

TWO FANS BY PLONCARD

In my collection featured a black satin fan with a printed design showing a girl spinning the wool of her flock while listening to the sweet words poured into her ear by a gallant young man.



Then I chanced upon another fan with the same design but on a pale blue background.



The leaf was signed "Ploncard".



I think there can be no doubt as to the identity of this Ploncard : he must be the person who played a major part in the long lawsuit that caused so much trouble in Lauronce's life from 1877 to 1880. (See the chapter 'Biography')

Let's recall the facts: Ploncard testified as a witness and declared that prior to Lauronce's patent and using the same technique he had produced fans known as "Red Cherubs" and "Lady on a Swing".

There is no mention of a "Wooing the Shepherdess" fan, so this design must be posterior to 1877, the year Ploncard testified.

Comparing these fans and Lauronce's brings out major differences.

To start with the design of Ploncard's fans looks stiff and awkward, contrary to Lauronce's motifs, always graceful and lively.



Fan by Ploncard



Fan by Lauronce

But the obvious difference lies in the quality of the printing itself. Ploncard's fan, printed on pale blue satin, allows the colour of the fabric to show through the lithography. His shepherdess and her lover have a bluish, unhealthy complexion. This never happens on Lauronce's fans, however dark the satin may be.



Two fans by Lauronce on blue backgrounds: "Piège aux Oiseaux" and "The Letter"

Ploncard's technique is not as refined as Lauronce's and Auguste's charge of counterfeiting seems groundless: Ploncard's lithographies could not have competed with Lauronce's on the market of printed fan leaves.

Just consider the little sheep on Ploncard's black fan. One must agree with Alfred Lemerrier, the President of the French Society of Printers-lithographers, who testified as an expert and declared that on Ploncard's fans "the undercoat was so crudely applied that the delicacy of Lauronce's fans could never have been achieved."



Sheep by Ploncard



A goat by Lauronce

In 1878 the Court gave a ruling which was rather harsh on Ploncard. They judged that his work "instead of displaying a three-dimensional subject with lights and shades, as on Lauronce's production, only shows a muddle of colours piled on a grey, drab surface."

Moreover Ploncard's blue fan shows hand-touching over the print. The foliage and brightly coloured flowers are not printed but painted in gouache over the lithography.



The point here is not to be snifty about Ploncard's fans nor to snub the work of other printers systematically, but to put back into perspective the amazing quality of Lauronce's prints. Many critics nowadays look down on Lauronce's fans, judging that printed leaves cannot compete with painted ones. It seems to me that the two kinds are worth our interest and admiration and that we shouldn't think too little of Lauronce's achievements, his remarkable technical and artistic skills.
