Although the term is gendered male in the latter part of this entry, I have translated the definition as gender-neutral in accordance with the initial definition ("celui, celle"), and indeed, the activity was ascribed to both men and women in literature, journalism, and works of art.
61. Émile Littré, "Badaud," *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, vol. 1 (Paris: Hachette, 1873), 276: "Badaud: Qui s'arrête à considérer tout ce qui lui semble nouveau. [Gawker: Someone who stops to look at anything new.] Les badauds de Paris, locution qui vient de ce que, à Paris comme dans les grandes villes, une foule s'amasse rapidement autour de quoi que ce soit."
62. Victor Fournel, *Ce qu'on voit dans les rues de Paris* (Paris: Adolphe Delahays, 1858), 261–63.
63. On the distinction between *flânerie* and *badauderie*, see Auguste de Lacroix, "Le flâneur," in *Les français peints par eux-mêmes: Encyclopédie morale du dix-neuvième siècle*, vol. 3, ed. Léon Curmer (Paris, 1841), 66; and Fournel, *Ce qu'on voit dans les rues*, 268–75.
64. The literature on the *flâneur* is vast. Important historical and theoretical approaches to the subject include (but are not limited to) Laurent Turcot, "Promenades et flâneries à Paris du XVIIe au XXIe siècles: La marche comme construction d'une identité urbaine," in *Marcher en ville: Faire corps, prendre corps, donner corps aux ambiances urbaines*, ed. Rachel Thomas (Paris: Éditions des Archives Contemporaines, 2010), 65–84; Aruna D'Souza and Tom McDonough, eds., *The Invisible Flâneur? Gender, Public Space, and Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, "The Flâneur: The City and Its Discontents," in *Paris as Revolution: Writing the Nineteenth-Century City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 80–114; Keith Tester, ed., *The Flâneur* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Elizabeth Wilson, "The Invisible Flâneur," *New Left Review* 191 (January–February 1992): 90–110; Susan Buck-Morss, "The Flâneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering," *New German Critique* 39 (1986): 99–140; and Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: NLB, 1973). Despite the widespread significance of *badauderie* as a subject for writers and artists in nineteenth-century France, the only historians to give the *badaud* substantive attention are Gregory Shaya, "The Flâneur, the Badaud, and the Making of a Mass Public in France, circa 1860–1910," *American Historical Review* 109, no. 1 (February 2004): 41–77; and Christopher E. Forth, "The End of the Flâneur," in *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 105–10. A rare instance of the *badaud*'s appearance in art historical literature is Robert L. Herbert's identification of the figure at left in Edgar Degas's *Place de la Concorde* (1875) as a "*badaud*," an onlooker who is easily distracted by what comes within his notice." Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 35.
65. Lacroix, *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, 66: "Le badaud ne pense pas; il ne perçoit des objets qu'extérieurement."
66. In addition to the works already mentioned, see, for example, *The Paris Crowd* (*La foule à Paris*), 1892; *Print Enthusiasts* (*Les amateurs d'estampes*), 1892; *Parading through the Streets in Single File* (*Le monôme*), 1893; *Street Singers* (*Les chanteurs*), 1893; *Absolution* (*L'absoute*), 1894; *The Suicide* (*Le suicide*), 1894; and *Fireworks* (*Le feu d'artifice*), 1901.
67. *La Revue Blanche*, Paris, 1891–1903. For more on this journal, see Paul-Henri Bourrelier, *La Revue Blanche: Une génération dans l'engagement, 1890–1905* (Paris: Fayard, 2007); and Georges Bernier, *La Revue Blanche* (Paris: Hazan, 1991).
68. Octave Uzanne, ed., *Badauderies parisiennes: Les rassemblements; Physiologies de la rue*, with contributions by Paul Adam, Alfred Athys, Victor Barrucand, Tristan Bernard, Léon Blum, Romain Coolus, Félix Fénéon, Gustave Kahn, Ernest La Jeunesse, L. Muhlfeld, Thadée Natanson, Edmond Pilon, Jules Renard, Pierre Veber et Veek (Paris: H. Floury, 1896). For a discussion of this anthology in the context of the history of illustrated books, see Luce Abélès, "Tradition et modernité: Les rassemblements, un livre de transition," in *L'illustration: Essais d'iconographie; Actes du Séminaire CNRS, Paris (GDR 712), 1993–1994*, ed. Maria Teresa Caracciolo and Ségolène Le Men (Paris: Klincksieck, 1999), 311–25. Although the Vallotton prints in *Badauderies parisiennes* look like woodcuts, as they adopt various features of the artist's style in that medium, and despite the fact that they are advertised as "gravures" on the book's title page, they are probably relief prints made photomechanically from drawings. See Field, "Exteriors and Interiors," 273 n. 26.
69. Uzanne, "Prologue: Félix Vallotton et l'origine de ce Livre des Rassemblements; La bibliophilie et la jeunesse littéraire contemporaine," in Uzanne, *Badauderies parisiennes*, i–v: "L'idée me vint de lui demander une série d'estampes brutalistes sur la Badauderie parisienne. . . ."
70. On Vallotton's early fame as a graphic artist, see Marina Ducrey, "Honneur au graveur," in *Félix Vallotton, 1865–1925: L'oeuvre peint*, vol. 1 (Milan: 5 Continents, 2005), 243–45.
71. Lucien Muhlfeld, "L'affichage moderne," in Uzanne, *Badauderies parisiennes*, 70: "Il faut l'image pour retenir le regard au hasard accroché."
72. Romain Coolus, "Les affiches lumineuses," in Uzanne, *Badauderies parisiennes*, 113: "Aussi la perspective de quelques heures noires, bien reposantes, bien pacifiantes nous-est-elle comme un rafraîchissement. On pourra déambuler à l'aveuglette, en tâtonnant délicieusement, sans être forcé de rien voir, sans être tenu de rien regarder. La bonne nuit nous protège."
73. Ibid., 114: "La nuit avait vaincu l'affiche; l'affiche triomphe de la nuit; elle en surgit victorieuse, lumineuse et despotique; l'écran—un écran d'arrêt—nous agrippe au passage. . . . la projection nous persécute; elle nous assène du spectacle. . . ."
74. "Romain Coolus," in "Complete Index to World Film," www.citwf.com/person39983.htm (accessed July 20, 2014).
75. Coolus, "Les affiches lumineuses," 115: "Il s'imbibe les yeux de lumière; et si, lorsqu'il repose, on les pressait comme des éponges, ils égoutteraient de l'image."
76. Le Bon's chapter "Idées, raisonnements, et l'imagination des foules," in *La psychologie des foules*, 48–59, deals most directly with the power of images to influence the crowd.
77. Paul Adam, "L'ivrogne," in Uzanne, *Badauderies parisiennes*, 66: "C'est l'idiotie de la plèbe, la bassesse de la plèbe, la méchanceté de la plèbe, en pleine évidence. . . . Et voici les petits rendus fiévreux par la convoitise de meurtrir le faible, de tuer. . . ."
78. Félix Fénéon, "L'incendie," in Uzanne, *Badauderies parisiennes*, 159–64.
79. For a detailed account of the charges against Fénéon and the ensuing trial, see Joan U. Halperin, *Félix Fénéon: Aesthete & Anarchist in Fin-de-siècle Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 267–95.
80. Fénéon's *faits divers* were first collected and published by Jean Paulhan in his edition of the writer's complete works: *Oeuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948). They have since been translated by Luc Sante as *Novels in Three Lines* (New York: New York Review Book Classics, 2007). For an insightful analysis, see Julian Barnes, "Behind the Gas Lamp," *London Review of Books* 29, no. 19 (October 4, 2007): 9–11.
81. See Rudolf Koella, "Félix Vallotton, un 'artiste-critique' au tournant du siècle," in Koella and Poletti, *Félix Vallotton, 1865–1925*, 3–9.
82. As a critic, novelist, and playwright, Vallotton embodied the close relationship between artists and writers in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century France. For an excellent analysis of the relations between art, literature, and criticism as competing and intersecting "cultural fields" in this period, including a discussion of the "fin-de-siècle crisis in artist-writer relations," see Dario Gamboni, *The Brush and the Pen: Odilon Redon and Literature*, trans. Mary Whittall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
83. Scholars have argued that Zola, Guy de Maupassant, and Maurice Barrès culled material for their novels from *faits divers*. See Louis Mandin, "Les origines de *Thérèse Raquin*," *Mercure de France* 297 (May 1, 1940): 282–98; Charlotte Schapira, "Maupassant et le fait divers," *Hebrew University Studies in Literature and the Arts* 15 (Spring 1987): 23–32; and Ida-Marie Frandon, "Fait divers et littérature: En marge d'une exposition," *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de France* 84 (1984): 561–69. For a broad study of the relation between French literature and *faits divers* with an emphasis on the twentieth century, see David H. Walker, *Outrage and Insight: Modern French Writers and the "Fait Divers"* (Oxford: Berg, 1995).
84. *Le Grand dictionnaire universel*, 1872, quoted and trans. Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 36.
85. Ibid.
86. Anne-Claude Ambroise-Rendu, *Petits récits des désordres ordinaires: Les faits divers dans la presse française des débuts de la IIIe République à la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Seli Arslan, 2004).
87. Dominique Kalifa, *L'encre et le sang: Récits de crime et société à la Belle Époque Paris* (Paris: Fayard, 1995). See also Kalifa's collection of essays that looks at the culture of crime in nineteenth-century France more broadly, *Crime et culture au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Perrin, 2005).
88. In 1890, *Le Petit Journal* introduced a subsection of its *faits divers* rubric titled "Les écrasés" or "Chapitre des écrasés," an indication of the fin-de-

siècle fascination with traffic accidents and their victims. Ambroise-Rendu, *Petits récits des désordres ordinaires*, 191–92.

89. *Ibid.*, 107–16.
90. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Sur les faits divers” (1954), in *Signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 388: “Le goût du fait divers, c’est le désir de voir, et voir c’est deviner dans un pli de visage tout un monde semblable au nôtre. / Mais voir, c’est aussi apprendre que les plaisirs, que les douleurs sans limites qui nous remplissent ne sont pour le spectateur étranger qu’un pauvre grimace. On peut tout voir, et vivre après avoir tout vu. Voir est cette étrange manière de se rendre présent en gardant ses distances, et sans participer, de transformer les autres en choses visibles. Celui qui voit se croit invisible: ses actes restent pour lui dans l’entourage flatteur de ses intentions, et il prive les autres de cet alibi, il les réduit à quelques mots, à quelques gestes. Le voyeur est sadique.”
91. *Ibid.*, 389: “Ce qui est caché, c’est d’abord le sang, le corps, le linge, l’intérieur des maisons et des vies, la toile sous la peinture qui s’écaille, les matériaux sous ce qui avait forme, la contingence et finalement la mort.”
92. *Ibid.*, 389: “Ces nuances dans l’absurde sont un spectacle fascinant—mais après tout ne nous apprennent que notre parti pris de regarder sans comprendre.”
93. *Ibid.*, 388: “Peut-être n’y a-t-il aucun fait divers qui ne puisse donner lieu à des pensées profondes. [Merleau-Ponty then recalls seeing a man commit suicide in an Italian train station, and the way the crowd of witnesses swarmed around him only to be beaten back by militia.] A voir mourir un inconnu, ces hommes auraient pu apprendre à juger leur vie.”
94. Roland Barthes, “Structure of the *fait-divers*” (1962), in *Roland Barthes: Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 187.
95. *Ibid.*, 194.
96. *Ibid.*, 188–91.
97. *Ibid.*, 194.
98. Vallotton, *La vie meurtrière*, 243.
99. *Ibid.*: “Their silhouettes detached in sharp relief, the violence of which shocked me; still sunk in my torpor, I continued not to hear, and the silence of this macabre agitation gave it the unreal appearance of a nightmare [*Leurs silhouettes s’enlevaient avec un relief dur, dont la violence me choqua; toujours plongé dans ma torpeur, je continuais à ne pas entendre, et le silence de cette agitation macabre lui donnait une apparence irréelle de cauchemar*].” By giving this closing scene the “unreal appearance of a nightmare,” Vallotton acknowledges once again his novel’s duplicity as autobiography and fiction.
100. On the latter theme, Vallotton also produced a portfolio of ten woodcuts titled *Intimités* (Intimacies), 1897–98, a striking contrast to his scenes of crowds and public life in Paris. On this series, see Field, “Exteriors and Interiors,” 43–91.