I

BROADSIDES AND POSTERS

Contemporaries were well-aware of the fin-de-siècle as the “Age of Paper.” The early Third Republic in France, from the 1870’s through the turn of the century, was also the “golden age” of the poster. Before the arrival and establishment of today’s mass-media—film, radio and television—commercial and democratic society depended on paper for the communication of all information whether commercial or political in character.

Printed matter for posting or distribution in the street saw an unprecedented growth throughout the nineteenth century. Broadsides, placards, and posters were a major form of communication. Posters (Fr. affiches) like newspapers were subject to official scrutiny. Material for posting was taxed and had to be "stamped." Official proclamations were printed on white stock, unofficial materials had to be printed on alternatives. "Broadsides" are usually taken to include advertisements, proclamations, ballads, popular songs, or even newspapers. Frequently the term carries scurrilous connotations. In cataloguing the present collection, "broadside" indicates those items which do not have the formal appearance of a poster or which display a content which distinguishes them from official or tolerated materials. A la nation, however, may be considered a poster (large-scale, intended for posting) although its content appears incendiary according to latter-day standards. (BP.1). By scale and content, the Official Testament of Emile Zola which was probably distributed in the street for reading or for posting seems better conveyed by the term "broadside." (BP.8). The "Museum of Horrors" may be considered posters, but their serial publication, scabrous content, and incendiary intent (which ultimately caused them to be banned) bring them close to the earlier, unofficial and satirical implications of the "broadside." (BP.4, 1-51).

Poster production benefited from the demand for extensive publicity of products, services, and spectacles. In the development of Art Nouveau, the style which flourished during the epoch of the Dreyfus Affair, the poster occupies a particularly important place. Artists from across the spectrum developed the poster as a visual form, creating a lasting vision of the period and its dreams of elegance, pleasure, daily life, or social progress. Although mechanization was taking over many traditional functions in the printing industry—it was during this period that photographic and color printing became viable on a large scale—many trained draftsmen and artists were still required. Lithography had come to the fore as a major medium of artistic expression, but the first beginnings of photography in its role as a mass-communication technique is visible in the poster announcing the major voices of the dreyfusard camp, Dreyfus est Innocent. (BP.22). Academic artists, members of the avant-gardes, caricaturists, and designers innovatively responded to the poster as a commercial proposition or as a means of personal expression. As well as fulfilling its role in mass-communication and advertising as an art of the streets, the poster attracted many of the major artists of the period. An extraordinary example in the collection demonstrates the union of political propaganda with the talents of a recognized artist in the self-advertisement of Adolphe Willette, running as an "antisemitic candidate." (BP.7).

The Lorraine Beilte Collection includes a variety of works, either illustrated or with a dynamic usage of typography, which document the relation of the medium to the events and issues of the Affair—from governmental position statements to political propaganda, satirical comment, and advertising.