CDF II International Congress
BARCELONA JUN. 2015

Strand 2: Keynote speech

HYBRID FEMININITY AND ART NOUVEAU

Elizabeth K. Mix, Butler University

This paper will examine why and how the hybrid feminine occurs in Art Nouveau prints, paintings, sculpture, decorative art objects and jewelry by Georges de Feure (1868-1943), Alphonse Mucha (1860-1939), Victor Prouvé (1858-1943) and René Lalique (1860-1945). The hybrid feminine in Art Nouveau is often formed with aspects drawn from nature, specifically flowers, insects, birds, fish, reptiles and animals. Sometimes the hybrid condition is created with reference simultaneously to aspects both of nature and elements of technology. A constant in the hybrid feminine however is fashion, used here in two different ways: as both a reference to clothing and accessories and more generally as a condition of modernity that became increasingly transient due to the rise of the department store and mass production and marketing techniques aimed at the new leisure class.

It is not insignificant that illustrated journals proliferated at the same time as the development of Art Nouveau, for it was in this printed context that fashion was promoted. The regular cyclical production of illustrated periodicals helped to popularize the fashions available in department stores and stimulate the expectation in the public that women's fashions would regularly change and evolve, especially connected to the change of seasons. Images in popular journals, especially *La Vie Parisienne* predict the development of the hybrid feminine in Art Nouveau. This lavishly illustrated publication, which already had a circulation of 8,500 in 1866, carried the subtitle "the elegant life, topics of the day, fantasies, travel , theatre, music, fine arts, sports and fashion" and its primary purpose was to advertise Paris and its merchandise to the provinces and other countries. How fashion was defined by writers and artists has bearing on the navigation of the space between "real" clothing and "fantasy" conceptions of costume and fashion in the popular press. We will see that there is a gap between reproductions in the fashion and popular presses that expresses anxiety about women's roles (as indicated by the nature of their dress) in often humorous ways. Women are seen by male artists as being consumed with a passion for la mode that often indicated a frivolous attitude that could compromise "traditional" notions of domesticity and childbearing. Several contemporary articles probed the "psychology" of fashion that indicated that a more far-reaching significance of "clothing as sign" that predates Roland Barthes' foray into the semiotics of fashion. Several of the articles, by Gomez Carrillo, titled "Psychologie de la Mode" appeared in *Revue Bleue* in 1910, but the earliest "La "Psychologie du vêtement," written by Guillaume Ferrero, appeared in *La Nouvelle Revue* in 1894.[1] Ferrero declared that clothing did not have the sole function of protecting the human body from the elements, nor was its only purpose a matter of morality (via modesty). To Ferraro, clothing had a "purely psychological" function, imbued with social importance, perhaps more than the physiological or moral aspects. He saw clothing as ultimately integrating the physical individuality of the wearer with moral factors. As a result, when something changed in clothing, something also changed within the actual members of society. While Ferraro believed new fashion could stimulate joy in the wearer, especially in the case of women, he also believed that fashion could indicate potential danger.

---

[1] Guillaume Ferrero, "La Psychologie du vêtement," *La Nouvelle Revue*, 1894, p. 773

Advertisements for clothing and certain couturieres were featured in dedicated fashion publications, and these, along with both serious and humorous illustrations of

"fashionable" women, were capable of stimulating desire in classes that were not financially capable of attaining them by legal and moral means. Similarly responsible for the creation of desire was the ever-expanding role of the department store, which, through the linking of various departments was more capable of demonstrating the "complete picture" of fashion than previous small specialty stores that catered to very specific needs. The stores also provided more job opportunities for women directly in the fashion industry—women who sold or modeled fashions were expected to dress "more fashionably" themselves. Primary sources indicate that the notion of the "Parisienne" was intricately linked to the idea of "fashion" or la mode, as well as to many key terms that were equally applied to certain types of clothing and certain types of women: desire, temptation, seduction, vanity, luxury, elegance and chicness.

Images in *La Vie Parisienne* from the 1870s and early 1880s show a progressive and sinister development of hybrid feminine creatures. In "Les femmes-oiseaux, les femmes-fleurs, les femme-anges, les femmes-tout!!!," (figure 1) women's fashions are the site of transformation into natural forms of birds.[2] In some of *La Vie Parisienne*'s spreads only some of the women depicted receive the hybrid treatment. In "Livres de messe" books are connected to different types of women (figure 2). Here only the woman termed the "elegant" receives insect wings while the "austere" woman is given bird wings.[3] In "Coeurs de femme" (figure 3) the figures identified as "Innocence,"

---

[2] "Les femmes-oiseaux, les femmes-fleurs, les femme-anges, les femmes-tout!!!" *La Vie Parisienne*, December 15, 1877 pp. 696-697.

[3] "Livres de messe," *La Vie Parisienne*, April 8, 1882, pp. 208-209.

"Passion" and "Vampire" receive wings. Here the size and type of the wings are significant. "Innocence" receives small bird wings suggestive of an angel and her heart is filled with photographs of men; both of the other women are described in the text as monsters. "Passion" has much larger wings with peacock feathers integrated and her heart contains a revolver and a bottle of vitriol. The Vampire has the wings of a gargoyle or bat and her heart contains a spiderweb complete with a large spider and assorted victims. The caption reads, in part, "the monster waits for others, always new… the revenge of the minotaur."[4]

Part I. The Material of Hybridity

Before turning to the specific ways that the hybrid feminine condition is found in Art Nouveau examples, let us consider the origins and significance of the various natural elements with which the feminine is combined. The association with women and nature that began long before the nineteenth century and in fact can be traced back to the Biblical story of Adam and Eve. In the Genesis story, Eve was closely connected to nature in Eden, a garden of lush vegetation containing the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The gender encoding of nature itself as inherently feminine had its basis here as well, although much scientific literature made similar claims.[5] Nature continued to be characterized as feminine (benevolent and maternal) by nineteenth-century scientists, such as Charles Darwin in his *On the Origin of the Species* (1859).[6] At the same time a series of enormously popular books by Jules Michelet *L'Oiseau* (1856), *L'Insecte* (1857), *L'Amour* (1858) and *La Femme* (1859) ensured that femininity and nature were intricately linked. While each of his texts posits nature to be feminine, none is as dramatic in its connection of women to flowers as *La Femme*, where woman is seen both as the caretaker of the garden (in the role of nurturer) and *as* a plant, that will "bloom" for her husband in marriage. In this sense, Michelet's work provided a basis for later nineteenth-century reformers to blame the "new woman" for the decline in population. Michelet's audience consisted of men and

---

[4] "Coeurs de femme," *La Vie Parisienne*, November 24, 1883, pp. 658-659.

[5] Carolyn Merchant, in *Earthcare: Women and the Environment* (NY: Routledge, 1995), discusses the male/female; technology/nature dichotomy and assigns three distinct forms of nature associated specifically with Eve: virgin land with the potential for development is associated with "original Eve," while chaotic wilderness or wasteland is connected to "fallen Eve" and nature as a nurturing garden is representative of "mother Eve" (32). Julien Offroy de la Mettrie had a theory of a uniformity of nature, leading to a startling correspondence between the "systems" of humans and plants: "L'homme n'est donc point un arbre renversé, dont le cerveau serait la racine, puisqu'elle résulte du seul concours des vaisseaux abdominaux qui sont les premiers formés; du moins le sont-ils avant les téguments qui les couvrent et forment

women of the middle class who shared his views about the "naturalness" of marriage and family.

The chapters in *La Femme* correspond to different developmental stages. In chapter seven, entitled "Love at Ten Years - Flowers," Michelet stated that the female

---

l'écorce de l'homme." "Man, therefore, is by no means a tree in reverse, with root and brain interchanged, since the brain develops solely from the aggregation of the abdominal vessels, which are the first to be formed; at least, they are so before the teguments that cover them and form man's 'bark'." Julien Offroy de la Mettrie, *L'Homme-Plante* (New York: Institute of French Studies, 1936, p. 118 (original publication date was 1748). Mettrie also described the "ejaculations" of plants as being similar to man; while more feminine traits included the "même ovaires, mêmes oeufs, même faculté fécondante" "same ovaries, same eggs, same ability to bear fruit." p. 130. While Mettrie chose to connect plant life to "mankind" in general, other scientists, including Johann Casper Lavater in his *Essays on Physiognomy* (1775-8) separated male and female on the bases of dichotomous characteristics: "Man is more solid; woman is softer / Man is straighter; woman is more supple / Man walks with a firm step; woman with a soft and light one Man contemplates and observes; woman looks and feels" Lavater quoted in L. J. Jordanova, "Naturalizing the Family: Literature and the Bio-Medical Sciences in the Late Eighteenth Century, in Languages of Nature, p. 92. Lavater was Swiss, the original language of his text was German, but it was quickly translated into both English and French, becoming a standard reference in most of Europe.

[6] See Gillian Beer's essay, "'The Face of Nature: Anthropomorphic Elements in the Language of The Origin of the Species," in L. J. Jordanova, *Languages of Nature: critical essays on science and literature* (Rutgers University Press, 1986, pp. x-x.

child is called upon to love “vegetable life” through her connection to nature.[7] According to him, woman can learn all she needs to know in order to fulfill her domestic role from plants. He described the flower as “a whole world, pure, innocent” and then connected woman directly to it. ". . . the little human flower harmonizes with it so much the better for not being like it in its essential point. Woman, especially the female child, is all nervous life; and so the plant, which has no nerves, is a sweet companion to it, calming and refreshing it, in a relative innocence."[8] But Michelet might also be seen as indicating a hybrid condition that spans flowers, human sexuality and animal instinct when he wrote “It is true that this plant, when in blossom, excited beyond its strength, seems to be animalized.”[9] He further suggested that the perfume given off by flowers can be dangerous in its ability to hasten “the sensual crises, and forcing the blossom that should rather be delayed.”[10] Only the husband should only open this "blossom." Michelet was by no means alone in this particular interpretation of woman’s inherent nature, but as a respected historian, he affirmed these ideas in the popular vernacular by 1859. Women continued to be linked with flowers, as, for example, in Pol de Saint-Merry’s book also entitled *La Femme* (ca. 1898), in which the author declared: “Les femmes sont les fleurs brillantes du parterre humain.”[11]

---

[7] Michelet. *Woman*. Translated by J. W. Palmer. (New York: Carleton, MDCCCLXVIII), p. 85. Similar arguments regarding woman’s role as expressed by nature are found in each of the “natural” texts. For a thorough analysis of Michelet’s writings involving women see Jeanne Calo, *La Création de la Femme chez Michelet*. (Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1975). On Michelet’s works in the “nature” cycle see Linda Orr, *Jules Michelet: Nature, History and Language* (Cornell University Press, 1976) and Roger Huss, “Michelet and the Uses of Natural Reference,” in L.J. Jordanova, ed., *Languages of Nature: Critical Essays on Science and Literature*. (Rutgers University Press, 1986.)

[8] Michelet, p. 86.

[9] Ibid. Michelet, who was himself a student of natural history, no doubt was aware of botanical studies that discussed flower parts as “sexual” and related them to women. See Delaporte, *Nature’s Second Kingdom*, especially pp. 92-99.

[10] Michelet, p. 87.

[11] Pol de Saint-Merry, *La Femme* (Paris, c. 1898), p. 20.

[“Women are the glorious flowers of the human border.”] This statement is characteristic of the positive type of association between women and flowers in the nineteenth century.

The evolution of a similar symbolism, combining women with flowers, is found in *La Vie Parisienne*, which published a significant number of articles and images on the subject.

A spread entitled *Femmes et Fleurs* of 1876 (figure 4) demonstrated broad knowledge of the language of flowers, and discussed this symbolism in conjunction with women and their fashion.[12] The “femme aux oeillets” ["the woman of carnations"] is “Une coquetterie raffinée, de l’esprit qui relève tout, des caprices qui bouleversent tout, un caractère panaché comme ses fleurs chéries, passionnée et voulante, ardente et timide, un incendie dans un encensoir.” [“a refined flirt, her soul all brilliance, her fickleness all destruction; her character is as variegated as her beloved flowers, passionate and insistent, ardent and timid, a fire in a censer.”] In similar fashion, the petite bourgeoisie is associated with the Reseda, the “modern Venus,” with the rose, and the fortuneteller with the daisy. Tulips are associated with foolish women who are lucky enough to have good *couturières*. Georges de Feure demonstrates a similar understanding of women’s characteristics as expressed by specific flowers in his 1899 works *Innocence ou Vertu* (figure 5) and *Expérience ou Vice* (figure 6).

One of the most elaborate centerfolds in *La Vie Parisienne* to examine flower symbolism is the *Bouquet de Femmes,* (figure 7), of 1883.[13] Here rather than just being associated with flowers, women actually *become* the flowers. While traditional flower symbolism remains, the highly detailed descriptions focus on the women, indicating their hair and eye color, as well as personality traits. Included is Foxglove, a pale brunette with violet eyes, her quiet appearance interrupted by a cruel mouth and a tendency toward naughtiness. Lazy Poppy is elegant, with sapphire-blue eyes, black hair, and milky skin. Hyacinth, with black eyes and violent red lips, has a classical, cold exterior that hides an excessively passionate nature. Orchid is infatuated with luxury and chicness. The reader is warned to beware of the sarcastic, corrosive nature of Nasturtium, the self-involved Primrose, and the introverted Pansy. It is the scale of the women compared to the flowers that complete the sense of interchangeability—this is seen in George de Feure's *Fan* of 1900 (figure 8), which features a woman at the same scale as the lilies articulated using the whiplash line of Art Nouveau.

---

[12] “Femmes et fleurs,” *La Vie Parisienne*, Nov. 11, 1876, pp. 644-645.

[13] “Bouquet de femmes,” *La Vie Parisienne*, March 24, 1883, pp. 160-161.

While the sexuality of flowers was frequently revealed in eighteenth-century botanical texts, the sexualization of women *as* flowers occurred only during the late nineteenth century. As the turn of the century approached, the *femme-fleur* took on increasingly negative associations. This coincided with the rise of the symbolist movement and intense feminist agitation for women's rights. Artists and writers at the turn of the century who used negative flower imagery often invoked Charles Baudelaire and his seminal work, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, which was determined by the critic Théophile Gautier to be powerful specifically because it subverted the well-established language of flowers.[14] Written beginning in the 1850s, the poems remained popular throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century society, influencing countless artists, and writers, in their use of woman/flower imagery.[15] In the hands of artists in the decorative arts movement of Art Nouveau, the "flower of evil" was not an abstraction. The motif of the flower worked so well within the realm of popular culture because it had a visual ambiguity that gave it the fluidity of spoken argot. With or without explicatory text, the flower embodied the duality of good and evil and, most importantly, this duality turned on female sexuality. Georges de Feure completed a series of works that illustrate evil

---

[14] Théophile Gautier publicized his interpretations of the significance of *Les Fleurs du mal* first in 1862, in Eugène Crépet's *Les Poètes français*, then in *Le Moniteur Universel* (1867), and again in *L'Univers illustré* (1868). The definitive version of Gautier's thoughts eventually became the preface to *Les Fleurs du mal*. See Claude-Marie Senninger, *Baudelaire par Théophile Gautier* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1986) for details on the relationship and reproductions of

woman/flower hybrids (figures 9-12), including *Feux-Follets* (1893), *The Source of Evil* (1894), *Blind Love, Bloody Love* (1894), *Dans la rêve* (1897) and *Damned Women*

---

the original French texts. The most comprehensive analysis of all of the themes within *Les Fleurs du mal* remains the staggering 4 volumes by Léon Bopp, *Psychologie des Fleurs du mal* (Geneva: Droz, 1964). See also James R. Lawler, *Poetry and Moral Dialectic: Baudelaire's "Secret Architecture*." (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997).

[15] Originally published as an edition of 1300 in 1857 (and subjected to a censorship trial that same year), Baudelaire produced a new, expanded work in 1861 in an edition of 1500. Individual poems also appeared in newspapers—three poems were found in *Le Messager de l'Assemblée*; 18 poems appeared under the borrowed title *Fleurs du mal* in advance of the appearance of the text, in the June 1, 1855 issue of *Revue des Deux Mondes*. (critic and short-story writer Hippolyte Babou suggested the title to Baudelaire after considerable discussion. Joanna Richardson, *Baudelaire.* [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), p. 145. See also Alfred Engstrom, "Baudelaire's Title for 'Les Fleurs du mal,'" *Orbis Litterarum* v. 12 (1957): 193-202.] At the 1857 trial, the public prosecutor had the edition seized; he filed suit against Baudelaire and his publisher. Baudelaire was fined and ordered to remove six poems: "Lethe," "Jewels," "Lesbos," "Damned Women," "Against her Levity" and "Metamorphosis of the Vampire." The overriding issue centered on lesbianism. [See F. W. Leakey, *Baudelaire: Collected Essays, 1953-1988* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), especially "*Les Lesbiennes*: A verse novel?"[1988], pp. 29-47.] Baudelaire was defended by Victor Hugo, who praised the Fleurs du mal. By 1862, Swinburne (another major advocate) published a defense of *Fleurs du mal* in *The Spectator*. [See Anne Walder, *Swinburne's Flowers of Evil: Baudelaire's Influence on the Poems and Ballads, First Series*. (Stockholm: Uppsala, 1976).] In 1866, sixteen poems written after the second edition appeared were published as "Nouvelles Fleurs du mal" in Catulle Mendès' publication *Parnasse Contemporain.* The third edition of *Fleurs du mal* appeared in 1868, the year following Baudelaire's death. Between 1869 and 1903, at least 19 editions appeared, with never more than three years passing without a new reprinting. There were several editions of the "pieces condamnées" or the censored original poems. By 1891 a new illustrated edition appeared with works by Odilon Redon, then a leading Symbolist image maker. Thus the continued popularity of Baudelaire's works cannot be questioned.

(1897-98).[16] In each of these it is difficult to distinguish where the bodies of the women begin and where they end. Woman/flower hybrids also are found in the jewelry of Lalique (figures 13, 14). The most complete hybrid of woman flower, however, is found in Victor Prouvé's *Fille-Fleur* (figure 15) made in 1896 in bronze and later translated into Bisquitware by Mougin in 1902 and Pate de Verre by Daum in 1905. Prouvé's work illustrates a passage from fellow Art Nouveau artist Emile Galle: "…we are fully aware that the eloquence of a flower, thanks to the mysteries of its organism and destiny, thanks to the synthesis of the botanical symbol that is achieved by the pencil of the artist, often surpasses the authority of the human figure in the intensity of its suggestive power."[17]

Insects and flowers as natural forms are related—in many instances they have a mutually beneficial relationship and both have transient existences. In the pages of *La Vie Parisienne* women and their fashions were also described as types of insects (figure 16) and as species of butterflies (figure 17). In both of these spreads, however, it was the woman's fashion as an indication of social class that was the subject of the accompanying text, which not coincidentally mentioned the literary work of both Jules Michelet and Emile Zola. The most complete hybrids conditions in *La Vie Parisienne* appeared in spreads where women became different types of fish (figure 18), birds and animals (figures 18, 19). Art Nouveau paintings by Georges de Feure (figures 20, 21) demonstrate the integration of stylized birds and animals into environments that serve as symbolic commentaries on the women who also inhabit the works. We will see even more complete instances of hybridity as we consider the different methods by which Art Nouveau artists could create the sense of a merging of woman with natural forms.

---

[16] De Feure's knowledge of Baudelaire is indicated through the titles of these works, which come directly from the poems in De Fleurs du Mal. See Gabriel Weisberg, "Georges de Feure's Mysterious Women: a study of symbolist sources in the writings of Charles Baudelaire and Georges Rodenbach," *Gazette des beaux-arts* vo. 10, 1974, pp. 220-230.

[17] Ecrits, 216 in Warmus, 77.

Part II – The Means of Hybridity

The hybrid condition can be found in several different ways (and we might think of these as different levels of hybridity) – the first, the most common in Art Nouveau, is the creation of the hybrid by the application of forms to the woman's body. Victor Prouvé, in the dress Bord de rivère au printemps, (figure 22) is capable of turning the wearer into a landscape replete with flowers; a dragonfly ornament accents the bust area. Réne Lalique created a wide variety of insect ornaments including a hat pin decorated with wasps (figure 23), a beetle brooch (figure 24) and a butterfly belt buckle (figure 25)—these insects suggest transformation and metamorphosis; their short lives express transience well. He also created jewelry and objects decorated with birds (figures 25-27) which suggest not only movement but also a seasonal migration. Items ornamented with snakes include a handbag by René Lalique and Alphonse Mucha's bracelet/ring combination (figures 28-29) both created for the famous actress Sarah Bernhardt. Snakes have historically symbolized regeneration because of their cyclical shedding of skin; of course with this particular reptile there was a persistent connection to Eve and the fall of man. To understand how these items create a condition of hybridity it is necessary to re-imagine the woman inside of Prouvé's dress or wearing Lalique's jewelry, as we have become accustomed to seeing these works in museum settings as objects devoid of the woman's body that can be considered to activate these pieces.

A second way hybridity occurs is through the manipulation of parts of a woman's body into forms that become artificial despite having their basis in natural forms—this is seen frequently in women's hair in posters by Mucha (figures 30-32) and in George de Feure's works from the turn of the twentieth century (figures 33-34). These examples suggest the interaction of natural forms with ornament more suggestive of Art Nouveau architecture. The hair of Mucha's women is soft and natural on the top of their head, but as the hair moves down and out from the body of the woman it takes on hard geometric shapes. In De Feure's works the architectural floral ornaments (again with a hard geometric focus) are found at the base of women's garments, which create a solid of anchoring of the body by these forms. In both Mucha and De Feure these types of hybridity serve to trap the woman in forms that are both connected to nature in some way but at the same time revel in a distinctly ornamental artificiality.

The most complete hybridity occurs in certain works of Art Nouveau jewelry by René Lalique – in these examples where the representation of women is sometimes the most monstrous and also containing the most overt suggestions that woman's sexuality, while natural, could also be destructive. Well known philosopher and political agitator, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, said "woman is a pretty animal, but an animal nevertheless." [18] According to Proudhon, woman craved elegance and luxury by nature, which would inevitably lead her to compromise herself and the men around her. This dichotomy of woman potentially bringing fertility or destruction to mankind would resonate throughout the nineteenth century. This pseudo-science was bolstered under the Third

---

[18] "La femme est un joli animal, mais c'est un animal," Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Notes et pensées. Oeuvre posthume* (original publication date 1875) reprinted in *La Femme au 19e siècle, Les Reporters de l'histoire no. 2. Textes réunis par Nicole Priollaud* (Publisher, date), p. x.

Republic, when a recommitment to scientific inquiry took place, partly to answer criticism of Louis Pasteur, who claimed that lack of government support for the

sciences contributed to France's loss in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. By 1880, Paris was the most active center of biology in the world, and the idea that woman was developmentally inferior, and lower on the evolutionary scale, was now "confirmed" by anthropologists.

In popular literature women were described frequently as creatures. For instance John Grand-Carteret, in his discussion of women drawn by Alfred Grévin's and artists like him in *Revue Encyclopédique*, described the woman known as a Parisienne as "a pretty, mischievous little creature, tiny and perverse, with inquisitive eyes, turned-up nose, and a disturbing way of carrying on."[19] Another example, even more suggestive of a hybrid feminine creature was published in Louis Larcher's anthology of writings about women: "Do want to know what a woman is like? Imagine a pretty little monster who bewitches your eyes and shocks your reason … an angel on the outside and a harpy inside … Combine a linnet's head, a serpent's tongue, the eyes of a basilisk, a cat's temper, a monkey's craftiness, the nocturnal inclinations of an owl, the brilliance of the sun and the moon's fickleness; wrap all this up in a nice white skin, add arms, legs, etc. … and there you have the complete woman."[20] These quotes, along with the illustrations of hybrid women/fish/bird/animal creatures in *La Vie Parisienne* shown earlier let us reconsider works by René Lalique in a more nuanced light. The woman/insect hybridity is not well resolved in his Femme-libellule of 1894-1896 (figure 35), where a woman's head seems awkwardly placed upon wings. In Tête de femme coiffée d'un casque ailé 1897-1899 (figure 36) the insect ornament seems more intentionally separate from the woman's face. A similar separation occurs in Lalique's Wild Beast pendant of 1900 (figure 37). For woman/fish hybrids in jewelry and glass

---

[19] *La Parisienne*, a "joli petit animal mutin, minuscule et pervers, aux yeux fureteurs, au nez en trompette, à l'allure troublante." "Grévin et le genre Grévin," *Revue Encyclopédique*, 1892, vol. 2, col. 857.

[20] "Voulez-vous bien connaître une femme? Figurez-vous un joli petit monstre qui charme les yeux et qui choque la raison [...] qui est ange au dehors et harpie au dedans... Mettez ensemble la tête d'une linotte, la langue d'un serpent, les yeux d'un basilic, l'humeur d'un chat, l'adresse d'un singe, les inclinations nocturnes d'un hibou, le brillant du soleil et l'inégalité de la lune; enveloppez tout cela d'une peau bien blanche, ajoutez-y des bras, des jambes et caetera... vous aurez une femme complète" quote attributed to Ghérardi published in Louis Julien Larcher and Pierre Jules Hetzel, *Anthologie satirique*, (Paris: 1858), pp. 79-80.

(figures 38, 39) Lalique used as the basis of his designs the mythological mermaid capable of luring fisherman to their deaths. His 1897-1898 brooch Sirène in particular takes the shape of a ship's figurehead; Lalique extends the tail to encircle a stone and places a second in the siren's hands, as if to light the way forward. A similar approach appears in Femme-papillon (1899-1900, figure 40) where the nude woman's body seems to generate an elaborate structure of growing forms that only abstractly suggest butterfly wings—in fact some of the shapes near the woman's body seem much more like feathers.

In another series of works Lalique more fully resolves his version of feminine hybrids. In the necklace Femmes-insectes et cygnes noirs (1897-1899, figure 41) women's bodies are stretched into shapes suggestive of insect bodies; wing shapes flow fluidly into extended teardrop shapes and the black swans ornament these faux wings, suggesting the myth of Leda and the swan but arriving at an original composition based on the transformation of a woman's body. For the mirror titled Masque encadré de lucanes, 1898-1900 (figure 42) Lalique has embedded a woman's face inside an insect shell, but the continuation of the beetle design into the handle of the mirror makes the figure seem more of a full hybrid creation.

But the design that most fully expresses the feminine hybrid is Lalique's Femme-libellule, 1894-1896 (figure 43). The elegant composition combines woman's body with a highly stylized dragonfly wings that seamlessly take the place of her arms. Her torso emerges from something that looks very much like the head of a fish (perhaps meant to be a dragon) that transmutes into the body of an insect at its conclusion. The woman's headdress, meant to look like insect eyes, is ornamented with scarab beetles.

Backwardly placed griffin claws emphasizes monstrousness as the size of these upward-moving pieces provide balance for the large wings but at the same time exist at a scale that dwarfs the woman's body. There is an extreme beauty in the disjointedness of these body parts stitched together from various species to form the ultimate example of an Art Nouveau feminine hybrid.

Max Nordau, in his 1895 book *Degeneration*, described fashion as part of the "symptoms" of this fin-de-siècle illness he saw embodied in the Art Nouveau style. He ascribed to the majority of the French population a style of "laboured rococo" taken up by those "anxious to be inconspicuous in unimaginative mediocrity." He continues his description "...with bewildering oblique lines, incomprehensible swellings, puffings, expansions and contractions, folds with irrational beginning and aimless ending, in which all the outlines of the human figure are now lost, and which cause women's bodies to resemble now a beast of the Apocalypse, now an armchair, now a triptych, or some other ornament.[21] Guillaume Ferrero, in "La "Psychologie du vêtement," written for *La Nouvelle Revue* in 1894, saw clothing as the eternal symbol of the history of mankind, because it consistently fluctuates in response to social conditions, morals and politics seen in humanity. As each century has its own distinct clothing types, so does each epoque have a particular psychology that corresponds to its institutions, taste and intellectual and moral trends.[22] The examples of feminine hybridity presented in this paper demonstrate that the Art Nouveau style expressed a persistent anxiety about the changed roles of women within society that had been expressed in popular journal illustrations decades earlier.

---

[21] Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (University of Nebraska Press, 1993), p. 8.

---

[22] Ferraro, p. 785.