Modernism and Mass Press from Mallarmé to Proust

Max McGuinness

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
2019
ABSTRACT

Modernism and Mass Press from Mallarmé to Proust

Max McGuinness

The rapid expansion of the mass press in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century France, along with the concurrent rise of an information-driven style of journalism known as reportage, coincided with a shift in literary portrayals of the press. Early to mid-nineteenth-century novels of journalism such as Balzac’s Illusions perdues consistently depict the world of journalism in intensely hostile tones, as do many later novels and works of poetry, at times with even greater vitriol. By contrast, from Baudelaire onwards, some French authors including Mallarmé, Apollinaire, and Proust took a more ambivalent approach to the press, pivoting between antipathy and enthusiasm for what became a truly massified and ubiquitous cultural phenomenon during their lifetimes. Their equivocal portrayals of the press in poetry and prose fiction epitomize their broader ambivalence towards modernity itself – a trait that distinguishes these modernist authors from their avant-garde contemporaries, who advocated a radical break with tradition and tended to be more consistently hostile or enthusiastic towards journalism.

The thematic prominence of journalism in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century French literature reflects its ongoing role as what Marie-Ève Thérenty calls “the laboratory of literature,” whereby authors published poetry and prose fiction in the mass press, for which they also wrote opinion columns, criticism, and other forms of journalism that they then frequently recycled in their literary works. Belying the account of literature’s autonomization found in the work of Pierre Bourdieu, who argues that literature and the mass press had grown apart by the end of the nineteenth century, modernist poetry and prose fiction continued to appear in large-circulation, commercially oriented newspapers and magazines into the twentieth century.
From the 1880s onwards, the growth of the mass press was paralleled by the emergence of a wave of little magazines known as petites revues that became the primary literary laboratory of literary modernism. These petites revues had many material links to the mass press. Authors often wrote simultaneously for both newspapers and petites revues. Many of the latter courted publicity in the former, even as they denounced those very same publications as the antithesis of true literature. And petites revues published many pieces of reportage – a style of journalism associated with the mass press. These connections to the mass press left their mark on the literary works published in petites revues, which often draw on newspaper articles and confront topical journalistic subjects. Moreover, several petites revues evolved into major publishing houses, including Éditions Gallimard, whose extensive commercial interactions with the mass press further shaped the works they published as modernist authors themselves became intimately involved in publicizing their books.

Early to mid-nineteenth-century authors consistently avoid confronting their debts to journalism in their literary works. They thunder against the press but cannot live without it. Anti-journalistic thunder underlain by various kinds of dependence on the press remains a dominant feature of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century French literature and cultural criticism. By contrast, Mallarmé, Apollinaire, and Proust as well as Gide and Péguy all allude to the ambiguous position of journalism within their prose poetry, poetry, novels, and essays. These authors at once draw on journalism in their literary works and reflect on the significance of their journalistic borrowings within those works themselves. The self-concious modernist spirit of their writing thus allows them, unlike their precursors and most of their contemporaries, to finally come to terms with the challenge posed by the mass press to literary creation.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS v

INTRODUCTION 1
   I. Searching for modernité 1
   II. Change, continuity, and newspapers 8
   III. Modernism and the avant-gardes 20
   IV. A laboratory of modernism 24

CHAPTER ONE: Mallarmé and the Golden Age of French Newspapers 32
   I. “Universel reportage” 32
   II. Divagations 43
   III. The synthesis of “le Livre” 56
   IV. Dicing with the mass press 67
   V. An unclaimed inheritance 73
   VI. Literature in newspapers during the Third Republic 76
   VII. The resilience of the writer-journalist 84
   VIII. Modernism in the mass press 90

CHAPTER TWO: Petites Revues in the Shadow of the Grande Presse 101
   I. The rise of the petite revue 101
   II. A literary laboratory 105
   III. Origins 109
      III.1. Politics, paper, and money 109
      III.2. Education 113
      III.3. Confronting the mass press 123
      III.4. Mallarméan values 128
   IV. A foot in both camps 131
CHAPTER FIVE: Journalistic Aporias in the Poetry of Apollinaire and His Friends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. New Spirit – old bottles</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. The wages of bohemia</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. A poetic laboratory</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Finding poetry in the news</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Performing the press and assassinating poetry</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. A poet-journalist at war</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. War reportage in free verse</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. Cendrars’s journeys</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX. Salmon’s lost illusions</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X. Parody and poetic reportage in Max Jacob</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XI. The twilight of poetic reportage</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XII. The ruins of the Book</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER SIX: Journalism and the Crisis of the Novel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Who will save the novel from the press?</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Crisis? What crisis?</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Thundering against the press – Flaubert, Huysmans, Lorrain, Bloy</td>
<td>387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Anti-modern ironies and continuities</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Thunder from the Left – Mirbeau, Schwob, Mac Orlan, Rolland, Barbusse, Dorgelès</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Surrealism’s search for consistency in the face of the mass press</td>
<td>419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. Freedom of the press – Vallès and Leroux</td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. Freedom from the press? – Alain-Fournier, Colette, Mauriac</td>
<td>437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX. Crisis to crisis</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER SEVEN: Heroic Equivocations from Verne to Proust

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Ambivalent compounds</td>
<td>454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Conflict and hybridity in Verne and Gourmont</td>
<td>456</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III. Roussel – making sport of the mass press? 464
IV. Hope and despair in Romains, Martin du Gard, and Giraudoux 472
V. Gide – turning “universel reportage” into novelistic gold 484
VI. Proust’s journalism 491
VII. Hostility towards the press in Proust’s early fiction 497
VIII. Sainte-Beuve and the “débutant” 504
IX. Varieties of journalistic experience in the Recherche 508
X. Proust’s “Livre”? 522

CONCLUSION 531

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. Archival sources 537
I.1. Archival sources 537
I.2. Digitized archival sources 537

II. Newspapers 539
II.1. Newspapers 538
II.2. Magazines 539

III. Primary texts 540
III.1. Collected works 540
III.2. Individual works 542
III.3. Correspondence, interviews, and published papers 552
III.4. Memoirs, journals, contemporary lectures, pamphlets, prefaces, and critical studies 555
III.5. Contemporary journalism 557

IV. Secondary works 571
IV.1. Journal and encyclopedia articles, book reviews, book chapters, conference papers, introductions, and prefaces 571
IV.2. Books, catalogues, and special issues of journals 587
IV.3. Theses and dissertations 601
IV.4. Bibliographies 602
IV.5. Miscellaneous 603
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illustration</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 2.1</td>
<td>Cover of <em>La Plume</em>’s special issue devoted to <em>Le Gaulois</em></td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 3.1</td>
<td>“Nouvelles en trois lignes,” <em>Le Matin</em>, May 10, 1906</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 3.2</td>
<td>“À l’aérodrome de Port-Aviation,” <em>L’Illustration</em>, July 10, 1909</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 3.3</td>
<td>A page from “Zone” in the fair copy of <em>Alcools</em></td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 3.4</td>
<td>Apollinaire, “Lettre-Océan,” <em>Les Soirées de Paris</em>, no. 25, June 1914</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 3.5</td>
<td>Apollinaire, “Voyage,” <em>Les Soirées de Paris</em>, no. 26-27, July-Aug. 1914</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 3.6</td>
<td>Detail from “Voyage”</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 3.7</td>
<td>Detail from <em>Le Matin</em></td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 4.1</td>
<td>Advertisement for Mercure de France, <em>Le Journal</em>, July 22, 1902</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 4.2</td>
<td>Advertisement with press quotations in Éditions de la NRF’s May 1923 catalogue</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 4.3</td>
<td>Jean Cocteau, “La Galerie des bustes: Marcel Proust,” <em>Excelsior</em>, Nov. 27, 1913</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 4.4</td>
<td>Advertisement for <em>Les Loups, Toute l’édition</em>, Feb. 11, 1933</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 6.1</td>
<td>Vallès, <em>Le Bachelier</em>, third ed. (Paris: Charpentier, 1881)</td>
<td>431</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Like a newspaper, this dissertation incorporates many voices and perspectives. First and foremost, I am immensely grateful to my advisor Elisabeth Ladenson who displayed boundless patience and understanding as I researched and wrote this opus. Her advice and comments on chapter drafts were consistently shrewd, painstaking, and provoking. I am similarly grateful to my other committee members Antoine Compagnon and Joanna Stalnaker for their valuable comments and advice. I also owe thanks to all current and former members of the Columbia French Department, particularly Gabriela Badea, Vincent Debaene, Madeleine Dobie, and Sarah Myers. Frederick Neuhouser of the Philosophy Department offered some timely pointers about Hegel.

My undergraduate tutor at Oxford Ann Jefferson made an early contribution to my interest in press and literature when she supervised my final-year extended essay on Baudelaire, and she has continued to be a source of wisdom and inspiration ever since.

In Paris, where I spent a happy year as a pensionnaire étranger at the École Normale Supérieure in 2013-2014, I was warmly welcomed and assisted by the late Philippe Chardin, Nathalie Mauriac Dyer, and Pyra Wise of the Équipe Proust. A colloquium organized on Proust and the press by Nathalie, Pyra, and Yuri Cerqueira dos Anjos in 2017 supplied the ideal forum to develop my ideas about Proust and La Nouvelle Revue française, which subsequently became an article in the Bulletin d’informations proustiennes that is largely reprised at the end of Chapter Three. I am also grateful to Audrey Cerfon and Géraldine Dolléans for their companionship and for patiently editing an early paper of mine about Proust and the press that stemmed from a study day they had organized. I am similarly indebted to Alain Vaillant and Marie-Ève Thérenty for inviting me to speak at the Congrès Médias 19 in Paris in 2015 and to Guillaume Pinson for editing the resultant paper, which included material that features in Chapters Two and Three. Conversations with Bertrand Marchal and Judith Lyon-Caen proved enlightening at an early stage.
of my research. Jacqueline Gojard provided vital information about André Salmon’s journalistic career. Laurence Campa similarly helped fill in some important detail about Apollinaire. And François Ravard gave me passionate encouragement to read Alain.

French librarians are a marvel of erudition and practical help. Among others, I am grateful to André Parisot at the Centre Charles Péguy in Orléans for supplying scanned pieces of correspondence, to Laurence Le Bras at the BnF-Richelieu for her insights into Apollinaire’s manuscripts, and to Claire Lesage at the Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal for providing me with her illuminating École des Chartes thesis on Mercure de France. The staff at the Arsenal also deserve effusive thanks for uncomplainingly carrying many volumes of disintegrating newspapers up from the stacks; their counterparts at the IMEC in Caen were similarly accommodating. At Éditions Gallimard, Éric Legendre gave me remarkably free run of the archives whilst offering choice reflections on the history of the publishing house. I am also grateful to Anne-Solange Noble, Rowan Somerville, and Jamie Byng for facilitating my research there. The French Embassy in Washington D.C., the French Institute in London, and the GSAS at Columbia all provided generous funding for my research in France.

In the UK, I am grateful to Edmund Birch and Kate Rees for organizing a lively conference in Oxford in 2014 and then assiduously editing a version of my paper, which is reprised at the beginning of Chapter One, for a special edition of Dix-Neuf. Edmund has also continued to provide various kinds of enlightenment over the years.

In New York, Lorin Stein, Davey Volner, and Jonathan Wells read and commented on drafts of parts of this dissertation with the keen eye of highly literate laymen. Lester Lenoff listened with great patience to many discussions of this subject.
Finally, I am eternally grateful to my father Paul, my mother Kathy, my sister Alexandra, and my brother-in-law Blake as well as all my friends for their unfailing support and tolerance. There are doubtless many others to whom I owe thanks, and I hope they will forgive their omission.
for Jessie
Ce fut par les journaux quotidiens que Christophe fit d’abord connaissance, – comme des millions de gens en France, – avec la littérature française de son temps.

Romain Rolland, *Jean-Christophe* (1904-1912)

Seulement, il faudrait choisir. L’art et le journalisme sont incompatibles et la vie est vraiment trop courte pour s’attarder à la démonstration de cette vérité banale. Quand on est embauché dans la maison publique du journalisme, la suprême et dernière pudeur consiste à n’en plus sortir. On n’a plus le droit de serrer une main propre ni de parler en confrère à un artiste souffrant et abandonné.

Léon Bloy, “Le Reportage littéraire,” *La Plume*, May 15, 1890

Une page de roman n’a pas plus d’importance à mes yeux qu’une chronique. Tous les moyens d’expression ont la même valeur: ou plutôt ce qu’ils ont à exprimer est cette chose que je dois dire sous quelque forme que ce soit. Je n’ai jamais compris mes confrères qui réservent au journal leurs scories. Chaque parole écrite, c’est la touche où le peintre tout entier se reconnaît. Il n’y a pas le journaliste, il n’y a pas le poète, il y a quelqu’un, quelqu’un qui s’exprime ou se dissimule, qui s’exprime directement ou qui s’exprime malgré lui, enfin qui se trahit ou qui se livre parce qu’il existe et qu’il a “son mot à dire”.

François Mauriac, interview with Madeleine Chapsal, *L’Express*, April 5, 1957
INTRODUCTION

I. Searching for modernité

The growth of the press was a central facet of modernity in nineteenth-century France. The concept itself was largely forged within its pages.

First attested in the early seventeenth century, modernité initially served to distinguish between antiquity and an ongoing modern era, either seen as beginning with the rise of Christianity or the Reformation.¹ For example, the historian, clergyman, and counsellor to Louis XIV Michel de Pure complains in his theatrical treatise Idée des spectacles anciens et nouveaux (1668) that it is difficult to develop a precise sense of what ancient clothing looked like because the only images are found on medallions that purport to be ancient but seem so well preserved that they convey “quelque soupçon de modernité, s’il m’est permis de fabriquer ce mot [...],” which implies the medallions themselves were recent fabrications.² In this passage, Pure is not necessarily antagonistic to modernité in and of itself. But, as René Fest has shown in his lexicological study of the term, modernité was often used pejoratively in religious and scientific writing to connote inauthenticity throughout the Ancien régime.³

In the early to mid-nineteenth century, the word re-emerges in Honoré de Balzac’s writing, where modernité continues to denote the products of post-Roman, Christian culture. Unlike his pre-revolutionary precursors, Balzac occasionally writes of modernité in laudatory tones. In an anonymously written 1822 article for the newsletter Annales françaises des arts, des sciences et des lettres, the young writer-journalist thus welcomes the rise of the novel, which he calls “le seul

[genre] qu’aït *inventé* la modernité” and duly goes on to expound upon the virtues of his own recently published novel *Le Centenaire ou les Deux Beringheld* (1822). And yet Balzac’s attitude towards *modernité* was far from unequivocal. In *Le Centenaire* itself, a melodramatic version of the Faust myth written under a pseudonym, Balzac deprecates “les constructions mesquines de la modernité,” which he contrasts with the grandeur of the Egyptian pyramids. The same novel later extols the collection of the Louvre Museum as “ce magnifique monument élevé par les peintres de tous les âges de la modernité.” In the first instance, Balzac is referring to architecture, in the latter visual art. His pivot from censure to praise for modern culture within a single work nonetheless evokes a sense of tension that sets the tone for future discussions of *modernité*.

From 1830 onwards, the political and cultural changes wrought by the liberal July Monarchy became a central preoccupation of the growing press, which flourished thanks to the relaxation of controls and censorship. Most commentators took a dim view of the new order (including the proliferation of the very same newspapers and magazines in which they expressed their antipathy). As Alain Vaillant puts it: “La ‘modernité’ devient l’emblème de cette décadence, où tout ce qui faisait prétendument la gloire de la France (la grandeur, l’enthousiasme collectif, le goût de l’idéal) est censé laisser la place à la médiocrité, à la banalité, à l’égoïsme.” Meanwhile, a minority identified *modernité* with virtuous historical progress and duly proclaimed its superiority to antiquity.

---


7 Vaillant, “La Modernité, invention médiatique,” 52.

8 See Vaillant, “La Modernité, invention médiatique,” 52-53.
Such faith in progress was bitterly derided by the poet-journalist Théophile Gautier, who remained nostalgic for the old verities of absolute monarchy. And yet he ultimately took a favourable view of modernité in art. “On a tort, selon nous,” he wrote in his review of the 1852 Paris Salon, “d’affecter une certaine répugnance ou du moins un certain dédain pour les types purement actuels. Nous croyons, pour notre part, qu’il y a des effets neus [sic], des aspects inattendus dans la représentation intelligente et fidèle de ce que nous nommerons la modernité.”

For Gautier, representations of modernité consist of works of art that depict their own times as opposed to those that recycle scenes from antiquity in keeping with Academic convention. And he would similarly praise Balzac for the modernité of his writing, whose innovative, eclectic vocabulary, much derided by other critics, was essential, Gautier averred, to his novels’ faithful depictions of nineteenth-century France. From this perspective, modernité no longer refers to the cultural products of a temporally specific historical period or to an assortment of recent political and cultural innovations. Rather, Gautier implies that each era has its own look and character, which artists and writers should endeavour to capture in their works.

This new appreciation of modernité forms the background to Charles Baudelaire’s “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” where the poet, who had dedicated Les Fleurs du Mal (1857) to Gautier, attempts for the first time to give a detailed account of the concept’s meaning. First published as a series of articles in Le Figaro in late 1863, the essay is a rapturous ode to the work of the contemporary newspaper sketch artist Constantin Guys, who embodies, for Baudelaire, the search for an elusive, volatile feature of existence that resists conventional description and thence calls for what he continues to treat as a neologism:

9 Théophile Gautier, “Feuilleton de la Presse: Salon de 1852 (10e article),” La Presse, May 27, 1852, 2; quoted in Vaillant, “La Modernité, invention médiatique,” 53.
10 See Fest, “Petite étude lexicologique du mot ‘modernité,’” 46-47.
Ainsi il va, il court, il cherche. Que cherche-t-il? À coup sûr, cet homme, tel que je l’ai dépeint, ce solitaire doué d’une imagination active, toujours voyageant à travers le grand désert d’hommes, a un but plus élevé que celui d’un pur flâneur, un but plus général, autre que le plaisir fugitif de la circonstance. Il cherche ce quelque chose qu’on nous permettra d’appeler la modernité; car il ne se présente pas de meilleur mot pour exprimer l’idée en question. Il s’agit, pour lui, de dégager de la mode ce qu’elle peut contenir de poétique dans l’historique, de tirer l’éternel du transitoire.11

Guys himself is identified in the essay only by the initials “M. G.”12 The ever-restless painter of modern life’s own mysterious aura thus seems to reflect the elusiveness of “ce quelque chose” that he pursues. And yet Baudelaire then offers what might appear to be a succinct and limpid definition of the object of Guys’s quest. By these lights, modernité is constituted of what is poetic within the unfolding drama of history and eternal within the transitory flux of existence. Guys’s mission, in other words, consists of locating what is poetic and eternal about his own times and immortalizing those qualities in art. For Baudelaire, as for Gautier, modernité is itself an eternal feature of cultural history, whence his remark that “[i]l y a eu une modernité pour chaque peintre ancien [...]”13 The opposition between antiquity and the modernity would thus be transcended in favour of an appreciation of how works of art transform what is timely about their era into timeless samples of beauty.

This passage presents several problems. On account of the phrase “il s’agit, pour lui, de dégager,” modernité here seems to refer ambiguously both to what is being sought and to the quest itself. As Jean-Pierre Bertrand and Pascal Durand put it: “la modernité serait à la fois cette opération et ce qui en fait l’objet, à savoir la part ou la dimension de poésie et d’éternité contenues

12 In the version of the essay posthumously published in book form, the editors noted: “Tout le monde sait qu’il s’agit ici de M. Constantin Guys” (quoted in the notes to Baudelaire, Oc, 2: 1414).
13 Baudelaire, Oc, 2: 695
dans l’historique et le transitoire.”¹⁴ Such ambiguity need not render the concept incoherent, however. Everyday language in both French and English includes many expressions that at once denote actions and the results of those actions – for example, la peinture, la cuisine, and l’écriture. By the same token, la modernité could plausibly refer to both the artist’s efforts to extract the eternal from the transitory and the object of that endeavour.

Later in the same paragraph, there follows another explanation of modernité, which presents a steeper barrier to coherence: “La modernité, c’est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l’art, dont l’autre moitié est l’éternel et l’imuable.”¹⁵ What had been the eternal within the transitory (and perhaps simultaneously the process of extracting the former from the latter) here becomes the transitory itself. And, according to Baudelaire, that fugitive, contingent element constitutes one half of art, whereas the other half is composed of what is eternal (itself a theoretically elusive quality) and immutable, to wit that which he had previously identified with modernité. What results from Baudelaire’s two contradictory definitions of modernité is that his dualistic formula of art becomes empty. One half of art is modernité; and the other half is modernité too. Like a conjurer, Baudelaire summons a grand aesthetic synthesis that turns out to be chimerical.

These frustrated (and frustrating) efforts at theorization are unlikely to provide much in the way of philosophical satisfaction.¹⁶ But the essay’s tergiversations do give us genuine insight into the artistic and intellectual turbulence of Baudelaire’s time as well as the difficulties inherent in describing that protean condition. For his struggle to come to terms with modernity evokes a

¹⁵ Baudelaire, Oc, 2: 695.
¹⁶ For an overview of efforts by Baudelaire’s interpreters to overcome this contradiction, see Antoine Compagnon, “L’Éternel minuscule,” in Baudelaire devant l’innombrable (Presses de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2003), 41-76.
broader sense of anxiety about the pace of historical change during the nineteenth century. Baudelaire describes Guys as a man who is constantly chasing after an elusive something that is itself constantly changing. *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) similarly portrays a world that has been thrust into a state of permanent impermanence:

> Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.¹⁷

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels do not use the word Modernität (attested in German as early as the 1830s¹⁸) in the *Manifesto*. And, unlike Baudelaire, their vision of volatile transience emphasizes the novelty of that phenomenon within their own times. They nonetheless share the poet’s sense of modernity’s intertwined promise and peril. As in “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” where the solitary Guys must navigate through “le grand désert d’hommes,” Marx and Engels conjure a spectacle of profound alienation that seems at once menacing, disorientating, and freighted with intoxicating possibility. If everything is constantly in flux, then everything is also up for grabs. Those endowed with the ability to perceive the “real conditions of life” amid the hubbub and with enough clear-eyed determination can seize the zeitgeist and steer it towards their own design. The *Manifesto* duly concludes: “The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chain. They have a world to win.”¹⁹

For Marx and Engels, the “everlasting uncertainty” of the bourgeois epoch is underlain by a constant metaphysical principle, whereby the material evolution of the forces of production

---

¹⁸ See Fest, “Petite étude lexicologique du mot ‘modernité,’” 34.
propels mankind towards ever-higher forms of political and cultural development, a process that is, if not quite destined, then at the very least anticipated to culminate in the final synthesis of communism. What appears to be the chaos of modern life is at once the death throes of the old world and the birth pangs of a new civilization. Superficial disorder belies, in other words, the fundamentally orderly workings of history. Like Baudelaire’s Guys, Marx and Engels sought to extract a kind of eternity from the transience of modern life. In their case, that enterprise takes the form of a totalizing philosophical system that aims both to comprehend and shape the fluctuations of modernity. Unlike Baudelaire, the twin prophets of communism were as much preoccupied by the future as by the present and the past; and they retained a boundless faith in the emancipatory potential of historical progress, whereas Louis Bonaparte’s coup d’état of 1851 left Baudelaire “physiquement dépolitiqué” and thence intensely skeptical of such optimistic prognoses. But a similar tension inhabits their more methodical efforts to grasp the essence of modernity and the poet’s intuitive exegesis of that concept in “Le Peintre de la vie moderne.” Like Baudelaire, Marx and Engels attempt at once to do justice to modernity’s elusive transience and to master that discombobulating flux.

As we shall see in this dissertation, versions of that struggle recur throughout late nineteenth and early twentieth-century French literature. The very title of Stéphane Mallarmé’s *Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard* (1897) evokes a desire to harness the random energy of modernity within poetry. And Mallarmé viewed that late work as the first instalment of the mysterious, unfinished “Livre” that he projected as the basis for a new civic religion. Guillaume Apollinaire similarly combined giddy excitement before the tumult of modern Paris with nostalgia for the timeless verities of Christianity in his poem “Zone” (1912). Charles Péguy also looked to

---

religion as a source of eternal salvation in a world, which, as he lamented in his essay “L’Argent” (1913), “a moins changé depuis Jésus-Christ qu’il n’a changé depuis trente ans.”\(^\text{21}\) Raymond Roussel turned to language as a refuge from the neurotic entropy of bourgeois life, devising an elaborate system of word-play that underlies his novels. And Marcel Proust sought to redeem life’s transient disappointments by contemplating the experience of time – an ambition expressed in uncertain, enigmatic terms, which recall Baudelaire’s original gloss of *modernité*, at the end of *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927), where his narrator-hero describes the object of the novel’s titular quest as “quelque chose qui, commun à la fois au passé et au présent, est beacoup plus essentiel qu’eux deux,” to wit “un peu de temps à l’état pur.”\(^\text{22}\)

**II. Change, continuity, and newspapers**

In their different ways, all these authors sought to accommodate the transformations of their times without being swamped by them. Religion, word-play, and “time regained” duly represent putative poles of stability within their writing. And yet perceptions of overwhelming change did not necessarily correspond to the historical reality of France between the Paris Commune and the First World War. As Eugen Weber, commenting on Péguy’s remark about the supposedly unprecedented pace of change during his lifetime, has put it:

What makes the fin de siècle interesting is its unexceptional nature: the way it reflects the nineteenth century to which it belongs; the way it announces the twentieth century already taking shape; the continuities it affirms in the midst of change; the changes it experiences amid persistent continuity.\(^\text{23}\)

---


The era’s “unexceptional nature” is reflected in uncertainties about periodization. Weber uses “fin de siècle” more or less literally to refer to the final two decades of the nineteenth century, which he distinguishes from the final prosperous decade before the First World War that was retrospectively dubbed the Belle Époque. But the beginning of the Belle Époque has also been dated to various points in the 1870s, the 1880s, and the 1890s. Following Eric Hobsbawm, it has also become customary to view 1914 as the end of the so-called long nineteenth century that begins with the French Revolution, which brings the fin de siècle up to the outbreak of the First World War. Indeed, Péguy’s remark about thirty years of unprecedented change, which Weber cites as emblematic of fin-de-siècle attitudes, dates from 1913. The history of France during the first four decades of the Third Republic that was founded in 1870 is punctuated by crises and a constant aura of political friction. But there is no Waterloo, “Trois Glorieuses,” Coup d’état of December 2, Sedan, or June 1940. There are, in other words, no decisive moments of political rupture that would facilitate clear, broadly agreed historical sub-divisions within the 1871-1914 period.

During these years, republicanism became institutionalized, and, despite countless changes of government, cabinets tended to feature the same familiar faces, who, on the whole, combined progressive social reforms, such as free primary education and press freedom, with a commitment to conservative fiscal orthodoxy while the burgeoning socialist movement remained on the fringes of power, and anarchism, after a brief reign of terror, fizzled out. The economy grew slowly at first, then picked up pace towards the end of the nineteenth century before expanding briskly during the decade before the First World War. Divisions between town and country grew much

less stark as rural France underwent a process of belated modernization. Amid much anxiety about the demographic threat of Germany, the French population barely increased at all. Until 1914, war was confined to France’s growing colonial empire. The cycle of revolutions that had begun in 1789 came to an end. The telephone, automobile, and aeroplane all made their first appearances whilst the remaining the preserve of a privileged few. All in all, Weber’s conclusion that fin-de-siècle France experienced an unexceptional blend of change and continuity seems justified.

Why then would Péguy resort to such extravagant hyperbole in his account of the three decades up to 1913? And why do other writers from this period such as Maurice Barrès, Léon Bloy, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Jean Lorrain, and Octave Mirbeau repeatedly conjure a mood of apocalyptic pessimism as if the fin de siècle represented the end of civilization itself?

Such gloomy overstatement partly reflects the limits of individual experience. If Péguy insisted on the unprecedented pace of historical change during his own lifetime, that is because he had not lived through any other. What we experience with our own eyes tends to seem more vivid than what we can only read about. It is thus tempting to magnify the significance of the history of our own times. And those of a pessimistic disposition will accordingly tend to perceive present-day flaws as uniquely grievous. As we have seen, diagnoses of precipitous cultural decline were also a common feature of journalistic commentary during the early July Monarchy. In any epoch, there will always be those who are convinced the world is going to hell in a handbasket.

In “L’Argent,” the primary focus of Péguy’s ire is the decline of Christianity and accompanying secularization of French education, underlain by the corrupting influence of money. The Separation of the Churches and the State in 1905 certainly marked the apogee of anticlericalism in France. But that law also represented the culmination of more than a century of conflict between Catholics and republicans. And the power of money can scarcely have been much
less overweening in 1883 – the year after the collapse of Union Générale, a Catholic-owned bank, had caused a stock-market crash – than in 1913.

Péguy’s essay does allude, however, to at least one genuine cultural transformation during the Third Republic. As he surveys the disappearance of “l’ancienne France” since his own boyhood, he remarks that thirty years previously “quand un ouvrier allumait sa cigarette, ce qu’il allait vous dire, ce n’était pas ce que le journaliste a dit dans le journal de ce matin.”27 Whether or not a French workingman’s opinions were dictated by his newspaper on the eve of the First World War, it is clear that he almost certainly read one. By 1914, total newspaper circulation in France exceeded 10 million copies. This marked a roughly seven-fold increase from 1870, when the corresponding figure had been just under 1.5 million, itself a dramatic jump from 1845, when the twenty or so existing Parisian daily newspapers had a total circulation of 148,000 copies.28 What had been a relatively expensive item mostly consumed by a metropolitan elite became in the space of half a century a truly massified industrial object as cheap and ubiquitous as bread and wine, whence the newspaper’s prominence in Cubist still lives from the early 1910s. Amid the otherwise unexceptional history of fin-de-siècle France, that rapid expansion, which far out-stripped the progress of the stuttering book trade, constituted a profound shift in the daily lives of the newly literate French masses, who collectively became a reading nation. And most of what they read was journalism.

The character of French journalism evolved in tandem with its expansion. As suggested by the genesis of modernité within its pages, the French press during Balzac and Baudelaire’s time

was what Marie-Ève Thérenty calls “le laboratoire de la littérature.”²⁹ New literary forms such as the roman-feuilleton (i.e. a serial novel published in a newspaper’s feuilleton at the bottom of the page) and prose poetry were forged within newspapers. Columnists, who frequently doubled as poets and novelists, drew on fictional techniques in their chroniques, to wit reflections on current events, usually written in a light, humorous tone.³⁰ Literary criticism was primarily conducted in the press. And pre-publishing poems and novels in newspapers and magazines became standard practice for authors, both as a way of promoting their books and as a source of income. Such interpenetration often makes it difficult and perhaps redundant to say where the boundary lies between journalism and literature throughout French writing in 1830-1880. As we shall see in Chapter One, literature did not disappear from French newspapers during the late nineteenth century. Indeed, newspapers such as Le Matin and L’Écho de Paris, both founded in 1884, as well as Le Journal, founded in 1892, provided new outlets for serial novels, short stories, and even poetry. But these developments were paralleled by the rise of reportage, a form denounced by many writer-journalists as the antithesis of literature, which nonetheless left its mark on fin-de-siècle novels and poetry.

The history of Le Figaro epitomizes the ambiguous evolution of the French press during this period. What had been a semi-weekly literary newspaper when Baudelaire published “Le Peintre de la vie moderne” in its pages in 1863 – emblematic of what he disparagingly called “le petit journalisme, et les petites gazettes, et la littérature de café” – became a daily newspaper in 1866 and acquired a reputation for society gossip and political intrigue.³¹ Its editor Gaston

³⁰ See Thérenty, “Pour une histoire littéraire de la presse au XIX° siècle,” 632-634.
Calmette was assassinated in 1914 by Henriette Caillaux because of a scurrilous journalistic campaign he had waged against her husband, the former prime minister Joseph Caillaux. And yet *Le Figaro* also published many articles by Marcel Proust, including several that reappear in his *Recherche*, whose first volume is dedicated to Calmette.

As we shall see throughout this dissertation, late nineteenth and early twentieth-century writers mostly reacted to the growth of the mass press with fear and loathing. Such antipathy was nothing new. Commentary about the scourge of *modernité* during the 1830s often identified newspapers as one its most pernicious manifestations. In his 1839 broadside against “la littérature industrielle,” the critic Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve focussed his scorn on “ce bruyant rendez-vous, ce poudreux boulevard [sic] de la littérature du jour,” namely the press. And with *Illusions perdues* (1837-1843), Balzac inaugurated the novel of journalism, which depicts newspapers as “ces lupanar de la pensée.” Other equally scathing fictional portrayals of journalism followed including Champfleury’s *Les Aventures de Mademoiselle Mariette* (1853), Jules and Edmond de Goncourt’s *Les Hommes de lettres* (1860 – later retitled *Charles Demailly*), and Guy de Maupassant’s *Bel-Ami* (1885). As Thérenty puts it in her study of nineteenth-century journalistic poetics: “Chacun à sa manière dresse un portrait au vitriol de l’écrivain perdu dans les colonnes du journal.”

And yet there was a shift within those fictional portrayals over the course of the nineteenth century, which reflects the continuing growth of the press. Both *Illusions perdues* and *Charles Demailly* present a basic opposition between the meretricious world of journalism and devotion to true art. In Balzac’s novel, the former is epitomized by Étienne Lousteau, a venal newspaper

---

journalist, the latter by Daniel d’Arthez, a humble novelist living in dignified poverty and head of an artistic “cénacle” composed of like-minded souls. The hero Lucien de Rubempré at first heeds Arthez’s example but then embraces the easy money and ephemeral glory of the feuilleton alongside Lousteau, which eventually leads to his ruin. There is nothing inevitable about that dismal outcome, which stems from Lucien’s failure to resist shallow temptation. Had he stuck with the cénacle, he might well have gone on, like Arthez in the later volumes of La Comédie humaine, to attain genuine literary success and even lead a distinguished political career. For Balzac, journalism is not inescapable, and writers can only hope to prosper by keeping well away from that cultural whorehouse. In the Goncourts’ novel, the eponymous hero follows the opposite course as he abandons journalism and devotes himself to literature among a group of disinterested artistic companions only to find himself hounded by his erstwhile journalistic colleagues, who pillory his novel throughout the press and ultimately threaten to destroy his reputation by publishing some compromising letters, whereupon Charles goes insane. Here again, the influence of the press remains far from all-encompassing. The literary cénacle in Charles Demailly continues to represent, as Edmund Birch puts it in his book on fictional portrayals of the press, “a world cut off from the hypocrisy of journalism, an idealised intellectual community.”35 And yet the writer’s room for manoeuvre seems to be tightening. Once Charles has committed the initial mistake of becoming a journalist, he can no longer hope to break free of the press. By contrast, in Champfleury’s slightly earlier novel, the hero ultimately escapes journalism for a successful career as a playwright. What had been a corrigeable error has become an unbreakable shackle. And in Bel-Ami, no literary counterpoint remains as the anti-hero George Duroy, who can barely churn out a

semi-literate article, cares nothing for art and attains worldly success precisely because he has no compunction about embracing journalistic corruption.

As we shall see in Chapter Six, another late nineteenth-century novel of journalism, Léon Bloy’s *Le Désespéré* (1887), similarly portrays a world that seems entirely vitiated by the press, where no *cénacle* exists to offer refuge to those in search of artistic purity. In Joris-Karl Huysmans’s *À Rebours* (1884), the hero des Esseintes escapes such indignities only by completely cutting himself off from humanity. And in Maurice Barrès’s *Les Déracinés* (1897), the corrupting influence of journalism has become so intense that it leads two formerly idealistic young students to commit murder in an attempt to keep their struggling newspaper afloat.

These fictional denunciations of the press display a fundamental irony. For, like Balzac, the Goncourts, and Maupassant, Bloy, Huysmans, and Barrès all wrote journalism, and that experience clearly shaped their fictional writings, which, like those of their precursors, were often pre-published in newspapers and magazines and also frequently reprise material they had previously published in the press. Journalism thus continued to represent a literary laboratory for these authors. And, like Balzac, the Goncourts, and Maupassant, they continued to resent the press all the more for the influence it exerted over them. That fraught relationship is summed up in an entry from Flaubert’s posthumously published *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* (1910): “JOURNAUX Ne pouvoir s’en passer – mais tonner contre.”36 As we shall see, anti-journalistic thunder underlain by various kinds of dependence on the press, from which even Flaubert himself was not entirely immune, remained a dominant feature of French literature and cultural criticism throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

---

The primary focus of this dissertation lies elsewhere, however. For there were also some authors, such as Mallarmé, Péguy, Apollinaire, and Proust, who took a more ambivalent approach to the rise of the mass press, pivoting between enthusiasm for journalism’s cultural dynamism and apprehension at the threat it posed to artistic independence and peace of mind. Their works also evoke the sheer ubiquity of newspapers by the early twentieth century. “[P]our la prose il y les journaux,” remarks Apollinaire in “Zone.” And the dilettantish connoisseur Charles Swann deplores “les assommants journaux que nous nous croyons obligés de lire matin et soir” at the beginning of Proust’s Recherche. Those newspapers, be they tedious or stimulating, have become an inescapable feature of these authors’ world. And they duly struggle to come to terms with that phenomenon rather than seek an unobtainable refuge.

An uneasy symbiosis between enthusiasm and loathing for the press is already central to Baudelaire’s writing. As we have seen, the titular hero of “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” itself published in a newspaper, was a newspaper sketch artist, who had travelled the world on assignment for The Illustrated London News, notably covering the 1853-1856 Crimean War in a series of sketches that Baudelaire describes in reverent detail. For Baudelaire, Constantin Guys was less an artist than “un homme du monde,” which the poet deems an altogether superior station in life. Whereas the man of the world “comprend le monde et les raisons mystérieuses et légitimes

----

38 Proust, RTP, 1: 25.
40 Baudelaire, Oc, 2: 689.
de tous ses usages,” the artist is a mere specialist, “attaché à sa palette comme le serf à la glèbe,” whose narrow range of experience renders his conversation “insupportable.”[41] Baudelaire thereby inverts the standard opposition between art and journalism found in nineteenth-century French literature. In “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” it is the globe-trotting journalist who is valorized as a “citoyen spirituel de l’univers,” while those who have chained themselves to their palettes back in Paris are dismissed as “des cervelles de hameau.”[42] Baudelaire is specifically referring to painters rather than writers. His essay nonetheless constitutes a remarkable breach with the reigning literary doxa of journalism’s aesthetic inferiority.

In Baudelaire’s prose poems, which were also published in a panoply of magazines and newspapers, including Le Figaro, we encounter a very different image of the press. For example, in “Le Gâteau,” one of twenty prose poems that were published in La Presse, a large-format, mass-circulation daily newspaper, over several days in September 1862, he derides “les journaux qui prétendent que l’homme est né bon.”[43] In the same series of prose poems, he mocks “le sauteuruisseau d’un directeur de journal qui réclame la suite du manuscrit” and recounts an argument with “le directeur d’une revue, qui à chaque objection répondait: ‘– C’est ici le parti des honnêtes gens’, ce qui implique que tous les autres journaux sont rédigés par des coquins [...]”[44] And in “La Solitude,” he demands that “mon maudit gazetier me laisse m’amuser à mon guise” – a plea that fell on deaf ears since his gazetier, Arsène Houssaye, editor of La Presse (whose own poetry Baudelaire subjects to some deeply insincere flattery in a dedication that appeared at the head of

---

[41] Baudelaire, Oc, 2: 689.
[42] Baudelaire, Oc, 2: 689.
the first instalment of the *Petits poèmes en prose*), spiked the fourth instalment that had been due to appear in the newspaper.45

In *Mon cœur mis à nu* (1887), a posthumously published collection of notes and aphorisms, Baudelaire gives still more emphatic vent to his anti-journalistic spleen:

Il est impossible de parcourir une gazette quelconque, de n’importe quel jour ou quel mois ou quelle année, sans y trouver à chaque ligne les signes de la perversité humaine la plus épouvantable, en même temps que les vanteries les plus surprenantes de probité, de bonté, de charité, et les affirmations les plus effrontées relatives au progrès et à la civilisation.

Tout journal, de la première ligne à la dernière, n’est qu’un tissu d’horreurs. Guerres, crimes, vols, impudicités, tortures, crimes des princes, crimes des nations, crimes des particuliers, une ivresse d’atrocité universelle.

Et c’est de ce dégoûtant apéritif que l’homme civilisé accompagne son repas de chaque matin. Tout, en ce monde, sue le crime: le journal, la muraille et le visage de l’homme.

Je ne comprends pas qu’une main pure puisse toucher un journal sans une convulsion de dégoût.46

The newspaper, which Baudelaire portrays as a vibrant forum of modernité in “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” here becomes an object of total revulsion that epitomizes all the corruption and hypocrisy of the age. And whereas his essay celebrates Guys’s sketches from the front line as “cette grande épopée de la guerre de Crimée,” newspaper war reporting here fuels a horrific form of collective bloodlust.47 Like Baudelaire’s account of modernité, this vitriolic diatribe, which dates from roughly the same period as “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” presents an aporia.48 For *Mon cœur mis à nu* and his essay in Le Figaro express two radically opposed views of the press, which by turns excites and appals him.

---

45 Baudelaire, “La Solitude,” in *Oc*, 1: 313; on Houssaye and the *Petits poèmes en prose*’s aborted final instalment, see Compagnon, *Baudelaire: l’irréductible*, 70-72.
48 For the composition dates, see the “notice” in Baudelaire, *Oc*, 1: 1467-1476.
That ambivalence parallels his attitude towards *modernité* itself. As we have seen, an early section of “Le Peintre de la vie moderne” depicts its titular subject as a bold, intrepid figure with “un but plus élevé que celui d’un pur flâneur.” But the essay’s final lines strike a more equivocal note:

Il a cherché partout la beauté passagère, fugace, de la vie présente, le caractère de ce que le lecteur nous a permis d’appeler la *modernité*. Souvent bizarre, violent, excessif, mais toujours poétique, il a su concentrer dans ses dessins la saveur amère ou capiteuse du vin de la Vie.49

Baudelaire’s account of *modernité* here echoes his second gloss of the term earlier in the essay, where it is identified with the transitory, the fugitive, and the contingent. The parallel emphasis on the eternal seems to have receded though a trace of that quality perhaps continues to lurk implicitly within the word “beauté.” And here it is Guys himself who is “poétique” rather than his work, which further emphasizes a sense of contingency since his own existence must be finite. The shift into the past tense also conveys an impression of encroaching finitude. Moreover, it is far from clear that Guys has ever truly found what he’s looking for, which evokes the conceptual elusiveness of *modernité* itself. The results of that quest now seem troublingly ambiguous. By turns bitter and intoxicating, the wine of Life served to us by this bizarre, violent, and excessive figure might easily drown out the fleeting beauty of *modernité*. Indeed, we might even find ourselves engulfed by the “ivresse d’atrocité universelle” that flows from the newspaper in *Mon cœur mis à nu*.

A similarly ambivalent mood inhabits the works of Mallarmé, Apollinaire, and Proust – the three authors most central to this dissertation. They too veer between excitement and trepidation before the amorphous spectacle of modernity and its many journalistic manifestations. And like Baudelaire – who remarks in “Le Peintre de la vie moderne” that “[l]e passé est

intéressant non seulement par la beauté qu’ont su en extraire les artistes pour qui il était le présent, mais aussi comme passé, pour sa valeur historique” — they were open to cultural change and formal experimentation yet simultaneously eager to maintain a sense of continuity with the past.50

III. Modernism and the avant-gardes

Mallarmé, Apollinaire, and Proust’s efforts to strike a balance between tradition and modernity are what make them modernists, a concept that presents definitional difficulties similar to those of modernity itself. There exists no tidy set of universally agreed necessary and sufficient conditions for what exactly constitutes modernism, and the term has been used in widely different ways. Huysmans was among the first to use “le modernisme” in French. In his reviews of the 1879 Salon, echoing Baudelaire, the term, surrounded by inverted commas to signal its novelty, refers to the approach adopted by those the novelist-critic dubbed “les peintres de la modernité,” such as Edgar Degas and Édouard Manet, whom he admired for their lack of artifice.51 In 1914, Apollinaire similarly used “le modernisme” in his journalistic art criticism to describe contemporary artistic movements such as Cubism.52 During the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, modernism was also the name given to a movement within Catholicism that attempted to reconcile church doctrine with science and Enlightenment values, which, as we shall see, is a central theme in Roger Martin du Gard’s novel Jean Barois (1913) as well as the subject of allusions in Apollinaire’s “Zone.” During the mid-twentieth century “modernism” in English then became identified with an array of artists and writers seen as having broken with realist tradition. Scholars of French literature have also used “le modernisme” to distinguish between the naive odes to technological progress found

50 Baudelaire, Oc, 1: 684.
in the works of mid-nineteenth-century authors such as Maxime Du Camp and Baudelaire’s nuanced, ambivalent appreciation of modernité.⁵³

In this dissertation, I follow critics such as Matei Calinescu and Antoine Compagnon in viewing literary modernism as a broad Europe-centred tendency, whose primary French instigators are Baudelaire and Flaubert, which blends bold stylistic and thematic innovation with existing literary forms in works that engage critically with the stimulating-yet-discombobulating changes wrought by modernity both in the world at large and within literature itself.⁵⁴ Modernists tend to resist modernity without rejecting it. As Compagnon has argued, modernist literature is often infused with the spirit of “l’anti-modernité,” which he calls “la modernité authentique, celle qui résistait à la vie moderne, au monde moderne, tout en y étant irrémédiablement engagée.”⁵⁵ For modernists, modernity itself represents an eternally evolving problem.

Among modernism’s innovations are techniques and forms, sometimes adapted from earlier writers, including stream of consciousness and interior monologue, free verse, and visual or concrete poetry. Modernist novels tend to be loosely structured, at times almost completely lacking in plot, which gives them a reputation for exceptional difficulty. Modernist poetry and prose poetry, notably the works of Mallarmé and his imitators, similarly present formidable challenges to comprehension by departing from syntactical convention. And both modernist prose and poetry display a sense of fictional self-consciousness or reflexivity, whereby literature itself

---

⁵³ See, for example, Gerald Froidevaux, “Modernisme et modernité: Baudelaire face à son époque,” Littérature, no. 63 (Oct. 1986): 90-103 and Bertrand and Durand, Les Poètes de la modernité, 28. It’s not clear that Du Camp himself ever used the word modernisme.


⁵⁵ Compagnon, Baudelaire: l’irréductible, 8.
becomes a central theme of these works, which include novels that draw attention to their own fictionality by telling stories about writers writing novels.

No single modernist work exemplifies all these stylistic and thematic features. Modernism can thus be deemed a “family resemblance concept,” an idea developed by the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, whereby some words and concepts, including very ordinary ones such as game, resist formal definition and can thus best be described in terms of a broad series of overlapping and criss-crossing characteristics, much as members of a family resemble each other in various ways although there may no single essential feature that is common to all members of the family. In light of modernism’s heterogeneity, a formal Merkmal definition that analyses the concept in terms of essential characteristic features would inevitably become misleading. Anti-modernity perhaps comes closest to representing a paradoxical common denominator within modernism. If so, the authors discussed in this dissertation embody that principle to varying degrees. Resistance to modernity, which seems all-consuming in Baudelaire and Proust, is strongly felt in Mallarmé, André Gide, and Apollinaire, less conspicuous in the poetry of Blaise Cendrars and the novels of Colette, and only faintly discernible in the detective novels of Gaston Leroux, whose works, though not typically seen as part of the modernist canon, display a high level of fictional self-consciousness.

Modernism is also characterized by its relationship to the many avant-garde movements that began to mushroom towards the end of the nineteenth century. As the term’s military origins suggest, these avant-gardes tended to adopt a pugnacious tone and advocate a radical break with

---

cultural tradition, tendencies that are already discernible within the Émile Zola-led Naturalist movement. Like the Naturalists (whom they generally disdained as yesterday’s men), these movements also grouped themselves under self-adopted labels – Symbolism, Futurism, Surrealism – typically accompanied by a manifesto, and, in the case of the latter two, a clear chain of command headed by charismatic autocrats, who would excoriate and excommunicate those members of the group they deemed heretical. If modernism represents a restless, questioning approach to creation, then late nineteenth and early twentieth-century avant-gardes seemed to think they had clear answers to what art should and should not be. Their attitudes towards journalism were correspondingly forthright. The Symbolists and Surrealists both loathed the mass press (though the latter aimed to replace it with their own revolutionary style of journalism). By contrast, the Futurists celebrated reportage for its speed and novelty. Zola also championed the press, albeit with reservations about the rise of reportage.

Critics have often conflated modernism and the avant-gardes. For example, the Italian comparatist Renato Poggioli even considered Proust part of the avant-garde.\textsuperscript{57} Such an approach seems overly broad and elides an informative cultural distinction. There is nonetheless considerable overlap between modernist and avant-garde literature in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century France. Mallarmé never embraced the label Symbolism. But the Symbolists – who, despite their vituperative rhetoric, were more loosely organized than the Futurists or Surrealists and not always hostile to tradition – certainly embraced him, viewing the poet as their de-facto leader. And while Mallarmé retained classical poetic forms and adopted a fragmented style of prosody only belatedly, his vision of a new civic religion based on poetry has a utopian aspect that anticipates Surrealism’s more intemperate projects for revolutionizing everyday life.

Apollinaire shared Mallarmé’s reverence for poetic tradition. But he also drew on Futurist ideas in his work and maintained a testy friendship with the movement’s impetuous supremo Filippo-Tommaso Marinetti. Mallarmé and Apollinaire were both situated, as Roland Barthes said of himself, “à l’arrière-garde de l’avant-garde.”

Leading avant-garde figures themselves displayed flashes of ambivalent modernist spirit. For example, the Surrealists Louis Aragon and André Breton both authored works, *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926) and *Nadja* (1928), that add formal innovation to the traditional genre of the *promenade littéraire* whilst evoking nostalgia for the disappearing urban landscape of nineteenth-century Paris. As we shall see in Chapter Seven, Jules Romain, the founder of Unanimism, similarly portrays the effects of urban regeneration in skeptical tones. As was the case for journalism and literature, the line between modernism and the avant-gardes in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century France was often blurred.

**IV. A laboratory of modernism**

What unites both modernism and the avant-gardes is their preoccupation with the mass press – a theme that reappears with extraordinary frequency throughout late nineteenth and early twentieth-century French literature. In an effort to do justice to that multiplicity and to the depth of literary-journalistic imbrication during the period, this dissertation is populous, comprising discussions of dozens of authors working between the 1880s and the 1920s, who include both canonical and largely forgotten figures, whilst occasionally overstepping those temporal boundaries when the stories of their lives and works lead in such directions. The focus is on those modernist authors for whom the press plays a central role in their broader struggle to come to terms with modernity. As Compagnon has written of Baudelaire: “Rien n’est plus emblématique de sa

---

position équivoque à l’égard de la modernité que son attitude face au journal.” Mallarmé, Apollinaire, and Proust all similarly oscillate between enthusiasm and antipathy for the mass press. Like Baudelaire, Apollinaire, who wrote prolifically for newspapers throughout his career, by turns portrays journalism in his poetry and prose fiction as an exciting new cultural horizon and as the enemy of true literature seemingly without ever resolving that tension. By contrast, Mallarmé moves from disdain for what he dubbed “universel reportage” to a rapturous vision of literary-journalistic hybridity. No similarly transcendent vision emerges in Proust, but he offers a uniquely rounded fictional account of the competing urges stirred by the press and of his own novel’s genesis within its pages that represents a disenchanted pendant to Mallarmé’s “Livre.”

Other modernist authors discussed here who depict the mass press ambivalently in their works include, in rough chronological order, Remy de Gourmont, André Gide, Charles Péguy, Valery Larbaud, Raymond Roussel, Blaise Cendrars, André Salmon, Jules Romains, Roger Martin du Gard, and Jean Giraudoux. They are all men, which reflects the fact that female authors were habitually excluded from modernist literary circles. Few women attended Mallarmé’s regular Tuesday-evening gatherings of Symbolist poets. The painter Berthe Morisot supposedly once joked to the poet that she would show up in drag. And when Mallarmé did invite her and her daughter Julie to attend, she declined because she thought the hyper-masculine atmosphere would be too intimidating. The fin-de-siècle literary magazine La Plume, which published work by Mallarmé, Verlaine, and Apollinaire amongst others, specifically forbade “les dames [...] non accompagnées” from attending its monthly banquets. As Rachel Mesch has argued, female authors found greater acceptance in “the literary Tout Paris: a world of elite, highly intellectual,

59 Compagnon, Baudelaire: l’irréductible, 46.
61 “Nos soirées littéraires,” La Plume, no. 72, April 15, 1892, 41.
largely conservative-leaning writers,” of which the early twentieth-century women’s magazines *Femina* and *La Vie heureuse* became commercially successful offshoots that projected a vision of women’s emancipation grounded in traditional gender roles. The literature written by contributors to these publications, such as Marcelle Tinayre’s *La Rebelle* (1905), a Naturalist novel set around a fictional women’s magazine resembling *Femina*, correspondingly tends to emulate existing models. The more radical feminist newspaper *La Fronde*, founded by the former actress Marguerite Durand in 1897, to which Tinayre contributed *chroniques*, focussed on political journalism rather than literature. *La Fronde*’s most prominent contributor, the anarchist activist Caroline Rémy de Guebhard, who wrote under the pseudonym Séverine, published no poetry and little prose fiction (though, as Thérenty has noted, her eclectic journalistic style attests to the influence of “la tradition d’un journalisme fictionnalisant” that blends *reportage* and political commentary with flights of imagination). As we shall see in Chapter Six, Colette’s novels were clearly shaped by her experiences of journalism but seldom allude to the press. Marguerite Eymery, who wrote under the pseudonym Rachilde, similarly combined her role as a prolific critic at the *Mercure de France* with a career as a novelist but did not depict the life of the literary magazine and publishing house she helped created in her fictional writings. Not until Simone de Beauvoir’s *Les Mandarins* (1954) do we encounter a modernist novel by a female French author where journalism itself becomes a central theme.

---

Such literary representations of the press lie at the heart of this dissertation. The wave of early twenty-first-century French scholarship devoted to literature and the press, culminating in the collectively authored *La Civilisation du journal* (2011), has, by contrast, tended to focus on the role of the press as a literary laboratory during the nineteenth century. Thérenty, Vaillant, and others have shown how realist fiction as well as new literary forms such as prose poetry and the serial novel emerged from the press and how nineteenth-century French journalism itself constantly drew on fictional techniques and tropes. Their work amounts to a quasi-encyclopaedic literary history of the nineteenth-century French press. By contrast, two recent Anglophone studies – Edmund Birch’s *Fictions of the Press in Nineteenth-Century France* (2018) and Kate Rees’s *The Journalist in the French Fin-de-siècle Novel* (2018) – examine how French novelists of the period portrayed the press in their works.

This dissertation attempts a synthesis of these approaches. By combining an overview of the evolution of the press as a literary laboratory during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with a study of the journalistic origins of individual modernist literary works and close readings of how those same works portray the press and draw on journalistic forms, I aim to provide a rich contextual account of how French modernist writers grappled with journalism in their lives and works. The basic premise is that knowledge of their works’ journalistic hinterland can shed some light on their frequently paradoxical depictions of the press. This dissertation makes three central arguments: firstly, that French literature remained deeply intertwined with journalism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and that modernist authors’ engagement with the mass press did not, contrary to the arguments of Pierre Bourdieu, come at the price of their artistic autonomy; secondly, that formal characteristics of modernist poetry and prose such as typographical innovation and fragmented narrative structure often reflect their authors’
journalistic experience; and thirdly, that modernism’s spirit of reflexivity or fictional self-consciousness yielded works that explored their own debts to journalism with unprecedented candour and depth.

The story begins in Chapter One with an account of the rise of reportage amid the rapid expansion of the press at the end of the nineteenth century. Those developments were the source of much anguish in literary-journalistic circles, which forms the backdrop to Mallarmé’s distinction between literature and “universel reportage.” The poet subsequently shifted to a more favourable view of the press, reflecting his positive experience of writing articles for newspapers such as Le Figaro, which culminates in a rapturous vision of literary-journalistic hybridity that is partly realized in Un coup de dés. That vision evokes the continuing profusion of literature, including prose and poetry authored by Mallarmé’s Symbolist followers, in the mass press during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Chapter Two explores how the growth of the mass press was paralleled by a wave of modernist and avant-garde literary magazines dubbed petites revues, which became the primary literary laboratory in France from the late nineteenth century onwards. Contributors to these petites revues tended to view newspapers and conservative, establishment-oriented grandes revues such as the Revue des Deux Mondes with disdain. And yet this chapter shows there were many material connections between the petites revues and the mass press. Many authors wrote for both newspapers and little magazines. The latter relied on and often actively courted publicity from the former. Petites revues also published reportage – a style of journalism associated with the mass press – to which these anarchist and socialist-influenced publications often added a politically radical edge.
Chapter Three looks at how the connections between the mass press and the petites revues shaped the literary works appearing in the latter, which included examples of what I call “literary actualité,” where writers transform news stories into literature. Authors such as Mallarmé, Alfred Jarry, Charles-Louis Philippe, and Félix Fénéon all drew on articles they had read in newspapers in their writings for La Revue blanche. Those experiments in that turn-of-the-century petite revue form the backdrop to Fénéon’s later Nouvelles en trois lignes for the newspaper Le Matin, where he turned faits divers into eerie, haiku-like political allegories. Other instances of “literary actualité” include Apollinaire’s short stories, which frequently resemble reportage, as well as poems such as “Zone” and his later calligrams, which allude to topical events and controversies. Jarry’s Ubu roi (1896), initially published in two petites revues, similarly contains echoes of political actualité. And several modernist novels first published in petites revues including Octave Mirbeau’s Le Journal d’une femme de chambre (1900) and Romain Rolland’s Jean-Christophe (1904-1912) directly confront political subjects such as the Dreyfus Affair and the drift towards a European war. Péguy similarly blurs the line between literature and political polemic in his writings for his own magazine, the Cahiers de la quinzaine. Moreover, the later volumes of Proust’s Recherche offer lucid reflections on the First World War and its aftermath that echo the political outlook of La Nouvelle Revue française (hereafter La NRF), which published extracts from Proust’s evolving novel from 1914 onwards.

The legacy of the petites revues in French book publishing is the subject of Chapter Four. Both Mercure de France and La NRF evolved into thriving publishing houses that persist to this day. Though not a direct outgrowth of the Cahiers de la quinzaine, Éditions Grasset also drew on the heritage of Péguy’s idiosyncratic magazine. These publishers simultaneously became skilled at cultivating the mass press as a source of publicity, investing heavily in newspaper advertising
and even bribing journalists. These methods stirred considerable tension between André Gide and Gaston Gallimard during the early years of Éditions de la NRF, which later became Éditions Gallimard. Gallimard and Proust also quarrelled over the publisher’s efforts to publicize the *Recherche*, an experience that left its mark on Proust’s novel itself. Valery Larbaud’s novel *A.O. Barnabooth* (1913) and Péguy’s writings similarly evoke the dark arts of publicity practised by their respective publishers. Such indirect patterns of influence point to a broader role for the press as a literary laboratory than has hitherto been conceived. It was not just publication in the press and journalistic techniques that shaped literature but also writers’ commercial interactions with the press via their publishers as they struggled to sell their books.

Chapter Five reprises the discussion of Apollinaire and the poets of the New Spirit, who benefitted from the backing of Mercure de France, Gallimard, and Grasset. Apollinaire, Cendrars, Salmon wrote countless articles for the mass press. Like Mallarmé, their portrayals of the press alternately evoke excitement at journalism’s cultural dynamism and disgust at its many depredations. Along with their friend Max Jacob, who mostly kept his distance from the mass press, these authors also experimented with forms of poetic *reportage*. Those forays into literary-journalistic hybridity recall Mallarmé’s vision of “le Livre.” But the First World War and Apollinaire’s death in 1918 interrupted that evolving epiphany. Cendrars and Salmon thereafter devoted themselves to writing derivative and increasingly reactionary journalism, leaving their initial poetic promise largely unfulfilled.

Chapter Six explores the role of the press in the so-called crisis of the novel, which was a recurring theme in journalistic literary criticism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. That crisis was regularly blamed on the growth of the press itself. Though the French novel was in fact evolving during this period, most fictional portrayals of the press duly continued
to echo Flaubert’s quip about thundering against newspapers whilst being unable to live without them. Some novelists celebrated journalism as a source of adventure or as a tool of personal and political emancipation. Others used the press as a literary laboratory without letting that journalistic hinterland intrude significantly upon their novels, which display a nonchalant attitude towards the press. But the sense of crisis never truly disappeared. And, after a brief hiatus following the Liberation, newspapers again seem both wretched and inescapable in post-war novels.

The crisis of the novel remains central to Chapter Seven, which discusses novelists who took an ambivalent approach to the press. Some of these ultimately moved towards a more consistently hostile view of the press. But others, particularly Gide and Proust, continued to pivot between fascination and hostility without arriving at a conclusive judgement. That ambivalence reflects the prominence of journalism within Gide and Proust’s novels, which confront their own debts to the press, thereby filling a lacuna at the heart of French fiction from Balzac onwards. Proust’s self-conscious exploration of his novel’s genesis within the press also emphasizes the affinity between the Recherche and Mallarmé’s vision of “le Livre.” Both Mallarmé and Proust struggled to find a way of incorporating journalism within their totalizing literary visions. Proust, unlike Mallarmé, brought that endeavour to completion, albeit stripped of the utopian fervour that animated his predecessor.
CHAPTER ONE
Mallarmé and the Golden Age of French Newspapers

Pardonnez-moi mon reportage.
Gustave Geoffroy, note to J.-K. Huysmans accompanying his review of À Rebours, May 1884.66

Tu es un très bon petit reporter de tes journées, on te suit, avec transparence.
Stéphane Mallarmé, letter to Geneviève Mallarmé, July 12, 1891.67

I. “Universel reportage”68

A spectre haunts late nineteenth-century French literature – the spectre of reportage. Long accustomed to writing for newspapers as critics, commentators, and serial novelists, many literary writers were discomfited by the emergence of a new style of journalism during the Third Republic’s newspaper boom. First developed in the United States, this approach hinged on eyewitness testimony, interviews, note-taking, and legwork. Its ascendancy was epitomized by the worldwide attention paid to Henry Morton Stanley’s exploits in Africa, on assignment for the New York Herald, where he located David Livingstone in 1871 after a two-year-long expedition. In France, the journalist and novelist Jules Vallès was one of the first to grasp the new rules of the game, vowing an end to the formalistic self-absorption of “littérature littératurante” and promising to deliver “la vie vraie après la vie factice.”69

Few other writers shared this enthusiasm however, and their hostility crystallized around the Anglicism *reportage*, seemingly a straightforward calque on *reporting*.\(^70\) In time, journalists would embrace the term, but *reportage* thus began its life – like *réalisme*, *impressionnisme*, and *décadence* – as an insult. First attested, according to the *Trésor de la langue française*, in 1865, the word had entered current usage by the 1870s but retained a somewhat alien quality for decades, as conveyed by the fact that it was often written in italics.\(^71\) To speak of *reportage* was to evoke a debased, Americanized journalistic culture in which semi-literate scriveners regurgitated the contents of the telegraph without any concern for style or propriety.

Journalists themselves often bemoaned this development. “C’est scandaleux,” wrote the future editor of *Le Figaro* Francis Magnard in an article for that newspaper in 1871, “mais c’est comme cela: des articles faits au courant de la plume, des informations, du *reportage*, puisqu’on a inventé ce mot là [sic], sont plus payés relativement qu’un roman qui a demandé six mois ou un an de travail […].”\(^72\) Such anxieties about the effect on literature were widely shared. It became a commonplace that the book was on the verge of extinction, swamped by the ever-rising tide of the press. For whereas total newspaper circulation, as we saw in the Introduction, increased between 1870 and 1914 from just under 1.5 million to over 10 million copies, the number of new books published each year declined markedly during the “crise de la librairie” of the 1890s and thereafter recovered lost ground at a steady but unspectacular rate.\(^73\) To many, *reportage* seemed poised to

---

\(^70\) *Reportage* would later make the opposite journey back into English, where the word came to designate a highly literate style of journalism associated with authors such as George Orwell or Ryszard Kapuściński. No such favourable connotations were present in its nineteenth-century French usage.

\(^71\) The word “*reportage*” did exist in French prior to 1865, but it had a different, highly technical meaning and was presumably not derived from English in this form. According to the *Dictionnaire général et grammatical des dictionnaires français* (Paris, 1834), the practice of “*reportage*” consisted of paying one half of “la dîme” – a feudal tax that was abolished during the Revolution.


engulf the very act of writing. As Edmond de Goncourt warned in the preface to his final novel *Chérie* (1884): “Répétons-le, le jour où n’existera plus chez le lettré l’effort d’écrire, et l’effort d’écrire personnellement, on peut être sûr d’avance que le reportage aura succédé en France à la littérature.”74 The editorial secretary of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* Ferdinand Brunetière (who later became editor of that *grande revue*) similarly inveighed against the encroachment of “le reportage dans le roman,” criticizing the propensity of contemporary writers, such as the prominent newspaper columnist Jules Claretie, for superficially recycling current events and society gossip in their novels.75

And Stéphane Mallarmé cast the opposition in even more fundamental terms in what is perhaps the most widely quoted (though seldom-analysed) comment from this period invoking the spectre of reportage:

> Un désir indéniable à mon temps est de séparer comme en vue d’attributions différentes le double état de la parole, brut ou immédiat ici, là essentiel.

> Narrer, enseigner, même décrire, cela va et encore qu’à chacun suffirait peut-être pour échanger la pensée humaine, de prendre ou de mettre dans la main d’autrui en silence une pièce de monnaie, l’emploi élémentaire du discours dessert l’universel reportage dont, la littérature exceptée, participe tout entre les genres d’écrits contemporains.76

Though it undoubtedly reflects prevailing anxiety about the rise of reportage, Mallarmé’s attitude here differs from that of Brunetière or Goncourt. For him, reportage is not an alien, corrupting presence that has seeped into the language of Molière on the irresistible tide of Anglophone culture. Rather, it encompasses all the basic everyday functions of language – “narrer, enseigner, même décrire” – thence its universality. By this account, reportage is what we do when we use language

74 Edmond de Goncourt, *Chérie*, “édition définitive” (1884; repr., Paris: Flammarion & Fasquelle, 1921), VI.
in a strictly utilitarian way to communicate pieces of information to each other. And it is clear from the analogy with handing over a coin that the poet does not take a benign view of such a crude approach to language. Inverting the standard hierarchy of values, it is not rudimentary acts of communication that are essential to him but poetry, which, as he goes on to explain in following two paragraphs, alone allows us to grasp “la notion pure” of “un fait de nature.”

Mallarmé’s comments on “universel reportage” first appear in his “Avant-dire” to the second edition of the poet René Ghil’s Traité du verbe (1886). They themselves largely unaltered though situated in shifting contexts, the same paragraphs subsequently feature in Pages (1891), Vers et prose (1893), and Divagations (1897), Mallarmé’s final prose collection, as part of the “poème critique” “Crise de vers.” The frequency with which the passage reappears within the slim body of work published during Mallarmé’s lifetime suggests he attached considerable importance to the ideas expressed therein.

Those ideas seem to put him at odds with many of his literary contemporaries. For the extended meaning of reportage in “Crise de vers” sets a rather high bar for what may qualify as littérature. If narration and description are classed as mere elementary discourse, this suggests at a stroke that the Naturalist novel and short story are to be excluded from the exalted domain of literature. And this is indeed what Mallarmé said when questioned by the journalist Jules Huret as part of the latter’s Enquête sur l’évolution littéraire (1891):

Pour en revenir au naturalisme, il me paraît qu’il faut entendre par là la littérature d’Emile Zola, et que le mot mourra en effet, quand Zola aura achevé son œuvre. J’ai une grande admiration pour Zola. Il a fait moins, à vrai dire, de véritable littérature que de l’art évocatoire, en se servant, le moins qu’il est possible, des éléments littéraires; il a pris les mots, c’est vrai, mais c’est tout; le reste provient de sa merveilleuse organisation et se répercute tout de suite dans l’esprit de la foule. Il a vraiment des qualités puissantes; son sens inouï de la vie, ses mouvements de foule, la peau de Nana, dont nous avons tous caressé le grain, tout cela peint en de

prodigieux lavis, c’est l’œuvre d’une organisation vraiment admirable! Mais la littérature a quelque chose de plus intellectuel que cela […]  

For Mallarmé, it is not simply utilitarian communication and journalism as commonly understood that stand in opposition to literature. Rather, a swathe of what would usually be considered literary works, such as Zola’s novels, are relegated to the category of reportage. If Mallarmé does not explicitly mention reportage in his interview with Huret, this perhaps reflects what Jean-Paul Sartre called the poet’s “terrorisme de la politesse” and his friendship with Zola, whom he may not have wished to offend by directly comparing him to a lowly reporter. But, read in conjunction with the passage in “Crise de vers,” his comments to Huret make it clear on which side of the littérature-reportage divide he sees Zola as falling. In private, Mallarmé explicitly stated as much with respect to Guy de Maupassant’s work which, he told the academic G.C. Moore Smith during his 1894 visit to Cambridge, was “only brilliant journalism.”

The tendency to dismiss Naturalist literature as journalism was hardly unique to Mallarmé. In Huret’s Enquête alone, this topos emerges in exchanges with three writers: the anti-militarist novelist Lucien Descaves dismisses Zola’s writing as “de la copie du journal tout bêtement bâclée, avec autant de facilité qu’on démarquerait un fait-divers”; with less vitriol, the novelist and nationalist politician Maurice Barrès similarly remarks that “les naturalistes ont affiché le parti-pris de se tenir dans le fait-divers”; and, on a slightly different note, the novelist and would-be nationalist politician Paul Adam accuses Zola of using “les plus vulgaires procédés du reportage” to attract public admiration. The irony of such accusations is that they were made in the context of what Huret was by now proud to call a piece of reportage, which was first published in the

81 Huret, *Enquête sur l’évolution littéraire*, 216, 44, and 351. As Huret notes (62), Adam like Barrès had run for election as a supporter of the revanchist General Boulanger in 1889. Unlike Barrès, he failed to be elected.
newspaper *L’Écho de Paris* during the spring and summer of 1891. Moreover, all three of these authors themselves wrote journalism.

Comparisons between Zola’s novels and *reportage* were hardly without basis. As Marc Angenot has noted, *La Bête humaine* (1890) clearly draws on contemporary *faits divers*, notably the murders committed by Jack the Ripper during 1888. And Zola himself, who had begun his career working for the publicity department of the Hachette publishing house, repeatedly declared his enthusiasm for the press and its influence on literature, writing in 1878 that “à notre époque un écrivain qui n’a pas été journaliste est incapable de comprendre et de peindre la vie contemporaine.” Though he would subsequently join in the ritual hand-wringing about “cette course folle à l’information” and the supposed Americanization of the French press, he nonetheless simultaneously noted with approval “la parenté qui existe aujourd’hui entre le reportage et le roman.” It follows that Zola and Mallarmé basically agreed about the contemporary novel’s debt to *reportage*. But whereas the former saw this affinity with journalism as a crucial aspect of Naturalism’s documentary mission, the encroachment of *reportage* upon the novel seemed to buttress the latter’s view that literature’s true vocation did not consist of striving to create literal representations of reality in prose.

Mallarmé’s letters often echo the opposition between literature and *reportage* established in “Crise de vers.” When Jean Moréas published his Symbolist manifesto in *Le Figaro*’s *Supplément littéraire* in September 1886, Mallarmé chided the young poet that “il faut, si l’on fait

---

82 When Huret published the interviews in book form, he dedicated the volume to Valentin Simond, publisher of *L’Écho de Paris*, “*dant la libérale autorité m’encouragea en cette tentative de reportage expérimental*” (Huret, *Enquête sur l’évolution littéraire*, 17).


de la littérature, parler autrement que les journaux.” And ten years later, following his election as doyen of French poets in a survey of his peers conducted by the little magazine La Plume, he replied to Le Figaro’s request for some unpublished work with a sonnet, prefaced by the assertion that “selon moi, les vers et le journal se font tort réciproquement.” In the wake of his triumph, he also told the poet Henri de Régnier that he found “cette couronne ‘en papier de journal’” to be ridiculous.

Such hostility to the press left a considerable impression on the acolytes who attended Mallarmé’s Tuesday-evening gatherings at his apartment on the rue de Rome. For example, in the poet and novelist Camille Mauclair’s Le Soleil des morts (1898), where, as the author stated in his preface to a later edition, “la figure de Calixte Armel est bien celle de mon maître Stéphane Mallarmé,” the very first pages feature a lengthy tirade on this theme by Armel, who dismisses the suggestion of one of his protégés that he respond to the slurs against him in the press:

A plus forte raison n’allons pas compromettre les pensées de l’élite dans l’explication hâtive des deux cents lignes d’une chronique quotidienne, lue le matin entre deux faits divers. Irons-nous demander la notoriété à un si fugace exposé de ce qui fait le fond de notre vie? Non, Leumann, que le journal parle de ce qui dure un jour, la notoriété n’a rien qui nous tente.

Mauclair’s portrait later acquired non-fictional form in Mallarmé chez lui (1935), which expresses his “indignation de voir comment Mallarmé était traité par la presse boulevardière” and, though his acolyte had himself become a journalist, credits the poet with imparting “ce scrupule de la forme dont le journalisme est le plus grand ennemi.”

---

the poet and critic Charles Morice similarly made his mentor’s serene indifference to both the relentless mockery of the press and its financial temptations a central theme of his memorial lecture delivered in Brussels in January 1899, which emphasizes that the sage of the rue de Rome, who had died in September 1898, “refusa toujours de prendre sa part sonnante & trébuchante de ce mensonge, le journal soi-disant littéraire.” In his earlier treatise La Littérature de tout à l’heure (1889), Morice also echoes his mentor’s comments about “universel reportage”: “Je ne pense pas avoir à spécifier en quoi la Littérature et le Journalisme, bien qu’ils emploient le même alphabet, constituent deux arts absolument étrangers l’un à l’autre.” Like Mauclair, Morice nonetheless became a newspaper journalist, notably working as a court reporter for Le Matin and later as the literary editor of Paris-Journal.

The image of Mallarmé as a paragon of unimpeachable artistic integrity, beset on all sides by the laughter of a gaggle of venal journalists, subsequently attained canonical form in the writings of Albert Thibaudet, among the most respected critics of the inter-war years, and Paul Valéry, one of the younger members of the poet’s circle, who is often seen as Mallarmé’s foremost literary heir. For Thibaudet, Mallarmé’s early foray into journalism as editor of the short-lived fashion magazine La Dernière Mode (1874), where he seemingly wrote all the articles under a variety of pseudonyms, suggests he could easily have earned a comfortable living as a newspaper columnist had he so wished. Instead, the poet, who worked as a lycée English teacher, “refusa de se sacrifier, en exploitant ce genre fructueux, une partie de son idéal à la clarté vulgaire qui y

---

94 On La Dernière Mode, see Jean-Pierre Lecercle, Mallarmé et la mode, rev. ed. (Paris: Séguier, 2014) and Marchal’s “Notice” in Mallarmé, Oc, 2: 1712-1715. The magazine also published poetry and short stories by friends of Mallarmé including Villiers de l’Isle-Adam and Zola.
eût été requise, et préféra continuer à vivre de son métier ingrat.”

In Valéry’s estimation, the opposition between the press and the young poets centred around Mallarmé – “ridiculisé par le moindre chroniqueur” – was not simply an incidental detail; rather, that antagonism constituted an essential feature of a heterogeneous movement united not by any specific aesthetic doctrine but by “quelque négation, et cette négation indépendante de leurs tempéraments et de leur fonction de créateurs.”

The Symbolists were, in his view, not defined by what they for so much as what they were against, to wit the “critiques les mieux établis dans les feuilletons les plus imposants […] Sarcey, Fouquier, Brunetière, Lemaître et Anatole France.”

By rejecting the dominion of the feuilleton, as the literary section of a newspaper located at the bottom of the page was called, the Symbolists, Valéry avers, carried out “une sorte de révolution dans l’ordre des valeurs,” whereby works that created their own public came to be prized over those that pandered to conventional critical tastes.

Of the Symbolists’ immediate precursors, Pierre Bourdieu has similarly written in Les Règles de l’art (1992), his sociological study of the nineteenth-century “champ littéraire”:

Il ne fait pas de doute que l’indignation morale contre toutes les formes de soumission aux pouvoirs ou au marché, qu’il s’agisse de l’empressement carriériste qui porte certains littérateurs (on pense à un Maxime Du Camp) à poursuivre les privilèges et les honneurs, ou de l’asservissement aux demandes de la presse et du journalisme qui précipite feuilletonistes et vaudevillistes dans une littérature sans exigences et sans écriture, a joué un rôle déterminant, chez des personnages comme Baudelaire ou Flaubert, dans la résistance quotidienne qui a conduit à l’affirmation progressive de l’autonomie des écrivains […].

95 Albert Thibaudet, La Poésie de Stéphane Mallarmé (1912; repr., Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 27.
97 Valéry, Œuvres, 1: 691; Francisque Sarcey, Henry Fouquier, and Jules Lemaître were drama and book critics for a variety of newspapers, principally Le Temps in Sarcey’s case, Le Figaro in Fouquier’s, and Le Journal des débats in Lemaître’s. The novelist Anatole France wrote a regular column for Le Temps, where, in response to Moréas’s manifesto, he reproached the Symbolists for the “obscurité profonde” of their work (Anatole France, “La Vie à Paris,” Le Temps, Sept. 26, 1886, 2).
98 Valéry, Œuvres, 1: 691.
Never explicitly defined in *Les Règles de l’art* itself, what Bourdieu calls a field can be summarized as “a relatively autonomous domain of activity that responds to rules of functioning and institutions that are specific to it and which define the relations among the agents.” As applied to late nineteenth-century French literature, this concept entails situating writers and their works within a set of institutions that includes publishers, theatres, literary salons, universities, the Académie française, and the press. For Bourdieu, the literary field is structured by a series of oppositions between agents and institutions endowed with varying levels of different kinds of capital. Late nineteenth-century French newspapers along with *grandes revues* such as the highly profitable *Revue des Deux Mondes*, to which Flaubert’s frère-ennemi Du Camp regularly contributed, were richly endowed with economic capital. But, as suggested by Mallarmé’s comments on “universel reportage” and the his acolytes’ many analogous anti-journalistic broadsides, the mass press lacked the kind of aesthetic prestige that Bourdieu dubs “symbolic capital,” stemming from an ethical-cum-aesthetic commitment to “l’art pur [...] fondée sur la reconnaissance obligée des valeurs de désintéressement et sur la dénégation de l’‘économie’.” The latter, as he sees it, accrued to writers such as Baudelaire and Flaubert in the first instance and then Mallarmé and his Symbolist followers, who defined themselves in opposition to the mercantile values of the mass press. By these lights, their collective rejection of the mass press made a decisive contribution to the development of their artistic autonomy, which Bourdieu defines as “la libre concurrence entre des créateurs-prophètes affirmant librement le nomos

---

101 The *Revue des Deux Mondes*, founded in 1829, boasted 25,000 subscribers and earned over 500,000 francs (over 2 million euros in today’s money) in annual profits by the 1870s (see Thomas Loué, “La Revue,” in Kalifa, Régnier, Thérénty and Vaillant, *La Civilisation du journal*, 333-357, 341-343).
extraordinaire et singulier, sans précédent ni équivalent, qui les définit en propre.”103 These writers, in other words, broke with the existing laws and institutions governing the literary field, replacing them with their own artistic law – that of independence from external political, religious, and economic forces, typically summed up in phrases such as “la littérature pure,” “l’art pur” and “l’art pour l’art” – which was underpinned by a new set of institutions, including new literary magazines, publishing houses, and theatres that flaunted their opposition to the world of the Académie, the boulevard theatre, and the feuilleton and signalled the primacy of symbolic capital over economic capital.104

Bourdieu’s analysis – which, as we shall see, has influenced recent scholarship on literature and the press in nineteenth-century France – replicates the self-image of authors such as Mauclair, Morice, and Valéry, who all portrayed Mallarmé and the Symbolists’ opposition to the mass press as a mark of their revolutionary artistic integrity. And yet Bourdieu fails to account for the extent to which these authors, like Baudelaire before them, repeatedly transgressed their supposed nomos of rupture with existing literary institutions, notably the mass press. As we saw in the Introduction, towards the end of his life, Baudelaire both published many of his prose poems in the feuilleton of the La Presse and, in an essay published in Le Figaro, cast the newspaper sketch artist Constantin Guys as a paragon of artistic modernity. Baudelaire had also prepublished eighteen poems from Les Fleurs du Mal in the Revue des Deux Mondes in 1855. Yet Bourdieu, whose hostility towards nineteenth-century journalism may well have reflected his frustrations with the mass media of his own time, never even mentions Baudelaire’s Petits poèmes en prose, “Le Peintre de la vie

104 See Bourdieu, Les Règles de l’art, 107 and 110.
moderne,” or the prepublications in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in *Les Règles de l’art*.105 Baudelaire’s unsuccessful efforts to become a member of the Académie are portrayed as a paradoxical form of revolt: [E]n contraignant cette instance à ses yeux discréditée à manifester au grand jour son incapacité de le reconnaître, il affirme aussi le droit, et même le devoir, qui incombe au détenteur de la nouvelle légitimité, de renverser la table des valeurs [...]”106 But the poet’s involvement with the mass press, which directly shaped his work and which he regarded with a blend of hostility and fascination, is passed over in silence. Moreover, as we have seen, Morice and Mauclair, notwithstanding their disdain for journalism, were themselves newspaper journalists. In their case, that experience of journalism did not yield any literary work of striking originality. But quite the opposite is true of their mentor, who, despite his dismissal of “universel reportage,” went on to elaborate a radical vision of literary-journalistic hybridity that itself took shape in the pages of the press. Mallarmé’s eclectic experiments in what continued to be a vibrant literary laboratory suggest that the structure of the literary field during the late nineteenth century was far more fluid than Bourdieu supposes and that robust engagement with the mass press did not preclude artistic autonomy.

II. *Divagations*

Mallarmé’s nuanced attitude towards journalism is suggested by the very first lines of

*Divagations:*

Un livre comme je ne les aime pas, ceux épars et privés d’architecture. Nul n’échappe décidément, au journalisme ou voudrait-il, en produit pour soi et tel autre espérons, sans qu’on jette par-dessus les têtes, certaines vérités, vers le jour.107

---

107 Mallarmé, *Oc*, 2: 82; italicized in the original.
Straightaway, Mallarmé concedes that his own book, far from being the antipode of journalism, is in fact a product of that culture. Indeed, versions of most of the writings assembled in *Divagations* had originally appeared in *petites revues* such as *La Revue blanche* and *La Revue wagnérienne*. Although these little magazines, as we shall see in Chapter Two, differed profoundly from popular newspapers such as *Le Petit Journal* or *Le Matin* in tenor and form, Mallarmé nonetheless seems to imply here that they too belong to the same ephemeral world of journalism, and, as we shall see, one piece included in *Divagations* had in fact initially been published in the popular daily newspaper *Le Journal*. Towards the end of the paragraph, he suggests, moreover, that this kinship with the press is not just an inescapable facet of modern publishing but a deliberate gesture. Mallarmé, who was repeatedly accused in the press of writing incomprehensible poems, here asserts a desire to be understood. 108 This does not come without some sacrifice and tension. “Certaines vérités” have thus been reserved for fear they would sail uselessly over readers’ heads. The prince of poets may have resolved to descend a bit closer to the level of the crowd, but he does not pretend that nothing has been lost.

There is also perhaps a material dimension to this sense of compromise. Whereas Mallarmé’s previous books had often been published in the form of luxurious boutique editions (notably his *Poésies complètes* [1887], whose print run of 40 copies cost 100 francs each109), *Divagations* was published by the mass-market publishing house Charpentier between plain yellow covers on normal quality paper. Such a volume would be out of place in the library of Jean des Esseintes, the virtuosic aesthete of Joris-Karl Huysmans’s *À Rebours* (1884), itself published

---


by Charpentier, whose raptures over the “quelques feuilles reliées en peau d’onagre, préalablement satiniée à la presse hydraulique, pommelée à l’aquarelle de nuées d’argent et nantie de gardes de vieux lampas” of his “Quelques vers de Mallarmé” had done much to shape public impressions of the poet. Mallarmé’s lament for his book’s lack of “architecture” thus plausibly refers to its physical form as well as its contents.

The opening passage sets the tone for the rest of Divagations, which abounds in references to journalism. Many of these are infused with the sense of antagonism apparent in “Crise de vers.” For example, at the beginning of “Un spectacle interrompu,” a prose poem originally published in 1875, the author expresses a wish to “écrire comme elle frappa mon regard de poète, telle Anecdote, avant que la divulguent des reporters par la foule dressés à assigner à chaque chose son caractère commun.” But others eschew such rancour entirely and make plain their affinities with the reporter’s craft. A whole section is thus entitled “Grands faits divers,” consisting of a series of gnomic meditations (versions of which had originally appeared in La Revue blanche and The National Observer, an Edinburgh-based magazine) on topics of contemporary interest such as the Panama Affair, anarchist bombings, and black magic. Moreover, “Quant au livre,” situated immediately after “Crise de vers” in the book, expounds at length on the relationship between literature and journalism, which attests to Mallarmé’s fascination for the form and culture of the newspaper.

“Quant au livre” is divided into three sub-sections, all originating in articles written for The National Observer and La Revue blanche, each of which portrays the press in a contrasting light. The first of these, “L’Action restreinte,” essentially reiterates the opposition between journalism and literature enunciated in “Crise de vers.” In response to a young man seeking guidance about

111 Mallarmé, Oc, 2: 90.
how he should live his life, the author suggests that action may take two forms: on the one hand, “par une volonté, à l’insu, qui dure une vie, jusqu’à l’éclat multiple – penser, cela,” in other words, a patient, reflective course corresponding to Mallarmé’s own approach that will bear fruit in the long run; on the other hand, “les déversements à portée maintenant dans une prévoyance, journaux et leur tourbillon, y déterminer une force en un sens, quelconque de divers contrariée, avec l’immunité du résultat nul,” which is to say, a frenetic career in the whirlpool of the press, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.\(^{112}\) It is the same dilemma that confronts Lucien de Rubempré in Balzac’s *Illusions perdues*: dedicate oneself to true art and live in dignified poverty like Arthez, or embrace the well-remunerated glamour of the *feuilleton* like Lousteau, who initiates the hero into the meretricious world of Parisian journalism. And Mallarmé’s advice is clearly to reject the latter and its “premier-Paris chargés de divulguer une foi en le quotidien néant” (the “premier-Paris” being the name traditionally given to the leading article, published in the first column on the left-hand side of the front page of a newspaper).\(^{113}\)

Yet the tone is transformed in “Quant au livre”’s second sub-section entitled “Étatages” in which Mallarmé reacts to the “crise de la librairie” of the early 1890s. Whereas book publishers are here taken to task for their short-sighted venality and lack of discernment, the literary pedigree of the French press becomes the subject of a surprising paean of praise: “Plutôt la Presse, chez nous seuls, a voulu une place aux écrits – son traditionnel feuilleton en rez-de-chaussée longtemps soutint la masse du format entier.”\(^{114}\) Mallarmé here alludes to the fact that, as we saw in the Introduction, literature indeed occupied an unusually prominent place in French newspapers, unlike their British counterparts, during the nineteenth century. The use of the *passé simple*

\(^{114}\) Mallarmé, *Oc*, 2: 221.
momentarily suggests that the reign of the literary *feuilleton* has been swept aside by the march of *reportage*. But the very next sentence indicates that the transformation Mallarmé has in mind is quite the opposite: “Mieux, la fiction proprement dite ou le récit, imaginatif, s’ébat au travers de ‘quotidiens’ achalandés, triomphant à des lieux principaux, jusqu’au sommet; en déloge l’article de fonds, ou d’actualité, apparu secondaire.”115 His point here is that, whereas novels and other literary texts had traditionally been confined to the *feuilleton*, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the separation between the literary and non-literary sections of the newspaper grew less rigid, and it became increasingly common to find short stories located in prominent positions at the top of the front page. This was particularly true of *Gil Blas*, *L’Écho de Paris*, and *Le Journal*, launched in 1879, 1884, and 1891 respectively, which habitually devoted pride of place to short stories by writers such as Remy de Gourmont, Marcel Schwob (both regular attendees at Mallarmé’s Tuesday-evening gatherings or “mardistes”), and Maupassant.116 Indeed, this section of “Étaloges” has its origins in an article written for *The National Observer* on the death of Maupassant, whose effusive tone suggests that, despite his apparently dismissive comments to Moore Smith, Mallarmé in fact held his work in high regard.117

---

Were Mallarmé’s point limited to approval for the increased prominence accorded such writings in the press, then it might be unremarkable. But there follows a passage that envisions a much greater literary mission for the press:

Telle aventure laisse indifférents certains parce qu’imaginent-ils, à un peu plus ou moins de rareté et de sublime près dans le plaisir goûté par les gens, la situation se maintient quant à ce qui, seul, est précieux et haut, immeasurabilement et connu du nom de Poésie: elle, toujours restera exclue et son frémissement de vols autre part qu’aux pages est parodié, pas plus, par l’envergure, en nos mains, de la feuille hâtive ou vaste du journal. À jauger l’extraordinaire surproduction actuelle, où la Presse cède son moyen intelligemment, la notion prévaut, cependant, de quelque chose de très décisif, qui s’élaboré: comme avant une ère, un concours pour la fondation du Poème populaire moderne, tout au moins de Mille et Une Nuits innombrables: dont une majorité lisante soudain inventée s’éméveillera. Comme à une fête assistez, vous, de maintenant, aux hasards de ce foudroyant accomplissement!118

Mallarmé here emphasizes that he does not share the view of those (including many of his own acolytes) who believe that true poetry will be forever excluded from the newspaper. On the contrary, Mallarmé sees the newspaper as the site of a nascent poetic revolution that will be embraced by the mass of a vastly expanded reading public. A new era beckons in which journalism shall attain the epic proportions and aesthetic grandeur of One Thousand and One Nights. In this passage, he specifically repudiates the modernist-cum-avant-garde disdain for the press with which his own name would, through the commentary of acolytes such as Mauclair and Morice, become increasingly associated. The scourge of “universel reportage” here reveals himself to be a cheerleader for the expansion of the press.

This passage also echoes articles from La Dernière Mode and other pieces of his early journalism in which he outlines his commitment to “le beau ordinaire” and describes the international exhibitions of the late 1860s and early 1870s as “fêtes magnifiques.”119

---

118 Mallarmé, Oc, 2: 221-222.
Bohac argues in *Jouir ainsi qu’il sied*, Mallarmé had a fundamentally democratic vision of beauty, which, he believed, should permeate everyday life and be available to all through the decorative arts.\(^{120}\) His comments in “Étalages” strongly suggest he foresees the newspaper playing a similar vulgarizing role within literary culture: Just as fashion, furniture, and ornamentation brought visual beauty into millions of ordinary homes, so the press will bring poetry to the people.

Mallarmé also believed that poetry should form the basis of a new civic religion that would fill the gap left by the decline of Christian worship and the eclipse of “quelque royauté environnée de prestige militaire” in a republic bereft of any guiding spiritual principle; as he puts it in “De même” (which concludes a section of *Divagations* with the religiously charged title of “Offices”): “le dévouement à la Patrie […] requiert un culte.”\(^{121}\) “Offices” does not include any specific allusion to the “Poème populaire moderne,” but, given that the proposed cult is supposed to be grounded in poetry and embraced by the citizenry at large, it seems warranted to infer an affinity between his religious and journalistic enthusiasms.

Furthermore, Mallarmé’s *Notes en vue du “Livre”* appear to foresee a ceremonial role within such a cult for the mysterious, unfinished Book that he regarded as his life’s work, thus implicating the newspaper by extension since, as becomes clear at the end of “Quant au livre,” Mallarmé’s vision of “le Livre” is itself heavily influenced by the newspaper. And there are also hints of this connection within the *Notes en vue du “Livre”* themselves, baffling though they may be, which include multiple mentions of the words “journal,” “feuilleton,” and “article.” One comment even implies Mallarmé was hoping to fund the project through the sale of advertising as

---


\(^{121}\) Mallarmé, *Oc*, 2: 242 and 244.
if it were a newspaper: “La réclame paie l’impression et papier (loterie) – et le prix est à partager entre le vendeur et l’auteur.”

It follows that the press seems poised to assume a sacerdotal role in an enterprise of civilizational importance. But Mallarmé’s comments in “Étalages” make it clear he does not simply view the newspaper as a convenient transmission belt for works conceived independently of it. As he sees it, the press itself, has, in contrast to book publishers, wielded its tools intelligently and thus created the conditions for the “Poème populaire moderne” that will emerge organically within the newspaper rather than being imposed from outside. It is journalism’s own energy and dynamism that will bring about Mallarmé’s hoped-for literary and spiritual renewal.

The point is further developed in “Le Livre, instrument spirituel,” the final section of “Quant au livre.” Seeing a newspaper slip from his hands and flutter around some flower beds, the author notes “comment ce lambeau diffère du livre, lui suprême. Un journal reste le point de départ; la littérature s’y décharge à souhait.” These remarks could suggest, contrary to the impression just conveyed by “Étalages,” that the newspaper lies firmly beneath the book in the aesthetic hierarchy and that journalism offers at best the opportunity for sketching out a first draft that will later be reworked in the pages of a book (Divagations itself being a case in point). The press would thus serve as what Thérenty calls the laboratory of literature, but the definitive solution would be perfected elsewhere. Yet the very next word – “Or” – isolated in a paragraph of its own, immediately disrupts this impression. Mallarmé then proceeds to discuss the unique formal “commodités” the newspaper offers, specifically the ability to join galleys end to end and to use proofs for the purpose of improvisation, whence emerges “un sens […] voire un charme, je dirai

---

122 Mallarmé, Oc, 1: 612.
123 Mallarmé, Oc, 2: 224.
de féerie populaire.” He thus reprises the theme of popular celebration previously explored in “Étalages” as well as in his own journalism from the 1870s; whereas the book seems restricted and closed off, the flexibility, expansivity, and sheer ubiquity of the newspaper make it ripe for jubilant collective experimentation. Far from being just a preliminary draft of the future contents of a book, the newspaper here appears in many respects to be an altogether superior medium leading Mallarmé to remark that it lacks “rien, ou presque” to displace the book entirely (a common idea at the time). What alone seems to rescue the book from obsolescence is “le reploiement du papier et les dessous qu’il installe.” The newspaper, he seems to be saying, is finally too open and thence lacking in mystery. The reader must be forced to unfold the pages and thereby discover the work of art in all its infinite permutations. For its part, the newspaper presents a further drawback because of the “monotonie” imposed by “l’insupportable colonne qu’on s’y contente de distribuer, en dimensions de page, cent et cent fois.”

There follows a radical proposal:

*Mais.*

– J’entends, *peut-il cesser d’en être ainsi*; et vais, dans une échappée, car l’œuvre seule ou préférablement, doit exemple, satisfaire au détail de la curiosité. Pourquoi – un jet de grandeur, de pensée ou d’émotion, considérable, phrase poursuivie, en gros caractère, une ligne par page à l’emplacement gradué, ne maintiendrait-il le lecteur en haleine, la durée du livre, avec appel à sa puissance d’enthousiasme: autour, menus, des groupes, secondairement d’après leur importance, explicatifs ou dérivés – un semis de fioritures.

As has been widely noted, this passage develops ideas about typography and the free distribution of text across a page that would later be realized in Mallarmé’s final experimental masterpiece *Un*...
Moreover, the passage seems to refer ambiguously to the preceding discussion of the newspaper as well as “la durée du livre,” suggesting a desire to blur the boundary between these media in their conventional forms and thereby transcend them both. As Pascal Durand puts it: “La dialectique du livre et du journal appelle, en somme, à l’émergence d’une forme hybride, dépassant et déclassant les deux médias dont elle retiendrait les propriétés les plus dynamiques.”

Mallarmé’s enthusiasm for the press was not limited, however, to an appreciation of its formal and typographic qualities. “Étalages”’s acclaim for the “Poème populaire moderne” also conveys his admiration for the profusion of literary works found within its pages. And *La Musique et les Lettres* (1895), a book based on a lecture delivered in Oxford and Cambridge in early 1894 and then published in *La Revue blanche*, goes even further, asserting that the leading articles of the “premier-Paris,” usually concerned with politics and affairs of state, are quite simply works of poetry in their own right:

Les articles, dits premier-Paris, admirables et la seule forme contemporaine parce que de toute éternité, sont des poèmes, voilà, plus ou moins bien simplement; riches, nuls, en cloisonné ou sur fond à la colle.

On a le tort critique, selon moi, dans les salles de rédaction, d’y voir un genre à part.

The paradoxical description here of the leading article as a simultaneously contemporary yet eternal form recalls Baudelaire’s exegesis of *modernité* in “Le Peintre de la vie moderne.” Just as his precursor had seen a triumphant synthesis of the actual and the eternal in Constantin Guys’s newspaper sketches, so Mallarmé makes the audacious claim that only the “premier-Paris” has the capacity to yoke together the same categories in literature while capturing the richness but also the

---

129 See, for example, the notes in Mallarmé, *Oc*, 2: 1648.
131 Mallarmé, *Oc*, 2: 75.
nullity of contemporary culture. This surprising praise for the form of the newspaper article is echoed by a remark in Mallarmé’s correspondence. Writing to the author Gabriel Mourey in October 1894 to compliment him on a recently published collection of his journalism, Mallarmé remarks that “[j]e m’évertue à dire que l’article de journal est la forme suprême et qu’il n’y a pas de différence avec le poème en prose.”\textsuperscript{132}

Such pro-journalistic zeal was not a mere passing fancy. “Le Livre, instrument spirituel” further expounds upon the fascination exerted over the poet by the contents of the newspaper:

Suivez – le faîte ou premier-Paris, dégagement, supérieur, à travers mille obstacles, atteint au désintéressement et, de la situation, précipite et refoule, comme par un feu électrique, loin, après les articles émergés à sa suite, la servitude originelle, l’annonce, en quatrième page, entre une incohérence de cris articulés. Spectacle, certainement, moral […].\textsuperscript{133}

The jumbled syntax and strange staccato rhythm of these lines (unusually difficult to decipher, even for Mallarmé) both mimic the telegraphic style and columnar lay-out of journalistic copy and convey the sense of disorientation that reading a newspaper can create as one struggles to navigate through the blocks of text. Yet, unlike the ever-ambivalent Baudelaire who, notwithstanding his admiration for Guys in “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” elsewhere, as we saw in the Introduction, expresses revulsion at the newspaper’s “tissu d’horreurs,” Mallarmé is unreservedly engrossed by the profusion of competing articles, here thrown together in a way not possible within the linear format of the book. And he even marvels at the “moral spectacle” of it all – the way in which the disinterested leading article arises from this swirl of information on the front page whilst the

\textsuperscript{132} Mallarmé to Mourey, Oct. 17, 1894, in Mallarmé, \textit{Corr.}, 7: 76.

\textsuperscript{133} Mallarmé. \textit{Oc.} 2: 225.
advertisements are confined to the back on the fourth page. Given that the favours of the “premier-Paris” were often bought and sold like advertising space (and at a higher price), Mallarmé can justifiably be accused of a little naïveté here, which may have reflected his own positive, albeit somewhat limited, experience of writing such articles.

On August 17, 1894, *Le Figaro* published a piece by Mallarmé in its “premier-Paris” entitled “Le Fonds littéraire” that advocated public subsidy for writers. A lively but respectful debate ensued in the pages of this and other newspapers illustrating that Mallarmé had, by this time, despite the ongoing jibes of some journalists, acquired a certain public prestige, and the episode can but have left a favourable impression on him. The passage discussing the “désintéressement” of the “premier-Paris” and its pre-eminence vis-à-vis the advertisements duly appeared just under a year later in July 1895 as part of the sixth instalment of his “Variations sur un sujet” in *La Revue blanche*. Moreover, “Le Fonds littéraire” was subsequently reworked into *La Musique et les Lettres*. The comment in this book equating the “premier-Paris” with poetry and describing it as “la seule forme contemporaine” thus alludes to the presence of an actual “premier-Paris” within its pages, a transposition that is overtly credited at the beginning. By publishing “Le Fonds littéraire” in *Le Figaro*, Mallarmé had personally demonstrated that such an article could indeed be a work of art.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the analysis in “Le Livre, instrument spirituel” and *La Musique et les Lettres*, these writings show beyond doubt that, at least by the mid-1890s, Mallarmé

---

134 Mallarmé had also expressed disdain for advertising in his interview with Huret: “Le vers est partout dans la langue où il y a rythme, partout, excepté dans les affiches et à la quatrième page des journaux.” (Huret, *Enquête sur l’évolution littéraire*, 74).

135 The editor of *Le Figaro* Hippolyte de Villemessant declared that he was not happy unless every line of the paper had been bought and paid for by someone. (See Theodore Zeldin, “Newspapers and Corruption,” in *France 1848-1945*, vol. 2 [Oxford University Press, 1973-1977], 513).

136 “Plusieurs paragraphes de ce bref essai furent par moi, je dirais, développés juridiquement, au FIGARO du 17 août [1894].” (Mallarmé, *Oc*, 2: 59-60). The comment about the “premier-Paris” appears in the form of an endnote that, unlike the body of the text, had not previously been published.
was as interested in what was in the newspaper as in how it was presented and laid out. So when he then remarks in the same paragraph that the newspaper is lacking in almost nothing that would allow it to replace the book for good, this should be read as a commentary on the contents of the newspaper just as much as its form.

Such enthusiasm may reflect the contours of the debate concerning his proposal for the “Fonds littéraire.” For whereas book publishers appeared universally opposed to the scheme, which Mallarmé wished to fund through a tax on book sales, numerous journalists, including Georges Clemenceau, then editor of La Justice, wrote articles supporting the idea.137 With Mallarmé’s encouragement, Charles Morice also undertook a survey on the subject for Le Figaro, interviewing Brunetière, Anatole France, and Edmond de Goncourt among others.138

The relative success of this intervention in the public sphere doubtless gave Mallarmé some encouragement to write his “Variations sur un sujet” for La Revue blanche the following year. Among this series of typically abstruse reflections on culture, religion, and politics is “La Cour,” later included in Divagations, which argues for a rehabilitation of the idea of aristocracy albeit applied to artistic talent rather than lineage. Given Mallarmé’s pre-existing comments on “universel reportage,” it is puzzling to find him describing this article towards its beginning as “un essai ici de reportage spacieux, aérant, de mois, l’actualité” (the connection with “l’actualité” being supplied by some recent books about aristocracy).139 Indeed, notwithstanding this self-

---

139 Stéphane Mallarmé, “La Cour,” La Revue blanche 8, no. 42, March 1, 1895, 223-227. This line was changed in Divagations to “un essai, ici, de reportage spacieux, aérant, de laps, l’actualité” (Mallarmé, Oc, 2: 264). The two books that prompted the article were Hugues Rebell’s Union des trois aristocraties (Paris: Bibliothèque artistique et littéraire, 1894) and Henry Béranger’s L’Aristocratie intellectuelle (Paris: A. Colin, 1895) (see the notes in Mallarmé, Oc, 2: 1662).
adopted label, Mallarmé also castigates the press in the article for how it writes about financial and political news, which he deems inferior fairgroundesque distractions.

“La Cour” is not the only place in Mallarmé’s writings where “reportage” seems to acquire positive or at least neutral connotations. His “Tennyson vu d’ici,” written in response to death of the British poet in 1892, is similarly presented as “ce reportage dignifié par le sujet.”\textsuperscript{140} And “Plaisir sacré,” originally an article for \textit{Le Journal} in 1893, suggests carrying out a survey of the attitudes of concert-goers that Mallarmé compares to “un cas de reportage énorme et supérieur.”\textsuperscript{141} Here too this is conjoined with a swipe, very similar to “La Cour”’s attack on financial and political reporting, against “[c]ette multitude satisfaite par le menu jeu de l’existence, agrandi jusqu’à la politique, tel que journellement le désigne la presse.”\textsuperscript{142} When it comes to newspapers, Mallarmé thus seemingly giveth with one hand and taketh away with the other.

\textbf{III. The synthesis of “le Livre”}

How then to make sense of this paradox? Why does Mallarmé denounce “universel reportage” yet describe one of his own articles as “un essai […] de reportage”? Why does he repeatedly criticise the triviality of the press yet extoll the newspaper as the harbinger of the “Poème populaire moderne” as well as “le Livre”?

Had he passed what F. Scott Fitzgerald called “the test of a first-rate intelligence […] the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function”?\textsuperscript{143} Faced with the myriad pressures and contradictions of the late nineteenth-century culture industry, perhaps Mallarmé simply accepts that a satisfying synthesis will necessarily prove

\textsuperscript{140} Mallarmé, \textit{Oc}, 2: 140.
\textsuperscript{141} Mallarmé, \textit{Oc}, 2: 236.
\textsuperscript{142} Mallarmé, \textit{Oc}, 2: 236.
elusive. In this vein, Dina Blanc has concluded: “One might be tempted to say that the modernity of Mallarmé’s ‘livre’ lies ambivalently between two poles [viz. between poetry and journalism].” After all, while consistency may be the duty of the philosopher, the artist faces no such obligation to maintain logical rigour. “Do I contradict myself?” as Walt Whitman puts it in “Song of Myself” (1855-1881), “Very well then I contradict myself./ (I am large, I contain multitudes.)” What seems to exclude such an interpretation is that little in Mallarmé’s life or work suggests that he possessed any tendency for fetishizing or indulging contradiction. The universe of his poetry may not always be harmonious and includes occasional paradoxical flourishes redolent of Baudelaire, but it is still a world away from the exultant oxymorons and jarring antitheses of Les Fleurs du M. That “Crise de vers”’s attack on “universel reportage” should be immediately followed by “Quant au livre”’s ecstatic vision of the newspaper’s literary attributes thus strikes an unusually discordant note. And it seems unlikely that Mallarmé could have been simply oblivious to the tension between these passages given that they are separated by a handful of pages in Divagations.

Mallarmé was, moreover, both an artist and a theorist of art who had concrete ideas about the nature of literature and its relationship to society. Those ideas may be expressed in prose of often intimidating difficulty, but it does not follow that they are primarily aesthetic constructions lacking coherent argumentation. As the Franco-Uruguayan poet Jules Laforgue put it in his posthumously published journal when describing Mallarmé’s way of speaking at his mardis:

[…] ce n’est pas le bégaiement et l’enfant qui a mal, mais le Sage qui divague, – ce n’est jamais une divagation d’images comme dans le rêve et l’extase inconsciente, c. à d. de sentiments exprimés avec l’immédiat de l’enfant qui n’a à sa disposition que le répertoire de ses besoins, mais de la divagation raisonneuse. Sa technique

Another witness to these gatherings, the Belgian poet Valère Gille similarly wrote of how “[a]vec une logique merveilleuse, il déduisait l’œuvre à faire […]” while Henri Mondor, Mallarmé’s first biographer and editor of the first Pléiade edition of his works, insisted on “le caractère systématique de [sa] pensée.”

If Mallarmé’s writing can convey the opposite impression, this is because he employs recondite forms of suggestion and association instead of explicit statements and analogies. As summarized by the mardistes Édouard Dujardin and Remy de Gourmont, the essence of Mallarmé’s poetic technique consists of systematically omitting the first term of a comparison.

He thus constructs metaphors whose object can only be deduced. For example, Dujardin argues that the quatrain:

Quelle soie aux baumes du temps  
Où la Chimère s’extène  
Vaut la torse et native nue  
Que, hors de ton miroir, tu tends!

contains an abbreviated form of the phrase ‘quelle soie vaut ta chevelure semblable à une nue’ in which the implicit simile has been elided. Only by dwelling on the adjectival meaning of ‘torse’ – twisting – do we perceive the allusion to the nude’s hair.

When reading Mallarmé, it falls to the reader to fill in the blanks that separate two seemingly incompatible images and ideas. As applied to the question of Mallarmé’s attitude

---


147 Henri Mondor, “Avant-propos” to Scherer, Le “Livre” de Mallarmé, VI and III.


149 Mallarmé, “Quelle soie aux baumes de temps,” in Oc, 1: 43.


towards the press, this suggests that we should not settle for a conclusion of wilful contradiction or unresolved ambivalence. It behooves us to try to make sense of his aptly named divagations on this subject.

Previous discussions of this question often fail to strike an appropriate balance. Whereas Mallarmé’s own contemporaries and an earlier generation of critics saw only antagonism between the poet and the press, more recent scholarship has tended to emphasise the enthusiasm of “Quant au livre,” while neglecting the opposition established between literature and reportage in “Crise de vers.” In this way, Marshall McLuhan’s “Joyce, Mallarmé, and the Press” (1954), probably the first article to challenge the traditional view of Mallarmé’s work as constituting the antipode of journalism, only alludes to the passage about “universel reportage” and never discusses any other critical remarks about the press.  

Roger Dragonetti’s Un fantôme dans le kiosque (1992) similarly makes little mention of the anti-journalistic Mallarmé in its account of how the newspaper “égalera ou presque les conditions du Livre inviolé.” By contrast, Richard Terdiman’s Discourse/Counter-Discourse (1985) resurrects the Mallarmé of “universel reportage” only to turn him into a straw man: “high literary culture,” writes Terdiman of the passage contrasting literature and reportage, “hides uncomfortably in the interstices of this haughty sentence.” From this perspective, the influence of journalism on Mallarmé is always repressed and surreptitious, being the inevitable consequence of the “counter-discourse”’s parasitic relationship with the “dominant discourse,” which always reasserts its own power in the face of challenges to that dominance. What dooms this analysis is “Quant au livre”’s overt enthusiasm for the press as well as the

---

abundant evidence attesting to the influence of newspaper typography and layout on *Un coup de dés*. Terdiman deals with the latter aspect in a single rather tortured footnote:

> It has perhaps not been sufficiently remarked that the typographic innovations of “Un Coup de dés” have as repressed referent a discursive code at the antipodes of Mallarmé’s own intention: the practices of the newspaper. [...] Mallarmé stipulates the parallel in “Le livre, instrument spirituel,” articulating it around a distinctive “Mais... [sic]” which we might take as the surreptitious recognition of the relationship hidden within this difference.¹⁵⁵

Yet none of this is remotely hidden in *Divagations*, whose debt to journalism is acknowledged from the very first page. Terdiman’s putative deconstructive reading thus invents a protocol of concealment where none exists.

Others who have attempted to reconcile the two poles of Mallarmé’s discourse on the press always seem to arrive at a conclusion that omits some crucial detail. Pascal Durand’s article “De ‘l’universel reportage’ au poème univers” (2004) thus draws a distinction between Mallarmé’s attitude towards the contents of the newspaper – viewed with hostility – and its form – considered as “porteur de potentialités expressives inexploitées.”¹⁵⁶ But this analysis fails to consider “Quant au livre”’s dithyrambs around the “Poème populaire moderne” and the “moral spectacle” offered by the pre-eminence of the “premier-Paris.” And when Durand does briefly discuss the “Poème populaire moderne” in a subsequent book *Mallarmé: du sens des formes au sens des formalités* (2008), he remarks that the poet wishes to see this form emerge “au-delà de la surchauffe

¹⁵⁵ Terdiman, *Discourse/ Counter-Discourse*, 335-336.
journalistique et politique.” But this again is misleading. For Mallarmé, the “Poème populaire moderne” will be forged not beyond the heat of the press but right inside that journalistic crucible. Mallarmé does not dismiss the contents of the press, and any successful interpretation of his position must take his enthusiasm for the unfolding drama of literary-journalistic hybridity into account. Patrick Suter’s *Le Journal et les Lettres* (2010), probably the most sustained discussion of Mallarmé’s relationship to the press, which overlaps in other respects with my own, similarly asserts that Mallarmé’s pro-journalistic fervour was confined to a vision of the newspaper’s creative potential. “Il ne s’en prend pas à l’idée du journal,” writes Suter, “mais seulement aux actualisations qu’en fournit la presse qui le déçoivent.” He then turns to the passage in “Étalages” where Mallarmé enthusiastically describes the encroachment of “la fiction” upon the upper part of the front page, commenting that “paradoxalement le journal offre donc un véritable espace à la littérature, et se montre innovateur quant à la disposition de ses textes.” It is indeed a paradox, one that Suter does not really manage to explain. For Mallarmé is not just praising the newspaper’s potential in this passage but its current disposition, a point that is clearer in the original article published in *The National Observer* on the death of Maupassant.

Suter also downplays the import of Mallarmé’s comments on the emergence of the “Poème populaire moderne,” stating that “[il] envisage au contraire que la ‘Presse’ puisse mener à l’invention d’un nouveau genre de ‘Poème.’” The subjunctive here is misleading. While Mallarmé’s initial formulation, “la notion prévaut,” may suggest the “Poème populaire moderne” remains embryonic, he nonetheless considers this development “décisif,” stressing that it is already

---

unfolding ("s’élabore") and that the reading public will marvel ("s’émérveillera") at the results. One might question the accuracy of Mallarmé’s vision, but his words clearly carry the ring of prophecy. Anna Sigrídur Arnar similarly understates the prognostic thrust of Mallarmé’s claim: “By ‘yielding its means intelligently,’ the newspaper can ultimately empower readers if deployed properly.” But there is no “can” in what Mallarmé has written, and “yielding its means intelligently” clearly refers to what is happening now (as conveyed by the epithet “actuelle”) rather than mere possibility. For Mallarmé, the newspaper’s potential is already being realized, and this metamorphosis seems destined to culminate in a poetic revolution.

The challenge thus remains to explain how the opposition between literature and “universel reportage” is compatible with the enthusiasm for journalism found in “Quant au livre.”

A solution can be discerned from considering Mallarmé’s allusive approach to poetic association, as outlined by Gourmont and Dujardin. If the opposition between literature and “universel reportage” is so blatantly juxtaposed with the poet’s exultant vision of book and newspaper coming together in a hybrid form, then it is up to us to puzzle through this paradox in the absence of any explanation in Mallarmé’s writings and correspondence. There must be a transition between these ideas, not explicit in the text itself, that we are supposed to fill in. Just as Mallarmé, according to Dujardin, crossed out the word “comme” from his dictionary, so some logical vincula seem to have been omitted here. If “littérature” and “universel reportage” constitute the thesis and antithesis of Divagations’ cultural Weltanschauung, then “le Livre” could represent its crowning synthesis wherein these two rival forces are reconciled.

---

161 Arnar, "'A modern popular poem,'” 309.
162 Dujardin, Mallarmé par un des siens, 50.
Such a dialectical leap would be consistent with Mallarmé’s Hegelian tendencies, as discussed in Lloyd James Austin’s “Mallarmé et le rêve du ‘Livre.’” While the poet may never have read Hegel, Austin argues he picked up a vulgarized version of his philosophy, notably through an article by the theologian Edmond Scherer in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* that contains passages bearing a close resemblance to comments in Mallarmé’s correspondence between 1866 and 1870. In a letter to his friend and fellow poet Henri Cazalis, he even uses strikingly Hegelian vocabulary to describe the Great Work (later to become synonymous with “le Livre”) that already lay at the centre of his artistic ambitions:

Fragile comme est mon appariion terrestre, je ne puis subir que les développements absolument nécessaires pour que l’Univers retrouve, en ce moi, son identité. Ainsi je viens, à l’heure de la Synthèse, de délimiter l’œuvre qui sera l’image de ce développement. Trois poèmes en vers, dont Hérodiade est l’Ouverture […]. Et quatre poèmes en prose, sur la conception spirituelle du Néant. […] [C]e ne serait pas sans un serrement de cœur réel que j’enterais dans la Disparition suprême, si je n’avais pas fini mon œuvre, qui est L’Œuvre, le Grand’Œuvre, comme disaient les alchimistes, nos ancêtres.

A second letter addressed a few days later to another close friend, the Egyptologist Eugène Lefébrure (described by Cazalis as “hégélien”), then casts the Great Work in unmistakably dialectical terms:

La Vénus de Milo – que je me plais à attribuer à Phidias, tant le nom de ce grand artiste est devenu générique pour moi, La Joconde du Vinci, me semblent, et sont, les deux grandes scintillations de la Beauté sur cette terre – et cet Œuvre, tel qu’il est rêvé, la troisième.

---

164 More recent assessments of Hegel’s influence on Mallarmé include Janine D. Langan’s *Hegel and Mallarmé* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986), which argues that Hegel’s metaphysics underlies the unity of Mallarmé’s work, and Barnaby Norman’s *Mallarmé’s Sunset* (Oxford: Legenda, 2014), which interprets the motif of the sunset in Mallarmé’s work in light of Hegel’s account of the end of history.
165 Mallarmé to Cazalis, May 14, 1867, in Mallarmé, *Corr.* 1: 242-244.
166 Quoted in Austin, “Mallarmé et le rêve du ‘Livre,’” 86.
The letter goes on to outline an aesthetic vision wherein the eternal, unselfconscious beauty of antiquity, represented by the *Venus de Milo*, and the anxious, mysterious beauty of the Renaissance, represented by the *Mona Lisa*, shall be reconciled. As Austin remarks: “On ne saurait formuler plus nettement une triade hégélienne avec son mouvement dialectique à trois temps.”168

Clearly, between da Vinci’s masterpiece and “universel reportage” there exists an aesthetic chasm. Yet Mallarmé’s comments in this letter evoke a flexible cast of mind predisposed towards overcoming seemingly intractable oppositions in the service of a radical, modern conception of beauty. And his willingness to confront less elevated cultural phenomena on the same terms as the *Venus de Milo* or the *Mona Lisa* is apparent from the “Notes sur le théâtre” he wrote for *La Revue indépendante* during 1886-1887 and republished in *Divagations*, with some variations, under the title “Crayonné au théâtre.”169 For the first article in the series makes plain his disdain for the theatre, then occupying a position analogous to Hollywood cinema or television today: “[E]n l’absence là de ce dont il n’y a pas lieu de parler, ou la Vision même, quiconque s’aventure dans un théâtre contemporain et réel [est] puni du châtiment de toutes les compromissions.”170 In other words, the contemporary theatre’s indifference to the ineffable cosmic vision that true art should convey makes theatre-going a degrading pastime. Why then would the poet willingly accept such punishment? Clearly not for the sake of money given *La Revue indépendante*’s precarious finances. Rather, it is precisely because of the theatre’s pre-eminent cultural position that Mallarmé concludes artists cannot avoid wrestling with this behemoth, whose legacy promises to be as significant and long-lasting as the monuments of antiquity:

Héroïques, soit! artistes de ce jour, plutôt que peindre une solitude de cloître à la torche de votre immortalité ou sacrifier devant l’idole de vous-mêmes, mettez la main à ce monument, indicateur énorme non moins que les blocs d’abstention

169 I am grateful to Bertrand Marchal for suggesting this parallel.
170 Mallarmé, Oc, 2: 161.
laissés par quelques âges qui ne purent que charger le sol d’un vestige négatif considérable.\footnote{Mallarmé, Oc, 2: 266.}

In the face of the banality of contemporary theatre, the heroic stance is not to turn away and indulge in nombrilism but to get involved, negate the negation (another Hegelian theme), and thence transform the genre, as playwrights influenced by Mallarmé such as Maurice Maeterlinck and Paul Claudel would come to do. Like Guys in Baudelaire’s “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” the artist must surrender his isolation and confront the crowd in order to come to terms with modernity. Assuming “toutes les compromissions” in the service of a new artistic synthesis becomes nothing less than a supreme aesthetic duty.

What is explicit in Mallarmé’s writings on the theatre is implicit in his writings on the press. The contrast between true art and popular theatre at the beginning of “Crayonné au théâtre” parallels the opposition between literature and “universel reportage” in the “Avant-dire” (ultimately reprised in “Crise de vers”). In the former, the dialectical leap is already clear: true artists must revolutionize the theatre and harness its popularity to their advantage. In the latter, the tension between art and journalism remains unresolved, and it is only in the following section of Divagations, “Quant au livre,” that Mallarmé elaborates his mature synthetic vision of a new hybrid form encompassing the most dynamic features of book and newspaper.

Between the “Avant-dire” and “Quant au livre” lie ten years during which Mallarmé’s personal relationship to the press was transformed. If newspapers deigned to discuss the Mallarmé of 1886 at all, it was, with rare exceptions, to ridicule him; the earlier failure of La Dernière Mode may also have coloured the poet’s then mostly negative perceptions of journalism. But by the mid-1890s, Mallarmé had become a respected public figure accorded pride of place on the front page of Le Figaro and then heralded as “prince des poètes” – following the 1896 survey in La Plume –
by the same newspaper. His growing acceptance by the mass press thus paralleled his own enthusiasm not just for the newspaper’s creative potential but for works already appearing in its pages. In “Un spectacle interrompu,” Mallarmé had called for the creation of “un journal qui remarque les événements sous le jour propre au rêve.”\footnote{Mallarmé, Oc, 2: 90.} A comment in his 1885 autobiographical letter to Verlaine suggests that La Dernière Mode had at least partly realized this aspiration: “les huit ou dix numéros parus servent encore quand je les dévêts de leur poussière à me faire longtemps rêver.”\footnote{Mallarmé, Oc, 1: 789.} But it was only in his articles for La Revue blanche in 1895-1896, forming the basis for “Quant au livre” in Divagations, that his vision of literary-journalistic hybridity acquired coherent theoretical shape. The attack on “universel reportage” a few pages beforehand serves to illustrate the dialectical twists and turns, divagations indeed, that led Mallarmé to that conclusion.

“Quant au livre”’s revalorization of journalism prepares the way for the concluding epiphany of Divagations, which seems to introduce an original generic framework for much of what has gone before:

Une publication, vive, au sommaire marquant le milieu, exact, entre des articles écourtés de journal et la masse oisive où flotte maint périodique, commande la façon. Les cassures du texte, on se tranquillisera, observent de concorder, avec sens et n’inscrivent d’espace nu que jusqu’à leurs points d’illumination: une forme, peut-être, en sort, actuelle, permettant, à ce qui fut longtemps le poème en prose et notre recherche, d’aboutir, en tant, si l’on joint mieux les mots, que poème critique. Mobiliser, autour d’une idée, les lueurs diverses de l’esprit, à distance voulue, par phrases […].\footnote{Mallarmé, Oc, 2: 276-277.}

Mallarmé’s preoccupation with formal experimentation here dovetails with a manifest desire to achieve a form of action through words. The “poème en prose,” itself forged in the columns of the press, gives way to a vision of a new form of literary-journalistic hybridity, pitched between the brevity of the newspaper and the ponderousness of the little magazine, which Mallarmé dubs the
“poème critique.” This concept anticipates the formal innovations of *Un coup de dés* but also describes many of the pieces contained in *Divagations*, which attempt a daring synthesis of prose poetry and critical commentary on subjects ranging from the future of literature to class conflict and the decline of traditional religion. Far from joining his Symbolist contemporaries in their lofty disdain for journalism, Mallarmé here portrays his own writings as a series of quasi-journalistic interventions in the public sphere. And on occasion he showed himself to be quite willing to compromise in order to get his point across. When Francis Magnard, editor of *Le Figaro*, brusquely rejected the initial draft of “Le Fonds littéraire” for being “incompréhensible au public,” Mallarmé insisted he had tried to write “quelque chose qui précisément fût entre mes habitudes et le journal” but nonetheless agreed to submit a simplified – albeit still quite challenging – version that Magnard then published.

IV. Dicing with the mass press

By contrast with Mallarmé’s intervention in *Le Figaro*, *Un coup de dés* would appear to make no concessions to journalistic accessibility whatsoever. Yet even here, the influence of the press plausibly extends beyond typography and layout. For the poem also contains traces of lexical and thematic continuity with Mallarmé’s comments on newspapers in *Divagations*. Where “L’Action restreinte” refers dismissively to “journaux et leur tourbillon,” *Un coup de dés* presents us with the image of:

---


Amid the general atmosphere of crisis that haunts the poem, these lines could be read as a metaphor for the fate of the artist who has been sucked into the destructive whirlpool of the press. Indeed, “hilarité” and “horreur” succinctly capture the competing preoccupations of chroniques and faits divers (i.e. brief miscellaneous news items, usually dominated by crime reports) in a late nineteenth-century newspaper. And yet, as Robert G. Cohn points out in his book on Mallarmé’s “Livre,” the motif of the whirlpool is also strongly associated with artistic creation, notably in Baudelaire’s essay on Edgar Allan Poe, of whom the poet remarks “[c]hez lui, toute entrée en matière est attirante sans violence, comme un tourbillon.” Such ambiguity seems consistent with the way Divagations portrays the press as, by turns, a graveyard for literary talent and a font of poetic inspiration, Un coup de dés itself being a possible result of the latter tendency. The challenge for the poet is to exploit the energy of the whirlpool without being wrecked by it. And overleaf a “plume solitaire éperdue” – marooned on an empty expanse of paper – does indeed seem to be struggling to negotiate these metaphorically charged currents.

Also at risk of being engulfed by the swirling depths is the mysterious tilted – and possibly broken – wing that appears towards the beginning of the poem:

---

177 Mallarmé, Oc, 1: 376-377; italicized in the original.
178 Arnar has similarly remarked: “Some of the epigrammatic pronouncements and synthetic slogans in this work rival the very tragedies and horrors of the fait divers.” (Arnar, “‘A modern popular poem,’” 312).
180 Mallarmé, Oc, 1: 378; italicized in the original.
Here too there is a parallel with the discussion of the relationship between the newspaper and the book in the final section of “Quant au livre,” where the imagery of flight is prominent. In this way, as the poet sits in the public garden at the beginning of “Le Livre, instrument spirituel,” his newspaper is picked up by the wind and “s’envole près de roses” leading him to remark, as we have seen, how “ce lambeau diffère du livre, lui supreme.” And yet he then notes how “[l]e pliage est, vis-à-vis de la feuille imprimée grande, un indice, quasi religieux: qui ne frappe pas autant que son tassement, en épaisseur, offrant le minuscule tombeau, certes, de l’âme.” The newspaper’s folds thus seem to hold the secret to some divine mystery, but the thickness of the book is more striking still, creating, as Greer Cohn puts it in his gloss of this passage, an aura of sepulchral “solemnity […], compared to the light, open newspaper.” That fixation on folding reappears at the end of the following paragraph, where Mallarmé complains about the physical limitations of the book: “Jusqu’au format, oiseux: et vainement, concourt cette extraordinaire, comme un vol recueilli mais prêt à s’élargir, intervention du pliage.” The comparison to flight on the verge of bursting forth suggests that the folded page is akin to a bird’s wing, foreshadowing

181 Mallarmé, Oc, 1: 370-371.
182 Mallarmé, Oc, 2: 224.
183 Robert Greer Cohn, Mallarmé’s Divagations: A Guide and Commentary (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 278.
the image of the wing in *Un coup de dés*. And what seems to be holding back the book is its inability to replicate the flexibility of the newspaper’s fold. As we have seen, Mallarmé duly goes on to articulate his vision of a radical new hybrid form that will transcend the limitations of book and newspaper by combining their most dynamic properties.

*Un coup de dés* realizes the formal aspects of that vision through its innovative layout and use of typography. Meanwhile, the images of the wing and the isolated feather-cum-writer (*plume*) battling against the whirlpool and the waves seem to provide an internal metaphorical illustration of the struggle to overcome the opposition between book and newspaper. The poem’s form and content thus evoke Mallarmé’s tenacious efforts to come to terms with the challenge posed by the press.

*Un coup de dés* was first published in May 1897 in a short-lived magazine, *Cosmopolis*, which itself straddled the division between popular journalism and literature. Consisting of three regular sections in English, French, and German (along with a Russian supplement published in Saint Petersburg from January 1897 onwards), *Cosmopolis*, which sub-titled itself *Revue internationale*, had been founded in 1896 by Fernand Ortmans, an occasional art critic for *Le Temps*, and was distributed throughout Europe.¹⁸⁴ The London-based magazine, whose final issue appeared in October 1898, published works of fiction by authors including Joseph Conrad, Henry James, Marcel Schwob, and Robert Louis Stevenson alongside critical essays, political commentary, and pieces of *reportage*. Unlike *La Revue blanche* and other *petites revues*, *Cosmopolis* possessed no clear commitment to either aesthetic or political radicalism and seldom published works of poetry. The magazine had the characteristics of a *grande revue*, resembling a polyglot and broader-minded alternative to the *Revue des Deux Mondes* with pay rates to match

Mallarmé was initially offered 40 francs – around 150 euros in today’s money – per page of verse. Un coup de dés was duly sandwiched in the May 1897 issue between a short story about Napoleon by that stalwart of the feuilleton Anatole France and some letters by Ivan Turgenev (another old standby of the mass press).

As he had done when submitting “Le Fonds littéraire” to Le Figaro, Mallarmé here proved to be more than willing to compromise with the exigencies of popular journalism for the sake of publication. At the demand of Cosmopolis’s editors, who feared their more conservative readers would be alienated by the poem’s “étrangeté typographique,” the poet supplied a brief introductory note, where he pithily sums up Un coup de dés as an attempt to “faire de la musique avec des mots.” That exegesis, published as a footnote to a longer, more abstruse “Observation relative au poème,” is credited not to Mallarmé but to the magazine’s (unnamed) editors. The poet thus dons a journalistic mask for the sake of vulgarizing his masterwork. And the same note draws attention to the incongruousness of Un coup de dés’s presence in the magazine with the remark that its publication would answer “le reproche qu’on lui [i.e. Cosmopolis] a fait, de méconnaître la nouvelle école poétique française.” In a further compromise with the constraints of journalistic publication, Mallarmé gracefully accepted Cosmopolis’s failure to fulfil his instructions that the poem be printed across a series of double-page spreads. As he wrote to Gide shortly after publication: “Cosmopolis a été crâne et délicieux; mais je n’ai pu lui présenter la chose qu’à moitié, déjà c’était, pour lui, tant risquer!”

---

185 See Millan, “La Publication d’Un coup de dés dans Cosmopolis,” 22. It is not known exactly how much Mallarmé was eventually paid though he appears to have been eagerly awaiting the arrival of his cheque (see Mallarmé to Marie and Geneviève Mallarmé, May 22, 1897 and May 24, 1897, in Mallarmé, Corr., 9: 194 and 198).
187 “NOTE DE LA RÉDACTION,” Cosmopolis 6, no. 17, May 1897, 417. Though written by Mallarmé, the title of the note gives the impression that it was the work of Cosmopolis’s editors (see the notes in Mallarmé, Oc, 1: 1327).
188 Mallarmé to Gide, May 14, 1897, in Mallarmé, Corr., 9: 172.
vicissitudes of fortune itself represented a high-stakes gamble for a magazine that was not usually inclined towards modernist experimentation.

In the absence of the manuscript sent to Cosmopolis, it is difficult to chart the genesis of Un coup de dés. But it is clear that Mallarmé’s contribution was actively solicited by Cosmopolis, and it even seems likely the poem had not been written (or at the very least completed) prior to him receiving the magazine’s proposal.189 Mallarmé’s single most esoteric and revolutionary work thus transpires to have been forged in collaboration with a large commercially orientated magazine.

The connections between Un coup de dés and the mass press also help to situate the work within Mallarmé’s overarching literary vision. For, as he told many of his contemporaries, the poem was intended as nothing less than the first instalment of “le Livre” itself.190 And Un coup de dés’s debts to newspaper layout, its lexical echoes of “Le Livre, instrument spirituel”’s discussion of formal hybridity, and its publication in Cosmopolis seem to confirm that Un coup de dés was indeed composed in the spirit of the Great Work that Mallarmé hoped would transcend the division between book and newspaper. It follows that in practice as well as theory Mallarmé’s “Livre” heaves with the turbulence and dynamism of the mass press.

 “[T]out, au monde,” says Mallarmé in “Quant au livre,” “existe pour aboutir à un livre,” (adapting a statement originally made to Huret during their interview).191 “Universel reportage” must have its place in that Book.

---

190 See Cohn, Mallarmé’s Masterwork, 13-16.
191 Mallarmé, Oc, 2: 224; cf. Huret, Enquête sur l’évolution littéraire, 80.
V. An unclaimed inheritance

Mallarmé’s fascination for the press found few echoes among his immediate literary heirs, notably Paul Valéry, whose writings seldom broach the subject of journalism and seem unaffected by “Quant au livre”’s transcendent vision of literary-journalistic hybridity. For the author of La Jeune Parque (1917) along with many other mardistes, the opposition between literature and journalism remained an article of faith. Mallarmé’s ideas about the role of the press in the elaboration of “le Livre” thus never took hold within the poet’s own circle. In the eyes of those belonging to this milieu, any hint of complacency towards the press was tantamount to heresy, an attitude common to both the Symbolists and their antagonists in the Zola-influenced Naturist school that emerged during the 1890s. For example, when the Naturist poet Adolphe Retté broke with Mallarmé and attacked him in La Plume, he took an implicit swipe at his former mentor’s decision to agree to be interviewed by Huret and to allow the journalist Bernard Lazare to attend one of the his mardis (which the future hero of the Dreyfus Affair then wrote about for Le Journal): “Pour moi, je soutiens qu’un poète vaut par ses livres publiés et, qu’en dehors de ses livres, son attitude, sa conversation ou son silence ne peuvent intéresser personne sauf, sans doute, de vagues reporters.”¹⁹² In a letter defending Mallarmé published in the Mercure de France, André Gide then sought to repay Retté in the same coin. Mallarmé and his admirers, noted Gide, “sont plus soucieux de littérature et d’art que de journalisme et de pugilat.”¹⁹³

And yet those, such as Camille Mauclair and Charles Morice, who insisted most loudly that literature and journalism existed on separate planets were themselves often journalists. (And even Valéry was closely involved with the press through his job as private secretary to Édouard

¹⁹² Adolphe Retté, “Chronique des livres,” La Plume, no. 138, Jan. 1895, 64; reprinted in Marchal, Mallarmé, 322.
¹⁹³ André Gide, “Une Protestation,” Mercure de France 21, no. 86, Feb. 1897, 428-430; reprinted in Marchal, Mallarmé, 417-418. The letter was written in response to a series of attacks on Mallarmé by Retté and was counter-signed by Valéry, Schwob, Paul Fort, and Émile Verhaeren, who all added a few lines of their own.
Lebey, former chief executive of the Havas news agency.) They, unlike Mallarmé, were in a position to observe up close the turpitude of the French press on a day-to-day basis during an era marked by numerous politico-journalistic scandals. It is thus perhaps little wonder that they never entertained the same ideas about the newspaper’s literary potential even as they themselves sunk, in some cases, ever further into unrewarding careers in journalism – a profession once decried by Valéry as a “latrine.”194 Along this path of degradation, Mauclair’s descent was undoubtedly the steepest. Within a few years of praising his erstwhile mentor for imparting “ce scrupule de la forme dont le journalisme est le plus grand ennemi, cette impossibilité de mentir,” he was writing anti-Semitic chroniques for Le Matin during the Occupation.195

More generally, the mass press served as a repoussoir for “les jeunes” of Mallarmé’s circle, who defined themselves in opposition to its values and protocols. Hostility to the culture of the feuilleton allowed them to stand out within a literary field dominated by Zola, the newspaper’s most consistent advocate. They consequently never embraced Mallarmé’s vision of the “Poème populaire moderne” and literary-journalistic hybridity. Indeed, they seem to have effectively ignored the exhortations on that theme in Divagations, retaining only the spirit of the broadside delivered against “universel reportage.” Mallarmé’s enthusiasm for journalism was thus systematically overlooked until the second half of the twentieth century.

By contrast with their Symbolist predecessors, the Futurists typically embraced journalism with gusto in the early twentieth century. As we shall see in Chapter Three, their leader Marinetti published an eccentric book of poetic reportage, Zang Tumb Tuuum (1914), about the Balkan Wars.196 And the movement began publishing its own newspaper, Roma futurista, after the First

195 Mauclair, Mallarmé chez lui, 90. For an example of Mauclair’s anti-Semitism, see Camille Mauclair, “Pourquoi l’Angleterre est enjuivée,” Le Matin, Nov. 16, 1943, 1.
When Marinetti criticised the press it was because he felt the delays involved in publication made it too slow a medium to keep pace with the events, in contrast to the telegraph itself and the pure, immediate form of *reportage* it divulged. Moreover, in the 1920s, some Russian Futurists, who were distinct from their Italian counterparts, called for journalism to replace imaginative literature altogether; one of their leaders even portrayed the newspaper as a potential “Bible of our time.”

Mallarmé’s vision of literary-journalistic hybridity lies between these two extremes. Instead of the attitude of splendid isolation adopted by many of his contemporaries and followers, he consciously drew inspiration from the press whilst maintaining a critical distance just as he retained classical poetic forms and only belatedly adopted a fragmented style of prosody in *Un coup de dés*, having originally viewed the innovation of free verse with skepticism. His equivocal approach also differed markedly from the headlong embrace of speed, technology, and novelty that characterized Futurism, whose devotees by turns regarded the newspaper as the ultimate replacement for the book or as already slipping behind the times.

Mallarmé charts a middle course between resisting and surrendering to the tides of modern civilisation. Neither the “poésie pure” to which Valéry ultimately aspired, nor the “mouvement agressif” extolled by Marinetti, the aesthetic of *Divagations* is about confronting the tumult of the modern, hyper-mediatized world with a critical poetic sensibility. It is an attempt to raise the

---

197 See Suter, *Le Journal et les Lettres*: 1, 136
coarse banality of public life, epitomized by “journaux et leur tourbillon,” to the level of literature. Mallarmé thereby sets the tone for a strand of modernist writing that will similarly combine formal innovation and critical engagement with the realities, both mundane and exceptional, of its times. The press remains a salient feature of such literature, notably the works of writers frequently viewed as antagonistic to Mallarmé such as Apollinaire and Proust. It is they, I will argue, who become the true inheritors to Mallarmé’s vision of “le Livre,” wherein literature never ceases to interact with journalism. Like Mallarmé’s work, their writings pivot between declarations of enthusiasm and hostility towards journalism whilst acknowledging the debt they owe to the press. Journalism remains a problem for them, whereas Valéry and the Futurists, in their different ways, believed they had found a resolution.

VI. Literature in newspapers during the Third Republic

Mallarmé’s critical engagement with the mass press raises the question of how much space existed for literary writing in French newspapers at the turn of the century. For the optimism he ultimately expressed does not find many echoes in recent scholarship about journalism and literature, which tends to argue that transformations within the French press towards the end of the nineteenth century made newspapers less literary and more information-driven. The era in which the mass press functioned as a literary laboratory is seen as drawing to a close with the rise of Symbolism. The opposition between literature and “universel reportage” thus assumes the guise of historical fact. Circumstances seemingly did not bode well for the emergence of the “Poème populaire moderne.” According to Alain Vaillant,

[…] dès l’époque de Mallarmé, le journal a changé lui-même de nature: il n’est plus cet espace bavard et un peu inutile, voué au plaisir des mots et ouvert aux divagations littéraires, mais un organe d’information calibré et rubriqué pour remplir sa fonction nouvelle. Les poètes, en s’exilant du périodique fourre-tout pour se retrouver, entre soi, dans les revues des diverses avant-gardes – sauf à répondre, à ses qualités, aux interviews qu’on fait d’eux dans la grande presse –, allaient cesser
de faire l’épreuve littéraire de l’altérité et de la marginalité. Une des aventures de
la poésie française se termine alors, dont l’œuvre de Mallarmé, vieux compagnon
d’armes du Parnasse contemporain, constitue le tombeau ironique et énigmatique,
mais qu’on aurait tort de prolonger au-delà de ce qui l’avait rendue historiquement
possible, à savoir le journal né de 1830.  

Marie-Ève Thérenty similarly writes of “une scission entre la littérature et le journal” around the
turn of the century:

Apparaît la description chez Marcel Proust ou chez James Joyce d’une nouvelle expérience du temps et de la durée qui choisit de faire au moins partiellement abstraction du journal quotidien, de se construire en tout cas résolument en dehors de ses protocoles d’écriture.

These analyses, which echo Bourdieu’s account of the autonomization of the literary field, may not be wrong in every respect, but there are good reasons to dispute the view that the newspaper ceases to be of literary interest in the late nineteenth century – not least the abundance of references to the press in both À la recherche du temps perdu and Ulysses (which includes a whole episode set in a newspaper office and written in mock journalistic prose). Moreover, as we shall see in Chapters Three, Four, and Seven, the press indeed constituted a literary laboratory for Proust’s novel. The transformation of the French press during its so-called golden age was complex and multi-faceted and should not be reduced to a story of the triumph of “information” at the expense of literature. Indeed, in a later book chapter, co-authored with Dominique Kalifa and Philippe Régnier, Thérenty and Vaillant adopt a more nuanced tone, referring to “le retrait relatif de la littérature des grands quotidiens.” The question is just how relative this retreat was.

It is necessary to distinguish between the discourse of the time, with its litany of complaints about reportage and américanisation, from the reality of what was actually appearing in the press.

203 Thérenty, La Littérature au quotidien, 368.
One of the merits of work by Thérenty and Vaillant has been to emphasize that novels of journalism such as Balzac’s *Illusions perdues*, the Goncourts’ *Charles Demailly*, and Maupassant’s *Bel-Ami* should not necessarily be read as accurate historical depictions of the world of nineteenth-century journalism, however tempting it might be to undertake such a hermeneutic leap. What was written about the French press during its so-called golden age at the end of the century should similarly be taken with a grain of salt. It does not follow from the existence of widespread anxiety about *américanisation* and *reportage* that these forces had in fact triumphed across the press.

The case of *Le Matin* is instructive in this respect. Launched in 1884 by the American journalist Sam Chamberlain, its first issue declared that it would be “un journal d’informations télégraphiques universelles et vraies,” would remain apolitical, and would publish no *feuilleton*. Its masthead, adorned with an illustration of a telegraph pole, emphasized this orientation, informing readers that it was the “seul journal français recevant par fils spéciaux les dernières nouvelles du monde entier.” However, it is probably a mistake to identify this as a turning point in the history of the French journalism, as scholars have often done. For, as Thérenty *et al.* point out, telegraphic dispatches and news stories in general had already begun to attain greater prominence in newspapers during the 1860s and 1870s. And despite its initial pledge, *Le Matin* soon performed a volte-face and introduced a *feuilleton* in June 1884, which initially featured some extracts from Turgenev’s memoirs, followed by several *romans-feuilletons*. *Le Matin* also

---

208 This volte-face is systematically overlooked in existing scholarship. For example, Kalifa, Régnier, Thérenty, and Vaillant inaccurately state that *Le Matin* “ne publiait pas de feuilleton” (“Les Scansions internes à l’histoire de la presse,” 291). In her earlier article, “Pour une histoire littéraire de la presse au XIXe siècle,” Thérenty offers a rather different take on this newspaper without discussing *Le Matin*’s literary qualities in detail: “*Le Matin*, dont la date
usually adhered to the existing convention of publishing a *chronique* in the most prominent spot at the top of the left-hand side of its front page. And among its original *chroniqueurs* was Jules Vallès, whose articles for the newspaper during 1884-1885 occasionally recount events that also feature, as we shall see in Chapter Six, in his last novel *L’Insurgé* (1885). In sum, *Le Matin* did not differ quite as much from its competitors as its editors claimed, although it did distinguish itself by the quality of its foreign reporting.\footnote{On the latter point, see Dominique Pinsolle, *Le Matin (1884-1944): une presse d’argent et de chantage* (Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2012), 88.}

At first, *Le Matin* was a commercial failure. By the mid-1890s, its daily print run was only 23,000 copies, and, amid financial difficulties, it was purchased in 1895 by Maurice Bunau-Varilla, a shady financier who had been implicated in the collapse of the Panama Canal Company at the beginning of the decade.\footnote{For *Le Matin*’s print run, see Bellanger et al., *Histoire générale de la presse française*, 3: 310.} Under his ownership, *Le Matin*’s readership soared, and by the First World War it was one of the four biggest newspapers in France, printing over a million copies per day.\footnote{See Pinsolle, *Le Matin*, 129.}

This success is attributable to major editorial changes introduced by Bunau-Varilla, who made *Le Matin* more populist in tone but also more literary. Crucial to its popularity were *romans-feuilletons* by authors such as Gaston Leroux and Michel Zévaco, which were accompanied by massive publicity campaigns.\footnote{See Pinsolle, *Le Matin*, 98 and 113.} These page-turning tales of crime and adventure were ideally suited to attracting a broad general readership. But, as we shall see in Chapter Six, Leroux’s *Rouletabille* novels are no mere hackwork and include dense literary allusions as well as playful evocations of their own fictionality, which is a defining feature of canonical modernist literature.
from this period. As Jean Relinger has argued, the hundred or so short stories published by Henri Barbusse in *Le Matin* prior to the First World War similarly conform to the standard generic precepts of the *feuilleton* whilst offering enigmatic sketches of human perversity that seem to transgress the newspaper’s conservative moral code.\(^{213}\) Moreover, as we shall see in Chapter Three, in 1906, the same newspaper published Félix Fénéon’s *Nouvelles en trois lignes*, where the author transforms *faits divers* into haiku-like depictions of quotidian horror that frequently display flashes of subversive political intent. What appeared to be the stoniest of journalistic soil thus yielded eclectic forms of literary flourishing.

*Le Matin* simultaneously maintained its focus on *reportage*, at different times employing Albert Londres and Joseph Kessel – two legendary *grands reporters*, who invested the genre with distinctly literary flair. Colette contributed short stories, *chroniques*, and *reportage* to the newspaper, notably covering the trial of the serial killer Henri Désiré Landru in 1921; she also edited a regular short-story column in *Le Matin* between 1919 and 1923. All in all, far from signalling the triumph of “information” and the demise of literature in the French press during the Belle Époque, the evolution of *Le Matin* suggests that the situation was in fact far more fluid and nuanced.

1884 saw the launch of another newspaper, *L’Écho de Paris*, which has attracted less commentary than *Le Matin*. Whereas the latter had promised to dispense with literature and focus on information, the former adopted the opposite approach. Describing itself as “le plus littéraire des journaux du soir,” *L’Écho de Paris* published Alphonse Daudet’s novel *Sapho* and Maupassant’s short story *Les Sœurs Rondoli* in its *feuilleton* during the first months of its

---

existence. It also emphasized that it was “le seul journal du soir qui donne deux et jusqu’à trois chroniques par jour.” Reportage, by contrast, did not constitute a prominent part of its offering. The newspaper was not an instant commercial success, attaining a print run of around 30,000 copies per day, but it remained a fixture on the Parisian media landscape for sixty years, steadily increasing its circulation over time, and never abandoned its literary bent (which was combined with a devotion to reactionary politics from the Dreyfus Affair onwards). Another recent addition to the Parisian press was Gil Blas, founded in 1879, whose pages were similarly dominated by chroniques, romans-feuilletons, and other short fictional prose works. Though its circulation always remained low, Gil Blas attained a prominent position within literary circles, notably prepublishing several novels by Zola, including Germinal in 1884-1885.

A veteran of both these publications was Fernand Xau, who quit L’Écho de Paris in 1892 to found a newspaper of his own, deftly named Le Journal. His vision, according to Arthur Meyer, publisher of Le Gaulois, was to launch “un journal littéraire à un sou et mettre à la portée des petits commerçants, des ouvriers, des instituteurs, des employés, un peu de littérature. Ce serait la table d’hôte à peu de prix.” Contrary to Meyer’s prediction that Xau, soon joined in the venture by the construction magnate Eugène Letellier and his brother Léon, risked overestimating the taste of the public, Le Journal was an immediate success, claiming a print run of 300,000 by August 1893, less than a year after its foundation. By the outbreak of the First World War, this had soared to over a million.

---

214 L’Écho de Paris, May 22, 1884, 1.
215 L’Écho de Paris, May 18, 1884, 1.
216 For L’Écho de Paris’s print run, see Bellanger et al., Histoire générale de la presse française, 3: 346.
219 See Bellanger et al., Histoire générale de la presse française, 3: 315.
Le Journal’s commitment to offering “un peu de littérature” to the masses was genuine. Among its regular contributors in 1893 were Gourmont, Mauclair, and Barrès (who all periodically attended Mallarmé’s mardis220) while, as we have seen, the poet himself contributed “Plaisir sacré” to the newspaper’s weekly literary supplement, where it featured prominently on the front page.221 Le Journal regularly printed fictional literary works at the top of its daily front page rather than confining them to the feuilleton. And this shift is, it seems, what Mallarmé is referring to in “Étalages” when he describes “la fiction proprement dite ou le récit […] triomphant à des lieux principaux, jusqu’au sommet.”222

The success of Le Journal suggests that it is inaccurate to view the late nineteenth century as a period when literature and the press were essentially drawing apart. In terms of sheer scale, there was in fact undoubtedly more literature being published in newspapers and being read in that form by many more people than ever before. Indeed, Le Journal’s massive circulation easily surpassed that of all French newspapers during the mid-nineteenth century, which is habitually identified as the high point of the literary press.

Literature also continued to hold its own in terms of column inches. According to a study carried out by the playwright and journalist Henri de Noussane in 1902, “littérature,” both “utile” and “inutile,” along with “arts” accounted on average for 18.35% of the contents of twenty Parisian daily newspapers, whereas faits divers accounted for only 8.8% of total.223 Another 6.45% of newsprint was occupied by “spectacles” while advertising occupied 27.5% of the available space.

---

220 See Mauclair, Mallarmé chez lui; Rosemary Lloyd, Mallarmé: The Poet and His Circle (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1999), 195-196; and François Broche, Maurice Barrès (Paris: Jean-Claudes Lattès, 1987), 118.
222 Mallarmé, Oc, 2: 221.
223 Henri de Noussane, “Que vaut la presse quotidienne française?” Revue hebdomadaire, no. 27, June 1902, 1-27, 4. Noussane defines littérature inutile as “tout ce qui est roman banal, nouvelle ou récit vulgaire,” littérature utile as “les articles de sociologie, de philosophie, de morale, qui ont une certaine tenue de forme et de fond,” while “les œuvres purement artistiques, même très libres, mais où il est évident que l’auteur s’est efforcé vers la Beauté,
Financial data further suggest that literature was far from being marginalized. Christian Delporte – in support of the opposite view – cites some statistics regarding the editorial budget of *Le Petit Parisien*, which was the highest-selling newspaper in France for much of the Third Republic:

Le croisement entre un journalisme ancien, en recul, et un journalisme nouveau, en ascension, est illustré par le budget du *Petit Parisien* qui, en l’espace de deux décennies, change radicalement: entre 1880 et 1900, la part des frais rédactionnels occasionnés par la chronique et le roman-feuilleton chute de 44,7% à 20%; dans le même temps, les dépenses de reportage passent de 8,8% à 30,3% (environ deux tiers pour la province et l’étranger; un tiers pour Paris et sa banlieue). Désormais, reportage et reporters sont en voie de devenir la référence, sinon le modèle, de toute une profession.\(^\text{224}\)

The percentages here convey a rather misleading impression given the growth in *Le Petit Parisien*’s sales during the period in question. Its circulation soared from just over 30,000 copies per day in 1880 to nearly 700,000 in 1900, and this increase was accompanied by a corresponding rise in the overall editorial budget.\(^\text{225}\) The raw figures, drawn from Francine Amaury’s study of *Le Petit Parisien*, indeed show that sums devoted to *reportage* increased massively, but so did those spent on *chroniques* and *romans-feuilletons*, albeit at a less exponential rhythm. From a mere 712 francs in January 1880, expenditures associated with *reportage* climbed to 18,478 francs in January 1900; expenditures on *chroniques* and *romans-feuilletons* climbed from 3,598 francs in the first period to 12,190 francs twenty years later.\(^\text{226}\) These increases occurred during an era of overall price stability and thus do not reflect generalized price inflation. It follows that, though the relative share of *chroniques* and *romans-feuilletons* may have declined, in absolute terms the


\(^{226}\) See Amaury, *Histoire du plus grand quotidien de la IIIe République*, 428.
monies devoted to these sections of the newspaper had nearly quadrupled. The *chroniqueurs* and *feuilletonistes* of *Le Petit Parisien* were in effect receiving a narrower slice of a vastly bigger pie. Furthermore, it stands to reason that *reportage* would, by the very nature of the activity, incur greater marginal costs in terms of travel and subsistence; over half the total expenditure in this area in January 1900 was thus linked to assignments in the provinces or overseas. By contrast, the overheads associated with writing a *roman-feuilleton* or *chronique* were basically minimal, and the bulk of the sums quoted here must have reverted directly to the writers. Indeed, throughout January 1900, *Le Petit Parisien* simultaneously published two separate *romans-feuilletons* by Jules Mary and Charles Mérouvel (the pseudonym of the lawyer Charles Chartier), who were among the most sought-after and, by extension, highly paid practitioners of the genre.

These figures indicate that far from being a casualty of the rise of *reportage*, literature remained an essential component of the mass press at the tail end of the nineteenth century. And this remained the case in 1914 when, in January of that year, *Le Petit Parisien* spent 18,087 francs on “contes et feuilletons,” which was slightly less than half the 39,288 francs devoted to *reportage.*

**VII. The resilience of the writer-journalist**

The continuing presence of literature in newspapers around the turn of the century is paralleled by the extensive overlap between the journalistic and literary professions that persists well into the twentieth century and, indeed, to a lesser extent, up to the present day. Prior to the introduction of government-assigned press cards and the accompanying journalist’s “statute” in 1935, it can be hard to state with precision who was or was not a professional journalist. And it is similarly difficult – in any epoch – to specify objective criteria for what exactly constitutes a writer.

---

It is nonetheless clear from the biographies of individual authors during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that few, if any, never wrote for the press and that many, perhaps a majority, were dependent on income derived from journalism. In Mallarmé’s circle alone, Paul Adam, Édouard Dujardin, Félix Fénéon, Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, Camille Mauclair, Charles Morice, Henri de Régnier, Marcel Schwob, Francis Vielé-Griffin, and Teodor de Wyzewa among others all wrote extensively for major newspapers, at times on an effectively full-time basis. Mauclair recounts how his literary ambitions led, given his impecunious circumstances, more or less automatically to a journalistic career, in accordance with a pattern seemingly unaltered since the time of *Illusions perdues*:


Underlying this ongoing involvement with the mass press was the fact that, with the exception of a small number of popular authors, royalties from book sales were insufficient to sustain even a modest lifestyle while *petites revues* seldom offered much in the way of payment; indeed, books, particularly volumes of poetry and début novels, frequently continued to be published “à compte d’auteur.” The theatre offered the potential for substantial earnings, but many plays flopped and consistently successful playwrights were rare; despite their notoriety,

---

neither Balzac nor Flaubert ever managed to master the art of the theatrical hit. Consequently, authors usually had to rely on other activities to make a living. According to Marc Angenot,

[I]’histoire biographique montre qu’il est aisé de classer tous les écrivains de l’époque à quelques rares exceptions près (médecine, profession libérale), dans les quatre conditions de vie suivantes: 1. fortune personnelle (et hautain mépris pour les basses contingences); 2. journalisme à titre d’appoint; 3. carrière dans la fonction publique, si possible point trop harassante; 4. marginalité et vie de bohème, c’est-à-dire en cru, vie de misère.

The major difference between the early and later parts of the century was the growth of the civil service. Mallarmé thus found secure employment as a teacher, Huysmans as a senior administrator in the Ministry of the Interior, and Leconte de Lisle as a librarian while Paul Claudel would go on to become the most distinguished member of a generation of writer-diplomats. Yet these choices of profession by no means insulated them from the world of “journaux et leur tourbillon.” Leconte de Lisle had an early stint working for the Fourierist daily La Démocratie pacifique during the Second Republic while Mallarmé, Huysmans, and Claudel all wrote articles for major newspapers during their careers, to varying degrees of frequency. Following the success of À Rebours (1884), Huysmans’s novels also became prized candidates for the feuilleton. In 1891, L’Écho de Paris purchased the rights to serialize Là-Bas for 6,000 francs, more than his annual civil service salary, an experience Huysmans nonetheless deemed to be “un des dégâts de ma vie.” He later rebuffed initial attempts by the same newspaper to acquire the rights for La Cathédrale (1898) but,

---

230 See Marie-Ève Thérenty, Mosaiques: être écrivain entre presse et roman (1829-1836) (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2003), 25-26. Thérenty’s analysis concerns the 1830s, but nothing suggests that a career in the theatre had become any safer a bet in the late nineteenth century. Many members of Mallarmé’s circle dabbled in the theatre during this period, but, with the exceptions of Maeterlinck, Octave Mirbeau, and Claudel (belatedly in his case), none met with much commercial success. Moreover, Maeterlinck came from money while Mirbeau and Claudel had successful careers in journalism and diplomacy.

231 Angenot, 1889, 76.


by his own account, acquiesced to their second proposal to publish some extracts when they vowed to attack the novel if he continued to refuse their offer.\textsuperscript{234} And despite these expressions of lofty disdain for the press, a sentiment that, as we shall see in Chapter Six, comes across strongly in À Rebours and Là-Bas, Huysmans kept track of every published reference to himself, methodically pasting an endless stream of press clippings into seven large scrapbooks, collectively running to several thousand pages.\textsuperscript{235} These clippings were supplied by the Argus press service, to which Mallarmé (as well as many other writers, including Proust) also subscribed. Indeed, Mallarmé once angrily complained they were overcharging him.\textsuperscript{236}

The extraordinary quantity of press clippings accumulated by Huysmans during his lifetime attests to the sheer physical ubiquity of newspapers during this period. Even when writers were not compelled to grind out chroniques and faits divers on a daily basis, they were still constantly surrounded by newspapers and depended on them both for publicity and, on a more banal level, for basic information about what was happening in the world. Among educated Parisians, it was normal to read many different newspapers every day. Newspapers were cheaper – in both relative and absolute terms – and more plentiful than at any time before or since. Ignoring this deluge of information was more or less impossible, and, prior to the invention of the radio and television, news was effectively synonymous with the newspaper. Details of official appointments, decorations, publications, commissions, banquets, duels, deaths, and other everyday goings-on in the literary and artistic worlds were all mediated through the press. Mallarmé’s correspondence abounds with references to such pieces of news. “Vous devinez avec quelle impatience j’ouvre chaque matin le journal, ou j’en consulte plusieurs,” he wrote to the painter Marcellin Desboutin.

\textsuperscript{234} See Huysmans, Interviews, 62.
\textsuperscript{235} Recueil de coupures de presse sur lui-même constitué par Huysmans 1874-1907.
in advance of the latter’s anticipated elevation to the Légion d’honneur in 1895.\textsuperscript{237} Newspapers were such a fundamental part of the cultural furniture that in 1888 the Folies-Bergères put on a show entitled \textit{Presse-Ballet} in which dancers dressed as different newspapers and periodicals pranced about the stage.\textsuperscript{238} As Evan Kindley remarks: “For the discerning Parisian audience of the Third Republic, apparently, such publications were prominent and familiar enough to be used as subjects for an evening’s light entertainment.”\textsuperscript{239}

The development of the interview as a stand-alone journalistic genre during the final twenty years of the nineteenth century created a further point of contact between writers and the press. For journalists realized that publicity-hungry authors constituted an inexhaustible fount of potential copy, and Huret’s widely imitated \textit{Enquête sur l’évolution littéraire} is thus only the most extensive and systematic example of the writer-interview. Zola gave at least 350 press interviews during his life and was, in the estimation of one of his interviewers, “l’homme le plus interviewé de France” (a description that occurs in an interview about the practice of the interview – a meta-interview, if you like – which shows just how institutionalized the genre had become).\textsuperscript{240} Huysmans, far less well known a figure than Zola, was interviewed on at least 140 occasions, most of them after 1891.\textsuperscript{241} The rise of \textit{reportage} thus provided writers with unprecedented levels of exposure in the press. Initially consisting of questions about the author’s works and literary opinions, these interviews expanded to include surveys on all manner of random topics. Mallarmé responded to questionnaires, among others, on Zionism (for), the top hat (here to stay), and the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Mallarmé to Desboutin, May 1895, in Mallarmé, \textit{Corr.}, 7: 199.
\item Henry Leyret, “M. Émile Zola: interviewé sur l’interview,” \textit{Le Figaro}, Jan. 12, 1893, 4; for the number of interviews given by Zola, see Jean-Marie Seillan’s introduction to Huysmans, \textit{Interviews}, 56.
\item See Seillan’s introduction to Huysmans, \textit{Interviews}, 56.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
appropriate form of dress for women riding a bicycle (a skirt hitched up, not trousers – too boyish).\textsuperscript{242}

The trend for interviewing writers, Huysmans’s enormous cutting file, and Mallarmé’s anxiety over his Argus bill indicate that even authors with secure careers outside of the press were nonetheless unceasingly confronted by “journaux et leur tourbillon.” Even if the importance of journalism as a “second job” for writers perhaps began to decline in the late nineteenth century, the press continued to play a significant role in their lives on account of its cultural ubiquity. And it is thus to be expected that this quotidian diversion would continue to affect their writing.

The figure of the writer-journalist by no means disappeared at the end of the nineteenth century. As late as the 1940s, according to Gisèle Sapiro’s sociological study of French writers during the Second World War,

[1]a moitié des écrivains de notre population de 185 écrivains collaborent régulièrement à un quotidien (Le Temps, L’Écho de Paris, L’Action française, Le Figaro, Paris-Soir, Ce soir, etc.), et près de deux tiers écrivent régulièrement dans la grande presse; pour un écrivain sur quatre environ le journalisme est la principale source de revenus.\textsuperscript{243}

And though the roman-feuilleton and chronique may have gradually declined in importance, the emergence of grand reportage as a literary genre along with the creation of cultural newspapers such as Fayard’s Candide (1924-1944) and Je suis partout (1930-1944) and Gallimard’s Marianne (1932-1940) provided new outlets for writers in the press during the interwar years.\textsuperscript{244} The tendency in recent scholarship to view the writer-journalist as being primarily a creature of the early and mid-nineteenth century thus seems overly restrictive. Indeed, the results of a survey carried out by Bernard Lahire for his book La Condition littéraire: la double vie des écrivains

\textsuperscript{242} See Mallarmé, Oc, 2: 657-672.
\textsuperscript{243} Gisèle Sapiro, La Guerre des écrivains 1940-1953 (Paris: Fayard, 1999), 76.
\textsuperscript{244} See Sapiro, La Guerre des écrivains, 75.
(2006) suggest that journalism at the beginning of the twenty-first century was still the second most common “second job” among writers after teaching. The journalistic careers of contemporary novelists such as Emmanuel Carrère, Sorj Chalandon, Michèle Fitoussi, Éric Fottorino, Leïla Slimani, and Philippe Vasset, to name just a few, illustrate that journalism and literature do not today inhabit entirely separate cultural planets (and in the cases of Carrère and Chalandon, the overlap between their journalistic and literary writing is manifest). Reports of the writer-journalist’s demise have undoubtedly been exaggerated.

VIII. Modernism in the mass press

As depicted in the writings of Gustave Kahn, Camille Mauclair, Charles Morice, Paul Valéry among others, the mass press was essentially hostile to the modernist-cum-avant-garde literary movements that emerged in France during the late nineteenth century. And it is true that jejune chroniqueurs often heaped ridicule on Mallarmé and Symbolist poetry. This is not the whole story, however. On occasion, major newspapers also published articles praising Mallarmé that helped forge his literary reputation. These were typically written by friends and acolytes of Mallarmé’s who had attained prominent positions within the mass press, notably the poet and prolific chroniqueur Catulle Mendès, who repeatedly praised the poet’s work in little magazines

245 Of the respondents to his questionnaire who declared a second profession, 7.6% of them were journalists at the time of the survey or had been journalists prior to ceasing their second profession; 30.1% were or had been teachers (taken to include lecturers and university professors) (see Bernard Lahire, La Condition littéraire: la double vie des écrivains [Paris: La Découverte, 2006], 581).

246 Thérenty raises this point at the beginning of La Littérature au quotidien: “Selon des préjugés pérennes qu’il faudra sans doute reconsidérer, ce changement de paradigme journalistique et de régime d’écriture [aux années 1880] contribuerait à éloigner les hommes de lettres des quotidiens” (22, my italics). However, the point is never developed, and it sits uneasily with the book’s conclusion about a “scission entre la littérature et le journal” during the twentieth century (368). In a recent article, Thérenty also remarks that “cette interaction entre presse et littérature reste encore importante aujourd’hui comme en témoignent les nombreux écrivains contemporains investis dans le fait divers à l’instar d’Emmanuel Carrère, de Régis Jauffret ou, plus récemment, d’Ivan Jablonka.” (Marie-Ève Thérenty, “Introduction: petit manifeste pour les ‘Press and Literature Studies,’” French Politics, Culture & Society 35, no. 1 [spring 2017]: 1-6, 1).
as well as newspapers over the course of more than three decades. In 1884, the Parnassian poet Théodore de Banville wrote a *chronique* for *Gil Blas* on the theme of “le quarante-unième fauteuil de l’Académie” – the hypothetical place reserved for all the major writers ignored by the Académie française during their lifetimes – which, without discussing his work, bore a prominent dedication to Mallarmé. And in 1889, the novelist and journalist Octave Mirbeau published a *chronique* on the front page of *Le Figaro*, where Mallarmé is described as “peut-être […] le pur artiste, l’artiste essentiel,” which was perhaps the first article praising Mallarmé in detail to appear in a major newspaper. Three years later, the Polish mardiste Teodor de Wyzewa wrote an article for the same newspaper, headlined “M. Stéphane Mallarmé” and again located in the most prominent slot on the front page, which announced: “Le renom de M. Mallarmé est universel.”

According to Lloyd James Austin, this article marked “la consécration de Mallarmé auprès du grand public et surtout du public mondain.” The poet himself was clearly impressed by Wyzewa’s tribute, telling his mistress Mery Laurent that he found the article “délicat, élégant – enfin comme moi.” Later that month, Bernard Lazare authored a similarly laudatory piece for *Le Journal*, which described the Tuesday gatherings at Mallarmé’s apartment on the rue de Rome and compared the

---


249 Octave Mirbeau, “Quelques opinions d’un Allemand,” *Le Figaro*, Nov. 4, 1889, 1. The praise for Mallarmé in this article is attributed to Mirbeau’s friend, the liberal Reichstag deputy Georg von Bunsen (thinly veiled within the text). At Mallarmé’s instigation, Mirbeau would later write a career-launching article about Maeterlinck in the same newspaper (see Mauclair, *Mallarmé chez lui*, 44, “Stéphane Mallarmé” and “Maurice Maeterlinck,” in *Dictionnaire Octave Mirbeau*, accessed May 2019, mirbeau.asso.fr/dicomirbeau/).


poet to Socrates. As we have seen, his election as doyen of French poets in 1896 prompted another lengthy article in *Le Figaro*, which included an unpublished sonnet supplied by Mallarmé at the newspaper’s request and adjudged by the journalist to be “d’une exquise musique.” By the time *Divagations* appeared in early 1897, press reaction was extensive and favourable notices appeared in, among others, *Le XIXe Siècle*, *L’Écho de Paris*, and *L’Événement*.

Huret’s interview with Mallarmé had also depicted the poet in a highly complimentary light, describing him as “l’un des littérateurs les plus généralement aimés du monde des lettres” and commenting on his “charme puissant” and “orgueil de dieu ou d’illuminé devant lequel il faut tout de suite s’incliner.” Numerous other authors interviewed by Huret also spoke of their appreciation for Mallarmé, thus prolonging the favourable publicity given to the poet in the pages of *L’Écho de Paris*. Indeed, Huret noted in his “avant-propos” to the book version of the *Enquête* that “M. Mallarmé, dont la haute personnalité littéraire ne se révèle que les mardis soirs à quelques personnes choisies, a pourtant groupé plus de nominations que Victor Hugo.” In contrast to this glowing portrait, Zola comes across in his interview with Huret as somewhat defensive and truculent, dismissing “les jeunes” as pretentious and chiding the interviewer that “vous venez voir si je suis mort!” The latter jibe alludes to the fact that Huret typically began his interviews with a variation on the rather loaded question “Le naturalisme est-il mort?” (Ironically, Huret’s approach to charting the *evolution* of French literature clearly betrays the influence of Charles Darwin, whose theories also underlay Zola’s own conception of Naturalism.)

---

256 Huret, *Enquête sur l’évolution littéraire*, 25. "Nomination" is used here as a synonym for “mention.”
The *Enquête*’s evident anti-Naturalist bias was complimented by the concurrent publication in *L’Écho de Paris*’s feuilleton of Huysmans’s * Là-Bas*, which opens with a forthright denunciation of its author’s erstwhile affiliates:

“[…] ce que je reproche au naturalisme ce n’est pas le badigeon de son gros style, c’est l’immondice de ses idées; ce que je lui reproche, c’est d’avoir incarné le matérialisme dans la littérature, d’avoir glorifié la démocratie de l’art!”

Contrary to the prevailing image of the late nineteenth-century press as being inimical to literary modernism, *L’Écho de Paris* thus actively promoted Mallarmé in its reportage whilst disparaging Naturalism both above and below the fold, even though Naturalism was the style of literature most readily compared to journalism at this time (not least by several participants in Huret’s *Enquête*).

The following year, *L’Écho*’s identification with “les jeunes” deepened when it launched a weekly *Supplément littéraire illustré*, edited by Mendès and Marcel Schwob, whose contributors included Claudel, Gide, Maeterlinck, Morice, Régnier, Verlaine, and Wyzewa. Alfred Vallette, the editor of the *Mercure de France* (a literary magazine, which had, as we shall see in Chapter Two, been founded in 1889), wrote a column entitled “Les Revues jeunes,” summarizing the contents of contemporary little magazines such as his own, in which he frequently discussed Mallarmé and quoted from his works. The editors also launched a prize worth 100 francs for original poetry and short pieces of prose, explicitly aimed at “la jeunesse littéraire,” which was won on four occasions (once for poetry, thrice for prose) by Alfred Jarry, still a schoolboy at the Lycée Henri IV, whose entries were then published in the *Supplément*. Other laureates included Mauclair and Henri

---


Barbusse, who topped Jarry’s achievement with five prizes and also went on to marry Mendès’s daughter. Among Jarry’s victorious contributions was a skit entitled “Guignol,” derived from the initial version of his play *Ubu cocu*, which constitutes the first appearance in print of the eponymous foul-mouthed tyrant.

The experience of *L’Écho de Paris’s* Supplément littéraire shows that the late nineteenth-century newspaper could still function as a literary laboratory. It would be stretching the point to say that Ubu and “pataphysique” were born in a newspaper supplement since it is difficult to determine whether “Guignol” was an extract from a pre-existing manuscript or not. What is perhaps more significant is that the prize served to bring Jarry to the attention of his fellow young writers, who were impressed by the unclassifiable brio of his writing. As Mauclair wrote to Schwob: “Qu’est-ce que c’est, Alfred Jarry? *Guignol*, c’est bien, c’est très-bien! C’est mécanique et tout à fait bizarre écriture… j’aime ça.” Schwob and Jarry soon became close friends, and *Ubu roi* is dedicated to the editor who had first brought its protagonist into print. *L’Écho de Paris* thus constituted both a literary laboratory and a socio-professional breeding ground for Jarry as well as Barbusse, effectively launching their literary careers in the world of Parisian letters.

The *Supplément littéraire* disappeared just over a year after its creation in August 1893. Its final issues contain notably few advertisements, which suggests that commercial considerations may have brought the experiment to an end. Vallette’s column on “Les Revues jeunes” continued to appear in the main body of the paper for several more weeks but was then dropped. However, this did not signal the end of *L’Écho de Paris’s* involvement with “la jeunesse littéraire.” On May 260 See Schuh, “Jarry lauréat.” 105-106 and 109-110.
262 See the notes in Jarry, *Oc*, 1: 1185-1186.
18, 1895, a front-page notice informed its readers that “depuis longtemps, l’Echo de Paris souhaitait élargir son cadre et s’adjoindre des éléments jeunes qui en poésie, en art, en littérature, signifient le mouvement d’une esthétique nouvelle.”264 The editors had thus recruited “les deux poètes sur lesquels la jeunesse française a les yeux fixés: MM. HENRI DE RÉGNIER, FRANCIS-[sic]VIÉLÉ-GRiffin. […] Ainsi la rubrique de la Poésie est fondée dans le journal quotidien.” For the best part of the following two years, L’Écho de Paris duly featured one original poem each week on its front page, alternating between these two writers who were, by Régnier’s account, well compensated for their efforts.265 And though none of these contributions quite rival the “Sonnet en yx” in terms of depth or complexity, they nevertheless constitute recognisably Symbolist works and are frequently composed in free verse. The view that the daily newspaper had by Mallarmé’s time become entirely closed off to such experimental endeavours thus seems erroneous.

Notable prose works authored by other members of Mallarmé’s circle were also forged in the pages of the mass press during this period. For example, as we have seen, most of the dark, fantastical tales of Schwob’s Le Cœur double (1891) and Le Roi au masque d’or (1892) were originally published in L’Écho de Paris during 1890-1892. Many of Remy de Gourmont’s Histoires magiques (1894), such as “La Robe,” a particularly perverse tale about necrophilia, similarly first appeared in Le Journal.266 These stories typically begin at the top of the right-hand side of the front page and then conclude overleaf. Their brevity and the abruptness of their invariably sinister endings can but reflect the constraints imposed by the newspaper column. Moreover, these works can be read on two levels, on the one hand, as a series of satisfying yarns

264 “A nos lecteurs,” L’Écho de Paris, May 18, 1895, 1.
265 See Régnier to Mallarmé, May 13, 1895, in Mallarmé, Corr., 7: 209. Mallarmé wished him well in the venture while noting that the requirement to produce a new poem every two weeks was “intimidant.”
– ideal for drawing in newspaper readers – on the other, as expressions of unspeakable, repressed desire and, particularly in the case of *Le Cœur double* and *Le Roi au masque d’or*, as allegories for the superficiality and hypocrisy of Belle Époque society. Similar themes circulate throughout Maupassant’s short stories and novels, yet they tend to examine perversity amid the earthy tedium of everyday bourgeois life, whereas Gourmont and Schwob’s tales usually take place in enigmatic, often mystical settings that suggest their Symbolist affinities.

As we shall see in Chapters Six and Seven, Schwob and Gourmont portray journalism in other fictional writings as a cretinous distraction from true art (albeit initially with some ambivalence in Gourmont’s case). Like Maupassant, the Goncourts, and Balzac, they thus reviled the mass press, even though much of their own writing had originated within its columns. Novels by authors as varied as Maurice Barrès, Jean Lorrain, and Octave Mirbeau, who also used newspapers as a literary laboratory, are, as we shall see, similarly characterized by their antipathy towards journalism. Favourable portrayals of the press in modernist prose fiction are rarer. As we shall see in Chapter Six, Vallès’s fictional alter ego Jacques Vingtras denigrates the book and imaginative literature whilst extolling the newspaper as a tool of personal emancipation and political agitation; and Gaston Leroux casts his reporter hero Rouletabille in an adventurous, dynamic light.

In a more meditative vein, the philosophy teacher Émile Chartier, writing under the pseudonym Alain, frequently praises journalism’s philosophical and pedagogical virtues in the regular columns he began to write in 1903 for *La Dépêche de Rouen et de Normandie*, which were published under the titles “Propos du dimanche” and then, from 1906 onwards (when they started to appear on a daily basis until 1914), “Propos d’un Normand.” As Denis Pernot has argued, Alain was, like Vallès, skeptical of the book, which he identified with the cult of dogmatic professorial
authority, whereas the press offered “quelque refuge à la liberté de penser” because of its improvised, ever-evolving form.\textsuperscript{267} Throughout his “Propos,” which, blending philosophical reflection with discussions of contemporary politics, classical literature, history, art, nature, and myriad other topics, defy traditional generic classification, Alain duly assumes a Socratic guise as he offers his readers what Pernot calls a series of “leçons non conclusives” that aim to stimulate a culture of deliberative democratic debate.\textsuperscript{268}

That questioning, self-critical outlook extends to his own writing. Alain, a devoted supporter of the anti-clerical Radical Party that dominated French politics for most of the Third Republic, thus concedes in an article gently criticizing the rhetorical ardour of a group of young socialists that his “Propos” themselves represent a series of “sermons radicaux à un sou.”\textsuperscript{269} He also frequently reflects on his choice to devote himself to writing a daily newspaper column rather than books. In response to a reader who had chided him that his “Propos” were “des feuilles volantes” and that he should instead be writing books, Alain responds that his column is itself a kind of protean book that he can open each morning “à la page qui me plaît.”\textsuperscript{270} Whereas a book, in the literal sense of the word, risks becoming dated, the newspaper allows him to carry out “ce travail de retouche perpétuelle” that ensures his writing ages only in the sense that it tracks the passage of time and his own advancing years.\textsuperscript{271} That self-conscious focus on the form of his own writing along with the “Propos” eclectic divagations between past and present emphasizes the essentially modernist spirit of Alain’s work. Like Mallarmé and, as we shall see in Chapters Two


\textsuperscript{268} Pernot, “\textit{Les Propos d’Alain ou le refus du livre},” 530.


\textsuperscript{271} Alain, \textit{Les Propos d’un Normand de 1913}, 307.
and Three, Charles Péguy, Alain both transcends conventional formal categories and examines that process of hybridization as he does so. The restless self-consciousness of his “Propos” thus mirrors their formal ambiguity. And Alain himself emerges not just as an exceptionally sensitive teacher but also as an eternal student, for whom the newspaper was a kind of copy book that allowed him to sketch out the shifting contours of his own open-ended education.

Alain ultimately published many books, including selections from his “Propos.” But, as Pernot notes, his steadfast refusal to authorize a complete edition of his articles “est surtout le signe de sa volonté de les voir rester inscrits dans le journal où ils sont parus.”272 For Alain, the perpetual work-in-progress of his newspaper column was an end in itself.

More commonly, the press remained a literary laboratory in the early twentieth century for modernist authors, for whom publication in newspapers and magazines typically represented a prelude to the consecration of a book. As we shall see in Chapters Three and Five, Apollinaire published short stories and poetry in a panoply of newspapers and magazines that he then gathered together in two collections of short stories and two collections of poetry. Apollinaire also frequently recycled material from his chroniques and reportage in his literary works.273 As we shall see in Chapter Seven, Proust similarly turned “Impressions de route en automobile,” an article for Le Figaro about driving through Normandy, into “le petit morceau,” which plays a crucial role in the evolution of the hero’s artistic vocation in the Recherche. Even Raymond Roussel’s eccentric novels Impressions d’Afrique and Locus Solus found a home in the press; both were serialized in Le Gaulois du dimanche (probably at the author’s own expense) in 1909 and 1913-1914 respectively.274

The literary laboratory of the mass press may have no longer been quite as busy as it had been during the early and mid-nineteenth century, when authors such as Balzac, Baudelaire, and Théophile Gautier published the bulk of their literary works in newspapers and *grandes revues*. Most of Apollinaire’s poems and short stories were, by contrast, prepublished in *petites revues* rather than newspapers or *grandes revues*. Proust published dozens of articles in newspapers from the 1890s onwards, but only a handful of these include material that later made its way into his novel. As we have seen, Mallarmé’s *Un coup de dés* was published in a *grande revue*. But when the poet outlined his vision of the “Poème populaire moderne” and literary-journalistic hybridity, he did so first in the pages of *La Revue blanche* and then in *Divagations*. “Le Fonds littéraire” and “Plaisir sacré” are the only “poèmes critiques” to have appeared in newspapers – still a remarkable enough occurrence but not the genetic heart of his work. And, as we have seen, “Le Fonds littéraire” was only published in *Le Figaro* after Mallarmé agreed to make substantial changes. A later encounter with the mass press did not prove so successful. In November 1894, an editor at *Le Journal* rejected a sonnet Mallarmé had submitted at his request because it did not conform to the theme of the series in which it was supposed to appear. Mallarmé pointedly replied to the journalist: “Je profite, à l’instant, du malentendu pour adresser ces quatorze vers à une Publication d’Art qui me sollicitait, et je n’ai qu’à gagner.”275 By and large, such *Publications d’Art* indeed constituted Mallarmé’s primary journalistic home.

All in all, while the role of the mass press as a literary laboratory may have declined somewhat during the late nineteenth century, significant literary works continued to be developed within its pages after the 1880s and into the twentieth century. And whatever ground may have been ceded to *reportage* within the newspaper itself, that transformation was paralleled by the

---

growth in the press’s overall cultural importance throughout the Third Republic. The mass press thus remained an unavoidable fact of life for writers even when, as we shall see in the next chapter, they sought to break free from its grasp within their own petites revues.
CHAPTER TWO
Petites Revues in the Shadow of the Grande Presse

La science complète des revues est difficile, et je ne la possède qu’en partie: c’est pourtant la seule source authentique, depuis un siècle, de notre histoire littéraire. J’écris entouré de tous leurs papiers jaunis, d’où s’échappent toutes sortes de poèmes, dont la beauté se rajeunit à revoir la lumière.

En somme, notre mépris de l’argent proclamé haut et fort, nous serions grandement enorgueillis si le premier numéro nous rapportait dix sous.

I. The rise of the petite revue

The 1880s saw the emergence of a wave of periodicals, dubbed the petites revues, that had a defining effect on French literature up to and beyond the First World War. Typically created by small groups of aspiring authors, these publications served in the main as outlets for their own poetry and prose. Notwithstanding the label revue, criticism initially tended to be a secondary concern though its role increased steadily in those petites revues that attained some degree of longevity (most disappeared after a handful of issues). In contrast to conservative grandes revues, such as the Revue des Deux Mondes, founded in 1829, petites revues were characterized by their openness to new literary styles and forms: Décadence, Symbolism, and countless other literary movements that sprung up during these years.

Founding contributors tended to be young – usually in their twenties or early thirties, rarely over forty – such that petites revues were referred to interchangeably as jeunes revues or revues des jeunes. That the first of these labels has proved the most enduring can be attributed to Gourmont’s Les Petites Revues: essai de bibliographie (1900), whose preface constitutes its locus

---

But the term was already in wide usage by the mid-1880s and frequently carried disparaging overtones. As the journalist and novelist Félicien Champsaur wrote of his less successful contemporaries in *Le Figaro* in 1885:

'Redingotés, boutonnés jusqu’au cou, après s’être amusés, énervés, dans la solitude de leur chambre (car ils craignent les femmes, ces juges charmants devant lesquels ils se sentent grotesques), ils entrent dans les bureaux de leurs petits journaux, de leurs petites revues, le visage fatigué, exangue[sic], couleur de moule […].'

For established writers like Champsaur (whose pantomime *Lulu* [1888] possibly inspired the plays that were in turn adapted into Alban Berg’s opera279), involvement in a *petite revue* was clearly nothing more than an exercise in literary onanism. But, not for the first time in cultural history, what originated as an insult eventually became a badge of honour.

Champsaur’s reference to “leurs petits journaux” suggests an affinity between the *petites revues* and an earlier wave of publications dating from Baudelaire’s time, such as *Le Corsaire-Satan* (1844-1847), *Le Charivari* (1832-1937), and, indeed *Le Figaro* itself (founded in 1826) prior to its transformation into a daily newspaper in 1866. These *petits journaux* combined free-wheeling ribaldry and satire with poetry and other literary works.280 But while some fin-de-siècle *petites revues*, notably *La Revue blanche*, did make space for humour, they tended to be more serious, at times even dogmatic, in tone. Like Mallarmé, their contributors viewed literature with a quasi-religious intensity that also frequently spilled over into anarchist politics and later played a significant role in the Dreyfus Affair.

---

278 Félicien Champsaur, “La Vie littéraire et artistique: la jeunesse où l’on s’ennuie,” *Le Figaro: Supplément littéraire* Dec. 12, 1885, 1
In terms of physical appearance, early petites revues often did resemble the petits journaux of the 1860s, consisting of four pages laid out in closely packed columns on a single large sheet of folded paper. But soon a more refined and distinctive format emerged, comprising a booklet of 16 or 32 pages (later increasing, in some cases, to as many as 300 pages per issue) bound between a cover of heavy coloured paper. Varying in size between in-18 and in-8 (along, in some cases, with special luxury in-4 editions), the better-financed or more successful petites revues ultimately tended to adopt the larger format. This preference reflected their editors’ concern for visual aesthetics with columns yielding to liberally spaced stanzas and paragraphs. As one author remarked at the founding meeting of the Mercure de France in November 1889: “Il faut de l’air, des marges, de belles marges. Il faut que le texte ait la possibilité de se mouvoir sur le papier.” It is difficult to imagine such elevated sentiments being uttered in the salle de rédaction of Le Corsaire-Satan or the aptly named Le Charivari a generation beforehand.

A more relevant immediate precursor was the three-volume collection, Le Parnasse contemporain, published in multiple instalments between 1866 and 1876, which brought together the work of 99 poets including Villiers de l’Isle Adam, Verlaine, and Mallarmé as well as stalwarts of what became known, following this publication, as the Parnassian school, notably Théodore de Banville, Théophile Gautier, and Leconte de Lisle, whose devotion to the principle of “l’art pour l’art” was frequently shared by fin-de-siècle petites revues. As Gourmont points out in his bibliographical essay, petites revues such as Villiers’s Revue des lettres et des arts (1867-1868) did in fact exist prior to the 1880s, but these were isolated publications that had little long-term

281 Renard, Journal, 43 (Nov. 14, 1889).
282 Le Parnasse contemporain, 3 vols (1866-1876; repr., Geneva: Slatkine, 1971). The principle of “l’art pour l’art” was theorized by Gauthier in a preface, which doesn’t feature the phrase itself, to his novel Mademoiselle de Maupin (Paris: Eugène Renduel, 1835-1836).
cultural influence. As Yoan Vérilhac puts it: “[A]vant 1880, il y a des petites revues, mais il n’y a pas la petite revue.”

What distinguishes petites revues from the 1880s onwards is the sheer profusion of titles. Gourmont had counted around 130 of them by 1900. Over 180 new titles would appear between the turn of the century and the First World War. And another 270 or so have been recorded for the period 1919-1939. The vast majority of these had an extremely brief lifespan. But, in contrast to the decades prior to the 1880s, dozens of new petites revues were constantly emerging to fill the gaps left by their predecessors. A handful of titles also proved to have a more enduring existence: La Plume (1889-1904; 1905; 1911-14), La Revue blanche (1889-1903), the Mercure de France (1890-1965), L’Ermitage (1891-1906), La Revue indépendante (1884-1895), and Les Cahiers de la quinzaine (1900-1914). Indeed, La Nouvelle Revue française, founded in 1908, continues to appear today. Such longevity brought a readership (over ten thousand in some cases) and a level of cultural and even political influence that, though still modest by the standards of the grande

---


presse, were unprecedented for publications of this kind. Neither niche nor mass, these “grandes petites revues,” as Vérilhac calls them, straddled two opposing journalistic worlds.

II. A literary laboratory

Small in circulation and size (at least initially) though they may have been, the importance of the petites revues for the writers that grew up around Mallarmé was immense. A whole generation – “la plus brillamment douée que la France ait jamais connue,” as Claude Digeon puts it – including Jarry, Gide, Proust, Valéry, and Péguy published their first works and forged their reputations in the pages of these petites revues, as did the slightly younger poets grouped around Apollinaire. Collectively, they thus constituted a literary laboratory of unusual fecundity. A far from exhaustive list of major literary works that originally appeared, in whole or in part, as pre-originals in the pages of petites revues between 1884 and 1922 includes Rimbaud’s Illuminations (1886), Jarry’s Ubu roi (1896), Valéry’s “La Soirée avec Monsieur Teste” (1896), Octave Mirbeau’s Le Journal d’une femme de chambre (1900), Romain Rolland’s Jean-Christophe (1904-1912), Claudel’s L’Annonce faite à Marie (1912), Apollinaire’s Alcools (1913) and Calligrammes.

286 Circulation figures for petites revues are frequently difficult to ascertain. The Cahiers and Édouard Dujardin’s La Revue indépendante were unusual for publishing the figures of their print run in each issue, which oscillated around 2,000 copies in both cases. Paul Léautaud estimated that the Mercure had 3,000 readers in 1905, and the magazine was printing 6,000 copies by 1918 (see Claire Lesage, “Le Mercure de France de 1890 à 1914,” 3 vols. [École des Chartes Thesis, Paris, 1984], 2: 446). In 1910, La NRF was printing 1400 copies, a figure that increased steadily after the war such that it boasted 12,000 subscribers by 1928 (see Alban Cerisier, Une histoire de La NRF [Paris: Gallimard, 2009], 25 and Anne-Rachel Hermetet, “Modern Classicism: La Nouvelle Revue française [1909-43] and Commerce [1924-32],” in Brooker and Thacker, The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Europe 1880-1940, 3: 101-119, 102). La Revue blanche had earlier scaled similar heights, attaining a print run of 10,000-15,000 copies at its apogee around 1900 (see Olivier Barrot and Pascal Ory’s preface to La Revue blanche: histoire, anthologie, portraits, ed. Barrot and Ory [1989; repr., Paris: La Table Ronde, 2012], 17). By contrast, L’Ermitage lived up to its name and sold no more than a few hundred copies, despite the publicity efforts of André Gide (see Paul-Henri Bourrelier, La Revue blanche: une génération dans l’engagement [1890-1905] [Paris: Fayard, 2007], 962-965). No data are available for La Plume, but, as we shall see, its sales must have numbered in the thousands given this magazine’s commercial success.

287 Yoan Vérilhac, La Jeune Critique des petites revues symbolistes (Publications de l’Université de Saint-Étienne, 2010), 44.

(1918), Roger Martin du Gard’s *Jean Barois* (1913), Alain-Fournier’s *Le Grand Meaulnes* (1913), Proust’s *Les Plaisirs et les Jours* (1896) along with significant portions of the *Recherche*, Valery Larbaud’s *A.O. Barnabooth* (1913), Cendrars’s *Dix-neuf poèmes élastiques* (1919), practically all of Péguy and Gide’s writings, most of Mallarmé’s prose and much of his poetry.

The “laboratory” metaphor is not strictly applicable to all of these works. When *La Vogue* published *Illuminations* for the first time in 1886 (while also resurrecting *Une saison en enfer*), Rimbaud had long since abandoned both texts (as well as literature in general), and the process of pre-publication consequently had no bearing on the development of either work. *L’Annonce faite à Marie, Le Grand Meaulnes, Jean Barois,* and *Les Caves du Vatican* were also essentially finished prior to pre-publication in *La NRF*, and there are few differences between the pre-originals and the versions that appeared in book form. Even then, the churn of serialization did yield some notable alterations. For instance, Claudel, indignant at the depiction of homosexuality in the third instalment of *Les Caves du Vatican* in *La NRF* in March 1914, forced Gide to remove an epigraph taken from *L’Annonce faite à Marie*, which is thus absent from the version of the work that appeared in book form later that year.\(^{289}\) Gide also added the sub-title “*Sotie*” to the book – referring to a kind of medieval play that satirized real events and people – after reading Jacques Rivière’s gloss of this concept in an essay on “le roman d’aventure” by *La NRF*’s editorial secretary, which had appeared in the magazine during 1913.\(^{290}\) In other cases, pre-originals had a truly defining influence. The versions of works by Mirbeau, Apollinaire, and Cendrars among others that appeared in book form were typically stitched together from fragments scattered across a panoply of *petites revues* and newspapers; and Rolland’s *magnum opus* was published serially


\(^{290}\) See Gide, *Romans et récits*, 1: 1475.
in Péguy’s *Cahiers* as he wrote it over the course of nearly a decade. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the *petite revue* was where a great deal of work-in-progress happened. As Édouard Dujardin, founder of *La Revue indépendante*, recalled in 1924:

Les jeunes revues, les petites revues, les revues d’avant-garde sont la vie même de la littérature. Vous dites que leur étude serait “d’une utilité indéniable à qui voudrait étudier l’évolution de la littérature”; je vais plus loin: elles représentent cette évolution même; elles en sont à la fois le symbole et la réalité. Je parle que de ce que j’ai vu; depuis 1885 et les commencements du symbolisme, c’est dans les jeunes revues que s’est réalisé l’histoire de la littérature française.

Aside from a series of works that have since become canonical, this process of experimentation also yielded the defining formal and stylistic innovations of literary modernism. The first examples of poetry in free verse appeared in *Le Chat noir* in 1882, by Marie Krysinska, and in *La Vogue* in 1886, by Gustave Kahn and Jules Laforgue (several poems from *Illuminations* published in the latter magazine are also frequently deemed to be written in free verse). Stream of consciousness was born in the pages of *La Revue indépendante*, whose publisher Dujardin serialized his own short novel *Les Lauriers sont coupés*, told from the rambling perspective of a Parisian student, in that *petite revue* in 1887. The opening chapter of Gide’s *Paludes*, with its titular book-within-the-book, which became a common device in twentieth-century modernist and post-modern literature, was first published in *La Revue blanche* in 1895. The theme of the *acte gratuit* – one lacking any ordinary psychological explanation – is already prominent in the work of Dostoyevsky and Baudelaire. But it was Gide who named and theorized this concept in his

---


philosophical apologue *Le Prométhée mal enchaîné*, first published in *L’Ermitage* in 1899, which underlies his depiction of the capricious murder committed by Lafcadio in *Les Caves du Vatican*.\(^{295}\) Another innovation whose roots lie in the *petite revues* is the *roman-fleuve* – the category invented by Rolland to describe *Jean-Christophe*.\(^{296}\) Such a work would be unlikely to have ever found a home in the *feuilleton* of a newspaper; it is too long, too abstruse, and too loosely plotted. But the flexibility and erratic publication schedule of the (misleadingly named) *Cahiers de la quinzaine* made Péguy’s magazine the ideal forum for this constantly evolving meditation on the culture and politics of its times, based around the experiences of a single central character. Rolland’s novel inaugurated a series of lengthy, episodic psychological novels including Roger Martin du Gard’s *Les Thibault* (1922-1940) and Jules Romains’s *Les Hommes de bonne volonté* (1932-1946). Although Proust dismissed Rolland’s novel as superficial (which also suggests he had read at least some of it), his *Recherche* can also be considered a *roman-fleuve* and notably shares *Jean-Christophe*’s focus on a single character.\(^{297}\) Rolland’s novel, though now rather dated, undoubtedly has greater merit than Dujardin’s lightweight tale of seduction or Kahn’s forgettable free verse, but it conforms to a pattern whereby initial formal and stylistic experiments seldom obtained the most successful results. What made the *petites revues* so influential was precisely that they gave writers the latitude to fail. And thanks to their unreliable tinkering in the literary laboratory, others, as Samuel Beckett might have put it, were subsequently able to fail better.

\(^{295}\) Gide, “*Le Prométhée mal enchaîné,*” *L’Ermitage* 10, no. 1-3, Jan-March, 1899.
\(^{296}\) “Jean-Christophe *m’a toujours apparu comme un fleuve,*” wrote Rolland in his preface to the twelfth instalment (Rolland, “Jean-Christophe à Paris II. – Dans la maison – 1” *Cahiers de la quinzaine* 10, no. 9, Jan. 1909, 18). The expression “*roman-fleuve*” (along with “*récit-fleuve*”) itself seems to have entered critical discourse during the 1920s and 30s, when it was frequently used by the novelist and critic André Maurois and the critic Albert Thibaudet (see Aude Leblond, “Poétique du *roman-fleuve* de *Jean-Christophe à Maumort*” [doctoral thesis, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris III, 2010], 17-21).
III. Origins

III.1. Politics, paper, and money

Why did these petites revues begin to flourish during the 1880s? A confluence of political, legal, economic, educational, social, and ideological factors can be observed. First and foremost, the rise of the petite revue would have been unlikely in the absence of the unprecedented liberalisation of the press enacted by the law of July 29, 1881, which eliminated a battery of punitive restrictions and taxes that had been imposed or re-imposed ten years earlier in the aftermath of the Paris Commune.298 The most formidable of these was the hefty cautionnement – a financial guarantee that newspaper and some magazine publishers had to provide as insurance against any potential lapses into sedition or immorality. A monthly literary magazine could in theory have avoided paying the cautionnement by strictly avoiding any reference to politics; in practice, many petites revues were eager to weigh into political debates, usually from an anarchist perspective, as suggested by titles such as Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires (1890-1893) and La Revue indépendante: politique, littéraire et artistique, and they could not have existed in such form prior to 1881. Thenceforth, while occasional prosecutions for obscenity did continue to occur, the only basic obligations imposed on newspapers and magazines were to register their titles, nominate a publisher, and deposit two copies of each issue at the Bibliothèque Nationale (a requirement seemingly ignored by many petites revues).299 The so-called lois scélérates of 1893-1894, passed in response to a wave of anarchist bombings and the assassination of President Sadi Carnot, did restrict the freedoms granted in 1881, forcing some of the more overtly political petites


revues to cease publication, but the onerous administrative and financial barriers of the Second Empire were never restored.\footnote{On the effect of the lois scélérates on philo-anarchist petites revues, see Philippe Oriol, “Le Flirt des ‘petites revues’ avec la vierge rouge,” in La Belle Époque des revues 1880-1914, ed. Jacqueline Pluet-Despatin, Michel Leymarie and Jean-Yves Mollier (Paris: L’Imec, 2002), 161-177.}

Meanwhile, steady advances in paper and print technology meant that publication costs were low and even declining.\footnote{See Jean-François Gilmont, Une introduction à l’histoire du livre: du manuscrit à l’ère électronique, 3rd ed. (Brussels: Céfal, 2000), 107.} Cheap cellulose paper supplanted older cotton-based varieties by the late 1870s, thus eliminating anxieties, much discussed in Illusions perdues, about whether the available supply of rags could ever keep up with rising demand.\footnote{See Alain Nave, “Chiffon,” in Dictionnaire encyclopédique du livre, ed. Pascal Fouché, Daniel Péchoin and Philippe Schuwer, vol. 1 (Paris: Cercle de la librairie, 2002), 515-516.} When Alfred Vallette and ten others founded the Mercure de France in 1889, total printing costs for the first issue came to 125 francs (around 500 euros in today’s money), which was shared among the contributors in tranches of five francs. This paid for 600 copies of the 32-page periodical, printed in-8 and bound between a handsome blue cover (the iconic dark red cover was adopted later).\footnote{See Louis Forestier, “Présentation,” in “Le Mercure de France et la littérature en 1890,” special issue, Revue d’histoire littéraire de la France 92, no. 1 (1992): 3-6. Forestier quotes a total figure of 165.60 francs for the expenses incurred producing the first issue. However, this includes some additional design and administrative costs. The figure of 125 francs for printing is widely attested elsewhere (see Ernest Raynaud, “Alfred Vallette et la création du ‘Mercure de France,’” Mercure de France 264, no. 889, Dec. 1, 1935, 309-318).} According to the Franco-American poet Francis Vielé-Griffin, a 48-page issue of Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires cost 160 francs to produce in 1892.\footnote{See Isabel Violante’s foreword to Les Soirées de Paris (1912-1914; repr., Paris: Édité, 2012), 6. The title was chosen, without ironic intent, by the critic André Billy to echo Les Soirées de Medan (1880), a volume of Naturalist short stories published by Zola, Maupassant, and four others, Joseph de Maistre’s philosophical dialogue Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg (1821), and Hygin-Auguste Cavé and Adolphe Dittmer’s satirical dramatic sketches Les Soirées de Neuilly (1827). “Dans ma pensée,” recalled Billy, “cette réminiscence était destinée à marquer le caractère à la fois amical, doctrinal et narratif que notre revue devait avoir.” (Billy, preface to Les Soirées de Paris, Paris: Galerie Knoedler, 1958, exhibition catalogue, 1).} And when Apollinaire founded Les Soirées de Paris in 1912 with four others, they collectively pledged 100 francs towards printing the first 32-page issue.\footnote{See Vielé-Griffin’s March 25, 1892 letter to Édouard Dujardin in Lesage, “Le Mercure de France de 1890 à 1914,” 1: 105.}
Financial barriers to launching a petite revue in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries may have been slight. But maintaining a petite revue in the medium term, once the existing flurry of enthusiasm had subsided, typically involved a greater financial burden than a group of jobbing authors could hope to sustain indefinitely from their own resources. The Mercure de France and La Plume remarkably managed to become financially self-sustaining, which partly depended, however, on cross-subsidisation from associated publishing houses as well as an art gallery in La Plume’s case. These were exceptions. As Vallette, who remained the Mercure’s editor until his death in 1935, wrote to Léon Deschamps, his counterpart at La Plume, in 1891: “[…l’un et l’autre nous avons eu la fortune de rendre durable ce qui d’habitude n’est qu’éphémère = la petite revue.”

Some resorted to more speculative methods. For instance, Dujardin attempted, with predictable results, to salvage the struggling La Revue indépendante by making a trip to the casino in Monte Carlo in 1888.

More commonly, those petites revues that survived for more than a year depended on the munificence of rich men. Here too the historical conjecture was favourable since the first four decades of the Third Republic constituted, notwithstanding occasional slumps, a lengthy period of peace and prosperity, during which fortunes tended on the whole to grow steadily, yielding regular interest and dividends, unaffected by the later encumbrances of inflation, world war, and progressive taxation. Since the end of the Napoleonic Wars, more than half a century had

---

308 Recent research indicates that wealth accumulated at a prodigious rate during the final third of the nineteenth century. According to indices prepared by Thomas Piketty and Gabriel Zucman, private wealth in France grew from 138 billion francs (around 640 billion euros in today’s money) in 1870 to 234 billion (over one trillion euros in today’s money) in 1900, and investments in equities or bonds would have earned a roughly five-fold return over the same thirty-year period, amid broad price stability. See “Table FR.1: National income and private wealth in France, 1820-2010 (annual series)” and “Table FR.15a: Price and return indexes in France, 1800-2010 (annual series)” in “Piketty-Zucman Wealth-Income Data Set: France 1700-2010.” These gains were heavily concentrated among the richest one-percent of French society, and wealth inequality in France peaked around the turn of the century. See Thomas Piketty, Le Capital au XXI e siècle (Paris: Seuil, 2013), 538-547.
elapsed during which modern financial and industrial capitalism was born. *Petites revues* proved to be an indirect beneficiary of this development since many of the central figures behind these publications were the sons or grandsons of bankers, merchants, and industrialists who had enriched themselves in the mid-nineteenth century. Their heirs thus possessed the means, leisure, and self-confidence to devote themselves to cultural pursuits. “In came the nice fat dividends, up rose the lofty thoughts,” as E.M. Forster remarked in an late essay looking back on his comfortable Victorian youth.309 Among the members of this rising bourgeois “leisure class,” as the US sociologist Thorstein Veblen dubbed it in 1899, were the Natanson brothers, who founded and sustained *La Revue blanche*, Jacques Copeau, André Gide, Jean Schlumberger, and eventually Gaston Gallimard, who collectively financed *La NRF* throughout its early years, and probably Edouard Ducoté, who kept *L’Ermitage* afloat for most of its existence.310 Gide, along with Vielé-Griffin and the American poet Stuart Merrill, had also previously supplied a subsidy to *Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires*.311 And *Les Soirées de Paris* ultimately received financial support from the Russian aristocrat and artist Serguei Yastrebzov (better known by his pseudonym Serge Férat).312 Notwithstanding its socialist principles, even Charles Péguy’s *Cahiers de la quinzaine* relied – once Péguy had exhausted his wife’s dowry – on the financial support of, among

---

310 See Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions* (1899; repr. New Brunswick: Transaction, 2000). Little is known about Ducoté, son of an officer killed during the Franco-Prussian War. His maternal grandfather, Claude-Marie Empaire, was a merchant who lived in Paris and then Lyon. This may have been the source of Ducoté’s fortune, which was considerable albeit not enough, as he explained to Gide in 1900, to sacrifice an additional 5000 francs per quarter to finance a theatrical project for which Gide had solicited his support. See Ducoté to Gide, Jan. 1900, in Ducoté and Gide, *Correspondance 1895-1921*, ed. Pierre Lachasse (Nantes: Centre d’Études Gidiennes, 2002), 189. On Ducoté’s grandfather, see Gérard Orsel, “Le Dico des familles du Rhône,” Rhône Gen Web, accessed May 2019, http://archone.chez.com/dico69/fam69_Empaire.htm.
311 On Gide, Merrill, and Vielé-Griffin’s support for *Les Entretiens*, see Vielé-Griffin’s March 1892 letter to Dujardin in Lesage, “Le Mercure de France de 1890 à 1914,” 1: 105 and 3: 50.
others, the young philosopher Jacques Maritain, son of a prosperous lawyer, and the lawyer and businessman Edmund “Eddy” Marix, grandson of a successful mercer, to whom Péguy once wrote: “Nous ne tenons que par vous.”\footnote{Quoted in Ugo Rolandi, Les Cahiers de la quinzaine de Péguy (Orléans: Paradigme, 2002), 94. Little is known about Marix apart from his connection to Péguy, who dedicated his poem “Le Porche du mystère de la deuxième vertu” (Cahiers de la quinzaine 13, no. 4, Oct. 1911, 13) to his friend following Marix’s death at the age of 28 in 1908 in Eltville on Rhine. Marix’s death certificate lists the names of his parents, thus establishing that he was the grandson of Salomon Marix, who built the stately Villa Elvers in Eltville. See Aug. 31, 1908, no. 43, p. 111 in Standesamt Eltville am Rhein Sterbenebenregister 1907-1910 (HStAMR Best. 919 Nr. 991), Hessisches Staatsarchiv Marburg, accessed May 2019, http://dfg-viewer.de/show/?set[mets]=http%3A%2F%2Fdigitalisate.hadis.hessen.de%2Fhstam%2F919%2F991.xml. On the history of the Marix family, their villa, and their illustrious friends, see Helga Simon, “Der Zar wie Albert Schweitzer waren zu Gast,” Wiesbadener Kurier, Feb. 13, 2009.} Many of these publishers and patrons were either Jewish or Protestant – two communities that had benefitted from the post-revolutionary culture of toleration but were nonetheless far from being fully accepted by French society, as the Dreyfus Affair, during which influential Protestants such as Senator Auguste Scheurer-Kestner came to the Captain’s defence, would illustrate. It is fitting that they should have been associated with the marginal world of petites revues, which were nonetheless gradually moving towards the centre of French literary culture.

**III.2. Education**

The educational background of publishers and contributors also played a significant role in the rise of the petites revues, which were frequently created by groups of old school friends. Indeed, an extraordinary number of instrumental figures in this milieu emerged from a single Parisian school: the Lycée Fontanes, rebaptised Lycée Condorcet (for the second time) in 1883, whose comparatively liberal approach to discipline perhaps facilitated the development of a generation of poetic dreamers.\footnote{On the atmosphere at Condorcet, see Robert Dreyfus, Souvenirs sur Marcel Proust (Paris: Grasset, 1926), 20.} Jules Laforgue, a pioneer, as we have seen, of free verse, whose works appeared in, among others, La Revue indépendante, Le Décadent littéraire, La Vogue, and (posthumously) Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires, failed his baccalauréat there during the
late 1870s. The Natanson brothers, the humourist Tristan Bernard (a regular contributor to *La Revue blanche*), Copeau, Gallimard, and Schlumberger along with two of *La NRF*’s leading authors, Proust and Roger Martin du Gard, were all educated at the same lycée as was the group of young poets, including the future sports journalist Rodolphe Darzens, Georges Michel (who used the pen name Ephraïm Mikhaël), and Pierre Quillard, who founded their own little magazine, *Le Fou*, while still at the school in 1883, and then *La Pléiade* in 1886. Among the latter’s contributors were other alumni, such as René Ghil and future radical journalist Jean Ajalbert. Several members of the same group reformed in 1889 to create the *Mercure de France*, which acknowledged this genealogy in Vallette’s introductory article to the new magazine. Another past pupil André Fontainas, soon became one of the *Mercure*’s regular critics as did his school friend, the poet André-Ferdinand Herold. In 1892, a slightly younger group of alumni, including Proust, Daniel Halévy, who went on to lead a successful career as an essayist and publisher, and the future academician Fernand Gregh, created *Le Banquet*, which was absorbed a year later by *La Revue blanche*, whose editorial secretary Lucien Muhlfeld and drama critic Romain Coolus had also attended the same lycée. Another alumnus, was *Les Entretiens*’ patron Stuart Merrill, who also contributed to *L’Ermitage*.

317 Alfred Vallette, “Mercure de France,” *Mercure de France* 1, no. 1, Jan. 1 1890, 1-5, 1.
318 See Bourrelier, *La Revue blanche*, 97, 124.
319 See Antoine Compagnon, “Stuart Merrill,” *Encyclopédie universalis*. 
Moreover, the petites revues were not just populated by former students of the school. For Mallarmé himself, who contributed to many of these periodicals, had taught English at the Lycée Condorcet between 1871 and 1884. And while his efforts at imparting the language of Shakespeare have been widely derided, the memoirs of the painter Jacques-Émile Blanche as well as the reminiscences gathered by the literary scholar Charles Chassé in 1912 indicate that at least some of his pupils were conscious and admiring of their teacher’s literary standing.320 Among them was Fontainas, who later became close to the poet and eventually founded the Académie Mallarmé in 1937, along with Dujardin, Valéry, Herold, and several others. But, according to René Ghil, the rest of the group around Le Fou and La Pléiade studied German rather than English at Condorcet, and it was only later that they entered the poet’s social orbit and began to attend his mardis.321 Among the group that founded Le Banquet, only Halévy retained a vivid memory of being taught by Mallarmé.322

Other adolescent friendships and acquaintances whose traces reappear in these publications include those of Henri Fournier (who wrote Le Grand Meaulnes under the name Alain-Fournier) and Jacques Rivière, key figures at La NRF, who attended Sceaux’s Lycée Lakanal together; of Gide and novelist Pierre Louÿs, who met at the École Alsacienne and were later regular contributors to the Mercure de France; of Jules Renard and Ernest Raynaud, founders of the same petite revue, who had met at the Lycée Charlemagne; and of Gide and future Socialist prime minister Léon Blum who both progressed from the Lycée Henri IV to La Revue blanche, having

322 See Bourrelier, La Revue blanche, 261.
founded the poetry magazine *La Conque* en route together with Louÿs. The sense of solidarity which bound *petites revues* together – the feeling that, as Vallette told Henri Mazel, the editor of *L’Ermitage*: “nous tous […] combattons le même combat” – may thus have been frequently informed by shared memories of schoolboy camaraderie. Indeed, the very title of the *Cahiers de la quinzaine* evokes, as suggested by Péguy’s *frère-ennemi* Daniel Halévy, the school copybooks through which the *Cahiers*’ founder had risen from dire poverty to the Lycée Louis-le-Grand and the École Normale Supérieure.

Notwithstanding official republican rhetoric, few others were able to use their *cahiers* as tools of social advancement. The overall number of students attending France’s secondary schools barely increased during this period. From just over 140,000 in 1865, the total expanded to around 163,000 in 1898. Indeed, as Antoine Prost points out, when the effect of increased participation among girls and the re-absorption of Alsace-Lorraine is stripped away, student numbers even remained stagnant between 1880 and 1930. A similar trend is apparent when it comes to the *baccalauréat*. In 1846, 3,903 *baccalauréats ès lettres* were awarded; nearly half a century later, in 1891, this had increased to...4,142. So while the concurrent boom in newspaper circulation tracked increasing literacy and primary school attendance, the rise, on a much smaller scale, of the *petite revue*, cannot be attributed to a surge in the number of *bacheliers*.

---


324 Quoted in Bourrelier, *La Revue blanche*, 246.

325 See Rolandi, *Les Cahiers de la quinzaine de Péguy*, 30. Following Péguy’s example, many publications, such as *Les Cahiers du cinéma*, have since used *cahiers* in their titles.


328 See Jean-Benoît Piobetta, “Le Baccalauréat de l’enseignement secondaire” (doctoral thesis, Université de Paris, Paris: J.-B. Baillière et fils, 1937), 305. There was a small secular increase among those receiving the *baccalauréat ès sciences*, bringing total numbers to over 7,000 for the first time in 1891.
A dramatic change did occur, however, in the structure of a lycée education. Traditionally dominated by the study of Latin and Greek, the focus of secondary education began to shift towards the national language amid the atmosphere of aggrieved patriotism that followed defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. In 1872, the Minister of Public Instruction Jules Simon issued a circular recommending the study of French literary history which had, up to that point, been the exclusive preserve of higher education. Though later partially retracted in the face of clerical opposition, Simon’s circular cohered with a developing spontaneous shift in the same direction among lycée teachers.\(^{329}\) The trend proved to be an enduring one. From 1874 onwards, topics associated with French literature began to emerge in the Latin questions posed in the written portion of the baccalauréat.\(^{330}\) Then came, in 1881, what André Chervel calls a “petite révolution culturelle”: the replacement of the traditional Latin composition by a “composition française sur un sujet de littérature ou d’histoire” (an exercise at which the young Marcel Proust excelled).\(^{331}\)

The founders of petites revues during the mid-1880s and 1890s were thus part of the very first generation to have studied their own literary history in school. Whereas Jules Vallès had, thirty or forty years earlier, been pushed towards polemical newspaper journalism by the alienation he felt at being forced to study Greek and Latin at the future Lycée Condorcet, the education given to the budding authors of the late nineteenth century (many at the very same lycée) effectively prepared them for careers within literary magazines dedicated to the cultivation of French verse and prose. When, after quoting at length from Hugo’s “Napoléon II,” Péguy remarks in his essay “Victor-Marie, comte Hugo” (1910) that “[n]ous avons appris cela en quatrième, sous l’excellent


M. Doret, en leçon facultative, qui était une sorte de récompense,” he attests to the transformation that was then underway.\textsuperscript{332} For to study a contemporary author such as Hugo, who had died only a year before Péguy entered quatrième in 1886, at lycée level, even in the context of an optional class, would have been improbable a quarter century beforehand (and not merely, in Hugo’s case, for political reasons).\textsuperscript{333} Indeed, Hugo and Lamartine were probably the very first living authors to be officially taught in French schools.\textsuperscript{334} In 1866 two of Hugo’s poems appeared on the syllabus for the course on French literary history taught in the fourth year of the “enseignement secondaire spécial” cycle – a programme of vocationally oriented education created by Napoleon III’s reforming education minister Victor Duruy.\textsuperscript{335} From 1880 onwards, Hugo then featured conspicuously among the Morceaux choisis des classiques français des 16\textsuperscript{e}, 17\textsuperscript{e}, 18\textsuperscript{e} et 19\textsuperscript{e} siècles taught to lycée students following the traditional classical programme in troisième, seconde, première, and rhétorique.\textsuperscript{336} The effects of this development on the young men responsible for launching the petites revues are suggested by the first issue of Le Fou, published on Feb. 26, 1883, which celebrated the fact that this date coincided with the birthday of “notre Maître à tous […] M. Victor Hugo […] le Génie le plus grand du XIX\textsuperscript{e} siècle.”\textsuperscript{337} A writer’s education obviously extends far beyond what he reads in school. But the collective study of Hugo here plausibly stimulated the collaborative endeavour of the school magazine, where the schoolboys published their own

\textsuperscript{333} At the time, pupils attended a lycée for the whole of their secondary education. The “collège” represented a parallel, less prestigious system. It was only after the Second World War that the modern division between collège and lycée emerges, whereby the quatrième class is always part of a collège. For the dates of Péguy’s schooling, see Robert Burac, Charles Péguy: la révolution et la grâce (Paris: Laffont, 1994), 32-41.
\textsuperscript{335} See Fayolle, “Victor Hugo dans les manuels scolaires,” 192.
\textsuperscript{337} La Rédaction, “Au lecteur,” Le Fou, no. 1, Feb. 26, 1883, 1.
Hugolian verse. *Le Fou* and the *petites revues* that grew out of it thus owe a debt to Messrs Duruy, Simon, and Ferry as well as Mallarmé and Verlaine.

While student numbers in secondary education were basically static, the *petites revues* may also have been given a push by the genuine expansion in higher education. With the creation of *bourses* for those preparing a *licence* or the *agrégation* in 1877 and 1880 respectively, student numbers began to increase rapidly around the time that the first wave of *petites revues* emerged. An estimated 1000 students were studying literature in 1880; this had increased to 2,358 in 1888 and their numbers more than doubled again by the outbreak of the First World War. This expansion must have provided the *petites revues* with at least some new readers. In general, however, there seem to be relatively few specific connections between the world of the academy and the *petites revues*. In his memoir of the Symbolist movement and its *petites revues* *Les Dates et les Œuvres* (1923), René Ghil devotes a single sentence to the subsequent academic trajectory of the Lycée Condorcet group to which he belonged, as if their time in higher education had constituted a mild and forgettable spell in purgatory after the idyll of school: “La nécessité de hautes études, universitaires, Ecole des Chartes, nous sépara sans nous désunir.” The former editorial secretary of *La Vogue*, Gustave Kahn, despite having attended both the Sorbonne and the École des Chartes, similarly never mentions either institution in his *Symbolistes et décadents* (1902). When he does evoke *grande école* and university students, it is to ridicule their admiration for the popular actor and author Jean Richepin (himself a former student of the École Normale): “Les normaliens s’en enorgueillissaient, les candidats aux titres universitaires l’adoraient de les avoir piétinés, les futurs poètes aimaient sa saveur rude, et les étudiants

---

340 On Kahn’s education, see France Canh-Gruyer, “Gustave Kahn,” *Encyclopédie universalis*. 

119
admiraient sa légende de force et de bohémianisme.” There is a suggestion here that the condition of being a university student or academic is inherently defined by a sense of inferiority. Richepin is admired by his former peers, according to Kahn, precisely because he has soared above them by branching out into a theatrical and literary career.

One normalien who did play a decisive role in the milieu of the petites revues was Péguy. For his Cahiers were clearly shaped by his experiences at the rue d’Ulm and the acquaintances he made there. Their single most prolific contributor after Péguy himself was Romain Rolland, who had lectured at the rue d’Ulm while Péguy was a student there (although they only became fully acquainted later). Another regular contributor was the critic André Suarès, who had previously attended the École Normale with Rolland. Péguy’s own contemporary at the École, the lycée teacher Félicien Challaye, contributed a series of reports from around the world including, as we shall see, a ground-breaking exposé of French colonialism in Central Africa, “Le Congo français,” published as a single Cahier in 1906. Péguy also devoted one Cahier to publishing a lengthy extract from Henri Bergson’s Introduction à la métaphysique as well as contributing much admiring commentary of his own about the philosopher, whose lectures at the École had inspired him.

Péguy later turned against the entire institution of French higher education, bitterly deriding the scientism of “singuliers savants” such as the literary historians Gustave Lanson and Gustave Rudler. Despite the formative influence of the rue d’Ulm, for Péguy, it was ultimately the humble instituteur – and not the maître de conférence or professeur des universités – who

---

represented the soul of the *Cahiers* and indeed of the Republic itself. Péguy did not share the purely reflexive disdain or indifference of Ghil and Kahn, but such hostility towards universities and *grandes écoles* was nonetheless an abiding characteristic of those involved in the *petites revues*, many of whom, including the editor of the *Cahiers* himself, had had failed or abandoned academic careers. “Attaquer l’Université fait partie du conformisme d’avant-garde [...],” wrote the Sorbonne professor Raymond Picard in the midst of his quarrel with Roland Barthes about the rise of the anti-historicist “nouvelle critique.”347 That was just as true at the birth of the modern university in the late nineteenth century as it was in the 1960s.

Prominent scholars were more likely to write for their own scholarly journals, *grandes revues* such as the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (whose editor from 1893 to 1906, Ferdinand Brunetière, also lectured at the École Normale and the Sorbonne348), as well as newspapers. For instance, Lanson wrote a weekly column for *Le Matin* during 1912-1913, which provided Péguy with further ammunition to hurl at the Sorbonne professor in one of his final *Cahiers*, “L’Argent suite”:

> Quel ne fut pas notre étonnement quand nous trouvâmes en quatrième, ou en cinquième page du *Matin*, ou en sixième, ou en septième, ou en huitième, parce qu’il n’y en a pas de neuvième, ces espèces de crottes de bique perdues dans les *communiqués* des petits théâtres et dans les annonces des couturiers et dans les insertions payantes des éditeurs.349

Péguy’s contempt for Lanson here merges with his aesthetic revulsion for the popular daily newspaper and its commercial tawdriness. In contrast to the austere pages of the *Cahiers*, unsullied by advertising, and prepared with the utmost personal dedication, the mere appearance of Lanson’s *feuilleton* struck Péguy as an unpardonable affront to basic aesthetic principles:

348 See Antoine Compagnon, “Ferdinand Brunetière,” *Encyclopédie universalis*.
Amid such a grotesque visual cacophony, whatever Lanson had to say seemingly did not matter and Péguy never actually addresses the content of his articles (thus judging Lanson on a contextual basis and thence adopting a quasi-Lansonian approach that he claimed to abhor.) Notwithstanding Péguy’s by now well-developed disregard for the Sorbonne and all its works, he saw his rival’s presence on the pages of Bunau-Varilla’s scandal sheet as a betrayal of common literary values. Péguy and the Sorbonne might have their differences, but surely, he insists, they ought to maintain a common front against all that Le Matin represented – namely, the overweening power of money evoked in this Cahier’s title.

Other figures involved in the petites revues tended to see the mass press and the academy, with exceptions, as two sides of the same debased coin. As Kahn wrote in an 1888 article for La Revue indépendante:

 [...] l’universitaire sérieux est un élément de la nature; mais les irréguliers, les tirailleurs, la troupe légère, M. Sarcey, Lemaître, Faguet, etc. à quoi servent-ils? Est-ce à communiquer à des jugements pondérés et décisifs sur Cocard et Bicoquet et le talent de Mademoiselle Cerny, l’autorité des Sorbonnes, des âges et des baccalauréats? Est-ce pour que les journaux à deux et trois sous puissent répéter: nous sommes informés, rien d’humain ne nous est étranger et nous possédons Celui qui peut le dire en latin, avec variantes et notes des meilleures éditions.[sic]

The three critics mentioned here – Francisque Sarcey, Jules Lemaître, and Émile Faguet – were all normaliens who combined academic careers with their roles as newspaper critics (though, in Sarcey’s case, he abandoned teaching relatively early). Cocard et Bicoquet was a piece of vaudeville then playing at the Théâtre de la Renaissance, and Berthe Cerny one of the most popular

---

actresses of her time. For Kahn, notwithstanding their superficial differences, the mass press, the boulevard theatre, and the rue d’Ulm were all part of the same despised cultural establishment, leaving the petites revues as an isolated bastion of artistic integrity, alone contra mundum.

III.3. Confronting the mass press

Kahn’s disdain for “les journaux à deux ou trois sous” points to a final factor underlying the rise of the petites revues: the sense that newspapers and grandes revues had become entirely closed off to literary experimentation and new ideas. As we saw in Chapter One, newspapers and, albeit less frequently, grandes revues in fact continued to publish works by Symbolist authors such as Gourmont, Schwob, and Mallarmé during this period. And yet those involved in petites revues were typically adamant that the mass press had become a cultural wasteland. As Vallette wrote in his article launching the Mercure de France:

Il est pertinent qu’en tout, partout, à tous les étages sociaux, il y a évolution rapide, et qu’on ne voit plus aujourd’hui comme on voyait il n’y a pas vingt ans. Mais, soit respect de la tradition, soit flagonnerie auprès d’un public inconsciemment hypocrite, la Presse se tait volontiers sur le fond des questions brûlantes. Or, ce que chacun pense et que personne ne formule, ces idées paradoxales et subversives en 1890, codifiées en 1900, il nous serait agréable d’en écrire.352

For the founder of what would become a leading petite revue, the mass press was, quite simply, failing to keep up with the times. Notwithstanding the rise of reportage, its journalists had missed the big story: the emergence of a new literary generation distinct from both Naturalism and “bourgeois novelists” such as Paul Bourget as well as the remnants of the Parnassian school. Vallette would subsequently expand this critique to encompass the practice of criticism itself, which, he declared in an 1905 article, had been neglected by “une presse où l’omnipotente réclame et l’actualité ont chassé tout le reste.”353 To accommodate this increasingly encyclopaedic

352 Vallette, “Mercure de France,” 3.
approach to reviewing new literary works, the *Mercure* swelled in size to around three hundred fortnightly pages, becoming undoubtedly the only publication in French literary history to devote regular columns to *inter alia* “Lettres tchéco-slovaques” and “Lettres catalanes.”

The editors of *La Plume* included a still more emphatic statement of intent at the beginning of their first issue in April 1889:

> “Statistique intéressante:
> “Il se publie actuellement à Paris 1748 journaux. […]”
>
> ... Eh bien, il s’en publie 1747 de trop – nous avons un journal ami – puisque aucun de ces journaux ne répond à un réel besoin littéraire. Quelle est donc celle de ces feuilles qui ne soit pas inféodée à un groupe, à une opinion, à une personnalité? Laquelle peut dire qu’elle ne tend qu’à vulgariser les œuvres dues à la plume des inconnus de talent? tout en tenant ses lecteurs au courant des productions de nos célébrités? Qui donc, dans le grand public, connaît ces noms: de Goncourt, Verlaine, d’Aurévilly [sic], Huysmans?\(^\text{354}\)

Like the *Mercure*, *La Plume* explicitly presents itself as filling a gap in the literary-journalistic marketplace. And yet the examples chosen at the end of this *cri de cœur* suggest this chasm may not have been quite as wide as the editors claim. For none of these four authors were in fact ignored by the *grande presse*. The Goncourt brothers in particular had published extensively in newspapers, which serialized many of their novels. Of the four, Verlaine alone could be considered a marginalized figure throughout his career, but even he attracted sufficient press attention to warrant the disparaging epithet *décadent*, which, as he explained to Jules Huret, he and his followers duly appropriated as their own.\(^\text{355}\)

*La Plume* subsequently launched a successful subscription to publish Verlaine’s *Dédicaces* in an issue that featured one of his poems.\(^\text{356}\) The magazine also published articles by the Catholic

\(^{354}\) La Direction, “Notre programme,” *La Plume*, no. 1, April 15, 1889, 1; italicized in the original.


\(^{356}\) See La Direction, “SouscriptionouverteparLA PLUMEPourpublierDÉDICACESparPaulVerlaine” and Verlaine, “À François Coppée,” *La Plume*, no. 21, March 1, 1890, 31-32.
polemicist Léon Bloy praising Huysmans and Barbey d’Aurevilly.357 But there is no work by the Goncourt brothers. One of Bloy’s articles says of the brothers that “[l]eur œuvre déjà n’intéresse plus que les merlans du journalisme [...]”358 For his part, Edmond de Goncourt dismisses La Plume as a “feuille de chou cannibalesque” in his Journal.359 In truth, La Plume’s young founder, Léon Deschamps, was perhaps less worried by the public’s supposed ignorance of the prolific brothers (whose books were by now selling in the tens of thousands and being successfully adapted for the theatre360) than he was by the indifference that had greeted his own novel, published à compte d’auteur.361

Péguy introduces a twist on the theme of the inadequacy of the existing press, blaming not its literary failings but its lack of political independence in the “Lettre du provincial” that opens the first of his Cahiers in January 1900. In an echo of Pascal’s Lettres provinciales (1656-1657), Péguy’s fictional correspondent bemoans the absence of reliable information in his village located far from Paris as well as the inadequacy of the newspapers he does receive. He thus beseeches Péguy to send him “toutes les quinzaines un cahier de renseignements,” in which “[t]u me diras ce que tu verras et ce que tu sauras des hommes et des événements, en particulier ce que ne sera pas dans les journaux.”362 Here too it appears the author has an axe to grind. For as his “lettre” to himself goes on to make clear, Péguy fiercely opposed the recent decision by L’Aurore (the newspaper that had published Zola’s “J’accuse!...”) to start accepting paid advertising as well as a motion carried at the socialists’ Japy Congress, held the previous month, to bring the movement’s...
newspaper *La Petite République* under direct political control. He thus presents his own publication as being effectively the only independent source of news left in the entire country. Once again, the *petite revue* here emerges as the Robinson Crusoe of contemporary French letters.

Vallette, Deschamps, Péguy, and their contemporaries were all impatient to launch literary careers and to do so on their own terms. Freed from censorship and administrative barriers, they seized the opportunity offered by the liberalism of the Third Republic to create a series of publications they could mould in their own image. Whereas Baudelaire had prefaced his *Petits poèmes en prose* in *La Presse* with an ironically obsequious dedication to the paper’s literary editor and co-proprietor Arsène Houssaye, the young writers of the Belle Époque vowed never to abase themselves before the cultural establishment. Whatever the actual state of literature in the mass press, the perceived illiteracy of newspapers and their *feuilletonistes* served as a rhetorical foil for the *petites revues*, allowing them to stake out a distinct position within the literary field.

That development is consistent with Bourdieu’s conception of the literary field as being structured around a series of oppositions, among which the most fundamental divides “la production pure, destinée à un marché restreint aux producteurs” from “la grande production, orientée vers la satisfaction des attentes du grand public [...]”\(^{363}\) But the broader circumstances underlying the rise of the *petites revues* from the 1880s onwards belie his verdict that “les changements qui surviennent continuellement au sein du champ de production restreinte sont largement indépendants dans leur principe des changements externes qui peuvent sembler les déterminer [...].”\(^{364}\) In the absence of the 1881 press law, the *petites revues* simply could not have become a laboratory of French modernist literature. It was that political transformation that proved decisive while other developments external to the literary field in education, paper production, and

---

the broader economy played a secondary instrumental role. The liberalisation of the press thus had a primary impact on the literary field that went beyond the field’s *relative dependence* upon external forces, as construed by Bourdieu.365

He himself seems to inadvertently concede this point whilst significantly misdating the rise of the *petites revues*: “quand, sous l’Empire, avec l’instauration de la censure, les grandes revues se ferment aux jeunes écrivains, on assiste à une prolifération de petites revues, pour la plupart vouées à une existence éphémère [...].”366 Censorship was indeed a crucial factor; but it was the abolition of most forms of censorship under the Third Republic and not the repressive conditions of the Second Empire – when, as we have seen, few *petites revues* existed – that made their proliferation possible. *A fortiori*, even if, as Bourdieu puts it, “[l]a révolution symbolique par laquelle les artistes s’affranchissent de la demande bourgeoise en refusant de reconnaître aucun autre maître que leur art” was already well under way during Baudelaire and Flaubert’s time, that ideological shift within the literary field was not sufficient to launch a wave of literary magazines devoted to “art for art’s sake.”367

These facts point to the limitations of Bourdieu’s model of literary autonomization, whereby artistic literature is seen as having come to constitute “un monde à part” forged in opposition to a dominant mercantile literary culture that was itself dominated by external influences.368 The writers who launched the *petites revues* from the 1880s did so in opposition to bourgeois values, but they were also buoyed by the dominant tide of bourgeois republicanism that had brought about press liberalization. Their autonomy thus developed as much in accord with forces external to the literary field as in opposition to them. Moreover, as we shall see, the *petites

---

*revues*, despite their frequent avowals of artistic hermitism, did not belong to “un monde à part,” isolated from the mass press. Such ironies and ambiguities call for a more tentative and empirical approach to literary history that situates literary works within a broad cultural context, extending, where appropriate, beyond the literary field itself. By contrast, Bourdieu’s efforts to squeeze the evolution of mid-to-late nineteenth-century French literature into a reductive theoretical structure do not capture the complex interplay of political, material, and aesthetic factors underlying literary creation during this period; nor do they do justice to the specific, concrete forms of autonomy that modernist and avant-garde writers were able to carve out within the overlapping worlds of the *petites revues* and the mass press.

**III.4. Mallarméan values**

Allied to their contributors’ sense of aggrieved independence was the conviction that these publications were reserved for the happy few. As *L’Ermitage* declared in the very first lines of its first issue:

Ami lecteur, une Revue nouvelle! A quoi bon vas-tu dire? Au fait, tu as raison.
Ne la lis donc pas, si elle te déplaît. Peut-être ton voisin sera-t-il plus indulgent.
C’est pour lui que nous écrivons.

Such a defiantly recondite stance, also signalled by this *petite revue*’s title, owed much to the example of Mallarmé, or rather to the myth of the oracular sage who was best known for being completely unknown. For instance, *La Vogue* opened its very first issue with three of Mallarmé’s

---

369 On this self-conception, see Benjamin Custis Williams, “Public Enemies: French Symbolist Rationales for a Restricted Readership” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2012), particularly Chapter 6A “Methods of Selecting and Disseminating to a Contemporary Public.” Williams portrays the *petites revues* as offering Symbolist authors a means of consciously restricting readership to a cultural elite. But, as we shall see later in this chapter, editors such as Vallette, Léon Deschamps, and Péguy were in fact eager to boost the circulation of their *petites revues*, and Deschamps in particular aggressively courted publicity to that end. Elitist declarations were thus frequently belied by the *petites revues*’ actual modus operandi. Moreover, as we shall see in Chapter Four, Mallarmé himself was keen to publicize his works in the mass press and beseeched his publisher to print his books in larger editions.

370 *La Rédaction*, “Au lecteur,” *L’Ermitage* 1, no. 1, April 1890, 1-6. 1.
prose poems published under the suitably aloof title “Pages oubliées.” This short-lived petite revue also subsequently published a lengthy critical examination of the poet’s work by his friend Teodor de Wyzewa, which concludes: “[i]l a construit si loin le temple pur de son art qu’il l’a mis à l’abri de la Gloire elle-même.” In reality, Mallarmé was fast becoming a nodal point at the centre of this literary world. As Richard Cándida Smith has noted, over twenty petites revues were founded by those who attended his mardis. And, despite the small quantity of his own writings, he contributed work to most of the major petites revues of the period including, in rough chronological order, Lutèce, La Revue indépendante, Le Chat noir, La Revue wagnérienne, Le Décadent littéraire, La Décadence artistique et littéraire, La Plume, the Mercure de France, La Revue blanche, as well as the Edinburgh-based magazine The National Observer. For La Revue indépendante, Mallarmé even authored a short poem to commemorate the opening of its new offices, which concluded:

La REVUE avec bruit qu’on nomme
INDÉPENDANTE, Monsieur, pend
Une crémallère d’or comme
Le gaz en son local pimpant.

The petites revues invariably returned the favour, devoting abundant commentary to Mallarmé’s work, which was, with occasional exceptions, effusive in its praise. Mallarmé’s association with such publications even continued long after his death as Vers et prose, La Phalange, and La NRF, among others, republished existing texts and unearthed some new fragments and letters.

As in the tributes and recollections of acolytes such as Mauclair, Morice, and Valéry, which were discussed in Chapter One, Mallarmé was consistently portrayed in the petites revues as a

371 Stéphane Mallarmé, “Pages oubliées,” La Vogue no. 1, April 4, 1886, 1-5.
373 See Cándida Smith, Mallarmé’s Children, 10.
lonely voice of poetic integrity struggling against the strident cacophony of the mass press. For Wyzewa, his was “[u]ne prose sincère, obscure aux lecteurs des journaux, mais donnant aux artistes la jouissance incomparable d’une haute pensée traduite objectivement.”375 And following Mallarmé’s death, Gourmont denounced the writer-journalist Henry Fouquier’s disparaging envoi in Le Temps with excremental gusto in the Mercure:

Cette triste polyurie s’inaugure, ici, par le bafouage du génie précieux et discret de Stéphane Mallarmé; comme tous les chroniqueurs illustres, M. Fouquier a tenu à ouvrir pendant dix minutes, sur la tête du mort glorieux, le robinet de ses judicieux aphorismes.376

Such belligerence is typical of commentary in the petites revues on Mallarmé’s relationship to the mass press. Though “Quant au livre”’s vision of “le Livre” as a hybrid of book and newspaper was first elaborated in the pages of La Revue blanche, this aspect of the poet’s thought seemingly never received any attention from his contemporaries in the petites revues. For them, it was vital to enlist the poet’s prestige within their own struggle against the grande presse, at the expense of a more nuanced assessments of his ideas. The story of Mallarmé’s life and work seemed to show that having only a few dedicated readers, earning little or no money from your work, and toiling away in dignified obscurity were cardinal virtues whose value would become clear in the long run. His example thus provided an ideological justification for the creation of petites revues and offered moral succour to those who wrote for them. For their own lack of material success could be similarly taken as proof of underlying aesthetic rectitude. To complicate this picture by conceding that the “prince of poets” was himself fascinated by the mass press would have been a betrayal of the petites revues’ elevated sense of their mission. When one is locked in, to use Alain Pagès’s

phrase, a “bataille littéraire,” one must avoid at all costs ceding any ground to the enemy.\textsuperscript{377} The petites revues defined themselves as being against the mass press and for a certain image of Mallarméan integrity. There was thus little room for rhetorical compromise between these two warring parties.

IV. A foot in both camps

Hostility to the mass press was so intrinsic to the petites revues that it manifests itself in every section of these publications from polemical essays and book reviews to literary gossip. In any issue of the Mercure, La Revue blanche, or La Plume, readers would typically find at least one attack against the grande presse and frequently many more. At times this antagonism even takes poetic form. For instance, La Plume published a sonnet in 1890 entitled “FAITS DIVERS,” whose second stanza blends Symbolist obscurity with a swipe against the Fourth Estate:

\begin{quote}
Quelle lie en la coupe infâme:
Richesse vile, amour vénal,
Critique inepte du journal
Dévidant sa plate réclame!...
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{378} Once again, the newspaper here represents all that is loathsome about modern life, from which the poet himself feels deeply alienated. A similar sense of journalistically inspired world-weariness infuses “Sur champ de départ,” a piece of light verse that the writer-journalist Jacques Dyssord published in Les Soirées de Paris in 1913:

\begin{quote}
Mes saluts aux roses Débats,
Au Journal qui trop souvent saigne,
A l’Homme, libre à telle enseigne
Qu’en est Francis Carco baba.

Au Soleil où, frileux, Dalize
Attend le soleil d’Apollo;
A tout chacun qui s’étérnise
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{378} Auguste Cheylack, “Encore un suicide d’enfant!... — FAITS DIVERS,” La Plume, no. 28, June 15, 1890, 109.
A n’avoir que Paris pour lot.\textsuperscript{379}

Newspapers and journalists – namely the art critic Francis Carco and René Dalize, son of the editor of \textit{Le Soleil}, a royalist newspaper to which he himself contributed – here become metonyms for the Parisian hurly-burly that the poet is about to leave behind as he embarks for North Africa.\textsuperscript{380} But allowing newspapers to invade the poem draws attention to their cultural prominence. As in the received idea of Flaubert’s \textit{Dictionnaire}, disparaging the mass press just shows how indispensable it has become – a paradox further suggested by the ambiguous salutation of the first stanza, where the poet bids farewell to a series of Parisian newspapers but could also be greeting them on his return. And, as noted by his friend Apollinaire in an article for the \textit{Mercure}, Dyssord, who had temporarily left France for health reasons, went on to found a weekly newspaper called \textit{La Bataille de Tunis} during his North African sojourn, having briefly edited another local newspaper.\textsuperscript{381} Moreover, both Carco and Dalize were regular contributors to \textit{Les Soirées de Paris} (the latter being one of the magazine’s founding editors along with Apollinaire, who mentions Dalize by name in his poem “Zone”). The poem thus evokes the dense web of connections between this \textit{petite revue} and the mass press, which, as we shall see in Chapter Three, would again come to the fore in Apollinaire’s pictorial poem “Lettre-Océan,” first published in \textit{Les Soirées de Paris}’s penultimate issue of June 1914.\textsuperscript{382}

\textit{Les Soirées de Paris} had a particularly high concentration of regular newspaper journalists among its contributors (including Apollinaire). But such links to the \textit{grande presse} were by no means exceptional. It was normal for \textit{petites revues} to have many contributors who also wrote for

\textsuperscript{381} See Apollinaire, \textit{Op.}, 3: 192.
newspapers, playing a hand, as it were, on both sides of the street. In this vein, Jules Renard records a revealing exchange at the founding meeting of the *Mercure*:

– Et nous donnerons le dessous au *Figaro*.
– Il ne faut pas blaguer *le Figaro*. Aurier en est.
– Et Randon aussi.383

“Aurier” here refers to Gabriel-Albert Aurier, who would become the *Mercure*’s art critic before his untimely death in 1892; “Randon” was Gabriel Randon, a poet better known under the name Jehan Rictus. At this time, as they explained at the meeting, both depended on the money they earned from supplying scraps of gossip to *Le Figaro*.384 Their co-founders’ desire to publish similar material about that newspaper in the *Mercure* is thus frustrated for eminently practical reasons. Mockery at the expense of the *grande presse* here risks carrying an unacceptable price.

Renard himself spent his entire career moving back and forth between *petites revues* and newspapers, incurring the wrath of Vallette when he explained that he would cease contributing to the *Mercure* because he could sell his writing elsewhere:

J’ai jugé Renard du jour qu’il est venu me dire qu’il ne pouvait plus rien nous donner parce qu’on lui payait sa copie à l’*Echo de Paris*. [...] Ah! la, la, la, ne me parlez jamais de ces gens-là, des gens qui nous ont lâchés dès qu’ils se sont sentis connus au boulevard. Parlez-moi de gens comme Gourmont. Il a longtemps donné sa copie pour rien, Gourmont. On n’a commencé à payer qu’en 1896, je crois.385

Vallette’s indignation here towards the man who had made the biggest single financial contribution towards the first issues of the *Mercure* is rather selective.386 For, as we saw in Chapter One, Vallette himself had written a regular column for *L’Écho de Paris* in 1892-1893 while the pre-originals of Gourmont’s *Histoires magiques* were all published in *Le Journal, L’Écho de France*

386 Renard contributed 30 francs to launching the *petite revue* (see Renard, *Journal*, 45).
or in the *Mercure*. The right to pre-publish these stories was thus shared between a *petite revue* and two popular daily newspapers, with the former benefitting from an implicit subsidy from the latter. If Gourmont – who needed to earn a living from journalism after losing his job at the Bibliothèque Nationale for publishing his anti-chauvinist essay “Le Joujou patriotisme” in the *Mercure* – was able to provide stories free of charge to the *Mercure*, this is because *L’Écho de France* and *Le Journal* paid him for others. On occasion, the *Mercure* even celebrated such connections, noting in 1892 that:

Le *Parti National* vient de confier à notre ami et collaborateur Charles Morice la critique artistique et littéraire. […]

Avec Jean Jullien au *Paris, Sainte-Croix à la Marseillaise*, Charles Morice au *Parti National*, il semble que les idées qui nous sont chères commencent à être vraiment représentées dans ce qu’on appelle la Grande Presse.  

Central figures at *La Revue blanche* such as Paul Adam, Tristan Bernard, Gustave Kahn, and Lucien Muhlfeld also simultaneously wrote for newspapers. And after that magazine had folded in 1903, a sizeable contingent of its former writers and editors, including Bernard, Blum, Renard, and Alfred Natanson, having been collectively politicized by the Dreyfus Affair, went on to participate in the creation of the socialist newspaper *L’Humanité* the following year. In 1897, the Natanson brothers had also founded a weekly newspaper of their own, *Le Cri de Paris*, whose blend of satire, illustrations, and muckraking made it, according to Paul-Henri Bourrelier, a precursor of the radical satirical newspaper *Le Canard enchaîné*.

---

La Revue blanche’s interactions with the grande presse also took a melodramatic turn when Thadée Natanson’s wife, Misia Sert (one of the models for Proust’s Mme Verdurin) became the mistress and then wife of Alfred Edwards, the sulphurous founder of Le Matin along with several other newspapers including the short-lived Le Petit Sou, which was advertised in the pages of La Revue blanche. Edwards even employed Natanson on Le Soir, another newspaper he briefly owned during 1900, which was also advertised in La Revue blanche. And when Félix Fénéon, La Revue blanche’s de-facto editor for most of its existence, subsequently sought a job in 1906 at Le Matin, where he would write his Nouvelles en trois lignes (which will be discussed in Chapter Three), it was Sert who introduced him to that newspaper’s even more disreputable proprietor, Hubert Bunau-Varilla.

The rentiers at the helm of La NRF were typically shielded from the need to write for newspapers or grandes revues (though Gide would years later become a semi-regular contributor to Le Figaro). Even here there were exceptions, however. From 1907 to 1910, Copeau was the regular drama critic for La Grande Revue, a liberal alternative to the Revue des Deux Mondes, from which Gide and Schlumberger eventually poached the critic André Suarès in exchange for an annual salary of 2,000 francs (around 8,000 euros in today’s money) – an extraordinary sum for a petite revue. Such largesse helps explain why La NRF was able to become primus inter pares within this milieu before emerging as a leading literary voice during the interwar years, when the magazine managed to maintain the image of a petite revue devoted to artistic independence whilst attaining the readership and broad cultural influence hitherto reserved for traditional grandes revues.

---

391 See Bourrelier, La Revue blanche, 78.
392 See Bourrelier, La Revue blanche, 78 and the advertisement inside the back cover of La Revue blanche 23, no. 174, Sept. 1, 1900.
393 See Datta, “‘La Revue Blanche’ (1889-1903),” 163.
394 On Suarès’s recruitment by Gide, see Anglès, André Gide et le premier groupe de la NRF, 2: 315-316.
revues, thus epitomizing the paradoxical label grande petite revue. Copeau also wrote for Le Gaulois and Le Petit Journal, briefly employing Rivière as his ghost writer – a role for which La NRF’s editorial secretary proved to be ill-equipped. Rivière’s friend Alain-Fournier worked full-time for the newspaper Paris-Journal during 1910-1912 as a kind of literary gossip columnist (sharing an office there with the poet and critic André Salmon – one of the founders of Les Soirées de Paris). In this capacity, he became increasingly close to Péguy, who soon began to feature regularly in Alain-Fournier’s “Courrier littéraire.” Notwithstanding his professed disdain for the grande presse, Péguy even published a poem about Saint Geneviève on the front page of Le Figaro in August 1913. And, in 1909, he had lamented that Anatole France did not use his feuilletons in the same newspaper to advance the cause of the Cahiers: “Si Anatole France avait seulement écrit dans Le Figaro, sous sa signature et sous sa responsabilité le vingtième de ce qu’il m’a répété vingt fois, [...] il y a dix ans que nous fussions sortis de la misère [...].” The Cahiers may have been founded to counter the failings of the mass press, but, by its tenth year of publication, Péguy had clearly concluded that they could not survive without the newspapers’ support.

Behind the façade of doughty camaraderie that characterised the petite revues’ public attitude towards the grande presse, tensions occasionally erupted. For example, in 1891, Léon Deschamps challenged La Plume’s co-founder, Georges Bonnamour, to a duel because of an obscure dispute concerning their relationship with Le Gaulois. A year earlier, La Plume had

---

395 As Maaike Koffeman puts it in her sociological study of the magazine: “Ni commerciale ni élitiste, La NRF veut servir de lien entre les différentes sections du champ littéraire. Elle est à beaucoup d’égards une revue intermédiaire: entre petite revue d’avant-garde et grande institution, entre innovation et tradition.” (Koffeman, Entre classicisme et modernité: La Nouvelle Revue française dans le champ littéraire de la Belle Époque [Amsterdam-New York, Rodopi, 2003], 131).
396 See Anglès, André Gide et le premier groupe de la NRF, 1: 258.
devoted a laudatory special issue to this newspaper, edited by Arthur Meyer (the model for the grotesque press baron in Maupassant’s *Bel-Ami*), which may thus be the anonymous “journal ami” mentioned in the preamble to their first issue (see above). As Deschamps explained in a letter to René Ghil, the special issue (whose cover features *Le Gaulois*’s logo – a cockerel perched above the slogan “Je chante clair”) had been concocted at Bonnamour’s insistence in order to get himself a job there. Agreeing to the special issue had been a “lâcheté,” wrote Deschamps (before crossing out this word), contrasting Bonnamour’s eagerness to please *Le Gaulois* with his own refusal of entreaties, supposedly from Paul Bourget, to write for the same newspaper. Like Vallette’s clash with Renard over his defection to *L’Écho de Paris*, the episode indicates how petites revues struggled to compete with the financial muscle of the grande presse whilst maintaining their integrity. Notwithstanding their recurrent declarations of independence, these little magazines were ultimately obliged to come to terms with the power of the mass press in order to remain afloat in the crowded literary marketplace of the Belle Époque.

---

Fig. 2.1. Cover of *La Plume*’s special issue devoted to *Le Gaulois* (Source: Google Books)

---

Above all else, what they needed from newspapers was publicity. And despite his retrospective qualms about the special issue devoted to *Le Gaulois*, the acknowledged master at getting newspapers to pay attention to his *petite revue* was Deschamps himself. His old *frère-ennemi* Bonnamour was the first to admit this. As he reflected in later life:

De dons littéraires médiocres, Léon Deschamps possédait, en revanche, d’exceptionnelles qualités d’animateur et d’organisateur. Ses “tendances”, auxquelles je me suis pleinement associé, peuvent se résumer en une seule formule: “[sic]créer autour des œuvres littéraires, et principalement de celles des jeunes, un mouvement de curiosité assez vif, une agitation assez profonde pour obliger la grande presse et en particulier les journaux littéraires comme le *Gil-Blas* [sic] et l’*Écho de Paris* – *le Journal* n’était pas encore fondé – à s’y intéresser.”

However loudly *petites revues* such as *La Plume* might dismiss these newspapers as bloated vessels for received ideas, Deschamps (a former chef) and Bonnamour, who had no financial cushion, were realistic enough to perceive that they could not survive without them. The challenge consisted of riding this tiger without being devoured by it. Deschamps’s letter to Ghil shows he felt (at least retrospectively) that the special issue devoted to *Le Gaulois* had been an exercise in self-abasement that had gone too far in trying to placate a degraded old hack like Meyer. The following year he duly devised a publicity wheeze that would bring the press to him: “les Dîners de *la Plume*.” These were banquets organized at a series of restaurants in the Latin Quarter. The first had, by *La Plume*’s own account, been held on a whim to celebrate the magazine’s second year of existence in April 1891, but they evolved into regular monthly events. As Julien Schuh has noted, Deschamps was probably influenced by the example of “les Dîners Magny,” which had brought together Flaubert, the Goncourts, and Sainte-Beuve among others during the 1860s. Unlike these earlier repasts (where it was agreed that “rien ne serait répété” – a rule breached by

---

403 See “Échos d’art et de littérature,” *La Plume*, no. 49, May 1, 1891, 16.
the Goncourts’ *Journal*\(^{405}\), “les Dîners de la Plume” were staged for the purposes of attracting media attention. Deschamps’s masterstroke was to invite a prominent individual associated with the *grande presse* to preside over many of these banquets. The first four “présidents” were the former editor of *L’Écho de Paris*, Aurélien Scholl, Zola, the *académicien* and veteran newspaper columnist François Coppée, and the Comédie Française’s *administrateur-général*, Jules Claretie, who also for decades contributed a weekly *chronique* to *Le Temps* under the title “La Vie à Paris.” Such a collection of literary and journalistic mastodons was bound to appear out of place among a group of hungry young Symbolist poets. And, by Renard’s account, these banquets did resemble bouts of giant-killing: “[l]es dîners de *la Plume* sont des casse-croûte où une cinquantaine de jeunes gens réunis se payent, pour cent sous, la tête d’un président chaque fois renouvelé.”\(^{406}\) But Deschamps and his fellow editors were in fact careful to cultivate these authors, who in turn paid tribute to “les jeunes” in the speeches they delivered to the banquets. When Zola was attacked for a poster advertising *La Bête humaine* “que messieurs les intègres de la Grande Presse ont trouvée obscène,” *La Plume* came to his defence, dismissing his critics as “imbéciles.”\(^{407}\) Deschamps and co. also subsequently recommended Zola and Scholl for a vacant seat in the Académie française (with Verlaine being only their third choice).\(^{408}\) As for Claretie, he had already subscribed to *La Plume* before presiding over the June 1892 banquet and maintained an affectionate correspondence with Deschamps (whom he addresses, one man of the press to another, as “mon cher confrère”) until the latter’s untimely death in 1899, and then with his successor Karl Boès.\(^{409}\)


\(^{408}\) See “Échos d’art et de littérature,” *La Plume*, no. 86, Nov. 15, 1892.

\(^{409}\) See Claretie’s letters to Deschamps and Boès, *La Plume* Archive, MNR Beta 238, Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet, Paris.
Deschamps’s efforts at securing favourable publicity proved to be astoundingly successful.

The newspapers took such an interest in the “Dîners de la Plume” that by the sixth banquet in December 1892, due to be presided over by Leconte de Lisle, whose speech was read out by Mallarmé instead, “la presse quotidienne” had a whole table to itself, at which were seated journalists from Le Journal, Le Figaro, Le Gil Blas, Le Pays, La Fin du siècle, L’Écho de Paris, Le Rappel, L’Événement, Le Voltaire, Le Télégraphe, La France, and L’Étendard. Even the international press had begun to pay attention with correspondents from Le Genevois, Le Libéral sud américain, La Ilustración española, and Aus Fremden Zungen in attendance. All these titles were carefully noted in La Plume’s own report on the proceedings.410 Such accounts would occasionally contain a note of hostility towards the newspapers whose presence was the basic point of the exercise. For instance, the text of Zola’s speech to the banquet held in his honour, which was published in La Plume, is prefaced with remark that it had been “dénaturée par des journaux mal informés – le Figaro et le New-York Herald,” giving the impression that their presence constituted a barely tolerated nuisance.411 But Deschamps’s own correspondence leaves no doubt of his true feelings concerning the publicity garnered by these bunfights. As he excitedly noted in a letter to Mallarmé after the poet had delivered his speech on behalf of the absent Leconte de Lisle:

Articles sur le banquet, [sic] dans le Gil Blas, le Journal, l’Echo de Paris, l’Événement, le Parti National, La Cocarde, Le Gaulois, Le Voltaire, le Parisien, le Courrier du Soir, le Paris, le National, la Petite République, le Pays, le Patriote, le Rappel, le Radical, La Libre Parole, la Presse, la Petite Presse, le Nouveau Siècle, l’Eclair, la Marseillaise, etc.412

---

410 “Sixième banquet de la Plume,” La Plume, no. 88, Dec. 15, 1892, 532-533.
411 See La Plume, no. 73, May 1, 1892, 187.
Another significant source of publicity for La Plume was the launch of a subscription, in August 1892, to pay for the “Monument Baudelaire” that would finally be unveiled ten years later in the Montparnasse cemetery. In the meantime, there erupted a lively quarrel as the leading feuilletonistes of the day – Barrès, France, Fouquier, Mendès – weighed in for and against the scheme. Indeed, more than two hundred articles on the subject were published during the last five months of 1892 alone.\footnote{These articles have been republished in La Querelle de la statue de Baudelaire (août-décembre 1892), ed. André Guyaux et al., Collection Mémoire de la critique (Paris: Presses de l’Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2007).} The scheme’s most dogged critic was Brunetière, who attacked it in a lengthy editorial in the Revue des Deux Mondes at the beginning of September and then again on the front page of Le Figaro three weeks later.\footnote{Brunetière, “La Statue de Baudelaire,” Revue des Deux Mondes, Sept. 1, 1892 and “Quelques baudelairiens,” Le Figaro, Sept. 20, 1892, in Guyaux, La Querelle de la statue de Baudelaire, 103-118, 223-228.} As Mallarmé wryly noted, Brunetière’s intervention “ne sera pas sans avoir attiré quelques autres souscriptions au monument.”\footnote{Quoted in Guyaux, La Querelle de la statue de Baudelaire, 21.} And it can be assumed that the controversy also brought in some new subscribers to La Plume itself, whose revenues, as reported in its own pages, nearly quadrupled between 1891 and 1892 to over 15,000 francs (about 60,000 euros in today’s money), with 79 new subscriptions being added during the first two months of 1893.\footnote{See Léon Deschamps, “Les Revues,” La Plume, no. 93, March 1, 1893, 113-114.} Typically, Brunetière was later invited in October 1893 to preside over a “Dîner de la Plume,” an invitation he cordially declined due to illness.\footnote{See “La Quinzaine littéraire et artistique,” La Plume, no. 109, Nov. 1, 1893, 466-468.}

Among his contemporaries in the petites revues, Deschamps had an unrivalled flair for attaining publicity at almost no cost (even the banquets were paid for by attendees themselves at a price of five francs per head).\footnote{Not all La Plume’s publicity was obtained at no cost. As the periodical became more prosperous, Deschamps also began to invest in billboard advertising, thereby imitating another practice associated with the mass press (see Harold Swan, “Propos Épars,” L’Ermitage 3, no. 11, Nov. 1892, 293-297. 294). La Revue blanche similarly produced a series of iconic advertising posters designed by Pierre Bonnard and Toulouse Lautrec (see Barrot and Ory, La Revue blanche, 17).} However, his concern for cultivating the grande presse was by no
means unique. It can be difficult to determine the full extent of contacts between other petites revues and the mass press given the absence, in many cases, of surviving archives (La Plume being only a partial exception). It seems clear nonetheless that those titles that attained some longevity generally maintained a “service de presse,” sending out complimentary copies both to newspaper journalists (often at their request) and to other petites revues. Some took a loftier approach. When launching La Pléiade in 1886, Ephraïm Mikhaël declared that “[i]l est inutile de faire le service des revues aux journalistes et autres marchands de copie.”419 Seven issues later, La Pléiade was gone. Le Centaure founded by Gide, Louÿs, and Henri de Régnier among others in 1896, similarly noted in its second issue, lavishly printed in-4 on vellum, that “[i]l n’est pas fait de service du CENTAURE.”420 There was no third issue. Fittingly, Le Centaure is chiefly remembered for having first published Valéry’s “La Soirée avec Monsieur Teste,” whose portrait of a reclusive rentier who has attained absolute mental self-mastery seems like an allegorical justification for literary hermeticism.421

Even in Le Centaure, there are signs, however, that this petite revue did not itself exist in a state of such splendid isolation. The second issue, published in September 1896, includes a prominent notice encouraging subscribers to read Régnier’s poems in L’Écho de Paris (which, as we saw in Chapter One, had launched a regular poetry column the previous year) and Louÿs’s short stories and chroniques in Le Journal.422 In April, a front-page article in the latter newspaper by François Coppée had helped Louÿs’s first novel Aphrodite, published by Mercure de France,

422 “Supplément au Volume II,” Le Centaure, no. 2, Sept. 1896, VII.
become a bestseller.\textsuperscript{423} Despite the defiantly recondite pose he and his fellow editors struck in \textit{Le Centaure}, Louÿs, who had vowed in 1890 at the age of nineteen that his first book would be printed in secret and spared “la plus petite souillure de réclame,” was clearly learning to live with – and profit from – the power of the mass press.\textsuperscript{424} Gide too was far from indifferent to such matters. In 1895, he urged the poet Francis Jammes to publish a collection of verse with Mercure de France because Vallette was “excellent pour la publicité.”\textsuperscript{425} And in the early days of \textit{La NRF}, he would become, as Auguste Anglès puts it, an “[e]xcellent agent de ce que nous appellerions aujourd’hui les public relations,” who, despite his disdain for the mass press, fretted constantly about maintaining the magazine’s relationship with leading \textit{feuilletonistes}, particularly \textit{Le Temps}’s Paul Souday.\textsuperscript{426} Even Valéry would ultimately benefit from such entregent in 1917, when, thanks to Louÿs’s intervention, Souday devoted an influential \textit{feuilleton} to his long poem \textit{La Jeune Parque}, which had been published by \textit{La NRF}’s nascent publishing arm (later to morph, as we shall see in Chapter Four, into the powerhouse of Éditions Gallimard).\textsuperscript{427}

Lurking behind these authors’ disdain for the mass press was an acute sense of dependency. For they needed to draw the attention of major newspapers to attract readers for their books and \textit{petites revues}. That ambivalence acquires fictional form in Valéry Larbaud’s novel \textit{A.O. Barnabooth: journal d’un milliardaire} about a young South American rentier’s dilettantish


\textsuperscript{426} Anglès, \textit{André Gide et le premier groupe de la NRF}, 1: 234.

peregrinations around Europe, which was first published in *La NRF* in 1913.\textsuperscript{428} Upon seeing his own photograph in a newspaper accompanied by a caption trumpeting his colossal fortune, Larbaud’s eponymous narrator-hero affects haughty indifference: “[j]e n’étais plus l’esclave de ce temps; je ne subissais plus la vérité des gazettes.”\textsuperscript{429} And yet he avidly reads those same newspapers, earlier noting with apparent satisfaction how “[l]e *Florence Herald* et la *Nazione* signalent mon arrivée ici, et rappellent la fête donnée au casino Barnabooth l’été dernier en l’honneur de la colonie américaine de Florence.”\textsuperscript{430} Barnabooth’s resentment and delight at his own celebrity recalls the bon mot of another fictional playboy, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*’s Lord Henry Wotton: “[T]here is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about.”\textsuperscript{431} In Larbaud’s novel, talk has become newsprint. Fame is here mediatized through the mass press as it was in Oscar Wilde’s life, though not in his work. It is thus fitting that a flamboyant Irish aesthete called Maxime Claremoris, bearing no little resemblance to Wilde, should crop up towards the end of the novel and proclaim of his own literary notoriety:

> C’était le succès: j’étais écorché vif dans les revues à grand tirage, et mon nom, dans la presse, s’entourait déjà de ce ridicule qui précède ce que notre époque, qui n’est pas difficile, appelle la gloire.\textsuperscript{432}

For Claremoris, if writers can only escape the mass press at the price of being ignored, then they may as well strive to turn its attentions to their advantage. The founders of *La NRF* seemed to take a similar view. After experiencing the frustrations of literary hermitism at *petites revues* such as

\textsuperscript{428} The novel, accompanied by a short story and some poems, was published in book form under a slightly different title by Éditions de la NRF in July 1913 (Larbaud, *A. O. Barnabooth, ses œuvres complètes, c’est-à-dire: un conte, ses poésies et son journal intime* [Paris: Éditions de la NRF, 1913]).


\textsuperscript{430} Larbaud, “A.O. Barnabooth: journal d’un milliardaire,” *La NRF*, no. 50, Feb. 1, 1913, 177-237, 188.


Le Centaure and L’Ermitage, Gide and his cohorts finally adopted a more pragmatic approach. And the magazine’s own reluctant acceptance of the inescapable power of the mass press is duly reflected in one of the first major literary works to appear in its pages.

V. Satirizing the grande presse

The parallels between newspapers and petites revues have mostly been overlooked in recent scholarship. For Alain Vaillant, who here again echoes Bourdieu’s account of literary autonomization, these two styles of publication represent fundamentally different literary and journalistic outlooks that have little in common:

Tout se passe donc comme si, à la fin du XIXe siècle, l’univers du périodique se scindait en deux secteurs de plus en plus étrangers l’un à l’autre: d’un côté le monde des revues littéraires à faible tirage mais à forte légitimité littéraire, et d’où sortiront tous les auteurs reconnus du siècle suivant […] de l’autre la grande presse quotidienne, pour qui la littérature ne serait rien de plus qu’un objet de reportage parmi beaucoup d’autres.433

Notwithstanding the numerous connections between newspapers and petites revues in terms of personnel and publicity, this judgement (which largely replicates the petites revues’ own account of their relationship to the grande presse) would still have some validity if such overlaps had had no effect on the contents of the petites revues. To adapt Chekhov’s quip about his own medical career, for many writers, journalism is their lawful wife and literature their mistress. With any luck, the two may never meet. But, as suggested by the ambivalent portrayal of journalism in A.O. Barnabooth, the opposite was the case in turn-of-the-century petites revues, whose testy interactions with the mass press frequently spilled over into their own pages.

433 Vaillant, “Avant-propos,” in “La Littérature fin de siècle au crible de la presse quotidienne,” special issue, Romantisme 33, no. 121 (2003): 3-8, 5-6. See also the diagram of the “Le champ littéraire à la fin du XIXe siècle” (205) in Bourdieu, Les Règles de l’art, which situates “petites revues” and “journalisme” at opposite ends of the field.
Satirizing the errors and stupidity of the newspapers and grandes revues was a central preoccupation of several petites revues, which occasionally devoted a regular column to this purpose. Typical of such mockery is the following jibe from La Plume, which emphasizes its own literary bona fides by using the words of Beaumarchais’s Figaro to cock a snook at his journalistic namesake:

_Le Figaro_, 10 sept. – “L’épidémie cholérique. 1ᵉʳ arrondissement: Zéro cas, _un_ décès. – 2ᵉ arrondissement: _Huit_ cas, _neuf_ décès”. Une place de statisticien était vacante rue Drouot. Il fallait un calculateur, ce fut un danseur qui l’obtint. Bravo! _Figaro_!434

The pretentions of the roman-feuilleton were another regular target:

_Voulez-vous des perles? En voici que j’ai cueillies dans un roman signé Louis Noir, en cours de publication dans le _Petit Nord_:

Le chasseur portait une blouse de chasse tachée de sang, et un pantalon de même étoffe.

_(Feuilleton du 1ᵉʳ octobre 1891.)_435

In these snippets, the emphasis is on the newspapers’ own carelessness and incoherence. The petite revue implicitly mocks the newspapers’ failure to live up to their own commitment to accurate reporting, whereas the newspapers’ own chroniqueurs and feuilletonistes would in turn ridicule petites revues for their supposed obscurity. The grande presse thus finds itself hoist on its own petard.

A more complex form of satire involved imitating articles found in the mass press and occasionally trying to pass these off as the work of genuine feuilletonistes. _La Plume_ published a series of theatre reviews signed “Francisque Sarcey” that ridicule the critic’s derivative opinions and corpulent physique.436 The early issues of _La Revue blanche_ similarly include a “Contre-enquête sur l’évolution littéraire,” written pseudonymously by Alfred Natanson, which parodies

434 “_Échos d’art et de littérature_,” _La Plume_, no. 83, Oct. 1, 1892, 110.
435 “_Échos d’art et de littérature_,” _La Plume_, no. 60, Oct. 15, 1891, 38.
436 See, for example, Francisque Sarcey [pseud.], “Rodolphe Salis,” _La Plume_, no. 5, June 15, 1889, 41.
Huret’s *Enquête* (published concurrently in *L’Écho de Paris*) whilst also poking fun at the magazine’s own founders and contributors. For instance, imagining himself to be one of the interviewer’s subjects, Natanson sends up Huret’s pseudo-Darwinian fixation on authors’ physical appearance as well as his own bohemian affectations: “Il est coiffé d’une petite toque rouge qui égaye encore sa physionomie rieuse et railleuse.”\footnote{Jean Lureau [Alfred Natanson], “Contre-enquête sur l’évolution littéraire,” *La Revue blanche: série belge* 3, no. 14, May 1891, 71-87, 72.} A response attributed to his brother Thadée similarly seems to cut both ways, mocking Huret’s embrace of American-style *reportage* but also “les jeunes”’ lofty hostility to the genre and their des Esseintes-like aestheticism: “D’abord, à vous parler franchement, je ne raffole pas des interviews, et autres importations américaines…. et puis, pour moi, il n’y a qu’un beau siècle dans l’histoire: le IIIᵉ siècle Assyrien [*sic*].”\footnote{Lureau, “Contre-enquête sur l’évolution littéraire,” 85-86.}

*La Revue blanche*’s commitment to satire deepened in 1893 when it absorbed *Le Chasseur de chevelures*, a short-lived newspaper founded by Tristan Bernard that had grown out of a column in *Gil Blas*, which became a distinct section (partly preserving the typographical appearance of a newspaper) within the *petite revue*.\footnote{See Bourrelier, *La Revue blanche*, 464.} Many of *Le Chasseur*’s targets were the same as those found throughout the *petites revues* – Sarcey and his fellow *feuilletonistes*, the spread of *reportage*, and the inadvertently comic effects of errors made by the newspapers. As in the earlier “Contre-enquête,” “la jeunesse littéraire” itself occasionally comes in for some good-humoured ribbing too. The difference in *Le Chasseur* is that satirizing the press has become its central purpose rather than a peripheral aspect of the publication. And though Bernard and his collaborator Pierre Veber, who went on to become a successful boulevard playwright, started off by insisting (in a rare display of apparent sincerity) that “les événements politiques ne nous intéressent guère que comme sujets de railleries,” *Le Chasseur*’s later editions have an increasingly
political edge. For example, April 1894’s edition includes a page-long skit in which “le commandant Quichotte” successfully demands that parliament vote for war credits to fund his expedition against “les moulins à vent.” In this article, Bernard skewers several salient features of European colonialism: the subordination of national legislatures to the military (a crucial factor in the outbreak of the First World War), the use of overwhelming violence against a largely defenceless adversary, and, above all else, the concealment of such infamy, with the willing complicity of the press, behind an opaque shield of political jargon and bombast (whereby war, for example, becomes “une expédition”). Another target is journalists’ laziness, ignorance, pretentious jingoism, and chronically short attention spans:

Les journaux officieux publièrent le soir même des détails sur les moulins à vent, puisés dans une encyclopédie:

“Les moulins à vent ne sont pas des adversaires à dédaigner. Ils sont à vrai dire d’une apparence paisible quand le temps est calme, mais dès que le vent soufflé en tempête, ils agitent des bras terriblement menaçants. Ils forment parfois des bandes bien disciplinées, et les mouvements qu’ils exécutent dénotent un souci de l’ensemble assez satisfaisant.” Des camelots vendirent des petits moulins à vent sur les boulevards.

On attendit quelques jours encore des nouvelles du brave commandant Quichotte. Puis, comme rien n’arrivait, on se désintéressa de cette affaire et l’on dilapida en paix les crédits votés par la Chambre.

Bernard writes of “journaux officieux” where we would expect to see “journal officiel” (i.e. the state’s own public record of legislative business and official directives), a play on words that emphasizes the extent to which the supposedly independent press served, with rare exceptions, as a mouthpiece for the Government on matters of colonial policy. For example, Le Temps’s chief foreign affairs commentator during the decade prior to the First World War was the future prime

---

minister André Tardieu, then a civil servant at the Ministry of the Interior and former diplomat, who continued to drop by the Quai d’Orsay each morning prior to writing his column.442

Incisive political satire was by no means unprecedented in France (though it had struggled under the repressive conditions of the Second Empire).443 What is new in Le Chasseur is the focus on the press itself as an instrument of political control employing subtler means than those of direct censorship. It is no longer simply a question of the news itself but of how it is collected, transmitted, and presented – in a word, mediatized. The malaise subsequently dubbed “bourrage de crâne” is already being diagnosed here.

Le Chasseur disappeared from La Revue blanche by the end of 1894, but its style of ribald intra-journalistic satire lived on in Jarry’s regular contributions to the magazine, published under the headings “Spéculations” and “Gestes,” which often capture the spirit of the times better than any genuine piece of reportage. For example, a vignette authored during the Boer War deftly records the steady transformation of warfare into a mediatized spectacle:

Les plus forts hommes. – Une foule nombreuse se presse quotidiennement sur un certain point du boulevard, où, derrière une vitre, deux fantoches de bois, figurant un Anglais et un Boer, luttent. [...] Le fil qui actionne les deux silhouettes est bel et bien un fil télégraphique qui les relie aux réelles opérations de l’Afrique du Sud [...].444

Like Ubu roi, whose vision of sadistic despotism in time migrated from the stage to the chancelleries of Europe, this portrayal of war as a spectator sport relayed by the press – metonymically represented by the telegraph wire – proved prophetic. As the Baron de Charlus remarks during the First World War in Proust’s Le Temps retrouvé: “Les gens de l’arrière

s’imaginent que la guerre est seulement un gigantesque match de boxe, auquel ils assistent de loin, grâce aux journaux.”

Fénéon’s interventions tended to be bitingly laconic, foreshadowing his *Nouvelles en trois lignes*. Typical of the “Passim” column that he co-authored with fellow anarchist activist, Victor Barrucand, is this gritty morsel from March 1895:

_Le 21. – Le Temps, ce journal amusant, apprécie une récente défaite navale des Chinois en y prodiguant quelques réflexions de haut bord: “C’est une réponse aux détracteurs de l’artillerie moderne, qui se lamentent du prix de revient des canons et des projectiles, et nous les dépeignent comme plus dangereux pour ceux qui s’en servent que pour l’adversaire auquel les coups sont destinés. Le Ping-Yuen sera désormais cité à l’appui de la théorie contraire, et nous ne sommes pas fâchés que les Asiatiques aient été les premières victimes de la science moderne.”_

In a variation on the idea that reality frequently ends up overtaking even the most outlandish satire, here it is the ostensibly ultra-serious _Le Temps_ that becomes a “journal amusant” on account of the newspaper’s chillingly exultant attitude towards the carnage of the Sino-Japanese War, which is portrayed in the manner of a life-size game of Battleship. Blending militarism and racism, the deaths at the Battle of Weihaiwei in early 1895 are celebrated as proof that modern artillery works. And all this appears in what was regarded as the newspaper of record (which also mistakenly reports here that the _Ping-Yuen_, a Chinese gunboat, had been sunk, whereas it had in fact been captured intact and was then re-commissioned into the Japanese navy). Once again, it is left to the humorous _petite revue_ to make a deadly serious point about the war-mongering of the _grande presse_. Moreover, given the naval arms race that was about to erupt in Europe (which contributed to international tensions in the run-up to the First World War), Barrucand and Fénéon’s entry in

---

445 Proust, _RTP_, 4: 373.
446 Barrucand and Fénéon, “Passim,” _La Revue blanche_ 8, no. 42, March 1, 1895, 240. For the original article quoted here, see “Effet de l’artillerie dans un combat naval,” _Le Petit Temps_, Feb. 21, 1895, 4.
“Passim” can, like Jarry’s sketch of war as a mediatized spectator sport, be considered altogether prescient. Their concern for exposing the distortions and manipulations of the mass press also makes La Revue blanche into a forerunner of satirical publications such as Le Canard enchaîné, which counted Tristan Bernard among its earliest contributors, and which continues still today to make extensive use of the device of satirical quotation. As in the Natansons’ petite revue, the essential point remains that of hoisting politicians and rival journalists on their own petard.

Péguy’s Cahiers may not have shared Fénéon and Jarry’s mordant wit, but they too sought to emphasize the specific failings of newspaper journalism in a way that went beyond routine hostility towards the mass press. This was particularly true of the Cahiers’ own reportage, which, as we shall see, often drew attention to the lies and omissions of existing coverage. Péguy also provided a succinct theorization of the need for such a reflexive approach to journalism in the course of his diatribe in “L’Argent suite” against Gustave Lanson and other academics who moonlighted as popular journalists:

Ils veulent bien que l’on commente tout. Mais ils ne veulent pas que l’on commente le commentaire. Ils veulent bien que l’on critique tout. Mais ils ne veulent pas que l’on critique la critique. Ils ne veulent pas que l’on écrive le pamphlet des pamphlets. 448

The Cahiers’ editor here appeals for a kind of journalism directed at journalism itself. He is asking a form of Juvenal’s question: Quis custodiet ipsos custodies? For the sake of Truth and Justice, critics, commentators, and pamphleteers must, contends Péguy, be subjected to the same scrutiny they apply to others. And “le pamphlet des pamphlets” is exactly what Péguy attempts in “L’Argent suite,” even if his indignation occasionally seems to outrun his intelligence (for instance, he provides no evidence here that Lanson and his supporters really were quite so viscerally opposed to the very principle of such criticism). There were also bigger and more

rapacious fish in the Parisian press pool whom Péguy let off the hook. Lanson is here attacked just
for writing in Le Matin, yet the paper’s owner Maurice Bunau-Varilla, responsible for countless
acts of journalistic skulduggery, never gets taken to task. In 1911, Péguy even refused a Cahier
attacking André Tardieu, probably because Tardieu’s anti-German views now coincided with his
own. Péguy thus applied his own formula unevenly. But the principle itself of reporting on the
reporters and commenting on the commentators is a vital one.

For there can be no genuinely free press in the absence of such a critique, which had
hitherto only found expression in veiled fictional form in novels such as Illusions perdues and Bel-
Ami. Only in the wake of the Dreyfus Affair did some newspaper journalists also begin to
tentatively question the often-sinister forces affecting their own trade. And the mass media today
remain habitually reluctant to scrutinize themselves. An essential niche thus exists for publications
at the margins of the mass press that aim to hold journalism itself to account. In a small way, this
is the role that La Revue blanche and the Cahiers played in their own time and even helped invent.
Far from being cut off from the grande presse, as Alain Vaillant claims, these and other petites
revues frequently acted as a kind of journalistic watchdog, barking at the newspapers’ endless
trespasses against both language and their own stated editorial principles.

VI. Discourses and counter-discourses

The brittle symbiosis between petites revues and the grande presse has occasionally
attracted brief commentary in scholarship about this topic. “[L]e microcosme des gens de lettres
[...],” Robert Jouanny has written, “révèle vite ses limites. Derrière les revues, au public forcément
limité, la presse: le journalisme est l’un des mirages du temps. Bel Ami réussira là où Rubempré a

449 See Burac, Charles Péguy, 184.
450 On journalistic self-criticism in the wake of the Dreyfus Affair, see Dominique Kalifa, “Le Journal,” in Les
2009), 91-100.
échoué.”451 For some, notably Maurice Barrès, who went from authoring his own unsuccessful one-man magazine Les Taches d’encre in 1884 to becoming a prolific contributor to newspapers such as Le Figaro and Le Journal, petites revues duly constituted a mere stepping stone towards the greater glory and financial rewards of the mass press. Indeed, one of the founders of La Pléiade, the poet Louis-Édouard-Léon Pilate (who used the pseudonym Louis-Pilate de Brinn’Gaubast), recommended La Revue blanche to a friend in 1895 for precisely this reason: “Le public de ce périodique est très utile, beaucoup plus étendu que celui du Mercure, et absolument différent. La Revue Blanche [sic], c’est, pour ainsi dire, le vestibule des grands journaux dits ‘boulevardiers.’”452 Authors who did break into the mass press often attracted the scorn of those they left behind. As the poet-journalist Charles Vignier complained to Jean Moréas in 1888: “Quand cesserons-nous de flétrir sous l’appellation de reporters ceux d’entre nous qui, plus chanceux ou plus outillés, ont réussi à s’introduire dans un vrai quotidien?”453

For Yoan Vérilhac, Vignier’s antagonists may well have had a point:

[...] le phénomène des petites revues fin-de-siècle peut être lu, aussi, comme le signe le plus criant de la profonde compromission des décadents et symbolistes avec le siècle… Cette génération, qui se donna visiblement pour tâche d’achever et parfaire la construction d’une arche salvatrice à l’art pur, est aussi celle que l’on peut décrire comme une foule de “professionnels du journalisme.” Les symbolistes sont aussi ceux qui définirent leur pratique contre l’âge de papier, que ceux qui se jetèrent dans la cohue médiatique.454

Vérilhac is right to emphasize the extent of the Symbolists’ association with the mass press. And it is clear, notably in the case of La Plume, that such involvement could on occasion create tensions within the milieu of the petites revues. But the suggestion that these authors thereby profoundly

452 Quoted in Bourrelier, La Revue blanche, 257.
454 Vérilhac, La Jeune Critique, 28-29.
compromised their own integrity seems unwarranted. The example of *La Revue blanche* shows that, on the contrary, robust engagement with the *grande presse* could form the basis for a powerful and original critique of its flaws. Moreover, it is unlikely that such an approach could have been developed in the splendid isolation sought (and then abandoned) by figures such as Louÿs. For being “le vestibule des grands journaux” meant that the *La Revue blanche* was in an ideal position to satirize those very same newspapers. Unlike most other *petites revues*, which were typically based around the Latin Quarter, the offices of *La Revue blanche* were, for much of its existence, situated on the Right Bank’s rue Lafitte, at the heart of the traditional newspaper district. *La Revue blanche* was thus able to straddle two worlds, a quality that came to the fore during the Dreyfus Affair when the magazine turned into a rallying point for *les intellectuels*. 34 of its existing contributors signed at least one of the two petitions in defence of Dreyfus published in *L’Aurore, Les Droits de l’Homme*, and *Le Temps* just after Zola’s “J’accuse” in January 1898 (and more than twenty other signatories, including Péguy, went on to write for the magazine).455 *La Revue blanche* then published its own unsigned “Protestation” against the treatment of Dreyfus and Zola in February along with a dozen more articles dealing with the Affair over the course of the following two years.456 Central figures at the magazine were also heavily involved in the formation of the Ligue des Droits de l’Homme, with Thadée Natanson serving on its central committee as one of three representatives of the press, alongside the publishers of *L’Aurore* and *Le Siècle*.457 By contrast, other *petites revues* tended to keep their distance (the *Mercure de France* constitutes a partial exception but was hopelessly split between Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards, with Gourmont attempting to occupy an implausible neutral position). *La Revue blanche* thus became

455 See Bourrelier, *La Revue blanche*, 621.
more closely associated with two radical campaigning newspapers than its fellow petites revues, but that alliance was hardly forged at the expense of its integrity. Quite the opposite: the editors’ willingness to throw themselves into the struggle for Truth and Justice was proof of genuine high moral purpose. All in all, far from trading away its principles in a series of compromises with the grande presse, the magazine’s willingness to confront and come to terms with such forces proved to be the making of La Revue blanche, which, alone among fin-de-siècle petites revues, succeeded in attaining a position of broad cultural and political influence beyond purely literary circles. What distinguished La Revue blanche from recondite petites revues such as Le Centaure and L’Ermitage was the editors’ recognition that it can be necessary to emulate one’s enemies in order to attack them more effectively. A great anti-journalist, as per the title of Paul Reitter’s book about the early twentieth-century Viennese polemicist Karl Kraus, must simultaneously be a great journalist.458

La Revue blanche could be seen as embodying a series of what Richard Terdiman calls “counter-discourses,” to wit “discursive systems by which writers and artists sought to project an alternative, liberating newness against the absorptive capacity of […] established discourses.”459 La Revue blanche certainly challenged the mass press by satirizing the established discourse of newspaper journalism. Indeed, it could even be considered an instance of what Terdiman calls “counter-journalism” with the capacity to disrupt the press’s “self-satisfied mechanism of reproduction.”460 But Terdiman’s argument is that such a critique is bound to be self-defeating: “The contesters discover that the authority they sought to undermine is reinforced by the very fact of its having been chosen, as dominant discourse, for opposition.”461 From this perspective, two

459 Terdiman, Discourse/Counter-Discourse, 13.
460 Terdiman, Discourse/Counter-Discourse, 314.
461 Terdiman, Discourse/Counter-Discourse, 65. Terdiman identifies “dominant discourse” with Bourdieu’s concept of habitus – to wit “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as
great unfinished monuments of late nineteenth-century opposition to the bourgeois order, Flaubert’s *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and Marx’s *Capital*, become examples of the dominant discourse’s tendency to overwhelm all attempts at outflanking it. For Terdiman, Marx and Flaubert’s penchant for gathering an endless compendium of facts, culled from the writings of their antagonists, meant they themselves risked turning into Bouvard and Pécuchet and “being drowned by their own collections.”462 By these lights, the strategy of turning the arms of the bourgeoisie against itself eventually tends to backfire.

Did *La Revue blanche* and other petites revues succumb to this fate? Jacques Dyssord’s “Sur champ de départ,” with its portrayal of the mass press’s inescapable hold over his colleagues at *Les Soirées de Paris*, seems to corroborate Terdiman’s theory. *Les Soirées de Paris* also published a series of articles purporting to make fun of individual newspapers whose tame jibes and long-forgotten in-jokes are closer to flattery than satire.463 In these cases, the dominant discourse does indeed appear to have swallowed up the putative counter-discourse. But there is little evidence of such discursive cannibalism in *La Revue blanche*, where the quotations wielded by Fénéon and Barrucand mocked the biases and pretentions of the mass press whilst they themselves maintained an icy distance. Underlying their journalistic satire was an uncompromising commitment to revolutionary and anti-colonial politics, which shines through their selections and accompanying commentary. Indeed, Fénéon was an active anarchist militant who had been tried

---

462 Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse*, 225.
and acquitted for blowing up the Restaurant Foyot on the rue Vaugirard in 1894. Whether or not he was in fact guilty (as his biographer believes him to have been), it is clear he approved of what was known as “the propaganda of the deed,” having openly defended similar bombings in the past. These are not the thoughts or actions of a man who was potentially in thrall to the dominant discourse. His sense of brevity also marks him out in this respect. Whereas Flaubert and Marx may have been physically and intellectually overwhelmed by the tasks they set themselves in *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and the later volumes of *Capital*, Fénéon’s critique was expressed in a series of trenchant fragments that never convey any sense of being dominated. If Flaubert and Marx are the heavy cavalry that risks getting bogged down in the muddy battlefield, Fénéon and his collaborators at *La Revue blanche* are nimble *francs-tireurs* taking well-aimed pot shots at the enemy and then moving on before their position has been discovered. They may not defeat the mass press; nor are they defeated by it. Terdiman’s theory that dominant discourses inevitably reassert themselves in the face of counter-discourses cannot account for such diversity.

A tendency to cast complex cultural phenomena in monolithic terms is also apparent in Terdiman’s treatment of the press. As he sees it, newspapers epitomized the hegemony of bourgeois ideas in nineteenth-century France: “their ubiquity, their very banality, stand as signs of dominant discourse self-confidently bodied forth.” And here again the spectre of *reportage*, though he does not use the word itself, looms ever larger: “[…] *l’information* […] increasingly dominated the increasingly dominant discourse of the mass-circulation dailies.” Terdiman thus equates the dominant discourse with *reportage*, which, from his perspective, is intrinsically incapable of playing any contestatory role. He does not specifically discuss the *petites revues*, but,

---

466 Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse*, 134.
given that Mallarmé’s prose works (which Terdiman singles out as the foremost example of “absolute counter-discourse”\textsuperscript{467}) were mostly published in such magazines, it seems warranted, on this reading, to deem them veritable bastions of resistance to the advance of l’information. Vérilhac concurs:

\[
\text{[...]} \text{lorsque la petite revue s’occupe d’élaborer un discours d’actualité, c’est souvent contre les codes du journal et de la revue [viz. la grande revue]. Du point de vue de la langue, notamment, la recherche formelle, la préciosité et la complexité des formulations marquent une volonté de s’abstraire du modèle communicationnel efficace de la grande presse.}\textsuperscript{468}
\]

By these lights, newspapers’ enthusiasm for the concise American-style journalism of faits divers and reportage is precisely what differentiates them from the petites revues (which typically insisted as much in their own pages).

\textbf{VII. Reportage in the petites revues}

\textbf{VII.1. Enquêtomanie}

Given the persistence of the dichotomy between literature and reportage in recent criticism, it is remarkable to discover the extent of reportage within the petites revues themselves. For they repeatedly denounced this genre as the height of meretricious vulgarity yet simultaneously published countless pieces of reportage, notably extensive enquêtes, whereby dozens of notables would be asked for their opinions on the pressing issues of the day. Ever alert to the possibilities of stirring publicity-generating controversy, La Plume published enquêtes – whilst avoiding this term itself – about topics including illustrated posters (such as those created by Jules Chéret and

\textsuperscript{467} Terdiman, \textit{Discourse/Counter-Discourse}, 289. Terdiman never specifically defines “absolute counter-discourse” but presents this concept as being exclusively realized in the form of prose poetry, which seeks, “a total exclusion of dominant discourse” (280), whereas mere counter-discourse, such as Marx and Flaubert’s prose, attempts to reappropriate its antagonist. As we saw in Chapter One, when applied to Mallarmé, this analysis ignores the abundant textual evidence in \textit{Divagations} that the dominant discourse of newspaper journalism is, on the contrary, explicitly and consciously \textit{included} within his prose poetry.

\textsuperscript{468} Vérilhac, “La Petite Revue,” 366.
Toulouse-Lautrec), the institution of marriage (which, as one respondent noted, had already been the subject of an enquête by London’s Daily Telegraph), and Émile Zola.\(^{469}\) They also twice organized what they called “le Congrès des poètes,” which anointed Verlaine and then Mallarmé doyens of French poetry, as chosen by their peers. The first of these “congrés” in 1894 was initiated by Le Journal and then completed by La Plume.\(^{470}\) Much of the material from the newspaper was simply re-printed in the magazine. An exercise that served to boost Mallarmé’s profile considerably (due to subsequent newspaper coverage) thus had its origins in the grande presse.

The Mercure de France published a steady stream of enquêtes throughout the 1890s on subjects such as the twenty-five worst books ever written, the Franco-German relationship, Alexandre Dumas fils, Alsace-Lorraine, and the use of photographic illustrations in novels, which collectively ran to hundreds of pages.\(^{471}\) Aside from parodies of enquêtes found elsewhere (such as the previously discussed “Contre-enquête sur l’évolution littéraire”), La Revue blanche conducted its own surveys on topics including the influence of Scandinavian literature and the education system.\(^{472}\) And in 1897, at Fénéon’s instigation, the magazine undertook a ground-breaking enquête about the Paris Commune, soliciting the views and recollections of many surviving participants.\(^{473}\) This survey was a far from neutral exercise given the bitterness and official amnesia associated with these events. Here again, Fénéon was effectively rewriting the


\(^{470}\) See “Résultats du Congrès des poètes,” La Plume, no. 132, Oct. 15, 1894, 405.


rules of the game, turning an otherwise banal and passive form into an active political statement. As Bourrelier puts it: “[e]n ouvrant une enquête, la *Revue blanche* rompt le silence à un moment où beaucoup d’anciens peuvent encore témoigner et réalise un travail de mémoire qui revêt une immense valeur libératoire.”474 The magazine made similarly radical use of another tool associated with the mass press (particularly *Le Matin*475) when it launched a public campaign in favour of distributing bread free of charge, which sparked a vigorous debate in numerous newspapers both at home and abroad.476

Such effective political agitation was unique among the petites revues. But recourse to enquêtes became a standard publicity device. Even the defiantly recondite *L’Ermitage* undertook a survey on poetry in February 1902 in a vain attempt at boosting its tiny readership.477 Only *La NRF* remained impervious to this trend. As the poet and critic Léon Bocquet remarked in its very first issue: “Que d’enquêtes! On fait assaut d’idées ingénieuses et réponses hâtives et spirituelles. Tout cela ne prouve pas grand’chose, mais contribue à lancer habilement une revue.”478 So numerous were these surveys throughout the petites revues that some even spoke of “enquêtomanie.”479 But the very first example of the genre published in the French press was Huret’s “Enquête sur l’évolution littéraire” for *L’Écho de Paris* in 1891.480 A form originally devised by the grande presse thus came into its own in the petite revue, where fewer space constraints allowed responses to be printed at great length. Indeed, one of the many obvious

---

474 Bourrelier, *La Revue blanche*, 552.
479 See Corpet and Fréchet’s “avant-propos” to “Les Revues d’avant-garde (1870-1914): enquête de MM. Maurice Caillard et Charles Forot.”
advantages of *enquêtes* is that they guaranteed an abundant supply of free copy. And, as Huret’s *Enquête* had shown, a successful *enquête* could shape events rather than merely report them. Like the “Dîners de *La Plume*” and the subscription to build a statue of Baudelaire, *enquêtes* were journalistic spectacles that aimed to manufacture publicity-generating controversy (as well as political change in the case of *La Revue blanche*). For example, when the *Mercure* conducted its survey of like-minded authors about the recently deceased Alexandre Dumas fils in 1896, the predictable conclusion that they generally did not consider this prince of the boulevard a great writer created an equally predictable backlash among the major *feuilletonistes*. Gourmont responded in the *Mercure* that this was exactly what he and his colleagues had anticipated: “Ces contre-appréciations furent logiques et dans le ton que l’on attendait.”\(^\text{481}\) The *petite revue* here seems to be goading the *grande presse* for the sake of its own amusement whilst exulting in the resulting attention. Far from being overwhelmed by the dominant discourse of the newspapers, it is the *Mercure* that finds its authority bolstered by the attacks directed against it.

**VII.2. Grand reportage**

*Enquêtes* were by no means the only form of *reportage* that appeared in the *petites revues*, which frequently published snatches of gossip about goings-on in the literary world. As *La Plume* informed its readers in 1889:

> Le prochain roman d’Emile Zola, dont nous avons déjà parlé, sera intitulé: *la Bête humaine*. Il paraîtra dans la *Vie Populaire*.

> Ajoutons qu’on a annoncé il y a quelque temps que M. Zola, pour mieux se rendre compte de certains aspects, avait fait un voyage sur une locomotive; cette nouvelle, fausse alors, est vraie aujourd’hui, car, il y a quelques jours, M. Zola partait sur une locomotive qui le conduisait à Chartres par le train de 8 heures 20 du matin.\(^\text{482}\)

\(^{482}\) Noel Chandey, “Échos d’art et de littérature,” *La Plume*, no. 3, May 15, 1889.
This titbit, which purports to constitute a minor scoop, would not have been out of place in any of the major literary newspapers such as *L’Écho de Paris* or *Le Journal*. With such articles, *La Plume* implies that it is an authoritative source of exclusive information on literary matters, aping the enthusiasm for *reportage* that it decries elsewhere (notably in a thunderous article by Léon Bloy attacking “le reportage littéraire”).

But *reportage* in the *petites revues* extended beyond the cloistered universe of books and bookmen. Péguy’s *Cahiers* and *La Revue blanche* stand out in this respect. For they published several pieces of *grand reportage* in which the personal experiences and attitudes of the writer, typified by liberal use of the first-person singular, play a central role. These included detailed eyewitness accounts of working-class militancy, colonial outrages, and the conduct of the French military.

*La Revue blanche*’s anti-militarist bent was particularly pronounced during the latter years of Fénéon’s *de-facto* editorship when the magazine published several articles by soldiers criticizing the army from the inside (sometimes anonymously). One of these articles recounts the use of torture on indigenous detainees in Algeria; another, written by a reservist, describes the tedium of being called up to take part in manoeuvres. And perhaps the most significant of all the pieces of *reportage* to appear in *La Revue blanche* concerned the military penal colony at the Château d’Oléron on the western coast of France. This article was written in 1901 by the young anarchist militant and ex-military convict Gaston Dubois-Desaulle, who was killed shortly

---

afterwards in Abyssinia.\textsuperscript{486} Having successfully infiltrated the prison, Dubois-Desaulle records in exhaustive detail the inhumane conditions under which inmates were held, including systematic use of torture. His findings are backed up by diagrams and surreptitiously taken photographs as well as correspondence from a military civil servant and former inmates (who were, like Dubois-Desaulle himself, all ex-\textit{pénitenciers militaires} – i.e. soldiers who had been court-martialled). At the end of the article he also encounters a warden in a nearby café who, unaware that he is talking to a reporter, describes how detainees are frequently shot out of hand for minor infractions. Dubois-Desaulle’s article is not just \textit{reportage} but a work of what was not yet called investigative journalism. Having been picked up by the entire Parisian press, the story became a scandal that prompted the Minister of War to pay a personal visit, supposedly unannounced, to the Château d’Oléron, whereupon he claimed – to Dubois-Desaulle’s disbelief – that the abuses described in the article had already been corrected since \textit{La Revue blanche}’s reporter had undertaken his investigation the previous year.\textsuperscript{487}

\textbf{The Cahiers de la quinzaine}’s commitment to \textit{reportage} was clear from its very first issue, which includes Péguy’s own eyewitness account of a Dreyfusard demonstration led by socialist leader Jean Jaurès. As in the first “Lettre du Provincial,” which immediately precedes this article, Péguy here emphasizes the corrosive influence of the mass press, which is capable of grinding down even such a giant as Zola in the eyes of an otherwise exultant crowd:

\begin{quote}
Il faut que cet homme ait labouré bien profondément pour que la presse immonde ait porté contre lui un tel effort de calomnie que même en un jour de gloire la foule,
\end{quote}

\footnotesize

cependant bienveillante, eût comme une hésitation à saluer le nom qu’elle avait maudit pendant de longs mois.\textsuperscript{488}

The implication is that the Dreyfusard movement needs the support of publications such as the Cahiers in order to counter the relentless propaganda of the mass press. It is necessary to fight reportage with reportage so that the truth may win out. The same militant style is on display in “Quatre jours à Montceau,” an article published by Péguy’s assistant André Bourgeois in March 1901 that describes a miners’ strike in Burgundy.\textsuperscript{489} In contrast to the Revue des Deux Mondes, which had denounced this action as “une grève qui a éclaté sans motif appréciable, sans raison sérieuse,” seemingly without its journalist ever setting foot in the town, Bourgeois, as suggested in the title, makes the journey with notebook in hand and sets down the facts of the matter along with closely observed details of daily life there.\textsuperscript{490} He then arrives at an equally trenchant but diametrically opposed conclusion:

Alors qui l’emportera? Qui le sait? Cela n’a pas un bien grand intérêt. Cela n’a même pas du tout d’intérêt que les similaires de Montmaillot obtiennent ou n’obtiennent pas cette fois-ci la même paie que leurs camarades des autres puits. On sait bien que cette concession faite ne changera en rien la condition des travailleurs. Il n’est pas douteux qu’après cette grève, d’autres grèves viendront. Car tout ceci n’est bien qu’un épisode d’une longue lutte maintenant irrévocablement engagée.\textsuperscript{491}

Whereas the Revue des Deux Mondes had presented the Montceau strike as an isolated and negligible incident, for Bourgeois and the Cahiers, its true significance lies in a broader pattern of working-class militancy, which would be further explored in two dispatches from Belgium and Finland the following year.\textsuperscript{492} Reportage here both documents and participates in that political

\textsuperscript{488} Charles Péguy, “Le ‘Triomphe de la République,’” Cahiers de la quinzaine 1, no. 1, Jan. 5, 1900, 24-49, 37.

\textsuperscript{489} André Bourgeois, “Quatre jours à Montceau,” Cahiers de la quinzaine 2, no. 9, March 19, 1901, 44-72.

\textsuperscript{490} Francis Charmes, “Chronique de la quinzaine,” Revue des Deux Mondes 71, no. 5, March 1, 1901, 229-240, 230. Bourgeois does not himself mention this article.

\textsuperscript{491} Bourgeois, “Quatre jours à Montceau,” 72.

struggle. Rather than a neutral, transparent medium for communicating a set of accepted and incontrovertible facts, for the Cahiers, reportage is about fighting over what those facts really are. Describing the strike as an inexplicable epiphenomenon or as evidence of a universal historical trend is to offer two radically different accounts of what had actually happened. At a time when reactionary newspapers such as Le Matin and Le Petit Journal maintained a posture of bogus impartiality, the Cahiers thus stood out by making plain their own political affiliations.

The Cahiers’ commitment to social revolution at home was paralleled by exposés of imperialist crimes abroad. In 1901, the civil servant André Dally (writing under a pseudonym) wrote an article detailing atrocities committed by French soldiers in the wake of China’s Boxer Rebellion, which Dally had witnessed while serving as an army paymaster.\footnote{Lionel Landry [André Dally], “Courrier de Chine,” Cahiers de la quinzaine 2, no. 5, Jan. 28, 1901, 67-79.} And the following year, the Cahiers published an account of the everyday brutality of French colonial rule in Indochina by the lycée teacher Félicien Challaye.\footnote{Félicien Challaye, “Courrier d’Indo-Chine,” Cahiers de la quinzaine 3, no. 7, Jan. 16, 1902, 53-72.} As in other petites revues such as La Plume, the term reportage itself is never used in these dispatches. But what impressed Péguy about their contributions, as well as Bourgeois’s Montceau article, was their basis in eyewitness observation – reportage’s defining feature:

\begin{quote}
Ce qui m’intéressait dans les courriers que Landry [i.e. Dally] nous envoyait de Chine, ce qui m’intéresse dans le courrier que Challaye nous apporta d’Indo-Chine, c’est justement que ces deux personnes, ayant voyagé dans ces deux pays, et y étant demeurées, nous contèrent ce qu’elles y virent. Qu’est-ce que le courrier de Challaye, sinon la narration personnelle de ce que Challaye vit en Indo-Chine. [sic]
Et quand Bourgeois nous fit un courrier de Montceau, qu’était-ce que ce courrier, sinon la narration personnelle de ce que Bourgeois avait vu à Montceau. [sic] – J’étais là, telle chose m’advint: toute l’histoire est là.\footnote{Péguy, “Personnalités,” Cahiers de la quinzaine 3, no. 12, April 5, 1902, 60-61.}
\end{quote}

For Péguy, like Jules Vallès, as we saw in Chapter One, being there and seeing what happened are the fundamental qualities of authentic journalism. In contrast to the armchair journalistic analysis

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{Lionel Landry [André Dally], “Courrier de Chine,” Cahiers de la quinzaine 2, no. 5, Jan. 28, 1901, 67-79.}
\item \footnote{Félicien Challaye, “Courrier d’Indo-Chine,” Cahiers de la quinzaine 3, no. 7, Jan. 16, 1902, 53-72.}
\item \footnote{Péguy, “Personnalités,” Cahiers de la quinzaine 3, no. 12, April 5, 1902, 60-61.}
\end{itemize}
of the kind Fénéon ridiculed in *La Revue blanche*, Dally, Challaye, and Bourgeois’s willingness to go into the field makes their contributions essential reading.

Challaye himself emphasized the failure of the mass press to uncover the truth about France’s “mission civilisatrice”:

Beaucoup de républicains croient encore, beaucoup de journaux républicains disent encore que, si les associations religieuses sont dangereuses en France par leur opposition au pouvoir civil, elles servent du moins dans le monde la cause de la nation française. Je reviens d’Extrême-Orient avec l’impression très forte que le mal fait par les associations religieuses en France est minime, comparé au mal fait par elles en Indo-Chine.\(^{496}\)

The contrast between the “journaux républicains” complacently recycling official propaganda at home and the “je” who sets off to discover the truth abroad could not be clearer. In Challaye’s later articles, this critique of the press hardens into full-blown animosity. From being naïvely misinformed, the newspapers now become complicit in the ghastliest aspects of colonial rule. Happening upon an article in a Tonkinese newspaper that bemoans restrictions on the use of corporal punishment against the native population, Challaye remarks:

> Ceux qui ne connaissent l’Indo-Chine que par les renseignements officiels et mensongers de notre presse et de nos grandes revues s’étonneront qu’un civilisé, qu’un Français, puisse regretter de ne pouvoir légalement battre l’Annamite à la “cadouille,” – “faire voltiger en l’air à coups de rotin les lambeaux de la chair” de l’indigène.\(^{497}\)

While the local colonial newspapers banalize torture, their counterparts in France dupe their readers into believing that all is well. And yet Challaye also suggests, in a later article, that people get the press they deserve: “Par les journaux se précise et se fortifie la tyrannie de l’opinion.”\(^{498}\)

\(^{496}\) Challaye, “Courrier d’Indo-Chine,” 62.

\(^{497}\) Challaye, “Second Courrier d’Indo-Chine,” *Cahiers de la quinzaine* 4, no. 9, Jan. 13, 1903, 69-72, 70.

\(^{498}\) Challaye, “La France vue de Laval,” *Cahiers de la quinzaine* 5, no. 12, March 15, 1904, 13-85, 32. This remark can also be read as an implicit rebuke to the sociologist Gabriel Tarde’s influential theory of public opinion, in which the mass press is seen as having an essentially positive, moderating influence (see Gabriel Tarde, *L’Opinion et la Foule* [1901; repr., Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1989]).
Newspapers may help to shape and amplify the conventional wisdom, but they do not create it *ex nihilo*.

Challaye was not entirely immune to such tyranny himself. For his views on colonialism were those of a paternalistic imperialist who believed in his own version of the civilizing mission:

Le régime colonial est un fait; c’est un fait actuellement inévitable, tenant à des conditions géographiques et historiques nécessaires, à la situation relative des peuples dans l’espace et dans le temps. Un peuple non européen militairement et économiquement faible est destiné à être le sujet d’un peuple européen militairement et économiquement fort.  

This Marxist-inflected vision of colonialism’s historical necessity was shared by Péguy himself (and also, with reservations, by Jaurès). For them as for most other European socialists, colonial powers had a responsibility to govern backward territories humanely in the name of progress. From this perspective, the role of reportage was to uncover abuses in European colonies in the hope that the resulting outcry would force governments to introduce reforms and punish the perpetrators. Such a critique clearly fell far short of *La Revue blanche*’s outright hostility to the entire colonial project (though even Fénéon’s opposition is implicit and bound up with his general rejection of all state authority). To this extent, the dominant discourse of colonial reportage does seem to have seeped into Challaye and the Cahiers’ counter-discourse, which reproduces many of the racist assumptions found in the writings of Henry Morgan Stanley and other imperialist cheerleaders.

Yet there is no doubting the sincerity and iconoclasm of Challaye’s attacks on the depredations of French colonialism, which assumed heightened political importance in “Le Congo

---

français,” a subsequent Cahier based on his experiences during the 1905 Brazza mission as secretary to the explorer Savorgnan de Brazza, who had previously founded and ruled over the colony, where the capital Brazzaville already bore his name, and who was now dispatched to investigate what transpired to be accurate claims of rampant brutality perpetrated by concessionary companies and the colonial authorities. Brazza died during the return voyage, depriving the mission of an influential figurehead capable of defending its incendiary findings. As the Chamber of Deputies then prepared to suppress both the evidence gathered by Brazza and its own commission of enquiry’s bowdlerized report into the affair, Challaye published several critical articles in Le Temps and La Revue de Paris. They both resiled, however, from printing his most damning conclusions, which left the Cahiers. As Challaye later wrote: “Aucune revue d’alors n’eut [sic] accepté d’article sur ce sujet dangereux. Mais les Cahiers étaient là.” Péguy had already published a similar indictment of what he pointedly termed “le Congo léopoldien” the previous year. Its author Pierre Mille, a journalist and novelist later dubbed “a French Kipling,” and Challaye then joined forces to produce a third Cahier, entitled “les Deux Congo,” which assimilates the French Congo to its already notorious Belgian-controlled neighbour, undermining official claims that French rule was relatively benign. As Challaye himself admitted, these efforts had little effect. His contributions to the Cahiers nonetheless reflected an emerging consciousness of colonialism’s crimes, typified by the Anglo-Irish diplomat Roger Casement’s

505 Pierre Mille, “Le Congo léopoldien,” Cahiers de la quinzaine 7, no. 6, Nov. 21, 1905.
507 See Challaye, Péguy socialiste, 149.
reports of 1904 and 1912 on the Belgian Congo and the Putomayo region of Peru. In his Cahiers, Challaye may not have broken with all the era’s dominant ideas concerning Europe’s relationship with Africa, but he still produced an assessment that was courageous for its time and showed official propaganda about the “mission civilisatrice” to be a myth. It would thus be inaccurate and unfair to label him a stooge of the dominant discourse. Indeed, Challaye, like Casement, eventually concluded that the whole colonial enterprise was an inherently sinister racket.\textsuperscript{508} His own investigative reportage is what brought him to that realization.

\textit{Reportage} in the petites revues was not always so enlightened. For example, during the First Balkan War in 1912, \textit{Les Soirées de Paris} published two articles, by one of its founding editors André Tudesq and the novelist Jérôme Tharaud, that are littered with bellicose clichés. Encountering a band of Montenegrin shephards, Tharaud swoons before “la bravoure d’un peuple qui se bat quotidiennement depuis cinq siècles” and “cette virilité qui frappe si vivement l’étranger.”\textsuperscript{509} Tudesq thumps his chest with only slightly less ardour in his paean to the “hardis volontaires” battling for control of “la montagne infernale.”\textsuperscript{510} These articles could easily have appeared in any sensationalist newspaper, and Tudesq had indeed been dispatched to cover the war as a correspondent for \textit{Le Journal} while Tharaud decided to tag along in search of adventure.\textsuperscript{511} There is no doubt that the dominant discourse is here, as Terdiman would put it, “self-confidently bodied forth.” By contrast, \textit{La NRF} published a more measured set of observations from the same conflict by Pierre de Lanux, the magazine’s former editorial secretary, who adopts a more elliptical and literary tone than Tudesq or Tharaud but nonetheless describes himself in the text as a

“[j]ournaliste français.” Lanux’s sense of equanimity seems in keeping with the cool aestheticism of La NRF’s editorial outlook just as Tharaud and Tudesq’s giddy machismo is consistent with the rambunctious attitude of the group around Apollinaire. Their underlying philosophical and aesthetic differences are thus reflected in diverging approaches to reportage.

Such connections were not always so clear cut. In 1912, La NRF serialized Tharaud’s novel La Fête arabe, a thinly veiled piece of reportage co-written with his brother Jean, that concludes with a rhapsodic ode to native warriors serving with the French army in Algeria: “Puissions-nous conserver toujours l’inébranlable amitié de vos cœurs et vous trouver toujours fiers et fidèles sur vos petits chevaux, pour les charges guerrières et les joyeuses chevauchées de la mort!” A little magazine more commonly given to publishing ruminative works such as Larbaud’s A.O. Barnabooth could thus also accommodate expressions of chauvinistic bloodlust redolent of the extreme-nationalist newspaper L’Action française (whose ideology, as we shall see in Chapter Three, was in fact viewed sympathetically by several founders of La NRF, including Gide).

Similar incongruities crop in other petites revues. Despite its anarchist leanings, La Revue blanche published a regular financial column. The equally high-minded Revue indépendante experimented with its own “Causerie financière,” and even La NRF made space for such mercantile musings (while excluding “La Vie financière” from its index and pagination). The “quatrième page des journaux” bemoaned by Mallarmé thus encroached upon the very same petites revues that offered a refuge to his writings. La Revue blanche also briefly published a “critique de sport,” co-written by Tristan Bernard and Léon Blum, where we find the future leader of the Front Populaire assessing the form at Longchamp and handicapping runners and riders for the Prix du

---

512 Pierre de Lanux, “En Serbie (Octobre-Novembre 1912),” La NRF, no. 53, May 1, 1913, 726-743, 739.
511 Jean and Jérôme Tharaud, “La Fête arabe,” La NRF, no. 40, April 1, 1912, 598-655, 655.
Such eclecticism illustrates that the *petites revues* and the men involved in them (for they were almost always men, with the notable exception of the *Mercure*’s veteran novel critic Rachilde, who was married to Vallette) cannot be easily pigeonholed. *La Revue blanche* published both hard-hitting investigative journalism and stock tips, Symbolist poetry and racing coverage. *Les Soirées de Paris* published both aesthetically radical poems and politically reactionary reportage.

Dominant discourses thus mingled with counter-discourses in their pages. But it does not follow that the relationship between them was inherently and inevitably parasitic (Terdiman’s word), and that the counter-discourse thereby always ends up being dominated. There are cases where Terdiman’s analysis is apt, but these do not point to a universally applicable theory. And the error of his approach is precisely to try to squeeze a variegated set of cultural relations into a single explanatory framework.

*La Revue blanche*’s courageous exposés of imperialism’s crimes and follies were no less authentic for its financial commentator’s suggestion that readers profit from the Spanish-American War by piling into the temporarily distressed stock market. And *Les Soirées de Paris*’s atavistic war reporting does not vitiate the originality of Apollinaire’s “Le Pont Mirabeau,” which first

---

515 Tristan Bernard and Léon Blum, “Critique de sport,” *La Revue blanche* 6, no. 32, June 1894, 575-576 (The Prix du Jockey Club is referred to in the text by its less commonly used name “le Derby.”).

516 In face of criticism, notably from Jeremy Popkin, that his theory does not account for the social and political diversity of the press in nineteenth-century France, Terdiman has since partially restated his position, conceding that newspapers themselves could on occasion play an authentically contestatory role. However, his view of the relationship between dominant and counter-discourse as fundamentally parasitic remains unchanged. If counter-discourses appear in newspapers, it is, he insists, because they have been co-opted by the mass press. Yet the presence of reportage in the *petites revues* suggests that publications on the margins of journalistic culture were just as capable of co-opting and transforming elements of the dominant discourse without sacrificing their integrity, a possibility Terdiman never seems to consider. See his “Afterword: Reading the News” and Popkin’s “Press and ‘Counter-Discourse’ in the Early July Monarchy,” in *Making the News: Modernity and the Mass Press in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. Dean de la Motte and Jeannene M. Przyblyski (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 351-376 and 15-42. Popkin subsequently expanded his critique of Terdiman in *Press, Revolution, and Social Identities in France, 1830-1835* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

517 See “Chronique financière,” *La Revue blanche* 15, no. 116, April 1, 1898, 560.
appeared in the same magazine. The presence of some conventional and reductive journalism in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century petites revues emphasizes their similarity to the grande presse in some respects. But those likenesses do not signal the irresistible march of the dominant discourse right across their pages. After all, if one’s antibodies are strong enough, then one need not catch a cold from the person sitting next to us. Exposure to the virus may even enhance the body’s own resilience. And the presence of reportage in petites revues could likewise be as much a sign of aesthetic innovation and ideological resistance as of domination by the mass press.
CHAPTER THREE

Literary Actualité in and around the Petites Revues

Valéry, Proust, Suarès, Claudel et moi-même, si différents que nous fussions l’un de l’autre, si je cherche par quoi l’on nous reconnaîtra pourtant du même âge, et j’allais dire: de la même équipe, je crois que c’est le grand mépris où nous tenions l’actualité.


L’information envahissait [sic] peu à peu, dans les gazettes, le terrain réservé – au moins nominativement – à la littérature, pourquoi la littérature ne se glisserait-elle pas par représailles dans le domaine de l’information?


I. Things present worst?

“[L’]art doit-il être palpitant d’actualité?” asked Théophile Gautier in an article for *Le Figaro* in 1836. The poet-journalist swiftly concluded it should not: “[N]ous n’hésiterons pas à dire que l’art doit être rétrospectif et s’occuper le moins possible de ce qui est autour de lui.”

Such skepticism towards *actualité* – meaning topicality, of the moment – is a recurring theme throughout nineteenth-century French letters. The word, derived from the adjective *actuel*, was of contemporary coinage (as late as 1873, Émile Littré described it as a neologism in his *Dictionnaire de la langue française*). As was the case with *reportage*, that very novelty, frequently signalled by italics, itself brought an aura of discredit. In her fictional travelogue *Lettres d’un voyageur* (1837), George Sand disparaged the fashionable contempt for religion expressed by “[I]es hommes d’actualité (comme on dit maintenant),” whose absorption in the present meant they lacked any sense of history. And Balzac cast a similarly jaundiced eye over the transient

---

520 Théophile Gautier, “Chronique,” *Le Figaro* Nov. 18, 1836, 1.
521 According to the ninth, most recent edition of the Académie française’s dictionary, the term *actualité*, derived from the scholastic Latin *actualitas*, was also used in medieval philosophy where it denotes the “[q]ualité de ce qui, de virtuel qu’il était, est devenu actuel, existe en acte.”
passions of his countrymen in *Eugénie Grandet* (1834): “Il est dans le caractère français de s’enthousiasmer, de se colérer, de se passionner pour le météore du moment, pour les bâtons flottants de l’actualité. Les êtres collectifs, les peuples, seraient-ils donc sans mémoire?” Here, in other words, was a modish word for modish people with a goldfish-like cultural memory.

And yet Balzac had previously argued in an 1830 newspaper article that it paid to possess “le secret du langage à la mode” – typified here by the neologism *actualité* – since dropping such a fashionable word into conversation was a good way of gauging whether one’s interlocutor was truly fashionable himself. Though delivered in tones of worldly irony, that advice anticipates Vautrin’s more substantive counsel to Lucien at the end of *Illusions perdues*, where the crafty old criminal remarks that “tout est dans la forme” and tells the young hero that he must learn to decode the signs of the social world whilst dissimulating his own intentions. By these lights, even if *actualité* itself might be a superficial preoccupation, only those who master its semiotic rhythms can hope to understand what is happening around them. Balzac duly absorbed himself in *actualité* to write the social history of his era in *La Comédie humaine*. Moreover, as Marie-Ève Thérenty has noted, many of Balzac’s early novels, notably *La Peau de chagrin* (1831) – which begins “Vers la fin du mois d’octobre dernier” – are explicitly set in the recent past, making them *romans de l’actualité*.

*Actualité* also had more forthright defenders. In *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823), Stendhal does not use the substantive itself, but his defence of romanticism in this pamphlet is based on the idea that writers should address topical concerns in their work: “Le romanticisme est l’art de

---

présenter aux peuples les œuvres littéraires qui, dans l’état actuel de leurs habitudes et de leurs croyances, sont susceptibles de leur donner le plus de plaisir possible.”

The two subtitles given to *Le Rouge et le Noir* (1830) – *Chronique du XIXe siècle* and *Chronique de 1830* – similarly emphasize Stendhal’s commitment to exploring the unfolding historical drama of his own time within literature. Moreover, both Gautier and Sand were themselves far from consistently dismissive of *actualité*. As we saw in the Introduction, Gautier extolled works of art imbued with *modernité*, which he treated as a near synonym for *actualité*. In a review of the 1845 Salon, the poet-critic similarly offered fulsome praise for Horace Vernet’s epic painting of the Battle of the Smala, where the French had routed Algerian forces in 1843: “L’actualité du sujet (comme on dit aujourd’hui), la dimension énorme du cadre, arrêtent tout d’abord l’attention.”

And Lucienne the narrator-heroine of Sand’s novel *La Confession d’une jeune fille* (1865) bemoans her backward upbringing in rural Provence, where “les nouvelles nous arrivaient de Toulon déjà vieilles, et ma grand’mère s’était si bien habituée à vivre en retard du mouvement général, qu’on l’eût effrayée en la pressant de s’intéresser à une actualité qui était toujours le passé pour elle.”

That isolation from the present, adds Lucienne, bred “une indifférence un peu fataliste,” which retarded her own intellectual development. Sand had also written extensively about the then-recent political events of the July Revolution in her first novel *Indiana* (1832), which Sainte-Beuve praised for its portrayal of “un monde vrai, vivant, *notre*, à cent lieues des scènes historiques et des lambeaux de moyen âge [...].”

---

531 Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, “Indiana,” in *Nouveaux Portraits et critiques littéraires*, vol. 2 (Brussels: Société belge de librairie, 1836), 90.
Gautier, Sand, and Balzac’s tergiversations about actualité reflect a broader sense of cultural and political turbulence in the mid-nineteenth century amid quarrels between partisans of romanticism and classicism, and royalism and liberalism, whose bewildering contours Balzac satirizes in Illusions perdues, where the journalist Lousteau tells Lucien, newly arrived in Paris, that he better pick a side because “[s]i vous êtes éclectique, vous n’auriez personne pour vous.” And yet eclecticism was an unsurprising consequence of such theoretical tumult as individual authors were torn between competing visions of tradition and innovation. In the course of a disorderly struggle for the soul of the Republic of Letters, attitudes towards the concept of actualité itself duly assumed a protean guise.

Commentators in fin-de-siècle petites revues were, by contrast, more consistently hostile towards actualité and its incursions upon literature. Reviewing a play by Henri Meilhac, who had previously written the libretto of Bizet’s Carmen, for La Revue indépendante in 1888, Gustave Kahn pointed to allusions to the then-current rise of General Boulanger as evidence of the work’s gossipy shallowness: “L’actualité coule à pleins bords, elle déborde, elle est contente d’elle et fait des nouvelles à la main.” Lucien Muhlfeld similarly attacked the mass press in La Revue blanche six years later for its obsession with ephemeral contingencies: “les raisons d’écrire sur tel ou tel sujet dans la presse sont immédiatement, puérilement, commandées par les ‘exigences de l’actualité’, comme dit le Petit Journal.” And, as we saw in the previous chapter, Vallette would later execrate “une presse où l’omnipotente reclame et l’actualité ont chassé tout le reste” in the Mercure de France.

532 Balzac, Illusions perdues, 253.
As these fulminations suggest, *actualité* was by the end of the century becoming synonymous with journalism, which perhaps explains the hardening of attitudes since the mid-nineteenth century. Whereas Littré makes no mention of the press in his laconic definition – “État de ce qui est actuel; chose actuelle” – the eighth edition of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (1932-1935), whose seventh edition (1878) includes no entry for *actualité*, emphasizes the word’s journalistic connotations: “Le souci de l’actualité est l’essence du journalisme. Un bon journaliste est à l’affût des actualités.” The *petites revues*’ disdain for *actualité* thus coheres with their broader hostility towards newspaper culture. If a fixation on topicality itself seemed discreditable, this is because it had become the central preoccupation of the mass press.

That aversion presents an obvious paradox. For, as we saw in Chapter Two, the *petites revues* became a laboratory for new literary styles and forms. They also frequently reproached the mass press for its indifference or antipathy to those developments. The *petites revues* were, in other words, devoted to shaping and exploring the current state of French literature. They also published many pieces of *reportage* about politics and topical cultural developments. And yet the *petites revues* simultaneously denigrated *actualité* itself. Here again, the received idea of Flaubert’s *Dictionnaire* seems apt. Fin-de-siècle *petites revues* thundered against the mass press and its obsession with *actualité* even as they strove to keep up with the times themselves. Like Baudelaire, whose conception of modernity entails a passionate commitment to *actualité* in explicitly journalistic form, as typified by Constantin Guys’s newspaper sketches, these publications sought to capture the cultural zeitgeist. Unlike Baudelaire, late nineteenth-century *petites revues* were generally reluctant to acknowledge even equivocally that journalistic *actualité* could be a source of artistic modernity. And yet, as we shall see, topical, journalistic themes manifest themselves not just in the *reportage* published in these *petites revues* but also in poetry, novels, and other literary
works that appeared in their pages. Moreover, contributors to *La Revue blanche* appropriated the journalistic genre of the *fait divers*, adding a distinctly literary flavour to their accounts of everyday misery and absurdity. *Petites revues* became, in other words, a laboratory of what might be called “literary actualité,” as their contributors, who, as we saw in Chapter Two, often simultaneously wrote for the mass press, transformed news stories into literature.

### II. Grands faits divers

As we saw in Chapter One, Mallarmé’s “Variations sur un sujet,” published in *La Revue blanche* in 1895-1896, frequently broach topical issues such as the Panama Affair, anarchist bombings, and black magic. Versions of five of these articles were then republished at the end of *Divagations* under the heading “Grands faits divers” alongside versions of two articles that had originally appeared in *The National Observer* and extracts from his earlier book *La Musique et les Lettres*, which, as we also saw in Chapter One, had begun life as a lecture that was initially published in *La Revue blanche* in 1894.

Calling these prose poems or *poèmes critiques* “Grands faits divers” both emphasizes their journalistic origins and evokes an overarching vision of their collective significance. As Bertrand Marchal comments: “Cette section [...] réhabilite le fait divers pourvu qu’il soit grand, c’est-à-dire qu’il révèle quelque chose du mécanisme social [...]”535 What preoccupies Mallarmé is not so much the so-called *faits divers* themselves as the broad pattern of societal disorder underlying them. Indeed, the label *fait divers*, which usually, though not exclusively, referred to news of accidents, crimes, and other quotidian horrors, would not normally have been applied to a major governmental scandal such as the revelations about the systematic bribery of politicians and journalists by the Panama Canal Company. By relegating the Panama Affair to the status of a *fait

---

535 *Note in Mallarmé, Oc*, 2: 1654.
divers, Mallarmé suggests that it is a mere symptom of a general crisis of civilization. Mallarmé here lends an ear to what he calls “le canon de l’actualité” to try to pick out a signal from the mediatized noise generated inter alia by political violence, corruption, class conflict, stock-market crashes, and the decline of traditional religion amid a contemporary mania for occultism. And what he discerns, as we saw in Chapter One, is a spiritual vacuum that will, he hopes, be filled by a civic religion grounded in a new form of poetry that will harness the dynamism of the mass press. Mallarmé’s Un coup de dés then offers a glimpse of that transcendent vision of literary-journalistic hybridity. His “Grands faits divers” – which are not necessarily faits divers at all – duly come to seem like a springboard for the truly grand endeavour of “le Livre.”

Other contributors to petites revues paid close heed to faits divers in the usual sense of the term. Jarry’s “Spéculations” and “Gestes” in La Revue blanche frequently recycled bizarre stories he had encountered in the press. For instance, in February 1901, Jarry devoted part of his column to the strange case of “La cervelle du sergent de ville”: “On n’a point oublié cette récente et lamentable affaire: à l’autopsie, on trouva la boîte crânienne d’un sergent de ville vide de toute cervelle, mais farcie de vieux journaux.” The image of a policeman’s newspaper-stuffed head might seem like a satirical swipe at what would later be dubbed “bourrage de crâne,” implying that, amid rising moral panic about crime fuelled by the press (extensively analyzed in Dominique Kalifa’s L’Encre et le Sang), even the forces of order have succumbed to lurid myths of omnipresent “rôdeurs” and “apaches” peddled by sensationalist newspapers such as Le Petit Journal. And yet the story, which had previously been reported in Le Temps, was true. An autopsy performed on the exhumed corpse of a policeman killed in a traffic accident had indeed

---

537 Alfred Jarry, “Spéculations,” La Revue blanche 24, no. 185, Feb. 15, 1901, 301.
539 “Une autopsie impossible,” Le Temps, Jan. 31, 1901, 3 (see the notes to Jarry, Oc, 2: 814).
revealed that his brain had been removed during a previous illegal autopsy conducted by some medical interns and replaced by scraps of old newspaper. Jarry duly jokes that the public would be better served if the heads of policemen were stuffed with pages torn from the *Code pénal* and Parisian street-maps.

In another instalment of his “Spéculations” entitled “Les Sacrifices humains du 14 juillet,” Jarry relates a series of bloody *faits divers* that had appeared in the press in the days following that year’s Bastille Day. He then cocks a snook at the Republic’s own violent origins: “Il paraît que la justice va considérer [les tueurs] comme des criminels; leurs prétendus crimes ont pourtant, comme les meurtres précédents, été commis le 14 juillet: pourquoi deux mesures et deux poids? Nous ne voyons pas la différence.” As in the story of the policeman’s newspaper-stuffed skull, the *faits divers* here become a prelude to the concluding punchline. Jarry seems less interested in the significance of these events themselves than the fuel they provide for his own mischievous insights, which on occasion convey a clear political message. For instance, Jarry recounts the story of a black man who had headbutted a waiter in a Belleville café and absconded without paying his bill, actions, he quips, that make the attacker an “émule admirable” of rapacious European explorers such as Henry Morton Stanley.

In contrast to Mallarmé’s “Grands faits divers,” while these squibs certainly evoke a sense of ambient chaos and lunacy, they do not convey any overarching vision of civilizational crisis, let alone its resolution. And, as Julien Schuh has noted, that lack of overall coherence perhaps explains why Jarry’s efforts to put together a collection of his columns for *La Revue blanche* in book form never came to fruition. What Jarry’s “Spéculations” and “Gestes” do share with Mallarmé’s

---

541 Alfred Jarry, “Paris colonie nègre,” *La Revue blanche* 24, no. 188, April 1, 1901, 537.
“Grands faits divers” is an emphasis on the instrumental value of news stories. “Le fait divers est la menue monnaie de l’information,” Jarry would later write in *Le Canard sauvage*, a short-lived successor to *La Revue blanche*.543 “Les faits divers,” he added, “comprennent tout ce qui n’est pas important.” The true importance of such journalistic loose change thus lay in the imaginative possibilities it gave Jarry to satirize the bizarreries and hypocrisies of the era.544

In 1901-1902, *Le Revue blanche* also published four articles by the novelist Charles-Louis Philippe under the heading “Faits divers,” where some recent *faits divers* become a tool of still more emphatic social critique.545 Consisting of Philippe’s accounts of six recent murders and one brutal assault along with some reflections on the experimental use of hypnotism on disturbed children in an Indiana mental hospital (as reported in *Le Journal*546), these dismal tales combine laconic precision with flashes of dry wit – “Est-ce que nous n’avons pas tous voulu ‘bouffer le nez’ à quelqu’un?” wonders Philippe of a cannibalistic assault in a rural mental asylum – and an often disturbing degree of sympathy for the criminals themselves.547 “Le Crime de la rue Monsieur-le-Prince,” which recounts the impulsive murder of a Parisian prostitute by a teenage Belgian tailor, straight off the train from Brussels, duly concludes with an emphatic plea on behalf of the murderer, buttressed by a (mis)quotation from *The Idiot*:

> Le jury de la Seine a condamné Jansen à un an de prison. Il avait dix-huit ans, pratiquait l’honnêteté, vivait, marchait, et n’avait pas eu de chance. La vie de Paris l’avait atteint du premier coup. Nous eussions tous pu commettre son crime, le jour même où nous avions quitté notre mère. Il y a une phrase de Dostoïevski que nous

543 Alfred Jarry, “Faits divers,” *Le Canard sauvage*, no. 28, Sept. 27, 1903, [5].
544 David F. Bell, drawing on the example of “Paris colonie nègre,” has similarly noted of Jarry’s attitude towards *faits divers*: “The fictional and theatrical nature of the fait divers is [...] an invitation to make of it what one wants, to turn it, for example, into a veritable tool for analysis and reflection.” (David F. Bell, “La Chandelle verte and the fait divers,” *L’Esprit créateur* 24, no. 4 [winter 1984]: 48-56, 53).
Given the light sentence imposed by the jury, it is doubtful many will share Philippe’s belief that a great injustice had been done here. And such an eccentric view of right and wrong underlines the intensity of the author’s anarchism and misogyny (he would later write, in *Le Canard sauvage*, of another fait divers: “Voici des hommes d’un grand courage! Et s’ils se sont attaqués à des vieilles femmes sans défense, c’est parce que l’ouvrier, même le meilleur, choisit la matière la plus tendre, même si son outil est bien tranchant.”). At times, Philippe also lurches into sub-Dickensian sentimentality, as in his conclusion to the story of a veteran English criminal who bludgeoned a Parisian actress during a botched robbery: “Gilmour le voleur, Gilmour le forçat, Gilmour ‘orphelin sans asile’, demandait que la redingote qu’il portait pendant les débats fût retirée du greffe et vendue au profit des pauvres.”

In themselves, Philippe’s “Faits divers” might seem like no more than an historical curiosity that shed a little dark light on the warped deeds and passions of the era. Novelists had often borrowed from such material in the past. *Le Rouge et le Noir* and *Madame Bovary* were, for instance, both possibly inspired by real faits divers that Stendhal and Flaubert had encountered in the press. What is new in these articles is that Philippe devises subversive literary allegories

---


551 Regarding *Madame Bovary*’s connections to the Delamare Affair among other faits divers, see Claudine Gothot-Mersch, *La Genèse de Madame Bovary* (Paris: José Corti, 1966), 19-42; on *Le Rouge et le Noir*’s connections to the Berthet and Lafargue cases, see Ansel and Berthier, “Le Procès Berthet,” in Stendhal, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, 1: 1139-1144.
within the condensed form of the crime story, to which he appends brief concluding commentary (also a common feature of contemporary newspaper *faits divers*), whereas *faits divers* in Jarry’s “Spéculations” and “Gestes” generally serve as a trigger for his own expansive ruminations. Philippe’s “Faits divers” differentiate themselves from the *faits divers* we would read in a newspaper, yet, unlike Mallarmé’s “Grands faits divers” or Jarry’s squibs, they remain structurally and thematically consistent with the underlying journalistic template. And, as we shall see, Philippe’s literary appropriation of that journalistic genre would have a significant afterlife.

All these works appeared in *La Revue blanche* under the aegis of Félix Fénéon. As Thadée Natanson later remarked: “De 1894 à 1903, il ne fut pas seulement le secrétaire de la rédaction, il fut la *Revue Blanche* [sic].” Fénéon himself wrote little during these years. As we saw in Chapter Two, he did co-author the regular “Passim” column in *La Revue blanche*, where he and Victor Barrucand added mordant commentary to scraps of political news, along with some *faits divers*, culled from the mass press. Fénéon contributed similar material, again largely focused on political news but, on occasion, also featuring *faits divers*, to several anarchist magazines. And, as Wolfgang Asholt has noted, in these satirical columns, Fénéon “développe une critique sociale par le fait divers qui n’est pas sans analogies avec les procédés des ‘Nouvelles en trois lignes’ [...]”

The latter was the title of a regular unsigned column, consisting of brief news stories mostly recycled from wire reports, that began to appear in the newspaper *Le Matin* in October 1905. The following May, Fénéon became a regular contributor to the column, where he published over 1200 *nouvelles* throughout the rest of 1906. What had been humdrum filler items acquired in Fénéon’s hands eerie poetic and political force. That effect is accentuated by the form of the newspaper

---

552 Quoted in Bourrelier, *La Revue blanche*, 199.
A fake bomb, a near-fatal accident worthy of *Loony Tunes*, gang crime, anti-clerical intimidation, and a politically charged assault – five vignettes of anomie, violence, and sheer stupidity here form, in Baudelaire’s phrase, a dense journalistic “tissu d’horreurs.” As in Baudelaire’s own poetry, those horrors are sublimated within a blend of incongruously refined language – “illusoirement chargé de grès fin,” “un revolver à détente trop douce” – and a more vernacular register – “Sur quoi, celui-ci le poignarda.” The collision of demotic and poetic language is further underscored by the fact that Fénéon’s own *Nouvelles* were published indiscriminately alongside those written by other journalists. Indeed, only the first two and the last of these five *nouvelles* have been attributed to him.\textsuperscript{554} Fénéon’s *Nouvelles* are not the “Poème populaire moderne” triumphantly bursting forth from the front page envisioned by Mallarmé but a discreetly subversive

\textsuperscript{554} The first two are included in Félix Fénéon, *Nouvelles en trois lignes*, ed. Patrick and Roman Wald Lasowski (Paris: Macula, 1990), 46. As Asholt notes, the fifth *nouvelle*, which is not included in the Lasowskis’ edition, seems typical of “la défense laconique des causes du peuple” (510) waged by Fénéon in his *nouvelles* and can thus be deemed his work.
form of literary-journalistic hybridity, hidden away inside the newspaper, which evokes the author’s own past as an anarchist militant who had toiled by day as an inconspicuous clerk in the Interior Ministry.

Having assailed the mass press in clandestine anarchist magazines and *La Revue blanche*, with these *Nouvelles*, Fénéon subtly deploys what Jean-Pierre Bertrand calls “l’art du clin d’œil” against its dominant discourse within the pages of one of France’s leading newspapers.\(^555\) The fifth *nouvelle* quoted above thus implicitly conveys Fénéon’s sympathies concerning a then-current strike wave in Paris by pejoratively branding a man who stabbed his striking father as “un jaune,” i.e. a blackleg, whereas a front-page article published ten days later in *Le Matin* by the Marquis de Dion, a right-wing parliamentarian and industrialist, denounced the same strike wave as “criminel” and “stupide.”\(^556\) Another *nouvelle* Fénéon published that month similarly conveys ill-concealed indignation at the depravations of capitalism: “Le cadavre du sexagénaire Dorlay se balançait à un arbre, à Arcueil, avec cette pancarte: ‘Trop vieux pour travailler.’”\(^557\) Here again, Terdiman’s theory that newspapers represented an impregnable bastion of the dominant discourse seems mistaken. The *nouvelle en trois lignes* – an inadvertently ambiguous label which can either be translated as “novella in three lines” or “news in three lines” – was not Fénéon’s invention. He nonetheless succeeded in harnessing that form to his own ideas and sensibility – to such an extent that the title of *Le Matin*’s column has long been synonymous with Fénéon.

That subversive achievement also belies Roland Barthes’s vision of the *fait divers* as a “une structure fermée” that lacks the expansive resonance of political news:

---


L’assassinat politique est [...] toujours, par définition, une information partielle; le fait divers, au contraire, est une information totale, ou plus exactement, immanente; il contient en soi tout son savoir: point besoin de connaître rien du monde pour consommer un fait divers; il ne renvoie formellement à rien d’autre qu’à lui-même [...].

Far from being closed off from the wider world, Fénéon’s *Nouvelles* (never mentioned by Barthes) continually allude to broader socio-political developments. Fénéon’s accounts of the blackleg stabbing his father during a strike and Dorlay’s suicide invite the reader to situate these *faits divers* in their political context, thereby eliding the distinction drawn by Barthes. For Barthes, *faits divers* are also defined by coincidence, which paradoxically breeds a sense of “fatalité intelligente – mais inintelligible,” as if a maliciously capricious deity is pulling the strings of destiny in inscrutable ways. Barthes suggests that aura of divinely orchestrated chaos has a hypnotizing effect on the masses: “[le] rôle [du fait divers] est vraisemblablement de préserver au sein de la société contemporaine l’ambiguïté du rationnel et de l’irrationnel, de l’intelligible et de l’insondable [...].” By these lights, *faits divers* make the events they describe seem arbitrary and thence resistant to the kind of structural analysis that would give the masses a firmer grasp of their real historical situation.

But, as we have seen, Philippe explicitly used *faits divers* as a basis for a broad critique, however tendentious, of structural injustice. And Jarry’s riffs on *faits divers* similarly evoke his opposition to militarism and colonialism. Unlike Philippe and Jarry, Fénéon appends no commentary to his *faits divers*, which are left to speak for themselves like verbal photographs. The editor of *La NRF* Jean Paulhan, who first republished Fénéon’s *Nouvelles* in book form, consequently regretted that “le moraliste en lui ne se soit pas plus nettement déclaré.”

---

nonetheless conceded that flashes of bitter moral clarity do shine through contributions such as the
depiction of Dorlay’s suicide – a fait divers that seems anything but arbitrary or coincidental in
Fénéon’s portrayal. And, as Luc Sante has written, Fénéon’s Nouvelles collectively form a
remarkable cultural and political panorama of a nation riven with strife and discord:

They represent the year 1906 in France, and they are charged with the essence of
that time and place in a way that is routinely available to artifacts and impersonal
documents while often remaining outside the grasp of literature. They testify to the
growing importance and menace of the automobile, the medieval conditions that
still prevailed in agriculture and country life, the often unfortunate inefficiency of
firearms, the vulnerability of rural populations to epidemic disease, the unflagging
pomposity of the military establishment, the mutual suspicion and profound lack of
understanding between the French and their colonial subjects, the increasing
number of strikes and the unchangingly brutal state of factory labour, the continuing
panic over the threat of anarchist bombs [...].

What brought all these dismal events within the grasp of literature was the arrival of a dyspeptic
veteran of the petites revues into the alien world of Le Matin, where Fénéon could draw on the
precedents of Jarry’s “Spéculations” and “Gestes,” Philippe’s “Faits divers,” and his own “Passim”
to transform a hitherto banal journalistic exercise into a radical new art form.

In a surprising twist on the habitual process of literary creation at the turn of the century, a
petite revue thus served as a literary laboratory for a work that acquired definitive form in a daily
newspaper. As we shall see throughout this chapter, the social and material connections between
the petites revues and the mass press explored in Chapter Two frequently yielded literary works,
first published in petites revues, that borrow material or techniques from newspaper journalism
and address then-topical political and cultural issues. The normal direction of creative traffic for
“literary actualité” thus runs from newspaper to petite revue and ultimately to book (or sometimes
from newspaper or grande revue directly to book). What is distinctive about the Nouvelles en trois

XXIX.
lignes is that a major newspaper became the final destination for the struggle to subvert journalistic orthodoxy initially waged by Fénéon and his colleagues in La Revue blanche. That unique genetic trajectory helps accounts for the work’s strange hybrid allure. Just as Fénéon’s Nouvelles depicted a world that seemed convulsed with violence and disorder, so the work itself upended the usual dynamic of literary-journalistic interchange.

After Fénéon had been arrested on (well-founded) suspicion of bombing the Restaurant Foyot a decade earlier, Mallarmé came to his friend’s defence in an interview with Le Soir: “On parle, dites-vous, de détonateurs. Certes, il n’y avait pas, pour Fénéon, de meilleurs détonateurs que ses articles. Et je ne pense pas qu’on puisse se servir d’arme plus efficace que la littérature.”

That assessment – which inaccurately played down Fénéon’s genuine commitment to political violence at the time – seems to anticipate the smouldering intensity of his Nouvelles en trois lignes. As Joan Ungersma Halperin puts it: “Mallarmé was right, after all; Fénéon’s detonators were his words.” And those words ended up detonating in the pages of the mass press that he abhorred.

III. Apollinaire’s poetic actualité

Among the admirers of the Nouvelles en trois lignes was Apollinaire, who saluted that endeavour in the Mercure de France in 1914, by which time Fénéon had ceased writing for the mass press and was working at the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, where he had curated an exhibition of Futurist art in 1912 and had also begun to write a regular bulletin of art news:

M. Félix Fénéon […] n’a jamais été très prodigue de sa prose, de même sa faconde est plutôt laconique. Toutefois, cet écrivain si dépouillé qu’il avait pour ainsi dire inventé, dans ses immortelles nouvelles en trois lignes du Matin, les “mots en liberté” qu’ont adoptés les futuristes, se taisait depuis trop longtemps.

563 Mallarmé, Oc, 2: 709.
564 Halperin, Félix Fénéon, 349.
The formal parallel Apollinaire draws here between Marinetti’s “mots en liberté,” whereby text is arranged in striking visual patterns without heed to grammatical rules – as in Zang Tumb Tuum (1914), his book about the First Balkan War – and Fénéon’s Nouvelles seems rather tenuous given that the latter had in fact adhered to the strict template of a pre-existing newspaper column. And yet Marinetti’s vision does recall Fénéon’s Nouvelles in another respect since the same 1913 manifesto that introduces the concept of “les mots en liberté” also calls on poets to imitate reporters and embrace the rhythm of the telegraph, thereby releasing “l’imagination sans fils.” Marinetti may have lacked Fénéon’s laconic precision, but he too sought to transform the news into poetry.

Apollinaire would himself draw on Marinetti’s ideas in his pictorial poems, collected in Calligrammes (1918), and in his free-verse war poetry, which, as we shall see in Chapter Five, frequently resembles reportage. That spirit of literary-journalistic hybridity already infuses several early short stories he published under Fénéon’s aegis in La Revue blanche in 1902-1903, which were collected in L’Hérésiarque & cie (1910) – a book dedicated to Thadée Natanson.

“Le Passant de Prague,” first published in the magazine in June 1902, begins with a vivid description of the author’s arrival in Prague a few months earlier that would not be out of place in the work of contemporary foreign correspondents such as Jules Huret:

En mars 1902, je fus à Prague. J’arrivais de Dresde. Dès Bodenbach, où sont les douanes autrichiennes, les allures des employés de chemins de fer m’avaient montré que la raideur allemande n’existe pas dans l’empire des Habsbourg. […]
Selon une habitude assez inconvenante, mais très commode quand on ne connaît rien d’une ville, je me renseignai auprès de plusieurs passants. Pour mon étonnement, les cinq premiers ne comprenaient pas un mot d’allemand, mais seulement le tchèque. Le sixième, auquel je m’adressai, m’écouta, sourit, et me répondit en français:

---

566 F.T. Marinetti, “L’Imagination sans fils et les mots en liberté,” in Marinetti et le futurisme, ed. Giovanni Lista (Lausanne: L’Âge d’Homme, 1977). In this manifesto, Marinetti imagines that a poet imbued with the spirit of “les mots en liberté” “lancera d’immenses filets d’analogies sur le monde, donnant ainsi le fond analogique et essentiel de la vie télégraphiquement, c’est-à-dire avec la rapidité économique que le télégraphe impose aux reporters et aux correspondants de guerre dans leurs récits superficiels.” See also Suter, Le Journal et les Lettres: 1, 119-123.

— Parlez français, monsieur, nous détestons les Allemands bien plus que ne font les Français. Nous les haïssons, ces gens qui veulent nous imposer leur langue, profitent de nos industries et notre sol qui produit tout, le vin, le charbon, les pierres et les métaux précieux, tout, sauf le sel. [...]

Peu de jours auparavant, Paris avait fêté le centenaire de Victor Hugo. Je pus me rendre compte que les sympathies bohémienes, manifestées à cette occasion n’étaient pas vaines. Sur les murs, de belles affiches annonçaient les traductions en tchèque des romans de Victor Hugo. Les devantures des librairies étaient de véritables musées bibliographiques du poète.568

Many defining features of reportage are present here: a first-person reporter/narrator on a foreign adventure; short, paratactic sentences; snatches of local colour; quotations picked up from bystanders; a clear sense of time and place; and allusions to cultural and political actualité. The story then enters a fantastic vein as the reporter/narrator is engaged in conversation by a man claiming to be the legendary Wandering Jew himself. But even then, the tone remains essentially realistic, and nothing rules out the possibility that the reporter/narrator has simply set down what he had actually heard from a delusional old man. As Michel Decaudin puts it: “Le début est un reportage à la fois pittoresque et minutieux; puis on glisse insensiblement au fantastique, sans quitter le réel, selon un processus fréquent dans le fonctionnement de l’imaginaire apollinarien.”569

And that sense of ambiguity is enhanced by “Le Passant de Prague”’s position within a petite revue that habitually published pieces of reportage and political commentary alongside short stories and serialized novels. Indeed, the same issue features an interview with Zola as part of a lengthy “Enquête sur l’éducation” as well as articles about the recent fall of Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau’s ministry and the coronations of Alfonso XIII of Spain and Edward VII of England.570

A later story, “Le Juif latin,” also originally published in La Revue blanche, further blurs the boundary between fiction and reality by identifying Apollinaire himself as the

569 Apollinaire, Opc, 1: 1113.
reporter/narrator, who is visited by a Jewish man named Gabriel Fernisoun claiming to have read “Le Passant de Prague.” Fernisoun then tries to poison Apollinaire before embarking on a gruesome killing spree across Paris and ultimately converting to Christianity in advance of his own suicide. The press reflexively attributes the murders to the “bandes d’Apaches et autres tatoués qui effrayent nos âmes meilleures.” Apollinaire thus frames “Le Juif latin” as the sensational true story behind these **faits divers** whilst mocking journalistic prejudices and complacency. No-one could mistake the fantastic inventions of “Le Juif latin,” unlike “Le Passant de Prague,” for a genuine piece of reportage. But, as in the intra-journalistic satire of *Le Chasseur de chevelures*, there is a method to Apollinaire’s madness in this story, which evokes the manipulative power of the mass press. For “Le Juif latin”’s account of Fernisoun’s reign of terror is only slightly more far-fetched than the lurid tales of ubiquitous “Apaches” that could be found in contemporary newspapers.

As we shall see in Chapter Five, Apollinaire’s later prose fiction portrayed the mass press in ever darker tones. In *Le Poète assassiné* (1916), a quasi-autobiographical collection of loosely connected short stories, the murder foretold in the book’s title comes about as a result of a newspaper article arguing that poetry represents a grave threat to civilisation and must be vigorously suppressed. Apollinaire had originally conceived that pivotal episode as part of “un roman [...] sur la fin du monde” that he had hoped to publish in *La Revue blanche.*

By contrast, in the poetry he published in *Les Soirées de Paris* shortly before The First World War, Apollinaire both offers a more enthusiastic vision of the mass press and occasionally alludes to journalistic **actualité**. Towards the beginning of “Zone,” first published in *Les Soirées de Paris* shortly before The First World War, Apollinaire both offers a more enthusiastic vision of the mass press and occasionally alludes to journalistic **actualité**. Towards the beginning of “Zone,” first published in *Les Soirées de Paris* shortly before The First World War, Apollinaire both offers a more enthusiastic vision of the mass press and occasionally alludes to journalistic **actualité**. Towards the beginning of “Zone,” first published in *Les Soirées de Paris* shortly before The First World War, Apollinaire both offers a more enthusiastic vision of the mass press and occasionally alludes to journalistic **actualité**. Towards the beginning of “Zone,” first published in *Les Soirées de Paris* shortly before The First World War, Apollinaire both offers a more enthusiastic vision of the mass press and occasionally alludes to journalistic **actualité**. Towards the beginning of “Zone,” first published in *Les Soirées de Paris* shortly before The First World War, Apollinaire both offers a more enthusiastic vision of the mass press and occasionally alludes to journalistic **actualité**. Towards the beginning of “Zone,” first published in *Les Soirées de Paris* shortly before The First World War, Apollinaire both offers a more enthusiastic vision of the mass press and occasionally alludes to journalistic **actualité**. Towards the beginning of “Zone,” first published in *Les Soirées de Paris* shortly before The First World War, Apollinaire both offers a more enthusiastic vision of the mass press and occasionally alludes to journalistic **actualité**. Towards the beginning of “Zone,” first published in *Les Soirées de Paris* shortly before The First World War, Apollinaire both offers a more enthusiastic vision of the mass press and occasionally alludes to journalistic **actualité**. Towards the beginning of “Zone,” first published in *Les Soirées de Paris* shortly before The First World War, Apollinaire both offers a more enthusiastic vision of the mass press and occasionally alludes to journalistic **actualité**. Towards the beginning of “Zone,” first published in *Les Soirées de Paris* shortly before The First World War, Apollinaire both offers a more enthusiastic vision of the mass press and occasionally alludes to journalistic **actualité**. Towards the beginning of “Zone,” first published in *Les Soirées de Paris* shortly before The First World War, Apollinaire both offers a more enthusiastic vision of the mass press and occasionally alludes to journalistic **actualité**. Towards the beginning of “Zone,” first published in *Les Soirées de Paris* shortly before The First World War, Apollinaire both offers a more enthusiastic vision of the mass press and occasionally alludes to journalistic **actualité**. Towards the beginning of “Zone,” first published in *Les Soirées de Paris* shortly before The First World War, Apollinaire both offers a more enthusiastic vision of the mass press and occasionally alludes to journalistic **actualité**. Towards the beginning of “Zone,” first published in *Les Soirées de Paris* shortly before The First World War, Apollinaire both offers a more enthusiastic vision of the mass press and occasionally alludes to journalistic **actualité**. Towards the beginning of “Zone,” first published in *Les Soirées de Paris* shortly before The First World War, Apollinaire both offers a more enthusiastic vision of the mass press and occasionally alludes to journalistic **actualité**. Towards the beginni

---

573 Quoted in the notes in Apollinaire, *Opc*, 1: 1264.
in December 1912, then republished as the leading poem in *Alcools* (1913), newspapers even become synonymous with prose itself:

Tu lis les prospectus les catalogues les affiches qui chantent tout haut  
Voilà la poésie ce matin et pour la prose il y a les journaux  
Il y a les livraisons à 25 centimes pleines d’aventures policières  
O portraits des grands hommes et mille titres divers.\(^{574}\)

Equating prose with newspapers was consistent with the editorial outlook of *Les Soirées*, which, as we saw in Chapter Two, published two pieces of bellicose, newspaper-style *reportage* about the First Balkan War by André Tudesq and Jérôme Tharaud. Indeed, the second of those dispatches appeared in the same issue of *Les Soirées* directly after “Zone,” as if to suggest that the poem’s eclectic vision of literature was being realized within the magazine itself. *Les Soirées* would also, as we shall see in this chapter and in Chapter Five, publish poems by Blaise Cendrars and Max Jacob directly inspired by Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain’s *Fantômas* (1910-1913), a series of pulp detective novels that Apollinaire called “une des œuvres les plus riches qui existent,” which are the most likely referent of “les livraisons à 25 centimes pleines d’aventures policières.”\(^{575}\) The poem thus simultaneously looks outwards to the tumult of contemporary Paris but also evokes the literary-journalistic dynamism of *Les Soirées* itself.

Even if poetry in “Zone” is equated with advertising rather than journalism, the mass press then re-emerges in the image of a Parisian newspaper kiosk with its riot of competing headlines and illustrations.\(^{576}\) Like those newspaper headlines, “Zone,” along with the rest of *Alcools*, is devoid of all punctuation. Apollinaire’s verse thus assimilates the visual immediacy of newspaper typography without sacrificing its essential poetic nature, a dynamic emphasized by the fact that

---

\(^{576}\) On the description of the kiosk in the latter two verses, see Luc Fraisse, “Le Paysage urbain, un espace de création poétique pour Apollinaire dans *Alcools*,” in *Paysages urbains de 1830 à nos jours*, ed. Gérard Peylet, Peter Kuon and Beate Steinhauser (Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, 2004), 190.
the description of the kiosk itself becomes an alexandrine, once the initial “O” is removed (as it was in the version published in *Alcools*). Apollinaire had, moreover, laid the ground for “Zone”’s radical literary vision in an interview published a few months previously in *Les Soirées*, where, thinly veiled as “Hector,” he had lamented restrictions on the public distribution of “prospectus” and celebrated the poetic potential of “les catalogues, les affiches, les réclames de toutes sortes.” An article imitating the style of *reportage* thus served as a laboratory for ideas later expressed in verse.

“Zone” alludes to journalistic *actualité* in four verses preceding the poem’s paean to advertising and the press:

Tu en as assez de vivre dans l’antiquité grecque et romaine

Ici même les automobiles ont l’air d’être anciennes
La Religion seule est restée toute neuve la Religion
Est restée simple comme les hangars de Port Aviation

Seul en Europe tu n’es pas antique ô Christianisme
L’Européen le plus moderne c’est toi pape Pie XI[.]”

Port-Aviation, which had been opened in 1909 in Viry-Châtillon just outside Paris, was the world’s first dedicated aerodrome. And, as Marc Poupon has spotted, the weary epiphany of these lines may have originated in a newspaper photograph of several chariots and an automobile parked in front of one of its aircraft hangars:

---

The symbiosis in “Zone” between antiquity and novelty, typified by the automobiles and Port-Aviation, acquires a further sub-textual dimension in the shape of the newspaper photograph that possibly inspired these images. Disenchanted by both the dusty relics of Ancient Greece and Rome as well as the violent roar of the automobile (just an updated chariot after all) – which Marinetti had proclaimed more beautiful than the Winged Victory of Samothrace in his 1909 Futurist Manifesto – the poet instead turns to the timeless verities of Christianity and the graceful simplicity of the aeroplane hangar, which seems to hold the promise of skyward transcendence. The opposition between past and present is thence bypassed in favour of an emphasis on what remains eternal across all epochs.

And if the newspaper indeed served as a trigger for the poet’s epiphany, then, as in Mallarmé’s journalistically inspired vision of “Le Livre,” the press here takes on a surprising religious role. In Christ’s parable, the Kingdom of Heaven emerges from a mustard seed.

---

581 On the photograph in L’Illustration, see Marc Poupon, Aux sources d’Apollinaire (Aix-en-Provence: Persée, 2010), 71-72.

Apollinaire’s own vision of eternity seems to spring from the equally humble pages of a newspaper. But whereas the parable emphasizes the inevitable growth and triumph of God’s dominion, the inspiration provided by the newspaper could only be a fortuitous accident. That sense of contingency also permeates “Zone”’s religious vision itself, which is perhaps less a genuine profession of faith than a provocative gesture that derives its rhetorical energy from the incongruous context of the aircraft hangars. As Marie-Jeanne Durry puts it, these verses say “yes” to religion. And yet: “Le “oui” est prononcé à la façon d’Apollinaire, avec beaucoup d’amusement, avec l’inattendu des comparaisons et des affirmations, avec un sourire.”

Apollinaire was, after all, far from a daily communicant by this time, and the stories collected in L’Hérésiarque & cie had offered a highly irreverent portrayal of the Mother Church. Other poems in Alcools, such as “La Chanson du mal-aimé” and “Le Brasier,” depict loss of faith rather than eternal devotion. Moreover, describing the arch-reactionary Pope Pius X as “L’Européen le plus moderne” seems like irreverent hyperbole given the ultra-conservative Pius’s implacable opposition to theological “modernism” – as contemporary efforts to reconcile Catholicism with science and Enlightenment values were known. But, as Robert Couffignal suggests, that epithet also plausibly alludes to the blessing Pius bestowed on the pilot André Beaumont, victor of the 1911 Paris-Rome air race, who had taken off from Port-Aviation.

Tradition and actualité thus collide to form an irregular, unpredictable compound. What counted for Apollinaire was not whether something was old or new, but whether it served his poetic purposes. The display of religiosity at the beginning of “Zone” thus strikes a bold, paradoxical note that challenges received ideas about modernity. And those verses seem to be less about

communicating a body of doctrine than embracing an aesthetic of puckish non-conformism that freely blends religion, technology, and journalism.

That confluence of religion and journalism can also be glimpsed in two later verses: “C’est le Christ qui monte au ciel mieux que les aviateurs/ Il détient le record du monde pour la hauteur.”585 As Durry puts it: “La majesté de l’ascension s’impose pour commencer, – ‘C’est le Christ qui monte au ciel’ – mais elle est complètement ‘dé-solennisée’ par le langage quotidien, le langage de journaliste – le Christ ‘détient le record du monde pour la hauteur.’”586 That recourse to hackneyed journalistic language has a doubly bathetic effect here.587 Depicting Christ as a champion aviator or mountaineer gently deflates both the religiosity of the preceding verse and the previous exalted vision of the newspaper kiosk. For just as the poem appears poised to take flight, its journalistic hinterland lurches back into the frame. Whereas Mallarmé had looked to a synthesis of journalism and literature as a substitute for traditional religion, Apollinaire thus seems to take a more jaundiced view of God and the press. Both provide inspiration in “Zone,” but any glimpse of transcendence derived from either religion or journalism quickly assumes an ironic hue. Alcools’ title itself has a similarly double-edged resonance. For the swings between exaltation and bathos in “Zone” are akin to the mercurial experience of inebriation. Having contemplated Christ’s heavenward ascent, the poet soon comes crashing back to earth where he finds himself at “le zinc d’un bar crapuleux” nursing a cup of coffee, perhaps along with a literal and metaphorical hangover.588

586 Durry, Guillaume Apollinaire: Alcools, 1: 286.
587 The exact phrase “Il détient le record du monde pour la hauteur” frequently appears in contemporary newspapers. See, for example, Paul Manour, “Le Record de la hauteur en aéroplane,” Le Petit Journal, June 18, 1910, 2.
The poem’s bold redefinition of poetry also pivots equivocally between modernity and tradition. As Anna Boschetti has argued, by equating poetry with advertising, “Zone” seems to repudiate Mallarmé’s previously noted comment to Huret: “le vers est partout dans la langue où il y a rythme, partout, excepté dans les affiches et à la quatrième page des journaux. Dans le genre appelé prose, il y a des vers, quelquefois admirables, de tous rythmes.” Apollinaire duly appears to vault over an aesthetic *cordon sanitaire* erected by his precursor – a leap Boschetti interprets as a nod to the “déclarations subversives des manifeses futuristes.” And yet “Zone” simultaneously maintains an explicit distinction – which had been eroded in Mallarmé’s later work – between prose and poetry themselves. The verse identifying poetry with advertising thus at once subverts and reaffirms poetic tradition.

“Zone”’s vision of literature also has a literal dimension. The fair copy of *Alcools* that he submitted to Mercure de France is partly composed of poems, including “Zone,” written on the back of old subscription forms for his own short-lived little magazine *Le Festin d’Ésope* (1903-1904), where he had originally published six of the poems included in the collection.

---

590 Guillaume Apollinaire, *Alcools*, MS NAF 28058, BnF, Paris/ Gallica. I am grateful to Laurence Le Bras of the BnF for confirming that this document was used to produce the first edition of *Alcools.*
A poem equating poetry with “prospectus” was, in other words, itself written on the back of “prospectus.” Apollinaire’s short stories were, moreover, often first published in newspapers. His puckish redefinitions of poetry as advertising and prose as newspaper journalism in “Zone” thus point to the material circumstances of his own œuvre.

In other parts of Alcools’ fair copy, Apollinaire simply inserted pre-originals of poems he had published in petites revues. Such improvisation could convey the impression that the collection had been cobbled together on the fly. But, as suggested by the dates “1898-1913” on the title page, Alcools in fact reflected years of poetic labour, which excluded many of the poems he had published in newspapers and magazines during that period. Alcools thus represents the distillation of Apollinaire’s experiments within the literary laboratory of the press. And those journalistic origins are on material display in the pages cut from little magazines and discarded subscription forms (themselves evoking a brief foray into magazine publishing by the young poet) of the book’s patchwork manuscript.

Almost all the poems in Alcools were first published in petites revues, including the Mercure, La Revue blanche, and La Plume as well as Les Soirées de Paris. And, as we saw in Chapter Two, these little magazines all had dense social and financial connections to the mass press that manifest themselves in what they published. Reportage and political polemics can thus be found alongside poetry and criticism in their pages. Such eclecticism was also a feature of Le Festin d’Ésope, where Apollinaire published both poems and his own political commentary on subjects such as the Russo-Japanese War and British politics, and which also featured regular advertisements for books, newspapers, and other magazines.591 “Zone”’s panoramic, multimedia vision of literature represents the apotheosis of that culture of literary-journalistic interchange.

591 See, for example, Apollinaire, “Échos sur les lettres et les arts,” in Opc, 2: 1250 and 1258.
There is also an obviously provocative and hyperbolic edge to “Zone”’s redefinitions of poetry and prose. Though “Zone” may have been written on the back of a “prospectus,” it is itself manifestly a poem and not an advertisement, or indeed a poster. And if all the prose one needed was to be found in newspapers, why would Apollinaire and his friends have created Les Soirées, which published both prose and poetry? Moreover, a chronique by Apollinaire published in the newspaper Le Petit Bleu in January 1912 depicts advertising brochures in a rather different light: “Tout le monde a lu dans les journaux que les médecins considéraient maintenant les… comment dirai-je? les… ‘prospectus’ que les chiens déposent parfois sur la voie publique […] comme des produits extrêmement dangereux pour la santé publique.”\(^{592}\) Whereas brochures become poetry in “Zone,” here dog droppings become brochures. The poem thus elevates advertising to literary status where the article, published less than a year beforehand, implicitly denigrates the same medium. Flowers might very well grow from such leavings. But “prospectus” themselves represent at best the possibility of flourishing. “Zone”’s vision might thus be less a celebration of the growth of advertising and newspapers than an acknowledgement that literature must come to terms with those media and thence the modern world itself. Seen from that perspective, the poem’s central aesthetic proclamation – “Voilà la poésie ce matin et pour la prose il y a les journaux” – strikes a note of resignation as much as jubilation. In other words: Writers must deal with the world as they find it.

Such ironies point to the fundamental ambivalence of Apollinaire’s outlook. For, unlike his frère-ennemi Marinetti, Apollinaire’s ode to the cultural vigour of advertising and newspapers does not mean he disdains the past. As he put it in his 1913 book on Cubism:

\(^{592}\) Apollinaire, “Choses à la mode,” in Opc, 3: 463.
On ne peut pas transporter partout avec soi le cadavre de son père. On l’abandonne en compagnie des autres morts. Et l’on s’en souvient, on le regrette, on en parle avec admiration. Et si l’on devient père, il ne faut pas s’attendre à ce qu’un de nos enfants veuille se doubler pour la vie de notre cadavre.

Mais nos pieds ne se détachent qu’en vain du sol qui contient les morts.\textsuperscript{593}

The image of burying one’s father at first suggests a desire to break with the past and move on. Then comes the problematizing coda of the following paragraph: Tradition, once buried, becomes the ground itself on which artists must walk.

That reverence for the past underlies the religious nostalgia of “Zone,” whose title bore an archaic circumflex when first published in \textit{Les Soirées}. And whereas Marinetti believed that the motorcar was literally the acme of modern art, the implication of “Zone”’s references to advertising and newspapers is that literature should draw energy from these and other modern media whilst preserving its distinctiveness.

Several other poems in \textit{Calligrammes} that had first been published in \textit{Les Soirées} illustrate that dynamic. Apollinaire understood that nothing ages so quickly as novelty. Today’s cutting-edge gadget is destined to gather dust in tomorrow’s junk shop, thence the already ancient automobiles of “Zone.” When seeking to justify \textit{Calligrammes} to the reactionary writer-journalist and political theorist Charles Maurras in 1918, Apollinaire thus explained that the collection contained examples of “une forme poétique que je n’ai point inventée puisqu’il n’y a rien de nouveau sous le soleil, mais que j’ai du moins renouvelée.”\textsuperscript{594} His titular calligrams (a word Apollinaire seemingly did invent) were indeed far from the first examples of what would later be called visual or concrete poetry, where the text itself takes on pictorial form. The seventeenth-century clergyman George Herbert had previously arranged the verses of poems such as “The


“Altar” and “Easter Wings” in the shape of their titles. And pictorial lettering is a common feature of illuminated medieval manuscripts such as the Book of Kells.

What sets Apollinaire’s calligrams apart is his use of text and imagery culled from other media and then pasted together in the form of a collage. “Lettre-Océan,” originally published, as we saw in Chapter Two, in Les Soirées in June 1914, includes typography from Mexican and U.S. postage stamps while the lettering of the title itself is taken from the envelope of an actual lettre-oceàn – the name given to telegrams received aboard ships via wireless radio, a piece of technology that had recently been developed by Guglielmo Marconi. The letters “TSF” – transmission sans fil – duly appear in a vertical column on the right-hand-side of the poem’s first page.

Fig. 3.4. Apollinaire, “Lettre-Océan,” Les Soirées de Paris, no. 25, June 1914, 340 (Source: Gallica)
The poem’s layout and nod to wireless telegraphy recall Marinetti’s raptures about “les mots en liberté” and “l’imagination sans fils.” Apollinaire had previously used those expressions in his own “manifeste=synthèse” L’Antitradition futuriste in mid-1913, which he sent to Marinetti, who included this mock tribute in his serially published Manifestes du mouvement futuriste. Though plainly satirical (Apollinaire’s manifesto even purports to abolish satire) and frequently nonsensical, as Caizergues and Décaudin have noted, the manifesto’s opening image of “ce moteur à toutes tendances” could easily be a description of the eclectic, synthetic spirit of Apollinaire’s own work.\footnote{See the notes in Apollinaire, Op., 2: 1672.} L’Antitradition futuriste might well be making fun of Marinetti, but this cod manifesto also signals the future direction of Apollinaire’s own poetry. He himself may not have been a Futurist, but he did draw on Futurist ideas. Like Picasso, Apollinaire was apt to steal whatever suited his own artistic purposes.\footnote{“When there’s anything to steal, I steal,” Picasso used to remark to his muse Françoise Gilot; quoted in Françoise Gilot and Carlton Lake, Life with Picasso (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 317.} And his calligrams thus invest the venerable tradition of pictorial writing with a burst of Marinetti’s frantic avant-garde energy.

Also preparing the way for Calligrammes’ leap into radical formal experimentation was Apollinaire’s own journalism, which exhibits several technical and thematic parallels with his calligrams:

Firstly, his articles frequently included verbatim transcriptions of items such as letters, advertisements, and restaurant menus, which sometimes even replicated their original typography.\footnote{See Caizergues, Apollinaire journaliste, 95.} These textual oddments usually served to illustrate anecdotes or witticisms, but were on occasion published without any accompanying commentary, creating a sense of aesthetic enigma that Pierre Caizergues compares to Marcel Duchamp’s “ready-mades.”\footnote{See Caizergues, Apollinaire journaliste, 95 and the notes in Apollinaire, Op., 3: 1228.} That penchant
for recycling random bits of found text and imagery prefigures poems such as “Lettre-Océan.” Moreover, Apollinaire’s writings for L’Intransigeant, Paris-Journal, and Mercure de France often consist of “échos” and observations arranged in short, unconnected paragraphs. “Lettre-Océan” similarly jumps between discontinuous fragments referring to Mexico, Paris, the river Rhine, Havana, and Tunisia, where his friend Jacques Dyssord had founded a newspaper, as recounted by Apollinaire in his column, which also quoted at length from the newspaper itself, for the Mercure de France’s May 1, 1914 issue – one month prior to “Lettre-Océan”’s first publication.599 This journalistic expedition, which, as we saw in Chapter Two, Dyssord had already described in his own poem for Les Soirées “Sur champ de départ,” duly made its way into “Lettre-Océan” itself: “Jac/ ques/ c’é/ tait/ dé/ li/ cieux// La/ Tu/ ni/ sie/ tu/ fondes/ un/ jour/ nal.” Despite Apollinaire’s frustrations with churning out newspaper copy, journalism clearly continued to hold out the possibility of renewal and adventure, traits emphasized by the isolated position of “jour” within the layout, such that we can also read this verse as “tu fondes un jour.” Indeed, the verse forms one spoke of a circular pictogram that evokes a Mayan sun god and thence the light of day.

Secondly, as an art critic for various newspapers and magazines prior to the First World War, Apollinaire had become the leading and perhaps the only consistent defender of Cubism in the Parisian mass press.600 The poet-journalist’s day-to-day involvement in this highly topical artistic revolution and his friendships with its central figures undoubtedly pushed his own poetry in a pictorial direction. Those affinities were already on display in Picasso’s portrait of the author, which was published alongside the title page of the first edition of Alcools. Apollinaire also originally intended to publish many of the poems that later appeared in Calligrammes under the

599 See Guillaume Apollinaire, “La Vie anécdotique,” Mercure de France 109, no. 405, May 1, 1914, 207-212.
600 As Apollinaire noted in his review of Cubist works at the 1911 Autumn Salon: “[J]e me vois presque seul parmi les écrivains d’art à défendre des artistes dont je connais les efforts et dont j’aime les ouvrages.” (Apollinaire, “Le Salon d’automne,” in Opc, 2: 371)
title Et moi aussi je suis peintre, as if he had come to envy his friends’ growing prestige. More specifically, Apollinaire was attentive to the Cubists’ use of collage. As he wrote in a February 1913 article for the German magazine Der Sturm: “Picasso et Braque introduisaient dans leurs œuvres d’art des lettres d’enseignes et d’autres inscriptions, parce que dans une ville moderne, l’inscription, l’enseigne, la publicité jouent un rôle artistique très important et parce qu’elles s’adaptent à cette fin.” Such comments suggest that both Apollinaire’s affirmation of advertising’s poetic potential in “Zone” and his use of collage in Calligrammes were shaped by his encounters with Cubist painting as a critic. His enthusiasm for posters as an art form, particularly the now-iconic advertisements of Leonetto Cappiello, who later provided cover art for Le Poète assassiné, similarly comes across in numerous articles for L’Intransigeant. Ideas and techniques that became essential to Apollinaire’s poetry thus first gestated in his journalistic art criticism.

Thirdly, the publication of “Lettre-Océan” itself occurred in the context of a bitter literary-journalistic quarrel that had erupted in October 1913 when Apollinaire’s friend Blaise Cendrars distributed an illustrated publicity tract for his forthcoming Prose du Transsibérien et de la petite Jeanne de France, which described the work as the “premier livre simultané” that would blend painting and text. Amid a slew of commentary in the press, the poet Henri-Martin Barzun distributed a tract of his own accusing Cendrars of having plagiarized his theories about integrating literature and visual art. He then attacked Apollinaire himself as a poetaster who lacked a genuine grasp of simultaneity. The squabble, which attracted press coverage as far afield as Berlin and

601 See the notes in Apollinaire, Op, 1075.
603 See, for example, “Ensembles’ de Cappiello” (Apollinaire, Opc, 2: 484) and “Les Orientalistes français. Cinq peintres et un ferronnier: Van Dongen” (Apollinaire, Opc, 2: 511). Regarding Cappiello’s contribution to Le Poète assassiné, see Laurence Campa, Guillaume Apollinaire (Paris: Gallimard, 2013), 652.
604 I here summarize Campa’s account of the row (Guillaume Apollinaire, 472-479).
Saint-Petersburg, continued into the summer of 1914 with the adversaries trading blows in the letters column of the newspaper *Paris-Journal*. Into this literary skirmish came “Lettre-Océan,” the first of Apollinaire’s pictorial poems to be published, which constitutes his definitive riposte to Barzun’s charge that he had no talent for fusing text and imagery. His nemesis is even addressed by name on the poem’s first page: “Zut/ pour/ M./ Zun.” (Meanwhile, in the same issue of *Les Soirées*, Cendrars’s poem “Fantômas” took another thinly veiled swipe at “monsieur Barzum,” dismissing him as “un imbécile.”) “Lettre-Océan” is thus not just a pictorial poem but also a journalistic polemic that delivers on “Zone”’s promise to transform the visual and verbal detritus of modern life into literature whilst retaining a dash of that detritus’s original circumstantial flavour. The journalistic origins of Apollinaire’s poetry here supply a jolt of modernity in one of the senses articulated by Baudelaire – “le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l’art, dont l’autre moitié est l’éternel et l’immuable.” On the one hand, a mostly forgotten literary-journalistic quarrel; on the other, the eternal cosmic majesty of the sun. That combination of *actualité* and eternity makes “Lettre-Océan” into a work that simultaneously epitomizes and transcends its own times.

*Calligrammes*’ journalistic hinterland also emerges in “Voyage,” originally published in *Les Soirées*’ final issue in July 1914, where, as Maria Dario has spotted, the graphic of a telegraph pole is taken directly from the masthead of *Le Matin*, just as Braque and Picasso pasted strips cut from real newspapers onto their canvases.606

---


606 See Maria Dario, “La Poésie d’Apollinaire à l’épreuve du journal,” *Ticontre: Teoria Testo Traduzione*, no. 5 (May 2016): 191-211, 194. Dario also notes that Apollinaire’s “poèmes conversation,” such as “Lundi rue Christine,” which apparently records a conversation between Apollinaire, Dyssord, and their friends on the eve of Dyssord’s departure for Tunis, give poetic form to a contemporary journalistic genre, wherein newspapers would publish
Apollinaire’s use of collage here gives metonymic visual form both to the poem’s unpunctuated telegraphic style (“OU VA DONC CE TRAIN”) and to its titular theme since telegraph lines were often aligned alongside railway tracks. Moreover, the telegraph poll from *Le Matin* hints at the likely destination of what the text alongside calls “le voyage de Dante.” The experience of writing a *roman-feuilleton* for that newspaper in 1899-1900 had not had a happy dénouement for Apollinaire, who never got paid.\(^607\) And, as we shall see in Chapter Five, the poet’s letters often describe his subsequent journalistic career in terms of sullen frustration reminiscent of the Fifth Circle of Hell. That sense of creative dissipation is echoed in the text to the right of the telegraph poll: “TÉLÉGRAPHE/ OISEAU QUI LAISSE/ TOMBER/ SES AILES PARTOUT.” A bird that drops its wings all over the place might signify the depth of the telegraph’s cultural and even topographical impact. But the image also evokes torpor and decline. Mallarmé had depicted the

\(^607\) See Campa, *Guillaume Apollinaire*, 84-86.
newspaper in “Quant au livre” as a furled wing whose energy is poised to burst forth and fuel the “Poème populaire moderne.” By contrast, the falling wings of “Voyage” suggest that the press, synecdochally represented by the telegraph pole from Le Matin, might be running out of creative steam. Instead of the graceful typographical arcs sweeping across the pages of Un coup de dés, the layout of “Voyage” is thus highly fragmented and asymmetrical. Moreover, the word “PALE,” followed by a nervous-looking question mark, runs backward up the edge of the right-hand page as if the train chugging along the centre of the page has abruptly hit a dead end. These visual symptoms of entropy and finitude concur with Apollinaire’s own reflections on the collection in a 1918 letter to André Billy: “Quant aux Calligrammes, ils sont une idéalisation de la poésie vers-libriste et une précision typographique à l’époque où la typographie termine brillamment sa carrière, à l’aurore des moyens nouveaux de reproduction que sont le cinéma et le phonographe.”

This tribute to the development of typography recalls “Zone”’s rapturous praise for poster art and newspaper headlines. And yet, just a few years later, he here signals that these media, which had also inspired Mallarmé, Marinetti, Picasso, and Braque, no longer represent the future of literature. Cinema and the phonograph are set to take their place. These new forms of expression, he declared in “L’Esprit nouveau et les poètes,” a lecture delivered in 1917 that was then published posthumously in the Mercure the following year, were already adding a new sense of movement to art.

Modernity, in other words, had assumed a new guise.

Les Soirées’ final issue also includes Cendrars’s short poem “Titres,” which proclaims the ambition of creating poetry out of faits divers:

---

Whereas “Zone” had equated prose with newspaper journalism, Cendrars here seems to suggest that the latter should become central to poetry itself, stripped of the traditional poetic devices of metaphor and imagery. These verses themselves have the chiselled, unpunctuated appearance of newspaper headlines. “Les accidents des fées” could indeed be the text of a genuine headline from a fait-divers column. And yet, as Jean-Pierre Goldenstein has noted, the phrase “des accidents de fée” appears in “Angoisse” in Rimbaud’s *Illuminations* while “Titres”’ first verse – “Formes sueurs chevelures” – similarly seems to be adapted from a sentence in “Barbare” in the same collection: “Et là, les formes, les sueurs, les chevelures et les yeux, flottant!” Like Apollinaire, Cendrars thus blends existing poetic models with themes and imagery culled from the mass press. “Titres”’ affinities with newspaper typography are further emphasized by the final two verses: “Quand le journal fermente comme un éclair claqué muré/ Manchette[]” The image of the fermenting newspaper suggests that its compressed energy is about to burst forth in the form of a “manchette,” i.e. a headline. Whereas “Voyage” evokes Apollinaire’s doubts about the mass press’s enduring creative potential, “Titres” implies that, for Cendrars, the adventure of looking for poetry in the news is just beginning. And yet, as we shall see in Chapter Five, that adventure never really took flight in Cendrars’s later writing. After serving in the French Foreign Legion during the First World War, which cost him his right arm, he embraced a career as a globe-trotting

---

610 Blaise Cendrars, “Titres,” *Les Soirées de Paris*, no. 25, July-Aug. 1914, 431. In the version he published after the war in *Dix-neuf poèmes élastiques* (1919), Cendrars altered these lines to “Premier poème sans métaphores/ sans images/ Nouvelles/ L’esprit nouveau/ Les accidents des fées,” (Cendrars, *Du monde entier*, 119) thereby adding an apparent allusion to Apollinaire’s lecture, though the verse “l’esprit nouveau” is already present in the original 1914 manuscript (see Jean-Pierre Goldenstein, *Dix-neuf poèmes élastiques de Blaise Cendrars* [Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1986], 94).

reporter, which yielded occasional intriguing hybrid works such as *Rhum* (1930), a fictionalized book of *reportage*, as well as much derivative and jejune newspaper journalism. His poetic output dwindled in parallel. Leaving behind the world of the *petites revues* for the celebrity and financial rewards of the mass press, Cendrars remained absorbed in *actualité*. But the eclectic vision of poetic *actualité* that he and Apollinaire had developed in *Les Soirées de Paris* proved ephemeral.

**IV. Political fictions**

Apollinaire and Cendrars’s pre-First World War poetry displays little concern for politics. When they found inspiration in *actualité*, it stemmed from technology, literary quarrels, *faits divers*, and the hurly burly of the modern metropolis rather than affairs of state. But, as we have seen, other contributors to late nineteenth and early twentieth-century *petites revues* took a keen interest in social injustice at home and colonial outrages abroad. Such preoccupations manifested themselves not just in riffs on contemporary news stories – of the kind found in Jarry’s “Spéculations” and “Gestes,” Philippe’s “Faits divers,” and Fénéon and Barrucand’s “Passim” – but also in fictional works that were first published in these magazines.

Jarry’s *Ubu roi* has long been a byword for chaotic despotism and political crisis. The adjective *ubuesque* continues to be applied with great frequency to scandals or unusual turns of events in contemporary French politics. And, as Gérard Damerval has argued, the play’s farcical portrait of a capricious tyrant who is ousted by the Russian Tsar evokes parallels with many political subjects that were topical at the time of its first, riot-provoking performance in December 1896 – from French colonial expansion and the Franco-Russian Alliance to anarchist bombings, the Dreyfus Affair, and friction between church and state.612

---

Contemporary critics, not all of them sympathetic to Jarry, were also frequently struck by the political resonance of *Ubu roi*, whose complete text was first published in *Le Livre d’art*, a short-lived *petite revue* edited by the poet Paul Fort, in April and May 1896, shortly before the play was published as a book by Mercure de France. For example, Catulle Mendès – who, as we saw in Chapter One, had been editor of *L’Écho de Paris’s Supplément littéraire* in 1892, when Jarry won its monthly literary prize with a sketch featuring Ubu – noted the play’s abundant historical echoes in his first-night review for *Le Journal*:

> Père Ubu existe.
> Fait de Pulcinella et de Polichinelle, de Punch et de Karageux, de Mayeux et M. Joseph Prud’honne, de Robert Macaire, et de M. Thiers, du catholique Torquemada et du juif Deutz, d’un agent de la Sûreté et de l’anarchiste Vaillant, énorme parodie malpropre de Macbeth, de Napoléon et d’un souteneur devenu roi, il existe désormais, inoubliable.  

As Timothy Youker has commented:

Mendès instantly recognized a link between Ubu’s slapstick violence and the violence of revolutionary street warfare (Adolph [sic] Thiers was president during the Bloody Week that ended the Paris Commune), inquisitional torture, venal treason (Simon Deutz infamously sold out the Duchess de Berry), police oppression, and terrorism.  

Jarry himself appeared to downplay such interpretations in a speech to the audience – subsequently published in the *Mercure de France*, which had previously published an extract from the play – prior to *Ubu roi*’s first performance, which turned out to be the only time the work would be performed during his lifetime. Having thanked Mendès, who had already offered advance praise for the play, along with four other appreciative critics, the playwright jokes that “leur bienveillance

616 For the extract, see Alfred Jarry, “Ubu roi,” *Mercure de France* 15, no. 69, Sept. 1895, 281-304.
a vu le ventre d’Ubu gros de plus de satiriques symboles qu’on ne l’en a pu gonfler ce soir.”

Yet, whilst cautioning against such interpretive overload, Jarry also concedes that “vous serez libres de voir en M. Ubu les multiples allusions que vous voudrez, ou un simple fantoche, la déformation par un potache d’un de ses professeurs [...]” His play, in other words, could indeed be read as a satirical political allegory or a piece of schoolboy whimsy. And Jarry himself declines to confirm or disavow either reading.

His speech concludes with a further enigmatic twist: “Pour l’action, qui va commencer, elle se passe en Pologne, c’est-à-dire nulle part.” This paradox introduces an additional political echo since Poland in 1896 was indeed “nulle part,” having been wiped off the map at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. The Mercure’s theatre columnist André-Ferdinand Herold, who had been responsible for the lighting during Ubu roi’s one-night run, then returns to the subject of political interpretations of the play at the end of the article that reproduced Jarry’s speech:

N’avons-nous pas déjà, quelques jours à peine après la représentation, lu un article où M. Rochefort, voulant exprimer tout le mépris qu’il a pour le ministère actuel, comparait M. Méline et ses collègues au Père Ubu? Et, en somme, Ubu, n’est-il pas, professeur ou politicien, l’homme de gouvernement? Herold here alludes to an article by Henri Rochefort, an erstwhile Communard sympathizer turned reactionary polemicist for the newspaper L’Intransigeant, which takes note of a recent “pièce fumiste” and its use of “un mot qu’on répète à tout bout de champ” (viz. merdre!) before concluding that “notre aristocratie parlementaire est au-dessous de ce mot-là.” Jarry’s speech had shown the playwright to be reluctant to endorse political interpretations of his play. But his

---

colleague at the *Mercure* thereafter cites a parallel with political *actualité* and anoints Ubu a government minister.

Whether Jarry liked it or not, his play had already become a political football that was being kicked back and forth between newspapers and *petites revues*. That polemical back-and-forth reflected the *Mercure*’s intermediary position between the mass press and more recondite *petites revues* such as *Le Livre d’art*. At once a laboratory for new work, an increasingly authoritative critical voice, and a source of literary news and commentary on political *actualité* as well as *reportage* on broad cultural and political themes, the magazine and its publishing arm offered a suitably expansive and eclectic forum for the exuberant polysemy of *Ubu roi*.

Jarry’s speech to the audience also echoes the ambivalence towards the mass press of the *Mercure* itself, which, as we saw in Chapter Two, by turns deplored the cretinous vulgarity of contemporary newspapers and celebrated its own contributors’ increasing journalistic success. Rather than reject the judgements of *feuilletonistes* such as Mendès, Jarry shows himself to be grateful for their attention and nimbly uses their interpretations as a way of emphasizing the play’s ambiguity. Like Mallarmé (and unlike Mallarmé’s less subtle acolytes), he tries to draw the newspapers into his own aesthetic vision and harness their power to his advantage. And, as we have seen, Jarry would continue to exploit the journalism of the mass press for his own comic purposes in later writings for *La Revue blanche*, which confront the contemporary rise of militarism and colonialism more explicitly than *Ubu roi*.

*La Revue blanche* also serialized two novels – Gustave Kahn’s *Le Roi fou* and Octave Mirbeau’s *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre* – that took clear polemical stances on topical political controversies.
Set in a fictionalized version of contemporary Belgium (“Hummertanz”), Kahn’s first novel, which was first published in the magazine in 1894-1895, is a thinly veiled allegory of militarism, imperialism, and capitalist exploitation – themes that featured prominently in *La Revue blanche*’s reportage and satirical commentary – as well as the connivance of the mass press in shoring up oligarchic power. Those echoes of political *actualité* were deliberate. As Kahn put in a preface to the novel: “Le rideau se lève ici sur une tragi-comédie romantique dont le cadre et le fond sont sociaux et actuels.” The novel’s portrayal of a brutally repressed strike wave thus recalls the violence of the 1893 Belgian general strike as well as an earlier social revolt in Belgium in 1886. There are also many allusions to colonial outrages committed in the Belgian Congo. And the titular king is nearly killed by a bomb, which evokes the wave of anarchist attacks across Europe that had begun in 1892. Indeed, *Le Roi fou*’s serialization in *La Revue blanche* coincided with Fénéon’s trial, where he was acquitted of blowing up the Restaurant Foyot. Arbitrary restrictions imposed on Hummertanz’s press also evoke France’s *lois scélérates*, introduced in 1893-1894, which, as we saw in Chapter Two, curtailed some of the freedoms associated with the 1881 press law and forced pro-anarchist *petites revues* such as *Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires* out of existence. The novel’s subversive political message might well have fallen afoul of those strictures had it been expressed in non-fictional form or a less recondite prose style (a nightmare here becomes “son somme éphialtique,” a loud noise “de hourvariques ébrouements”). That unlikely blend of Symbolist obscurity and sympathy for revolutionary

---

622 See Fagnot’s introduction to Kahn, *Le Roi fou*.
623 Léon Blum, then an auditor at the Conseil d’État, would later subject the *lois scélérates* to a detailed critique in an anonymous article for *La Revue blanche* (Un juriste, “Les Lois scélérates,” *La Revue blanche* 15, no. 122, July 1, 1898, 338-352).
politics brings together two central features of *La Revue blanche*’s editorial outlook within a single literary work.

As we saw in Chapter Two, *La Revue blanche* became a leading Dreyfusard voice during the late 1890s. That struggle acquired fictional form in Mirbeau’s *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre*, recounting the turbulent life of Céléstine, a jobbing lady’s maid, which was first published in the magazine during the first half of 1900 (though an earlier, very different version had appeared in *L’Écho de Paris* in 1891-1892). Joseph, the sinister coachman-cum-gardener and probable murderer, is an ardent anti-Dreyfusard, who constantly mutters anti-Semitic imprecations. A series of aristocratic and bourgeois grotesques are also defined by their vocal anti-Dreyfusism. Some even appear under their real names including François Coppée, the sketch artist Jean-Louis Forain, the former War Minister Auguste Mercier, and Jules Lemaître (who gropes the titular chambermaid). The anti-Dreyfusard psychological novelist Paul Bourget is also depicted as a snob who dismisses the “psychologie” of “de trop petites âmes.” Moreover, in keeping with *La Revue blanche*’s penchant for intra-journalistic sparring, the novel singles out anti-Dreyfusard newspapers: Joseph is a dedicated reader of Edouard Drumont’s virulently anti-Semitic *La Libre Parole*, which appears to dictate most of his vile opinions, while the world of the salon-based anti-Dreyfusards revolves around *Le Gaulois* and its petition to erect a monument in honour of Colonel Henry (who had committed suicide after forging documents to incriminate Dreyfus). By contrast, one of the more sympathetic characters, Céléstine’s lover William is a regular reader of *L’Autorité* and supporter of its editor Paul de Cassagnac, a Bonapartist politician who, despite his own anti-Semitism, was one of the first to question Dreyfus’s guilt. *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre* thus reprises the polemical thrust of the magazine’s “Protestation” and Zola’s “J’accuse”

---

(following which Mirbeau began to make substantial contributions to his fellow writer’s legal bills\textsuperscript{626}). Moreover, in the course of serialization, \textit{La Revue blanche} published several other articles about the Dreyfus Affair including Jean Ajalbert’s “Le Général Mercier falsificateur de textes” such that the minister who had launched the witch-hunt against Dreyfus was concurrently attacked in both fiction and a piece of factual journalism.\textsuperscript{627} Indeed, the section of the novel caricaturing Mercier appeared in the issue published two weeks after the issue containing Ajalbert’s article.\textsuperscript{628}

Célestine’s account of her wretched working conditions under a series of capricious and lecherous employers also has the feel of a genuine exposé. And, even if the claim (not included in \textit{La Revue blanche}) at the start of the version later published in book form that the work had been written by a real chambermaid can have convinced nobody, as Noël Arnaud puts it: “Rien n’interdit de penser que [Mirbeau] a pu rencontrer une femme de chambre assez observatrice et assez intelligente pour avoir noté divers épisodes de sa vie de domestique.”\textsuperscript{629} The book also includes a lengthy dedication to Jules Huret, where the novelist overtly credits the influence of his friend’s journalism: “J’ai toujours présentes à l’esprit, mon cher Huret, beaucoup des figures, si étrangement humaines, que vous fîtes défiler dans une longue suite d’études sociales et littéraires.”\textsuperscript{630} That salute to Huret’s work as a reporter emphasizes that, though not itself a piece of reportage, \textit{Le Journal d’une femme de chambre} displays clear affinities with that genre, namely

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{627} Jean Ajalbert, “Le Général Mercier falsificateur de textes,” \textit{La Revue blanche} 21, no. 162, March 1, 1900, 351-359.
\textsuperscript{628} Octave Mirbeau, “Le Journal d’une femme de chambre (VIII),” \textit{La Revue blanche} 21, no. 163, March 15, 1900, 409-428. In the absence of the relevant section of the manuscript, it is impossible to say whether Mirbeau had already completed this chapter before or after the publication of Ajalbert’s article. Chapter VIII draws on a section previously published in \textit{L’Écho de Paris} on March 29, 1892, which obviously contains no references to Mercier. See the notes to Octave Mirbeau, \textit{Œuvres romanesques}, ed. Pierre Michel, 3 vols (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 2001), 2: 1272-1275.
\textsuperscript{629} Note in Mirbeau, \textit{Le Journal d’une femme de chambre}, ed. Noël Arnaud (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 495.
\textsuperscript{630} Mirbeau, \textit{Le Journal d’une femme de chambre}, ed. Arnaud, 30.
\end{footnotesize}
its first-person narrative voice, frequent depictions of travel, and use of a fictional \textit{fait divers} as a central plot device.

Like several other novels by Mirbeau, which will be discussed in Chapter Six, \textit{Le Journal d'une femme de chambre}'s journalistic origins also seem to underlie its fragmented, episodic structure. The novel's formal modernism, in other words, reflects its fitful, scrappy genesis in the heat of a politico-journalistic struggle for the soul of France. As in \textit{Le Roi fou}, that blend of politics, journalism, and aesthetic innovation epitomizes the eclectic spirit of \textit{La Revue blanche}. Indeed, Mirbeau's entry into the \textit{petite revue}'s circle at the height of the Affair – when, according to Blum, he used to come to its offices almost every day – had a decisive influence on the development of the novel, whose initial version published in \textit{L'Écho de Paris} long predates the Affair, into a statement of the author's ardent Dreyfusism.\footnote{On Mirbeau's relations with \textit{La Revue blanche}, see the "Dossier," in Mirbeau, \textit{Le Journal d'une femme de chambre}, ed. Arnaud, 476.} Like \textit{La Revue blanche} itself, \textit{Le Journal d'une femme de chambre} both borrows from the mass press and assails its many depredations. Himself a veteran newspaper journalist who had seldom written for \textit{petites revues} prior to the Affair, Mirbeau here confronts the sometimes heroic but mostly abject role played by his colleagues in the era's greatest political scandal. And in the shape of the psychopathic Joseph, he makes a prescient point about the deleterious effects of unscrupulous newspaper propaganda on a half-educated populace.

Péguy's \textit{Cahiers de la quinzaine} also published two novels that addressed topical political concerns. The first of these, Antonin Lavergne's \textit{Jean Coste ou l'instituteur de village}, published as a single \textit{Cahier} in 1901, is a semi-autobiographical account of the tribulations of a village school teacher who, through no fault of his own, steadily sinks into a life of debt and poverty whilst falling afoul of local political intrigue, whose cynicism and petty corruption are a far cry from republican
ideals. For Péguy, there was little fictional invention in Lavergne’s work, which he presented as an authentic exposé of the conditions endured by the nation’s instituteurs: “[L’auteur est un historien, historien de son temps, de sa région, de son pays, de son entourage, de son métier.” Péguy was not alone in this view. For Jean Coste attracted considerable attention upon publication, being the subject of over seventy reviews, which frequently stressed the novel’s documentary value. For example, Péguy’s future nemesis Gustave Lanson saw the book as conveying a basic factual message: “L’instituteur meurt de faim, voilà la vérité brutale que M. Lavergne a voulu dire.” Indeed, his only criticism was that the author “a mis dans son exposé un peu trop d’invention littéraire.” The novel, in other words, was too novelistic for this austere literary historian; yet it is doubtful that a straightforward piece of reportage would have generated the same sense of pathos and thereby captured the public imagination. Jean Coste was even referenced in parliamentary debate on several occasions. A work of fiction thus proved to be instrumental to drawing attention to a real piece of injustice. Moreover, it was Péguy’s own concern for the truth that allowed Jean Coste to see the light of day; for the book had been refused everywhere else precisely because of its unremittingly harsh realism. The Cahiers’ self-proclaimed mission – “dire la vérité, toute la vérité, rien que la vérité, dire bêtement la vérité bête” – accordingly made Péguy’s publication the ideal forum for Lavergne’s novel, which blends literary and journalistic elements in the service of that cause.

632 Charles Péguy, preface to Antonin Lavergne, “Jean Coste ou l’instituteur du village,” Cahiers de la quinzaine 2, no. 12, June 13, 1901, VII.
633 See Laichter, Péguy et ses Cahiers de la Quinzaine, 37.
635 See Laichter, Péguy et ses Cahiers de la Quinzaine, 37.
636 See Péguy, preface to Lavergne, “Jean Coste,” V.
Jean Coste also prompted an essay by Péguy himself, “De Jean Coste,” which expressed his misgivings about the direction of French educational policy under the anti-clerical government of Émile Combes. Jean Coste itself is probably best described as being part of the Naturalist tradition. But the indifference to traditional generic distinctions displayed by Péguy in his commentary on the novel was a harbinger of the Cahiers’ openness to more innovative fictional writing about the social, cultural, and political ferment of the early twentieth century. Péguy thus welcomed Romain Rolland’s sprawling fresco Jean-Christophe, whose later volumes are dominated by political themes, reflecting the author’s involvement in the socialist movement. Controversies such as the Separation of the Churches and State, the growth of the Universités Populaires (a subject repeatedly discussed elsewhere in the Cahiers), and the looming spectre of militarism are all explored in Rolland’s novel, if not quite in real time, then at most with a few years’ hindsight. Jean-Christophe is thus both a modernist roman-fleuve and a roman de l’actualité or roman contemporain – a genre often disparaged as frivolous, notably, as we saw in Chapter One, by Ferdinand Brunetière in his diatribe against “le reportage dans le roman,” that acquires world-historical resonance in Rolland’s hands whilst addressing the same topical issues as polemical essays and pieces of reportage published in the Cahiers.

639 See, for example, Charles Guieysse, “Les Universités populaires et le mouvement ouvrier,” Cahiers de la quinzaine 3, no. 2, Oct. 17, 1901. The Universités Populaires were set up during the Dreyfus Affair with the aim of providing higher education to the working classes for a nominal fee. At their peak, they enrolled approximately 50,000 students. Their numbers had declined significantly by the outbreak of the First World War amid much internal squabbling (see Lucien Mercier, Les Universités populaires: éducation populaire et mouvement ouvrier au début du siècle, [Paris: Éditions Ouvrières, 1986]).
In the novel’s final instalment, published in October 1912, one week after the outbreak of
the Balkan Wars, Rolland concluded his work with a prophetic *tour d’horizon*:

L’incendie qui couvait dans la forêt d’Europe commençait à flamber. On avait
beau l’éteindre, ici; plus loin, il se rallumait; avec des tourbillons de fumée et une
pluie d’étincelles, il sautait d’un point à l’autre et brûlait les broussailles sèches. A
l’Orient, déjà, des combats d’avant-garde préluaient à la grande guerre des
nations. L’Europe tout entière, l’Europe hier encore sceptique et apathique, comme
un bois mort, était la proie du feu. Le désir du combat possédait toutes les âmes. A
tout instant, la guerre était sur le point d’éclater.640

A few pages on, Rolland posits “l’imminence d’un conflit franco-allemand.”641 Amid the tensions
of successive Moroccan Crises, he was hardly alone in predicting a resumption in hostilities
between France and Germany. Péguy himself was convinced of that eventuality, and his belief that
Jaurès and other socialists were underestimating the threat of German militarism had led him to
oppose many of his old friends on the Left. In *Jean-Christophe*, however, Rolland foresees not
just a new war but a pan-continental conflagration of unprecedented violence. And, as predicted
here, the first sparks of this conflict would indeed flare up in the so-called Balkan tinderbox.
Rolland even manages to predict the name of what became known as “la grande guerre.” A work
of fiction thus proved to be an uncannily accurate guide to the future course of world history.

Newspapers from the beginning of July 1914 offer few hints that the entire continent
would be at war one month later. Even during the week prior to Austria-Hungary’s declaration of
war, the Parisian press was still more preoccupied by the trial of Henriette Caillaux for the murder
of *Le Figaro*’s editor Gaston Calmette than by the unfolding diplomatic crisis. Yet a serial novel
published in a little magazine had grasped the drift to war with chilling prescience two years
beforehand. It is a commonplace, derived from Aristotle’s comments about poetry’s superiority to

640 Romand Rolland, “Jean-Christophe.—III.—La Fin du voyage. III.—La Nouvelle journée.— 2,” *Cahiers de la
quinzaine* 14, no. 3, Oct. 15, 1912, 207.

219
history in his *Poetics*, that fiction has the capacity to impart higher truths than journalism or other forms of factual writing. Jean-Christophe’s clairvoyance regarding the First World War conveys the truth in a more concrete sense. And it does so in a publication whose editor’s passion for the truth trumped any concern about respecting generic distinctions. A novel could thus cross over into territory that was usually the preserve of the reporter and the *chroniqueur*, just as Péguy’s own essays freely employed fictional and poetic techniques. The *Cahiers*’ eclecticism and disregard for convention are what made such hybridity possible. And, as in *La Revue blanche*, serialized novels in the *Cahiers* served as means of pursuing broad political ends. Jean-Christophe is inseparable from its author’s pacifist and socialist militancy, just as *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre* is a direct extension of Mirbeau’s Dreyfusism. Publication in *petites revues* underlined these novels’ topicality and thrust them into the centre of journalistic debate whilst also preserving their literariness. The format of the pugnacious little magazine could thus offer the best of both worlds.

**V. The passionate hybridity of Charles Péguy**

As we saw in Chapter Two, Péguy reproached Gustave Lanson and other academic literary critics who moonlighted as journalists for failing to write “le pamphlet des pamphlets.” That phrase evokes the self-conscious spirit of much of Péguy’s writing for the *Cahiers*, which frequently explores its own raison d’être and ambiguous position within the overlapping worlds of journalism and literature. For example, in one of the early *Cahiers*, he published a lengthy dialogue entitled “Entre deux trains” between him and a (seemingly invented) friend called René Lardenois, who reproaches Péguy for his journalistic obsessions:

Tu lis beaucoup de journaux, trop de journaux, pour ta santé, beaucoup trop de quotidiens, et nous savons combien est vaine l’action du journaliste, et toi-même, si je te pressais, tu en conviendrais. Alors? Pourquoi t’es-tu fait journaliste? Car tu es journaliste. Au lieu que tu pourrais employer ta jeunesse finissante à lire les bons auteurs, qui sont nombreux, que l’on connaît mal, et que tu ne connais pas. Puis tu emploierais ta maturité commençante à quelque travail épais, honnêtement
ennuyeux. Les travaux épais font plus pour l’action que les fantaisies plus ou moins réussies, que vous croyez légères. Descartes ou Kant ont plus fait pour préparer ce qu’il y a de bon dans ce que vous nommez la Révolution Sociale que toutes les boutades et tous les calembours des journalistes. Faisons des livres épais.642

Péguy, who had indeed recently abandoned a nascent academic career as a philosopher, here admits to some self-doubt about his chosen course. Having thrown himself into the Cahiers, his alter ego reminds him that the immediate political impact he craves does not come without cost, reiterating the standard opposition between the ephemeral world of journalism and the patience required for true scholarly labour, represented by the imposing metonym of “des livres épais.”

How does Péguy respond? By dodging the question. “[T]u trouveras aux cahiers,” he tells Lardenois, “aussitôt que j’aurai le temps d’en exposer l’institution, une réponse non négligeable aux reproches que tu m’as faits.”643 Lardenois remains unconvinced: “Oui [...] c’est un des nombreux articles que tu as promis et que tu ne feras jamais.” “Nous verrons,” insists Péguy. “Nous verrons,” says Lardenois in turn.

In literal terms, Lardenois’s hunch proved to be correct. No article specifically addressing his charges in “Entre deux trains” ever appeared in the Cahiers. Nor, though Péguy continued to discuss philosophical themes in his writing, did he ever produce a thick scholarly book on the subject. The closest he came was an unfinished essay on Descartes that was published posthumously in La NRF in 1919.644

And yet, in a holistic sense, the Cahiers themselves were Péguy’s response. Neither a thick book (though some Cahiers are very long), nor just a collection of ephemeral articles, Péguy’s publication was an expansive laboratory of literary-journalistic hybridity, bringing together novels,
poetry, philosophy, polemic, and reportage under a single editorial roof. All these distinctions are continually blurred within Péguy’s writing. “Entre deux trains” thus uses the form of a fictional philosophical dialogue to subject his own journalistic project to critical examination whilst weaving in reflections on contemporary politics and the contrasting fortunes of various contemporaries (who, like Lardenois, may be fictional). As we saw in Chapter Two, Péguy’s “Lettres du provincial” similarly use a classical literary form to discuss the evolution of the Cahiers and their position within the Parisian press and the socialist movement.

In later works such as “Notre jeunesse” and “Victor-Marie, comte Hugo” (both 1910), the sense of literary-journalistic hybridity is still more pronounced. Part memoir, part manifesto, part critical essay, these anguished jeremiads (constituting a pair given their shared focus on the Dreyfus Affair) are suffused with Péguy’s ongoing fascination for the mass press. In “Notre jeunesse,” the Dreyfusard tribune Bernard Lazare is thus commemorated as “un vieux journaliste, un routier du journal(isme),” whose heart “battait à tous les échos du monde” as he endlessly pored over newspapers in search of reports of injustice from distant lands. At the end of “Victor-Marie, comte Hugo,” the form of the newspaper then takes on an exalted character as Péguy evokes his reaction to Barrès’s funeral oration for Jean Moréas, which had been published in Le Temps earlier that year:

\[\text{Et il n’y eut plus que cette pureté antique, ce poème antique, tout l’antique, tout le païen, tout le tragique, toute l’harmonie évoquée, présente, dans peut-être pas même une colonne de ce journal; d’aujourd’hui: mouillé des presses, que l’on vient d’acheter pour trois sous. Toute une élégie.}\]

This epiphany emphasizes that great art can occur in any context. Unlike Mallarmé, Péguy is indifferent to the form of the newspaper itself, noting that he remained unaffected by “quelque

---

charme de typographie." But the shock of encountering a work he regards as a masterpiece in these humble pages seems to fuel the intensity of his aesthetic wonderment. For Péguy, through its presence in *Le Temps*, Barrès’s speech becomes a threepenny epic to rival the great works of antiquity: “Dans ces deux cents lignes, de prose, autant et plus qu’en un volume, autant et plus qu’en un livre, autant qu’en des vers, autant et plus qu’en un long poème.” There, ten years on, is Péguy’s reply to Lardenois: A two-hundred-line newspaper article can be just as profound as any “livre épais”; genius can and will flourish whatever material form it takes.

Péguy’s own writings, which draw strands of inspiration from both classical literature and the daily newspaper, similarly respect no single existing generic template. “Victor-Marie, comte Hugo” itself takes the form of an open letter to Daniel Halévy (an erstwhile Dreyfusard and socialist who had already embarked on an ideological journey that would culminate in membership of the Association pour Défendre la Mémoire du Maréchal Pétain). Péguy thereby adopts a journalistic genre – Zola’s “J’accuse” being the implicit model – and transforms it beyond recognition into an anguished 250-page lament where his friendship with Halévy becomes the basis for a soaring meditation on politics and literature.

Like Groucho Marx, Péguy would never join any club that might have him as a member. He was a republican who scorned the Third Republic, a socialist who rejected socialist politics, a Dreyfusard ill at ease among fellow Dreyfusards, and a Christian who belonged to no church. He was also a writer, editor, and publisher who heeded no existing boundaries or conventions. The *Cahiers* were at once a one-man newspaper and forum for literary experimentation on an epic scale. It is typical to group this publication among the *petites revues* (as I have done here), and the *Cahiers* clearly owed much to the example of *La Revue blanche*. But that label does not seem entirely fitting. Péguy himself rejected it in a 1902 essay:
Il faut être aussi mal renseigné qu’un professeur éminent d'histoire pour imaginer que nos cahiers sont une petite revue, ou une jeune revue. [...] S’imaginer que nos cahiers sont une jeune revue parmi tant de jeunes revues, c’est commettre un contresens correspondant à celui qui consiste à croire que le cours de M. Bergson est un cours parmi tant de cours.  

Just as Bergson stood out for normaliens of Péguy’s generation as their most influential teacher, so his most devoted acolyte hoped that the Cahiers would surpass all other petites revues and lead the charge towards social revolution. His rejection of the label petite revue is thus partly rhetorical. There is nonetheless some truth to his claim that the Cahiers belong to a category of their own. Unlike other petites revues, the Cahiers possessed no regular columns and fluctuated dramatically in size from issue to issue. The Cahiers shared the ambivalent spirit of openness towards the mass press that characterized the Mercure, La Plume, La Revue blanche, and Les Soirées de Paris. But Péguy seemed to take that rapprochement even further by systematically disregarding divisions between fact and fiction, and journalism and literature. For him, a novel such as Jean Coste was just as real as Challaye’s reportage; fictional letters and dialogues were suitable formats for discussing the internecine quarrels of French socialism or the evolution of the Cahiers; and poetry had as much place in political journalism as factual polemic. The results of that highly eclectic vision of literary-journalistic hybridity can at times seem rather unruly. Proust reproached Péguy, seven years after his death in combat at the First Battle of the Marne, for adopting “dix manières de dire une chose, alors qu’il n’y en a qu’une.” But that prolixity also signalled the scale of Péguy’s transcendent ambitions as he struggled to reconcile not just literature with journalism but also the secular, internationalist spirit of revolutionary socialism with his own patriotic and religious sentiments. Underlying the expansive formal hybridity of Péguy’s writing and its restless pivots between tradition and modernity, history and actualité was his quest for an

648 Marcel Proust, preface to Paul Morand’s Tendres Stocks (Paris: La NRF, 1921), in CSB, 616.
elusive intellectual synthesis that would resolve the tensions stirred by a tangled skein of competing passions.

VI. Actualité in La NRF

Péguy greeted the launch of La Nouvelle Revue française in 1908 with some resentment at the emergence of a rival publication. He nonetheless offered Jean Schlumberger a perhaps double-edged compliment on his co-founder Eugène Montfort’s timely choice of title: “Vous avez du moins quelque chose: votre titre. Celui-là est un signe des temps.” For the magazine’s title evoked a contemporary wave of political and cultural nationalism, within which Péguy’s mystical socialist patriotism constituted an isolated, idiosyncratic tendency. More specifically, the title echoed that of L’Action française, the daily newspaper launched earlier the same year by the extreme-nationalist movement of the same name led by Charles Maurras, whose monarchist ideology Péguy would explicitly disavow at the end of “Notre jeunesse.” The founders of La NRF were not overtly allied with that reactionary movement, and Montfort, a particularly fervent believer, as Auguste Anglès puts it, in “la précellence du génie national,” would quit the magazine after a row about an article criticizing Mallarmé in the magazine’s first issue. But they initially tended to view its ideas with critical sympathy whilst offering more fulsome praise for Péguy, who was, moreover, appointed the honorary president of a rugby club founded in 1913 by Alain-Fournier, whose membership included central figures at La NRF such as Gallimard and Rivière.

649 The following four sections are partly adapted from Max McGuinness, “Les Ambivalences de l’actualité chez Proust et à La Nouvelle Revue française,” Bulletin d’informations proustiennes, no. 48 (2018): 133-144.
652 Anglès, André Gide et le premier groupe de La NRF, 1: 113.
653 For an example of praise for Péguy in the magazine, see Michel Arnauld [Marcel Drouin], “Les ‘Cahiers’ de Charles Péguy,” La NRF, no. 10, Nov. 1909, 258-283. On the Club sportif de la jeunesse littéraire and its connections to La NRF, see Koffeman, Entre classicisme et modernité, 126.
As Gide’s biographer Frank Lestringant puts it: “Sans qu’il y eût, à proprement parler collusion avec le mouvement de Charles Maurras, l’ambiguïté était sciemment entretenue et le compagnonnage suggéré, sinon revendiqué.” Gide duly published three articles entitled “Nationalisme et Littérature” in La NRF in 1909-1910, which express qualified approval for the provincial nationalist theory of “déracinement” propounded by Action française’s sometime confederate Maurice Barrès (whose novels on that theme will be discussed in Chapter Six) and his “éloquente formule, rien qu’à demi métaphorique: ‘la terre et les morts’” as well as the ideas of “quelques jeunes gens à tendances nettement conservatrices et réactionnaires” grouped around Les Guêpes, a petite revue close to Maurras. Gide’s reservations concern not the emphatic chauvinism of such doctrines but their exclusively backward-looking focus, whereas he looks to the past for the sake of “l’encouragement au futur.” In contrast to the “chers jeunes traditionalistes” of Les Guêpes, he thus calls on artists to cultivate “terres nouvelles, difficiles et dangereuses, mais fécondes infiniment!”

That circumspect vision of aesthetic innovation became central to La NRF’s editorial outlook – typically summed up in the paradoxical phrase “le classicisme moderne” (though it was seldom used in the magazine itself), which evokes a desire to locate a juste milieu between tradition and modernity. The magazine similarly sought to strike a balance between artistry and actualité. As we saw in Chapter Two, like La Revue blanche and the Cahiers, La NRF published pieces of

---

655 André Gide, “Nationalisme et littérature (troisième article),” La NRF, no. 10, Nov. 1909, 237-244, 238; “Nationalisme et littérature (second article),” La NRF, no. 9, Oct. 1909, 190-194, 190. As a republican, Barrès never joined Maurras’s movement, but, despite his misgivings, he did agree to sit on L’Action française’s “comité de patronage.” See Broche, Maurice Barrès, 414.
656 Gide, “Nationalisme et littérature (troisième article),” 243.
657 Gide, “Nationalisme et littérature (troisième article),” 243.
658 The phrase was coined by the poet Henri Ghéon, a co-founder of La NRF, who first used it in L’Ermitage in 1904 (see Koffeman, Entre classicisme et modernité, 27).
reportage and fictionalized reportage prior to the First World War. Unlike La Revue blanche, which at once disparaged and emulated the mass press’s preoccupation with actualité, La NRF from its inception shared some of Péguy’s self-conscious approach to confronting the magazine’s own debts to the mass press. In Jean Schlumberger’s “Considérations” at the beginning of the magazine’s “second” first issue, published in February 1909 following Montfort’s ouster, the magazine’s co-founder thus offers a nuanced account of how artists should confront topical events and issues:

Et comme la contrainte rend l’art étranger au public, elle l’isole de l’actualité. Toute la matière qui revient de droit au journal est trop fraîche, trop instable, pour être immédiatement plastique. Elle est toute gonflée d’intérêts personnels qu’il faut que d’abord elle dégorge.

Par souci de noblesse, certains artistes ont pensé ne pouvoir creuser trop profond le fossé qui sépare leur art de la vie quotidienne: attitude respectable, mais qui risque d’aboutir à des œuvres étiolées, pauvres de sang et qui, au lieu de dominer la vie, la boudent. – Un tel pessimisme est simpliste. Rien dans la vie n’est négligeable. Les artistes ne sont point d’innocents et nomades jongleurs. Tout ce qui constitue la vie publique les requiert, et leur fantaisie, même frivole, n’est jamais trop nourrie. Mais les événements journaliers ne leur offrent point une facile récolte: fruits pierreux, bien plutôt, qu’il faut écraser sous les meules, et moisson de tiges brutes dont on ne peut utiliser les fibres que rouies et broyées.659

Schlumberger begins here by establishing an opposition between, on the one hand, “la contrainte,” to wit formal rigour and technical mastery – classical virtues of which he approves – and, on the other, actualité. He thus seems to reject an approach to literature grounded in topical, journalistic concerns. And yet the adverbs “immédiatement” and “d’abord” qualify this position, which evolves in the second paragraph into a clear statement that artists must in fact avoid cutting themselves off from actualité. Then, having hesitated between hostility and approbation, Schlumberger arrives at a synthesis in the final sentence: artists should confront “les événements journaliers” judiciously and glean ground-up and retted fibres from that ephemeral churn (like

Gide, his fellow Parisian bourgeois, Schlumberger was fond of gritty agricultural metaphors). In other words, actualité can indeed provide artists with raw material, from which they must extract what is essential.

The approach defended by Schlumberger is echoed in several literary works published by La NRF in its early years. As we saw in Chapter Two, the Tharaud brothers’ La Fête arabe is a novelized reportage with clear nationalist overtones about the contemporary conflict between indigenous Algerians and European settlers. In 1912, the magazine published a long fragment of Le Rail, by Schlumberger’s friend Henri Bourillon, who wrote under the pseudonym Pierre Hamp and who also contributed to Péguy’s Cahiers, about a 1910 rail strike, which Anglès calls a work of “reportage-fiction.” In 1913, La NRF published an extract from Jean Barois, Martin du Gard’s novel about the Dreyfus Affair, which, as we shall see in Chapter Seven, borrows extensively from journalistic sources and also charts the development of intellectual nationalism at the time of its publication. And the story of a freemason converting to Catholicism at the beginning of Gide’s Les Caves du Vatican, serialized in La NRF in early 1914, then published in book form, as were Jean Barois and Le Rail, by the magazine’s nascent publishing arm, is based on a real fait divers involving a cousin of Émile Zola while the plotline about the alleged abduction of the pope was inspired by a pamphlet purporting to prove that Pope Leo XIII had been kidnapped, which Gide may have read about in the Catholic newspaper La Croix. Gide’s use of the archaic generic label “sotie” (see Chapter Two) for this work seems to allude to those connections to real events.

---

660 Pierre Hamp [Henri Bourillon], “Le Rail (La Peine des hommes) (fragment),” La NRF, no. 37, Jan. 1912, 29-66; Anglès, André Gide et le premier groupe de La NRF, 2: 484.
661 See the “Notice” to Les Caves du Vatican in André Gide, Romans et récits, 1: 1466-1469.
La NRF’s openness towards “la matière qui revient de droit au journal” was far from unlimited. Gide in particular could be contemptuous of the mass press. As he was preparing to launch La NRF in 1908, he vowed that the magazine would have the “prétention de lutter contre le journalisme, l’américanisme, le mercantilisme et la complaisance de l’Époque envers soi-même.” And he told Proust in January 1914 that Éditions de la NRF had, to his eternal regret, declined to publish Du côté de chez Swann the previous year because “[p]our moi, vous étiez resté celui qui fréquente chez Mme X ou Y, et celui qui écrit dans le Figaro.” As Gide saw it, there was no place in the austere pages of La NRF for a society flibbertigibbet who wrote for a rive-droite newspaper with a frivolous reputation. And yet, as we saw in Chapter Two, other regular contributors to La NRF wrote for the mass press at this time, and even Gide published a few articles in La Grande Revue. If Proust had written for Le Temps, which Gide read every day and whose influential critic Paul Souday he, as we shall see in Chapter Four, eagerly sought to cultivate, then the founder of La NRF might not have initially dismissed the author of the Recherche with such hauteur.

Gide himself explored a topical, journalistic subject in his Souvenirs de la cour d’assises, first published in La NRF in 1913. In that account of two weeks spent on jury duty the previous May, he casts a cool, reportorial eye over human perversity and the flaws of the criminal justice system – a topic much debated in the mass press during 1912-1913. Indeed, the version published in book form by Éditions de la NRF includes a lengthy response Gide had given to an

---

662 Quoted in Anglès, André Gide et le premier groupe de La NRF, 1: 128.
enquête conducted by the newspaper *L’Opinion* about the jury system, where he made specific proposals for reform of how jurors should be selected and how trials should be conducted.\(^665\)

In a more philosophical vein, the *Souvenirs* draw attention to crimes that seem inexplicable. For example, Gide records an arsonist’s declaration in court that “J’avais pas de motifs.”\(^666\) Of a man who had murdered his mistress, he similarly remarks: “Charles ne s’explique pas trop bien à lui-même comment ni pourquoi il a tué.”\(^667\) Gide’s presentation of these crimes attests to his ongoing fascination for the concept of the *acte gratuit*, originally formulated, as we saw in Chapter Two, in *Le Prométhée mal enchaîné*. That theme then becomes central to *Les Caves du Vatican*, where the enigmatic antihero Lafcadio hurls a fellow passenger to his death from a train for the thrill of committing “[u]n crime immotivé.”\(^668\) Gide’s journalistic account of his experiences as a juror thus anticipates the work of fiction that he would publish in *La NRF* the following year, which shows how the *petite revue*’s achievements as a literary laboratory were intertwined with its openness to journalistic writing.

The *Souvenirs* also reveal Gide’s nascent concern for social justice. And here again Philippe’s “Faits divers” seem to lurk in the background. For, like Philippe, who was both Gide’s close friend and an original member of *La NRF*’s editorial committee prior to his death at 35 from typhus in late 1909, Gide tends to view criminals with a sympathetic eye in his *Souvenirs*.\(^669\) “Assis sur le banc des jurés,” he declares at the beginning of the work, “on se redit la parole du Christ:


\(^{668}\) Gide, *Romans et récits*, 1: 1134.

Ne jugez point.”670 Gide duly recounts his successful efforts to obtain a reduced sentence for Yves Cordier, a young recidivist who had played a tangential role in a violent robbery. Cordier, he concludes, “est sans jugement; de tête faible et déplorablement facile à entraîner.”671 As we have seen, Philippe similarly ascribed the murder of a prostitute to the perpetrator’s youthful inexperience and misfortune (though Gide, unlike Philippe, doesn’t disavow Cordier’s criminal responsibility entirely). Gide also ends his brief account of the trial of a young petty thief with a quotation from John Galsworthy’s play Justice (1910) – “He can be saved now. Imprison him as a criminal, and I affirm to you that he will be lost” – which, like Philippe’s misquotation from Dostoyevsky in his “Faits divers”, suggests that forgiveness rather than punishment is the essence of true justice.672

In early 1902, as Philippe’s “Faits divers” were being published in La Revue blanche, Gide noted a comment his friend had made on that theme in his Journal: “Peut-être le sentiment de justice est-il appelé à jouer chez nous le rôle que le pittoresque jouait chez les romantiques.”673 As Lestringant remarks: “Cette [...] phrase n’allait pas rester sans écho en Gide, qui y repensa souvent par la suite, notamment quand il rédigea ses Souvenirs de la cour d’assisés, et plus tard tel épisode des Faux-Monnayeurs ou telle episode du Voyage au Congo.”674 Gide’s early friendship with Philippe seems, in other words, to have contributed both to his most celebrated work of fiction and to his political evolution during the interwar years, when he became a prominent critic of French colonialism and a Communist fellow traveller.675

670 Gide, Souvenirs et voyages, 9.
671 Gide, Souvenirs et voyages, 55.
672 Gide, Souvenirs et voyages, 35.
674 Lestringant, André Gide, 1: 463.
675 As Lestringant puts it: “Il est probable que, dès le seuil du XXe siècle, Philippe déclencha en Gide une prise de conscience dont les effets se firent sentir à retardement, développant en lui un intérêt général grandissant pour la question sociale, l’appelant par exemple, dans les années 1910, aux séances du tribunal d’abord comme simple spectateur, puis comme juré de cour d’assises.” (Lestringant, André Gide, 1: 462).
Gide would also become increasingly fascinated by *faits divers*. As we shall see in Chapter Seven, the plot of *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, first published in *La NRF* in 1925, is partly based on two *faits divers* he had read in the press. The following year, Gide also began to republish *faits divers* in *La NRF* that he had been collecting since the late nineteenth century. And he explicitly acknowledges Philippe’s precedent in his “Lettre sur les faits-divers” introducing the series:

> Il ne s’agit pas de relater à neuf, comme pouvait le faire si pertinemment Charles-Louis Philippe dans la *Revue Blanche* [sic], quelques gros ou petits faits récents. Non; je compte verser ici le texte même du journal qui m’en aura fait part, et lui laisser la responsabilité du récit dont j’aurai toujours soin d’indiquer la provenance.

Gide may have diverged from Philippe in this series by not rewriting the *fait divers* he reproduced. But, as we have seen, Gide did follow his friend’s example in other works that give literary form to *faits divers*. Like Fénéon’s *Nouvelles en trois lignes*, his *Souvenirs de la cour d’assises*, *Les Caves du Vatican*, and *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* all plausibly owe a debt to Philippe’s largely forgotten series of articles. That genealogy conforms to the pattern discussed in Chapter Two, whereby initial forays into literary experimentation in the *petites revues* were often surpassed by subsequent works that emulate their precursors in more refined form. Gide’s nuanced *Souvenirs* thus make a more effective case for treating criminals with magnanimity than Philippe’s hyperbolic portrayals of vicious thugs and murderers as the real victims; by invoking the notion of an *acte gratuit*, *Les Caves du Vatican* explores criminal motivation in greater philosophical depth than Philippe – who seemed to view all crime through a single reductively determinist lens; and *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, originally conceived as a continuation of *Les Caves* featuring Lafcadio as a central character, portrays the law as a corrupt and arbitrary institution that nonetheless provides a necessary form of social structure, whereas Philippe celebrated violent crime as a liberating blow.

---

against social injustice. Philippe may have initially stirred Gide’s interest in justice as a socio-political phenomenon, but it was Gide, and not his dyspeptic journalistic comrade, who gave that theme durable artistic shape.

Gide’s creative method in Les Caves du Vatican and Les Faux-Monnayeurs recalls Schlumberger’s advice that artists should undertake a judicious, ruminative harvest of what they read in the press. For the faits divers that inspired both works were more than fifteen years old by the time Les Caves and Les Faux-Monnayeurs appeared in La NRF. These stories had, in other words, long since ceased to be part of journalistic actualité. That they continued to fascinate Gide long after the events they described had been otherwise forgotten thus seems to demonstrate their enduring aesthetic value. The faits divers Gide republished in La NRF, which included the story of a suicide that he had fictionalized in Les Faux-Monnayeurs, were also frequently very old. As he explained in his “Lettre sur les faits-divers”: “L’actualité, vous le savez, n’est pas mon fort.”

And yet, as we have seen, the portrait of French criminal justice in Gide’s Souvenirs de la cour d’assises was highly topical at the time of their publication in La NRF. Gide’s preoccupation with actualité then deepened after the First World War, during which La NRF had suspended publication. In the first issue of the magazine to appear after the conflict in June 1919, the erstwhile nationalist sympathiser thus published an essay, “Réflexions sur l’Allemagne,” that sketches a

---

tentative vision of Franco-German reconciliation founded on European unity.\textsuperscript{678} And Gide would publish two other articles on the same theme during the early 1920s.\textsuperscript{679}

That heightened interest in politics coincided with a broader shift in \textit{La NRF}’s editorial outlook under the new editorship of Jacques Rivière, formerly the magazine’s editorial secretary, who had spent most of the conflict in a German prisoner of war camp. Whilst declaring at the beginning of the June 1919 issue that \textit{La NRF} would revert to its “premier dessein” of creating “une revue désintéressée, une revue où l’on continuera de juger et de créer en toute liberté d’esprit,” in accordance with invariable classical principles, Rivière indicates that the magazine would henceforth also address the specifically political questions raised by the war:

\begin{quote}
Non seulement en littérature notre libéralisme n’aura rien de commun avec l’indifférence, mais non plus en matière politique notre neutralité ne devra être confondue avec un détachement et un dilettantisme que nous sommes aujourd’hui unanimes à détester du fond du cœur.\textsuperscript{680}
\end{quote}

The connotations of Rivière’s “libéralisme” here are more aesthetic than political. He is reaffirming the spirit of openness and the desire to avoid being associated with any particular literary clique that characterized \textit{La NRF} from its inception. That eclectic editorial outlook would nonetheless acquire a political dimension during the inter-war years as it underlay \textit{La NRF}’s willingness to publish writers as ideologically diverse as the Communist Louis Aragon, the fascist Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, and the conservative Catholic François Mauriac. And Rivière is simultaneously signalling that \textit{La NRF} would devote space to discussion of politics itself – a

\begin{flushleft}


\end{flushleft}
statement of intent framed around a rather paradoxical distinction between “neutralité” in political matters and the “détachement” that he rejects.

That nuanced stance echoes what Schlumberger had written ten years previously in his “Considérations.” In both articles, the essential point is that La NRF will aim to strike a balance between artistic independence and the demands of actualité. But whereas Schlumberger’s brief remarks about “la vie publique” take an elliptical form, Rivière directly confronts the question of “la matière politique.” It doesn’t follow that the new editor is advocating an ideologically militant approach to literature. Rather, he seeks to overcome the opposition between the Flaubertian ivory tower and the trenches of political commitment:

On voit des gens qui semblent persuadés que l’énormité et l’atrocité des événements que nous venons de traverser rendent désormais scandaleuse et impossible toute position purement speculative et obligent à ne plus se proposer que des fins pratiques. On en voit d’autres au contraire, plus rares, il est vrai — mais on trouverait parmi eux plus d’un ancien combattant — qui, par timidité, par répugnance pour les partis-pris, par lassitude souvent, ou par héroïque dédain de ce qu’ils ont fait de plus admirable, affectent de ne plus attacher d’importance qu’aux jeux de l’esprit et déclarent ouvertement se désintéresser des affaires publiques.

Nous n’appartenons ni à l’une ni à l’autre de ces deux catégories. J’ai assez dit plus haut le prix que conservait pour nous l’indépendance de la pensée et des arts. Je tiens maintenant à nous désolidariser formellement de tous ceux qui considèrent que la guerre étant finie, il n’y a qu’à n’y plus penser, et qui croient qu’on peut limiter de nouveau le champ de ses préoccupations à la seule esthétique. Non seulement un tel désintéressement nous indigne; mais encore il nous est impraticable. Pas de tour d’ivoire. Et d’abord pour cette bonne et élémentaire raison que nous serions absolument incapables de nous en construire une. Une force qui dépasse infiniment nos forces nous tient rivés à l’actualité, nous inspire même également à tous le besoin de contribuer personnellement à la solution des grands problèmes posés par la guerre.681

Whilst reprising some of Schlumberger’s initial ambivalence, Rivière here prepares the way for a shift in La NRF’s editorial policy. Not without tensions, he is reiterating that the magazine is set

to take a deeper interest in political *actualité*. And yet the following paragraph simultaneously proposes to erect a *cordon sanitaire* around literature itself:

Nous avons l’ambition de nourrir à la fois, conjointes mais séparées, des opinions littéraires et des croyances politiques parfaitement définies. Le seul point que nous nous défendions, c’est de laisser les unes déteindre sur les autres, pensant que ce ne pourrait arriver qu’à leur mutuel désavantage. La seule faute que prévoit notre programme serait de consentir à leur contamination: mais nous n’y tomberons pas.

Whereas Schlumberger envisaged an eventual artistic “récolte” reaped from journalistic *actualité*, Rivière proposes an internal dichotomy whereby artists would simultaneously become “des écrivains sans politique et des citoyens sans littérature.”

That editorial outlook soon left its mark on *La NRF*, which published many articles on political subjects during the interwar years, beginning, as we have seen, with Gide’s “Réflexions sur l’Allemagne.” In the September 1919 issue, Rivière himself re-entered the fray with an article attacking the signatories (who included Henri Ghéon, one of *La NRF*’s founders) of the nationalist manifesto “Pour un parti de l’intelligence” published in *Le Figaro littéraire* on July 19, 1919 whilst also criticizing Bolshevism in another article. And Franco-German reconciliation became a central preoccupation of *La NRF* at a time when that cause had few supporters in France, where the elections of November 1919 yielded an overwhelming right-wing majority – which campaigned under the slogan “L’Allemagne paiera!” – in the “Chambre bleu horizon” (named for the many nationalist ex-servicemen who wore their uniforms in parliament). In 1920, *La NRF*’s publishing arm even published the French translation of John Maynard Keynes’s *The Economic*

---

682 Rivière, “*La Nouvelle Revue française*,” 11.
683 As Dagan notes, although only a few dozen articles published under Rivière’s editorship dealt directly with political questions, “l’implication politique indirecte va au-delà de cet inventaire fondé sur une conception très étroite du ‘politique.’” (Dagan, *La NRF entre guerre et paix*, 231). *La NRF* would devote more space to political discussion under the editorship of Jean Paulhan, who succeeded Rivière in 1925 after his death.
Consequences of the Peace (also excerpted in the magazine) – a ferocious philippic against the Versailles Treaty and, in particular, Clemenceau’s revanchist stance.685

As before the war, in spite of Rivière’s rejection of the “contamination” of literature by politics, La NRF and its publishing arm also continued to publish works of fiction suffused with political actualité, such as Joseph Kessel’s La Steppe rouge, set during the Russian Civil War, Jacques de Lacretelle’s portrait of anti-Semitism in a Parisian lycée Silbermann, and the short stories of Paul Morand’s Ouvert la nuit, which unfold against a turbulent post-war backdrop featuring the 1919 Spanish General Strike, the 1919 Hungarian Revolution, and the 1919-1921 Greco-Turkish War.686

VII. Proust against the “Parti de l’intelligence”

Proust, who had defected from Éditions Grasset to La NRF’s publishing arm during the war, followed the magazine’s political evolution with a favourable eye. In September 1919, having already sent a reproachful letter to Daniel Halévy, who had signed the “Parti de l’intelligence”’s manifesto, he wrote to Rivière congratulating him on his two articles against Bolshevism and that manifesto.687 He returned to the same subject two months later in another letter to Rivière, where he mocks the “Parti,” comparing its elucubrations to the talking shop of the “Club de l’intelligence” in L’Éducation sentimentale. Unlike Flaubert, Proust does not disdain political engagement in and


686 These three works were all published in book form by the magazine’s publishing arm. Silbermann was serialized in La NRF in August and September 1922 (Jacques de Lacretelle, “Silbermann (1),” La NRF, no. 107, Aug. 1922, 163-205; “Silbermann (fin),” La NRF, no. 108, Sept. 1922, 287-338). The magazine also published one of the stories from Ouvert la nuit in January 1922 (Paul Morand, “La Nuit des six jours,” La NRF, no. 100, Jan. 1922, 56-69). Although Silbermann is set before the war, its portrayal of anti-Semitism remained highly topical at a time when extreme right-wing “leagues,” such as Action française, were rapidly expanding.

Rather, he attacks the “Parti”’s extremism and chauvinism while reiterating his own Dreyfusism in his letter to Halévy.

Rivière returned the favour the following year with his article “Marcel Proust et la tradition classique,” published in La NRF’s February 1920 issue, which responds to the attacks against Proust, from both left and right, that followed the controversial award of the Prix Goncourt to À l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs the previous year:

Je ne puis prendre pour un simple hasard le fait que Proust a vu se coaliser principalement contre lui tous les tenants de “l’art révolutionnaire”, tous ceux-là qui, confondant vaguement politique et littérature, s’imaginent que la hardiesse est toujours de même sens dans les deux domaines, que dans le second comme dans le premier il n’y a d’initiative qu’en avant, que l’inventeur est toujours celui qui va plus loin que les autres, – tous ceux-là qui se représentent l’innovation littéraire comme une émancipation et qui saluent comme un pas de plus vers la Beauté chaque abandon d’une règle jusque-là respectée, chaque nouvelle entrave qui tombe, chaque précision de moins qu’on apporte. L’un d’eux, non sans candeur, a traité Proust d’écrivain “réactionnaire”.689

This defence of Proust reprises a central theme of Rivière’s article introducing the new series of La NRF the previous June. Those whom he had previously reproached for wishing to subordinate literature to “des fins pratiques” here become “les tenants de ‘l’art révolutionnaire’ […] confondant vaguement politique et littérature”. Rivière thus seems to reaffirm the principle of artistic independence in the face of ideological passions. And yet that stance carries political overtones since, as Antoine Compagnon has commented of this passage, Rivière “cherchait des alliés, comme [Julien] Benda ou Proust, pour réaffirmer contre l’Action française et le Parti de l’intelligence, les prérogatives de la NRF sur le ‘classicisme moderne’.”690 An author deemed reactionary by the revolutionary Left duly represented an ideal ally to counter the genuine

690 Compagnon, Les Antimodernes, 399.

238
reactionaries of Action française and to demonstrate that *La NRF* occupied the *juste milieu* in politics as in literature.

VIII. Historical and topical echoes in the *Recherche*

Proust seems, on the whole, to have been pleased with what he called, in a letter to the writer-journalist Jean de Pierrefeu, Rivière’s “admirable article [...] mille fois trop élogieux.”691 He never addresses Rivière’s comments about “l’art révolutionnaire” in his correspondence. But at least the aesthetic dimension of such an outlook is satirized in the *Recherche*’s portrayal of Mme de Cambremer, who “se croyait ‘avancée’ et (en art seulement) ‘jamais assez à gauche’ [...]”.692 In politics, the marquess is deeply reactionary, “n’excusant les dreyfusards,” as Marie Migué-Ollagnier summarizes her attitude, “que s’ils sont comme les Guermantes ‘à moitié allemands’.”693 The two tendencies against which Rivière sought to defend Proust and modern classicism thus seem to converge in one of the most ridiculous characters in the *Recherche*.

The later volumes of the *Recherche* contain several other echoes of the political viewpoints expressed by Gide and Rivière among others in *La NRF* after the war. In *Le Temps retrouvé*, during a lengthy discussion about war-time propaganda between the narrator and Charlus, they both mock the chauvinistic boycott of German culture, specifically the works of Wagner, Goethe and Nietzsche – three examples that Gide had cited in his “Réflexions sur l’Allemagne.”694 Charlus also fears that the conflict will bring about a restoration of the monarchy in France, just as Rivière had accused the “Parti de l’intelligence” of nursing such an ambition.695 And though the narrator

691 Proust to Pierrefeu, mid-Jan. 1920, in Proust, Corr., 19: 73-79, 77. Proust expresses some reservations in this letter about how Rivière had portrayed the psychology of the *Recherche*.
692 Proust, RTP, 3: 210
later asserts his own “germanophobie,” Charlus’s tirade here channels much of Proust’s own revulsion at French chauvinism fomented by the press, which had been still more explicit in early drafts of this section of the novel. In this respect, the *Recherche* appears more enlightened than Gide and Rivière, whose writings, in spite of their support for Franco-German reconciliation, are not exempt from Germanophobic clichés. Among Gide’s “Réflexions” is the statement that “les Germains sont de piétres psychologues [...].” According to Charlus, the fashionable doctor Cottard is similarly fond of commenting on “l’habituel manque de psychologie qui caractérise la race teutonne.” Gide himself was thus a victim of the same journalistic “bourrage de crâne” denounced by an author whom the founder of *La NRF* had reproached for writing for *Le Figaro*.

Regarding press propaganda, Charlus and the narrator are entirely in agreement, with the latter noting that his friend “avait raison” to affirm that “ce public qui ne juge ainsi des hommes et des choses de la guerre que par les journaux est persuadé qu’il juge par lui-même.” And in a digression to Charlus’s tirade, the narrator himself points to an example of this collective delusion that echoes the post-war political preoccupations of *La NRF* whilst also mocking the newspaper whose frivolous reputation had initially blocked the magazine’s door to Proust:

"Je noterai aussi que, deux ans plus tard, le duc de Guermantes, animé du plus pur anticaillautisme, rencontra un attaché militaire anglais et sa femme, couple remarquablement lettré avec lequel il se lia, comme au temps de l’affaire Dreyfus avec les trois dames charmantes, que, dès le premier jour il eut la stupéfaction, parlant de Caillaux dont il estimait la condamnation certaine et le crime patent, d’entendre le couple charmant et lettré dire: “Mais il sera probablement acquitté, il n’y a absolument rien contre lui.” M. de Guermantes essaya d’alléguer que M. de...

---


697 According to Daniel Durosay, Rivière’s support for the rehabilitation of Germany represented “un effort de rachat” vis-à-vis his book *L’Allemand*, which expresses “une pensée chauvine et agressive” (“La Direction politique de Jacques Rivière à la *Nouvelle Revue Française*’ (1919-1925),” 228).


Norpois, dans sa déposition, avait dit en regardant Caillaux atterré: “Vous êtes le Giolitti de la France, oui, monsieur Caillaux, vous êtes le Giolitti de la France.” Mais le couple lettré et charmant avait souri, tourné M. de Norpois en ridicule, cité des preuves de son gâtisme et conclu qu’il avait dit cela “devant M. Caillaux atterré”, disait Le Figaro, mais probablement, en réalité, devant M. Caillaux narquois.\textsuperscript{701}

Convicted in April 1920 by the French Senate’s High Court of having maintained “une correspondance avec les sujets d’une puissance ennemie,” Joseph Caillaux, a former prime minister, was, notwithstanding some carelessness on his part, in reality only guilty of having advocated Franco-German reconciliation as early as the 1911 Agadir Crisis, of being a rival of Clemenceau, and of having contemplated a negotiated peace during the war, which erupted days after the controversial acquittal of his wife for murdering Le Figaro’s editor Gaston Calmette. Those personal and political circumstances made Caillaux “une sorte de traître idéal” in a post-war France consumed by vengeful nationalism.\textsuperscript{702} Given his friendship with Calmette, to whom Du côté de chez Swann is dedicated, Proust had little reason to flatter Caillaux, who was suspected of having pulled strings on behalf of his wife during her trial.\textsuperscript{703} And yet the Duc de Guermantes, the pompous diplomat Norpois, and Le Figaro all appear ridiculous in this passage, whereas the Radical politician, whom even an English military attaché deems innocent, cuts a proud, doughty figure. Politics thus seems to take precedence over personal antipathy.

Earlier, in Sodome et Gomorrhe II, Caillaux’s efforts to avoid war during the 1911 Crisis already appear in a favourable light:

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[701]{Proust, RTP, 4: 362.}
\footnotetext[703]{As Yuji Murakami notes in his doctoral thesis “L’Affaire Dreyfus dans l’œuvre de Proust” (Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2012, 457), Proust’s name was cited in Le Figaro among a list of correspondents offering their “condoléances” following the verdict (“Réponse au jury,” Le Figaro, Aug. 1, 1914, 2).}
\end{footnotes}
On revenait du reste sur cette décoration dans l’Écho de Paris de la veille, dont le directeur n’avait encore lu que “le premier paraphe” (pour paragraphe). La politique de M. Caillaux y était bien arrangée. “Je trouve du reste qu’ils ont raison, dit-il. Il nous met trop sous la coupole de l’Allemagne” (sous la coupe).704

As in Le Temps retrouvé, here we have a man who takes his judgements from his newspaper, namely L’Écho de Paris, a militarist organ, whilst believing he is judging for himself. And the manager of the Grand Hôtel de Balbec’s solecisms further undermine the authority of his political opinions. First published in La NRF in October 1921, this passage, where the reference to Caillaux was probably a late addition made in mid-1921, seems to recall indirectly that a politician who had recently been made a scapegoat for the trauma of mass slaughter had previously managed to keep the peace rather than trigger a Franco-German war.705 And like the allusions to Caillaux’s trial in Le Temps retrouvé, this addition introduces a perspective close to Rivière’s and Gide’s in their own articles for La NRF, whose enemies on the Right even decried the magazine as a “caillautiste” publication.706 Though La NRF seldom mentioned the disgraced politician, its pleas for Franco-German reconciliation were indeed in line with Caillaux’s highly unpopular views.

Such irruptions of political actualité in the Recherche coincide with the increasing importance of Dreyfus Affair within the novel, which stems from revisions made during and after the war. In this way, as Yuji Murakami has noted, the parallel between the transformation of the Duc de Guermantes’s opinion towards Caillaux (whose trial as well as that of his wife was often compared to Dreyfus’s in contemporary newspapers) and his earlier conversion to Dreyfusism

704 Proust, RTP, 3: 149.
705 Marcel Proust, “Les Intermittences du cœur,” La NRF, no. 97, Oct. 1921, 385-410. The sentence about Caillaux is part of a handwritten addition to the typescript prepared by Éditions de la NRF in early 1921 (Fonds Marcel Proust, NAF 16739, f. 16, BnF, Paris/ Gallica). Proust himself seems to have shared the hotel manager’s opinion before the war. In January 1912, the month of the Caillaux Ministry’s fall from power, he wrote to the diplomat Robert de Billy: “Il me semble que l’Angleterre est moins chaude pour nous. Quel ennui ce serait. Et voilà le Times qui a l’air de prendre le parti de l’Allemagne.” (Proust to Billy, Jan. 1912, in Proust, Corr., 11: 28).
points to a broader symbiosis between depictions of the Dreyfus Affair and the First World War in Proust’s novel.\textsuperscript{707} That “analogie permanente, méthodique et quasi automatique” is expressed through the recurrent motifs of the kaleidoscope and radiology, which Murakami interprets as metaphors for the vacillating fortunes of the Jewish people and the eclipse of the Affair from collective memory during the war.\textsuperscript{708} For example, the Dreyfusism of the fictional politician Bontemps, who becomes a convert to militarism and co-author of the 1913 law increasing compulsory military service to three years, is rendered, according to the narrator, “invisible et constitutif” and “ne se voyait pas plus que les os sous la peau,” which ensures him a favourable reception within high society.\textsuperscript{709} Although the narrator does not openly accuse Bontemps of hypocrisy here, these metaphors make his political evolution seem rather devious.

The obvious model for Bontemps is Joseph Reinach, a prominent Dreyfusard and co-author of the definitive version of the “loi des trois ans.” And, as Murakami notes, the narrator goes on to target Reinach directly at the end of Charlus’s tirade:

\begin{quote}
[J]’avais déjà vu dans mon pays des haines successives qui avaient fait apparaître, par exemple, comme des traîtres — mille fois pires que les Allemands auxquels ils livraient la France — des dreyfusards comme Reinach avec lequel collaboraient aujourd’hui les patriotes contre un pays dont chaque membre était forcément un menteur, une bête féroce, un imbécile, exception faite des Allemands qui avaient embrassé la cause française[.]
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{707} For the Duc’s conversion to Dreyfusism, see Proust, \textit{RTP}, 3: 137-138. On the parallel with his view of Caillaux, see Yuji Murakami, “Comme au temps de l’affaire Dreyfus,” in \textit{Proust écrivain de la Première Guerre mondiale}, ed. Philippe Chardin and Nathalie Mauriac-Dyer (Éditions universitaires de Dijon, 2014), 67-83, 70. Caillaux and his wife were defended during their trials respectively by Edgar Demange and Fernand Labori, who had both been Dreyfus’s lawyers. Though not himself a confirmed Dreyfusard, Caillaux was, moreover, minister of finance under Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau when the latter had Dreyfus pardoned in 1899.


243
This vitriolic portrait of the “collaboration” between Reinach and his erstwhile nationalist enemies suggests that the former member of parliament – who lost his seat in the elections of April-May 1914 and whose war-time columns on military affairs, published in *Le Figaro* under the pseudonym “Polybe,” were much derided by Proust in his letters – had yielded to the same chauvinist temptations that he had fought against during the Affair. It follows that the implicit Dreyfusism of the *Recherche*, as revealed by Murakami, brings the novel’s parallel critique of war-time chauvinism into sharper relief.

**IX. Silence in *La NRF***

*La NRF* itself sketched a very different portrait of its star author. Even in the special issue devoted to Proust in January 1923 after his death, though *Sodome et Gomorrhe II*, in which the Dreyfus Affair plays a crucial role, had been published the previous year, there is no mention of his novel’s political dimension, including in the brief “hommages” supplied by the two old anti-Dreyfusard comrades in arms Barrès and Léon Daudet, who were then both nationalist members of parliament. Comparing Proust to Paul Valéry, Albert Thibaudet remarks that during the war “[r]ien ne paraissait plus éloigné des préoccupations publiques et de la claire lumière de notre conscience que ces deux essences de l’oisir paradoxal et de désintéressement: la vie poétique pure et la vie mondaine pure.”\(^{711}\) And five years later, in his review of *Le Temps retrouvé*, Benjamin Crémieux only mentions in passing “les admirables pages qu’il contient sur la guerre à l’arrière [...].”\(^{712}\)

That reticence is consistent with Rivière’s initial vow against the “contamination” of art by politics. And yet he had pledged in the same article to publish reflections “sur les événements actuels” in *La NRF* that would never be “tout à fait des professions de foi politiques: plutôt une

---


\(^{712}\) Benjamin Crémieux, “*Le Temps retrouvé*,” *La NRF*, no. 172, Jan. 1928, 113-118, 118.
sorte de critique et d’interprétation de l’histoire contemporaine, mais à travers lesquelles forcément s’entreverra une couleur politique.”⁷¹³ There we have a perfect summary of the portrayal of the Dreyfus Affair, the First World War, and its aftermath in the Recherche. Proust breaches the 
cordon sanitaire that Rivière, who died in 1925, wished to erect around literature (and which was further eroded under his successor Jean Paulhan as the magazine became increasingly open to political engagement).⁷¹⁴ But he does so in the equivocal manner of Rivière, and indeed of Schlumberger, by reaping a difficult harvest from actualité and recent history in a novel where the narrator simultaneously repudiates “diverses theories littéraires qui m’avaient un moment troublé – notamment celles que la critique avait développées au moment de l’affaire Dreyfus et avait reprises pendant la guerre, et qui tendaient à ‘faire sortir l’artiste de sa tour d’ivoire’ [...]”⁷¹⁵ Like La NRF under Rivière’s editorship, Proust navigates between indifference and engagement in the Recherche. And both Proust’s novel and the magazine that ultimately embraced and celebrated that work display a distinct “couleur politique” – that of justice, of reconciliation, and of ambivalence towards politics itself.

⁷¹³ Rivière, “La Nouvelle Revue française,” 11
⁷¹⁴ Under the editorship of Jean Paulhan in the 1930s, La NRF became more open to literary engagement whilst paying less attention to Proust. Among the few articles about him published in La NRF during this period is an ambivalent portrait by the marxisant critic Pierre Abraham, who takes a jaundiced view of Proust’s bourgeois origins (“Sur Proust,” La NRF, no. 207, Dec. 1930, 794-812). On the reception of Proust in La NRF under Paulhan’s editorship, see Stéphane Chaudier, “Un écrivain apolitique à l’âge d’or des engagements: Proust à La NRF (1919-1941),” in La Nouvelle Revue française de Jean Paulhan (1925-40 et 1953-1968), ed. Jeanyves Guérin (Paris: Le Manuscrit, 2006), 145-164. Chaudier himself deems Proust an apolitical writer whose work is defined by his “refus” or “incapacité” to “penser l’implication d’un individu dans la vie de la nation” (145). This analysis seems to neglect the detailed discussions of Caillaux and Bontemps/Reinach’s highly consequential contributions to French political life in the Recherche.
⁷¹⁵ Proust, RTP, 4: 460.
X. Turning art into actualité

La NRF’s increasing openness to journalistic actualité betokened a broader sense of worldliness. For, as we shall see in the next chapter, the magazine and its publishing arm’s interactions with the mass press provided its editors and proprietors with an education in commercial realities that helped propel “la maison Gallimard” to a central position in French literary life. Mercure de France similarly became a major force in French publishing, which has long outlived the petite revue from whence it emerged, thanks in large part to its founder Alfred Vallette’s business acumen and discreet flair for cultivating the press. And though not directly descended from a petite revue, Gallimard’s principal rival during the interwar years, Éditions Grasset, whose aggressive promotional methods became legendary, owed much to the legacy of Les Cahiers de la quinzaine. These publishers’ commercial success – and thence that of the modernist authors they published – reflected their skill in using the mass press to generate publicity and subsidize their loss-making activities. Far from signalling a structural schism between modernist literature and journalism, the rise of the petites revues thus led in time to writers who had used those publications as a literary laboratory being subjected to unprecedented levels of mediatization. Selling books required newspapers. To attain commercial success, literature itself had, in other words, to become central to journalistic actualité. Writers and publishers who had initially struggled to impose themselves through little-read little magazines often seemed to display a firm grasp of that truth malgré eux.
CHAPTER FOUR
Mercure de France, Grasset, Gallimard, and the Art of Selling Difficulty

Toute la question est de savoir si une entreprise commerciale peut vivre en n’éditant que des ouvrages excellents de forme et de fond. [...] Ce que je crois le plus nécessaire à organiser, ce n’est pas tant la partie édition, c’est la publicité. Le commerce des livres me paraît aujourd’hui dans un état barbare et inorganique. Paul Claudel, letter to André Gide, June 2, 1910.716

Un beau livre doit se vendre à 100.000 exemplaires; cela est une vérité absolue. Bernard Grasset, letter to Jacques de Lacretelle, Oct. 9, 1923.717

I. How to get ahead in poetry

In 1838, Constant Hilbey, a young tailor with literary ambitions, arrived in Paris and set about trying to make his name as a writer. Soon he had published a collection of verse, at his own expense, and sent off copies to critics at the capital’s major newspapers, who ignored his efforts. Undeterred, he penned a new poem and went to the offices of La Presse, the daily newspaper founded by Émile de Girardin a few years previously that had invented the roman-feuilleton as a way of attracting new readers.718 There, Hilbey asked a clerk if he could speak to the editor responsible for selecting poetry to be published in the newspaper. The clerk, who knew Hilbey slightly, offered him some valuable albeit dispiriting advice:

Écoutez! Je vais vous parler franchement; eussiez-vous fait des vers aussi beaux que ceux de Lamartine, on ne vous les insérerait pas pour rien; le prix des annonces est sur le journal, celui des insertions est secret; mais il faut ou payer ou être l’ami d’un des rédacteurs: c’est le seul moyen que les jeunes aient pour se faire connaître.719

Getting known, it goes without saying here, meant getting your name in the papers. As in Balzac’s *Illusions perdues*, to which Hilbey’s account of his literary-journalistic travails, *Vénalité des journaux*, seems to constitute a real-life pendant, the mass press had, by the 1830s, become an indispensable source of publicity for those in search of literary fame.

In Balzac and Hilbey’s world, starving young poets lay at the mercy of unscrupulous hacks who traded reviews for cash without even having read their works. And there was little guarantee that journalists, once bought, would stay that way. Hilbey thus recounts in *Vénalité des journaux* how a critic from *Le Journal des débats* pocketed 460 francs from the young author without ever publishing a promised article about a later collection of his poems.720

Over the course of the nineteenth century, successful book publishers proved more adept at using the power of the press to their advantage. As the market for books expanded, buoyed by rising literacy levels and the introduction of cheap, pocket-sized editions, newspaper advertising played an increasingly important role in stimulating sales of what was becoming an industrial product. For example, in 1846, Gervais Charpentier (who pioneered pocket-sized books) sought to organize a consortium of his fellow publishers that would bulk-purchase all the advertising space in *Le National*, a liberal newspaper that went on to play a crucial role in the 1848 Revolution.721 Michel Lévy Frères, publisher of Balzac, Lamartine, Dumas, Flaubert, and even Baudelaire’s *Salon de 1846*, went further still. While continuing to invest heavily in advertising throughout the press, by the 1860s, Lévy Frères had created its own press group comprising about ten publications, such as *Le Journal du dimanche*, which serialized the works of the house’s own

720 See Hilbey, *Vénalité des journaux*, 43-44.
authors.Later, Calmann-Lévy (as the firm was redubbed in 1875) extended its influence by becoming a major shareholder in La Nouvelle Revue before re-founding La Revue de Paris – which had in its previous incarnation serialized Madame Bovary – in 1894. Owning newspapers and grandes revues gave Calmann-Lévy direct control over an inexhaustible source of publicity and, in conjunction with a policy of bold price reductions, contributed to the firm attaining a level of commercial success that was unprecedented for a literary publishing house.

Though responsible for publishing Villiers de l’Isle Adam’s Contes cruels (1883) as well as Proust’s Les Plaisirs et les Jours (1896 – at the author’s own expense), Calmann-Lévy generally had few associations with the décadents, Symbolists, and the generation of 1890 that found its voice in the petites revues. With the notable exception of Mallarmé’s Divagations (1897), Charpentier (absorbed in 1896 by Éditions Fasquelle) similarly stuck by and large to publishing realist and Naturalist works.

Authors associated with the new literary schools were initially forced to turn to so-called librairies spéciales, particularly Alphonse Lemerre and Léon Vanier, who produced luxurious editions with small print runs, usually at the author’s own expense or else by subscription. It eventually became clear that Lemerre, publisher of Le Parnasse contemporain, had in fact been systematically over-charging naive young poets for this privilege, thereby amassing a considerable personal fortune that bought him a hôtel particulier in the sixteenth arrondissement and a substantial art collection. Vanier, Verlaine’s long-time publisher, was never so venal. But like

---

723 See Mollier, Michel et Calmann Lévy, 477
725 See Mollier, L’Argent et les Lettres, 453-454.
Lemerre he made little determined effort to sell the books he published, which, Stuart Merrill complained, were left to pile up in the cellars beneath his shop.\textsuperscript{726} For these libraires, cultivating the press was never a priority. When Edmond Deman, a Brussels publisher of Symbolist works, published Mallarmé’s Pages in 1891, he offered to provide 32 copies for journalists and the poet’s own acquaintances.\textsuperscript{727} Mallarmé replied that he had received 75 copies of his translation of Edgar Allan Poe’s poems, previously published by Deman in 1888, and would need at least 60 copies of Pages.\textsuperscript{728} The publisher seems to have grudgingly acceded to this request but only after noting that “la presse demande plus qu’elle ne donne” and that press copies had not done much to boost sales of the Poe translation.\textsuperscript{729} He added that he had also placed notices announcing the forthcoming publication in “la Bibliographie de la France & divers journaux spéciaux,” with the implication that this represented an exceptional effort. Yet compared to the juggernaut built up by Calmann-Lévy, Deman clearly wielded a promotional peashooter, and Pages did not sell well.\textsuperscript{730} What articles did appear in the Parisian press were written by Mallarmé’s friends such as Octave Mirbeau, Lucien Muhlfeld, and Pierre Quillard.\textsuperscript{731} 

The poet himself had a better grasp than his publisher of the effect of coverage in mass-market daily newspapers (as opposed to the niche publications favoured by Deman). Earlier in 1891, he had written to Deman, proposing that he publish a new edition of his Poésies (originally published in a deluxe edition of 40 copies by Éditions de la Revue Indépendante in 1887) to satisfy demand created by an article in Le Figaro that had mentioned the book and overstated the print

\textsuperscript{726} See Stuart Merrill, “Critique des poèmes,” La Plume, no. 282, Jan. 15, 1901, 39-42, 41. 
\textsuperscript{727} See Deman to Mallarmé, May 6, 1891, in Mallarmé, Corr., 11: 134. 
\textsuperscript{728} See Mallarmé to Deman, May 8, 1891, in Mallarmé, Corr., 4(1): 237. 
\textsuperscript{729} See Deman to Mallarmé, May 9, 1891, in Mallarmé, Corr., 11: 134. 
\textsuperscript{731} See Fontainas, Edmond Deman, 153.
run. The article had portrayed the poet as an exceptionally lofty figure: “[…] le public, le vrai public – M. Mallarmé le dédaigne au point de ne laisser publier ses vers que par souscription et autographiés […]”. Mallarmé’s letter shows he was in fact altogether eager for his work to be sold and read. But it was not until after the poet’s death in 1899 that Deman finally published a definitive edition of his *Poésies*. Like Lemerre and Vanier, Deman’s overriding concern seems to have been not to lose money rather than to make it.

II. Little magazines versus booksellers

Frustrations with the *librairie spéciale* had a direct effect on the development of the *petites revues* towards the end of the century. Vanier had apparently sponsored some early *petites revues* such as *Paris moderne* and *Le Décadent*. But these were short-lived publications that never threatened to challenge the publisher’s privileged position within the world of Parisian letters. The emergence during the early 1890s of a new wave of independent *petites revues* that proved capable of lasting the distance, particularly *Mercure de France* and *La Plume*, represented a more troubling prospect particularly when they too began to branch out into book publishing. “Nous avons maintenant contre nous des revues littéraires,” complained Vanier in an 1894 letter to *Le Bulletin des libraires*, “qui, après avoir sollicité un dépôt dans nos librairies pour les aider à se faire connaître au public et à notre clientèle, s’efforcent, au bout de quelques semaines d’existence, à nous faire concurrence en s’essayant dans l’édition et la vente du livre neuf et d’occasion avec remise au public.”

---

735 Quoted in Alfred Vallette, “Questions de librairie,” *Mercure de France* 12, no. 57, Sept. 1894, 80-85, 80.
Such hostility seems rather churlish given that Vallette had initially suggested a partnership between the Mercure de France and Vanier, whereby the publisher would bring out cheap editions of works by the magazine’s contributors. This proposal came after Vanier had agreed in 1892 to stock copies of the second book published by the magazine, Gourmont’s Le Latin mystique, an essay on mysticism in medieval literature. But the Mercure’s editor found Vanier unresponsive and eventually told him (by Vallette’s own later account): “Si vous ne le faites pas, nous le ferons mais avec moins de chances que vous, car vous avez des relations commerciales et de l’argent, ce dont nous sommes dépourvus.” As it turned out, the pupil made the most of his limited resources and soon began to outshine the master.

At first, Vallette tended to replicate Vanier’s extreme financial caution, publishing books either by subscription, as in the case of Le Matin mystique, which had the benefit of spreading the cost and appealing to young writers’ sense of solidarity, or entirely at the author’s own expense. But by 1894, Mercure de France, reconstituted as a limited liability joint-stockholder company (société anonyme par actions) encompassing its activities both as a magazine and book publisher, had, become self-financing and even profitable. This success allowed Vallette to dispense with the compte d’auteur for an increasing number of books and offer advantageous terms to his authors. For example, Mercure assumed the full cost of publishing Henri de Régnier’s Poèmes in 1895 and pledged royalties ranging between 11.4 and 22.8 percent of sales.

---

737 Alfred Vallette, “Quelques mots sur le ‘Mercure de France,’” Mercure de France 298, no. 1000, Dec. 1946, 19-22, 22. This article was originally written for Jean Galtier-Boissière and René Lefebvre’s Histoire de la presse (Paris: Crapouillot, 1934), where it was published in truncated form.
Vallette by now felt sufficiently self-assured to turn on his erstwhile ally. In response to Vanier’s open letter complaining about the petites revues, he took the entire culture of the librairie spéciale to task in the Mercure’s September 1894 issue:

Ces éditeurs n’ont aucune initiative et ne risquent jamais leurs fonds, […] cette admirable prudence, dont ils moissonnent actuellement la récolte, en fait donc plutôt des dépositaires que des éditeurs. Or ce sont les pires dépositaires, sans presque de relations commerciales, ne cherchant pas à s’en créer, et, sur ce point, d’une inactivité torpide. Est-ce là ce que M. Vanier appelle savoir son métier? Tant pis! Je puis alors lui affirmer que les revues littéraires savent son métier mieux que lui.  

In the space of two years, Vallette has gone from deference to hostility. Where once he looked enviously upon Vanier’s supposed commercial acumen, now, at the controls of a thriving publishing enterprise, he realizes the cagey old bookseller has little to offer the young generation. Vallette and his fellow authors were discovering that in business as in literature, they had the capacity to forge a new set of institutions whilst either displacing existing ones or else engaging with them on their own terms.

In 1896, Mercure’s commercial ascent was accelerated by the success of Pierre Louÿs’s novel Aphrodite, which sold over 30,000 copies within less than a year. By the end of the century, Mercure’s catalogue had swollen to several hundred volumes, including works by rising French authors such as Claudel, Gide, Gourmont, Jarry, Schwob, and the prominent chroniqueur-cum-novelist Jean Lorrain; the first French translation of Friedrich Nietzsche’s complete works (not completed until 1909); and other translated works by Arthur Strindberg, H.G. Wells, and Oscar Wilde. In 1903, the publishing house moved to a substantial property at 26, rue de Condé, formerly Beaumarchais’s home, which remains its premises today. Vallette and his collaborators

741 Vallette, “Questions de librairie,” 81-82.
had come a long way from the bistro table around which they had launched the little magazine less than fifteen years beforehand. Vallette was apparently even prepared to purchase the rue de Condé building outright on the eve of the First World War.744 And, after Vallette’s death in 1935, Mercure remained an independent publishing house until 1958 when it was acquired by Gallimard amid a wave of post-war consolidation in French publishing.

How did they do it? Vallette’s extraordinary personal dedication was clearly instrumental. He worked twelve-hour days, seven days a week for over forty years and entirely renounced his own literary ambitions.745 As the owner of a typographer’s shop, his own pre-existing business experience in a related field, already apparent from Renard’s account of the magazine’s founding meeting, also must have given him a valuable sense of grit and realism.746 He thus took early steps to put the magazine and later the publishing house on a solid legal and commercial footing, typified by the creation of a joint-stockholder company and the decision to concentrate on publishing cheap editions (some costing as little as one franc) of the kind pioneered by Charpentier and Calmann-Lévy, while simultaneously catering to bibliophiles with luxurious limited editions printed on “japon impérial” or “hollande van Gelder.” Rather than cutting itself off in the elitist redoubt of the *librairie spéciale*, Mercure de France made a pitch for both ends of the market.

Rachilde and Gourmont’s indefatigable (and initially unpaid) contributions to the magazine, later complimented by a steady stream of books, were another factor underlying Mercure’s success. Gourmont (though not Rachilde) also sat on the publisher’s reading committee, alongside Vallette, Régnier, the magazine’s co-founder Louis Dumur, and regular contributor A.-F. Herold, which chose books for publication, a model later replicated by Gallimard that

744 On this mooted purchase, see Mollier, *L’Argent et les Lettres*, 461.
doubtless helped maintain Mercure’s high standards and reputation for probity. Indeed, a constant theme in Vallette’s own writings about Mercure is the magazine’s and then the publishing house’s absolute dedication to the unique principle of literary quality. The goal of the magazine, he declared in its first issue, was to publish “des œuvres purement artistiques” without heed to financial gain. Nearly half a century later, he insisted the Mercure remained a publication where “la qualité de l’œuvre import[e] autrement que la notoriété du nom.” A conspicuously ascetic aura duly settled over the typographer-turned-publisher. According to a 1932 profile in the trade newspaper Toute l’édition:

Pour lui, être éditeur, c’est rechercher un texte valable aussi bien pour le présent que pour l’avenir, c’est le publier sans souci du succès immédiat; non pas qu’il dédaigne la réussite, – quel homme assujetti aux obligations de la vie moderne oserait le faire? – mais il entend n’imposer les livres qu’il a choisis que par leur valeur propre et non par tels autres moyens “extra littéraires”.

The “extra-literary” methods alluded to here were those of publicity, including but not limited to the purchase of advertising in newspapers. In keeping with his reputation, Vallette had long evinced bluff disdain for such practices. As he told the author Georges Duhamel, who succeeded him as editor after his death: “Je ne fais jamais de publicité pour les ouvrages que j’édite. Ou ils sont mauvais et c’est bien inutile de faire quelque chose pour les sauver. Ou ils sont bons et alors ils finissent par s’imposer tout seuls.”

Scholars have tended to replicate this account. As Claire Lesage puts it in her École des Chartes thesis, the only full-length monograph about Mercure de France: “le Mercure ne pousse

747 See Lesage, “Le Mercure de France de 1890 à 1914,” 1: 409. The reading committee was established in 1897. Herold was only briefly a member.
749 Vallette, “Quelques mots sur le ‘Mercure de France,’” 22.
750 “Silhouettes – Alfred Vallette,” Toute l’édition 6, no. 145, Oct. 1, 1932, 2; italicized in the original.
751 Quoted in Georges Duhamel, Le Temps de la recherche: lumières sur ma vie III (Paris: Paul Hartmann, 1947), 186.
pas à la vente: Vallette et son entourage sont opposés à toute publicité trop voyante [...].”

In her study of La NRF, Maaike Koffeman similarly asserts that promotional methods such as newspaper advertising and the distribution of free press copies were seen as suspect by the “défenseurs de la littérature pure” in Mercure’s orbit and that “Vallette préfère s’en tenir aux moyens traditionnels de l’annonce et du catalogue.” And, in a recent history of French publishing, Jean-Yves Mollier portrays Vallette as a paragon of artistic disinterest who imported the high-minded values of the petites revues into the otherwise venal world of books and bookmen:

Rejetant l’édition sans autre visée que commerciale, ses pratiques immorales, la double comptabilité, le refus du contrôle des tirages, la publicité, le manque de soin dans la fabrication des volumes, la standardisation des ouvrages, le feuilleton et la littérature sérielle – bref, tout ce que la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle avait érigé en quasi-dogme –, [Vallette] avait suivi la voie du Scapin et de La Pléiade [...].

In truth, the road travelled by Mercure de France was rather more sinuous. Contrary to Vallette’s claims, his publishing house did invest in publicity, including newspaper advertising (as Lesage herself notes), and habitually sent out free copies to critics, often in substantial quantities. As we saw in Chapter Two, Gide even told Francis Jammes to publish his work with Mercure because of Vallette’s promotional talents. And while Jammes did subsequently clash with Vallette over press copies, as Mallarmé had done with Deman, the numbers involved suggest Jammes had slimmer grounds for complaint. In 1910, the author sought 125 press copies of Ma Fille Bernadette (a minor prose work about the birth of his daughter that was never likely to light up the feuilletons) after Vallette had already agreed to provide 100. Two years later, Jammes sent out 150 press copies of his long poem Les Géorgiques chrétiennes and sought another ten while grumbling in a letter (probably addressed to Duhamel) that Vallette apparently had little interest

753 Koffeman, Entre classicisme et modernité, 82.
in selling books.\textsuperscript{756} In a Lewis Carrollesque flourish, Jammes adds insouciantly that he should in fact be given an \textit{unlimited} number of free copies. Vallette’s reluctance to accede to such demands seems to stem not from any underlying hostility towards the concept of using the press for promotional purposes but from an eminently reasonable desire to strike a balance between the needs of publicity and profitability.

Vallette’s grasp of the importance of effective publicity for book publishing had also underlain his original breach with Vanier, whom he accused of failing to employ any promotional methods whatsoever.\textsuperscript{757} As the editor of the \textit{Mercure} saw it, \textit{petites revues} provided the best publicity of all because “[…] elles détiennent la seule publicité efficace touchant les livres des ‘écrivains nouveaux’, puisque seules elles vont dans le public qui les aime et les suit […].”\textsuperscript{758} But two years after he had written this riposte, the commercial success of \textit{Aphrodite} – triggered, as we saw in Chapter Two, by François Coppée’s front-page article in \textit{Le Journal} (written at the instigation of \textit{Mercure} contributor Albert Samain\textsuperscript{759}) – surely awakened Vallette to the benefits not merely of what he called the “publicité restreinte” available in little magazines but also the much broader promotional capacity of the mass press.\textsuperscript{760}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig41.jpg}
\caption{Advertisement for Mercure de France, \textit{Le Journal}, July 22, 1902, 4 (source: Gallica)}\end{figure}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item See letters from Jammes reprinted in Lesage, “Le Mercure de France de 1890 à 1914,” 3: LX and LXIV-LXV.
\item See Vallette, “Questions de librairie,” 84.
\item Vallette, “Questions de librairie,” 84.
\item See André Billy, \textit{L’Époque 1900} (Paris: Tallandier, 1951), 115-116.
\item Vallette, “Questions de librairie,” 84.
\item This example of Mercure’s advertising is noted in Lesage, “Le Mercure de France de 1890 à 1914,” 3: 182.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
That Vallette did in fact take advantage of even the most dubious forms of newspaper publicity is borne out by a 1903 letter from Colette’s husband Willy. As publication of *Claudine s’en va*, the fourth of the *Claudine* novels, was imminent, Willy (who purported to be the author of his wife’s books) turned to Vallette (who had published *Claudine en ménage* – advertised above – the previous year) for some precious advice about exactly what it would take to ensure that major newspapers paid appropriate attention to the forthcoming volume:

La maison Ollendorff [Willy’s publisher] me propose de participer à quelques articles de publicité, relativement à *Claudine s’en va*, mais... mais.... je suis surpris de constater que les prix ne sont pas du tout les mêmes que ceux du Mercure, pas du tout! Et je prétends ne pas payer plus chaussée d’Antin [Ollendorff’s address] que rue de l’Echaudé [Mercure’s address]. Voulez-vous avoir la complaisance de relever sur vos livres quelques prix (ça m’embête de vous donner ce souci-là, mon pauvre vieux, vous qui avez tout à faire déjà!)\[^762\]

That Willy should want to know the going rate for bribing journalists is of course perfectly understandable. What surprises here, astounds even, is that he, the hardened, plagiarizing hack, himself the son of a scientific publisher, should ask the monkish and by reputation incorruptible Vallette for such information. It is as if Vautrin were to ask the Baroness Hulot for advice about seduction techniques.

The letter continues with a request for the precise sums Vallette had paid (possibly using money advanced by the authors themselves) for articles about books published by Mercure in newspapers and magazines, including *Le Journal*, *Le Gaulois*, and *Le Figaro*. The names of these publications are arranged in a column on the left of the page accompanied by additional comments such as “petit machin de première page” in the case of *Le Figaro* and “article de Lorrain” in the case of *Le Journal*, which emphasizes that what Willy had in mind were puff pieces disguised as legitimate criticism rather than clearly recognizable advertisements. On the right-hand side of the

\[^762\] Henry “Willy” Gauthier-Villars to Vallette, n.d. [1903], Fonds Mercure de France, MDF 9.75, IMEC, Caen.
page, the corresponding amounts for each publication have been written in pencil in what appears to be Vallette’s handwriting. We thus learn that articles in *Le Figaro* and *Le Gaulois* cost 1000 francs each (around 4,000 euros today), whereas an item in *Le Cri de Paris* (the satirical weekly founded by the Natanson brothers, which they had sold in 1902<sup>763</sup>) could be had for a mere 150 francs (or 600 euros in today’s money).

In a further testament to Vallette’s connections throughout the press, Willy concludes with the following post scriptum: “Vous m’avez dit que vous comptiez faire passer qqs échos dans les journaux quand paraîtrait Cl. s’en va. Le bouquin paraît mardi.” Mercure’s founder thus apparently had the ability to get “échos,” as short gossipy items were called, into the newspapers through his personal influence without even resorting to bribery. Vallette later claimed that “il se moque de la publicité.”<sup>764</sup> Willy’s letter suggests he in fact took the shadier aspects of his trade rather seriously.

Sure enough, articles praising Mercure’s books did frequently appear in the newspapers mentioned in Willy’s letter. As early as 1894, in a single issue, *Le Figaro*’s “Bulletin bibliographique” extolled both Rachilde’s collection of short stories *Le Démon de l’absurde* – “autant de tableaux modernes ou antiques enlevés avec une surprenante vigueur” – and Mercure’s limited edition of Pierre Quillard’s play *La Fille aux mains coupées.*<sup>765</sup> Similar puff pieces appeared in the same newspaper on a regular basis throughout the 1890s and 1900s, usually in the “Vient de paraître” column on page four or five. The “petit machin de première page” sought by Willy was a rarer event. But there too Mercure’s latest offerings occasionally found their place. In 1902, a front-page “écho” announced the publication of Régnier’s “beau roman” *Le Bon plaisir:*

<sup>763</sup> See Bourrelier, *La Revue blanche*, 595.
<sup>764</sup> Quoted in Lesage, “Le Mercure de France de 1890 à 1914,” 2: 410.
[C’est toute la vie du dix-septième siècle en un raccourci saisissant, évoquée avec une variété et une vérité admirables [...]. Ce roman spirituel, captivant et de haut style [...] eût ravi Mme de Sévigné et amusé Saint-Simon.]

At least Vallette appeared to be getting his money’s worth. Moreover, he and Willy had form together. An item in the “Vient de paraître” column later the same year brought the doubtless hotly anticipated news that “[l]e gros succès de la troublante Claudine en ménage de Willy n’a point faibli au temps des villégiatures: la librairie du Mercure de France met aujourd’hui en vente la 86e édition.”

Le Journal was just as impressed. The very same day it published a word-for-word identical paragraph on its front page. Le Gaulois may not have been as frequent in its praise for Mercure’s books as Le Figaro or Le Journal. But they also occasionally garnered suspiciously effusive notices in that monarchist newspaper.

Little wonder that Vallette was able to write with such an air of authority:

La presse a “commercialisé” tout ce qui pouvait l’être, et bientôt, en dehors de l’information télégraphique et du grand reportage, ce sera, sous toutes ses formes, de la plus apparente à la plus ingénieuse, la publicité, car toute actualité est guettée par la réclame vigilante. Les articles où l’on trouvait autrefois des opinions libres, ou à peu près, sur les faits contemporains ne disparaîtront point: ils seront essentiellement viciés par la réclame.

As we saw in Chapter Two, this denunciation of journalistic corruption lay at the heart of Vallette’s 1905 article explaining the Mercure’s transformation into a fortnightly publication. The scourge of advertising, and particularly the puff pieces connoted by the word “réclame,” meant that the

---

768 “Échos,” Le Journal, Oct. 16, 1902, 1. Puff pieces for Mercure’s books and the magazine itself frequently appeared in Le Journal, including in Lorrain’s pseudonymously authored column “Pall-Mall Semaine” (as specifically desired by Willy). For example, in April 1897, Lorrain quoted at length from Gourmont’s novel Les Chevaux de Diomède [Mercure de France, 1897], which was then being serialized in the Mercure, and concluded: “C’est une spécialité. Après Aphrodite, de M. Pierre Louys [sic], après la Nichina, de M. Hugues Rebells [sic], et les Hors nature, de Mme Rachilde, le Mercure de France [sic] commence dans son dernier numéro, les Chevaux de Diomède, de M. Rémy [sic] de Gourmont.” (Raitif de la Bretonne [pseud.], “Pall-Mall Semaine,” Le Journal, April 19, 1897, 2).
Mercure now saw itself no longer as a mere “recueil” for the founders’ own literary dabblings but as a vital and uniquely independent critical voice. His magazine’s evolution into a literary review of record, Vallette contended, “fait mieux que combler les vides d’une presse d’où l’omnipotente réclame et l’actualité ont chassé tout le reste.”

Once again, the Mercure here defines itself in opposition to the mass press. Yet Willy’s letter and the trail of pro-Mercure puffery throughout the mass press show that Vallette himself was up to exactly the same tricks he thundered against elsewhere. His professed disdain for publicity and the dark arts practised by his fellow publishers turns out to have been somewhat less than completely forthcoming. Vallette’s was a subtle form of hypocrisy, however. Corrupter, he may have been, but not himself corrupted. For there is no evidence the Mercure accepted payments for favourable reviews of the kind Vallette appears to have been giving to others. As editor, he stood apart from the crooked crowd and successfully cultivated a reputation for total integrity that has remained unimpaired ever since. As publisher, he did what needed to be done to sell books and build Mercure into a permanent fixture of the French literary landscape. Vallette was an idealist; he was also an operator. The key to his success came from his ability to reconcile these two roles (while only admitting to the first of them). Faced with the power and corruption of Parisian journalism, Vallette kept his own little magazine above the fray while exploiting the venality of others. Like several authors published by Mercure, notably Gide, Jarry, Apollinaire, and Proust, he grasped that the press had to be reckoned with, not ignored.

---

III. Vallette’s heirs

In the years prior to the First World War, two new publishing houses that would have a defining effect on twentieth-century French literary history came onto the scene. Created in 1907 by Bernard Grasset, a lawyer’s son from the Auvergne with a doctorate in economics, Éditions Grasset (originally Éditions Nouvelles) stood out for the exceptional commercial vigour of its founder, who intensified the turn towards massification undertaken by Calmann-Lévy and Charpentier among others at the end of the previous century while publishing major literary works by authors such as Proust, François Mauriac, Paul Morand, Henry de Montherlant, Blaise Cendrars, and Jean Giraudoux. Whereas sales of 25,000 copies of *Madame Bovary* in a single year had represented an outstanding commercial performance in the late 1850s, 100,000 was Grasset’s benchmark for true success, one he frequently exceeded, notably in the case of Louis Hémon’s posthumously published romance novel *Maria Chapdelaine* (1921), which had sold 500,000 copies by 1937.\(^{772}\)

Meanwhile, in 1911, following the example of other petites revues such as the *Mercure*, *La Revue blanche*, and *La Plume*, *La NRF* set up its own “comptoir d’édition” under the tutelage of the young Gaston Gallimard, scion of a clan of prosperous Parisian rentiers. As in the case of *Mercure de France*, book publishing gradually took precedence over the magazine while Gallimard’s personal influence grew in tandem, a shift reflected in the decision in 1919 to rename what had been Éditions de la NRF the Librairie Gallimard, which ultimately became Éditions

\(^{772}\) On Grasset’s fixation on the figure of 100,000 copies and on sales figures of *Maria Chapdelaine*, see Boillat, *La Librairie Bernard Grasset*, 2: 205 and 264. On sales of *Madame Bovary*, see Mollier, *Une autre histoire de l’édition française*, 215.
Gallimard in 1961.773 Today, the publishing house, still a family-controlled firm, retains a central position in French cultural life as well its historic reputation for literary quality.

Though they never worked for him, both Grasset and Gallimard knew Vallette and viewed him as a mentor. Mercure’s founder had, Grasset said, initiated him into the “secrets de la profession.”774 Later, in 1909, he signed a contract to purchase regular advertising in the Mercure.775 Towards the end of his life, Gallimard similarly said that his generation held Vallette, the first publisher he had known, in the greatest esteem.776 And he declared after Grasset’s death that his long-time rival had been “le plus grand éditeur après Alfred Vallette.”777

Grasset was also close to Péguy and even authored a book in his memory, Évangile de l’édition selon Charles Péguy (1955), where he states that he owed the founder of the Cahiers de la quinzaine for all that “je peux valoir comme éditeur.”778 That late paean to his austere socialist precursor from the now-disgraced publisher, who had been sentenced to life-long “indignité nationale” for collaborating with the Nazis, is of course rather self-serving. But Grasset’s admiration for the Cahiers’ editor was sincere. In 1911, he had published Péguy’s Œuvres choisies. After the First World War, he also created a new collection, the “Cahiers verts,” in homage to the fallen editor under the direction of Péguy’s old frère-ennemi Daniel Halévy, which published an eclectic mixture of fiction and essays, thereby imitating the editorial approach of the Cahiers de la quinzaine. While Éditions Grasset, unlike Mercure and Gallimard, did not emerge directly from

---

773 The label “Éditions de la NRF” nonetheless continued to adorn Gallimard’s books for decades, while the NRF logo still often appears on their publications today. That exercise in double-branding seems to sum up Gallimard’s ability to straddle the worlds of the petite revue and commercial book publishing.
774 See Boillat, La Librairie Bernard Grasset, 1: 31.
775 See Boillat, La Librairie Bernard Grasset, 1: 80.
777 Quoted in Assouline, Gaston Gallimard, 437.
a *petite revue*, the publishing house thus drew inspiration from that milieu and, in the shape of Halévy, employed one of its central figures in a senior editorial role.

Grasset shared Péguy’s fascination for the mass press but not his mentor’s ambivalence. For the erstwhile economist, a publisher’s job was to promote his books relentlessly, and newspapers offered an ideal means of influencing millions of potential readers. He duly saturated the French press with serializations and advertising in both overt and concealed forms, using every trick in the book while adding some new ones of his own. Through the Havas news agency, Grasset negotiated contracts to buy column inches in bulk across all the major newspapers.\(^{779}\) Paid puff pieces even appeared in the foreign press.\(^{780}\)

A favourite ploy was to systematically overstate the number of editions and copies sold in advertisements.\(^{781}\) Like Vallette and other predecessors, Grasset also continued to pay off individual journalists directly in exchange for favourable notices.\(^{782}\) And he took such manipulation to new heights by writing furious letters to newspaper editors and publishers threatening to pull his advertising from their publications if they did not consistently praise works by Grasset authors. What had been an informal system of small-scale bribery gave way to raw displays of financial power. For example, Grasset had long been displeased by the tone of literary coverage in *L’Intransigeant*, where the critics André Billy and Fernand Divoire frequently expressed their disdain for his promotional methods. When the newspaper falsely reported his death in 1923, he seized the opportunity to sue the newspaper for 100,000 francs whilst demanding that Billy and Divoire’s column be discontinued.\(^{783}\) The following year, when Billy vowed never

\(^{780}\) See Boillat, *La Librairie Bernard Grasset*, 1: 45.
to write about books that benefitted from advertising in an article for the newspaper *L’Œuvre* that specifically alluded to Paul Morand’s novel *Lewis et Irène* (recently published by Grasset), the man dubbed the “Napoléon de la librairie” wrote to the newspaper’s publisher that “il m’est absolument impossible de continuer à faire de la publicité dans un journal où un semblable article a passé.” Grasset did not in fact live up to this threat as regular advertisements for his books continued to appear in *L’Œuvre.* But there are signs his pressure may have produced the desired result. A few weeks after the publisher’s minatory letter, Billy wrote an article praising Montherlant’s *Paradis à l’ombre des épées,* published by Grasset, who had already advertised the novel in *Les Nouvelles littéraires* though not in *L’Œuvre* itself. Around the same time, Grasset sent similar ultimatums to a number of other newspapers including *Le Figaro* boasting that he was “le plus gros publicitaire en librairie et de beaucoup.” The intimidating effects of this approach were even felt by Marcel Proust who, after deciding to defect from Grasset to Gallimard in 1916, fretted about “le jour inévitable où il fera faire une campagne de presse contre mon livre et dira qu’il a refusé de publier une pareille ordure.”

Underlying such manipulation was Grasset’s willingness to invest massively in publicity. Within a year of publishing *Maria Chapdelaine* in 1921, he had spent 100,000 francs (more than 100,000 euros in today’s money) on promoting the book, an outlay representing approximately one-eighth of its gross sale receipts, which, Grasset claimed, was slightly more than the profits he

---

785 See, for example, the advertisements for *Lewis et Irène* in *L’Œuvre* on Feb. 8 (p.3), Feb. 14 (p. 2), and March 6 (p. 2), 1924.
786 André Billy, “Le Livre de la semaine,” *L’Œuvre*, March 4, 1924, 2. For the advertisement for Montherlant’s novel, see *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, Jan. 12, 1924, 2. Grasset and Billy would later bury the hatchet, with the publisher telling the critic in a 1929 that he had begun to regret some of his promotional activities. According to Boillat, this rapprochement coincided with a reduction in promotional spending on behalf of many Grasset authors in response to increased productions costs. See Boillat, *La Librairie Bernard Grasset*, 3: 211.
had earned from the work.⁷⁸⁹ Even a relatively esoteric work such as *Lewis et Irène* benefitted from a major promotional effort in 1924, whose cost is estimated at 15,000 francs.⁷⁹⁰ And there were seemingly no rows about press copies at Grasset. For *Lewis et Irène*, about a thousand copies were sent out; for *Maria Chapdelaine*, two thousand during the first two months after publication alone.⁷⁹¹ At least ten percent of the first printing was usually set aside for journalists.⁷⁹²

In a manner reminiscent of Deschamps’s heyday at *La Plume*, Grasset also had a knack for generating additional publicity through various promotional spectacles and ruses. “[L’]événement, l’actualité se fabriquent,” as he put it in his own book *La Chose littéraire* (1929).⁷⁹³ For instance, to drum up interest in *Maria Chapdelaine*, he launched an ultimately successful campaign to erect a plaque outside the author’s childhood home in Brest.⁷⁹⁴ And in the mid-1920s, Grasset sought to rebrand Mauriac, André Maurois, Montherlant, and Morand, four novelists who had little in common and hardly knew each other, as “les 4 M.” Outside of Grasset’s advertising, the four only ever came together at a single dinner organized by their publisher. As Morand put it: “Ce fut glacial: il n’y en a pas d’autre, mais la majuscule resta.”⁷⁹⁵

Other gimmicks tied in with the themes of individual works. For example, to mark the publication of Montherlant’s bull-fighting novel *Les Bestiaires* (1926), the author made a speech before a real bull fight (technically a cow fight involving “vaches landaises”) held at the Vélodrome d’Hiver in Paris. The spectators soon tired of this display and began to jeer. Montherlant’s appearance was nonetheless widely covered in the Parisian press, and one reporter

---

deemed the incident a testament to “l’adroit sens publicitaire de Grasset.” The publisher also decided to launch the book in the bull-fighting town of Nîmes ahead of Paris. As the Éclair Montpellier noted, such an attention-grabbing gesture was typical of Grasset “qui n’en est pas à sa premi ère initiative.” His flair for publicity had itself become a story and was even satirized in a four-act play by Édouard Bourdet, Vient de paraître (1927), where a thinly veiled version of Grasset battles with an off-stage rival, the equally transparent “Chamillard,” to secure the talents of a successful young author.

IV. All must have prizes

The ultimate promotional coup was to win one of the literary prizes that mushroomed during the early twentieth century, beginning with the creation of the Prix Goncourt in 1903, followed in due course by, among others, the Prix Femina (1904), the Grand Prix de littérature de l’Académie française (1912), and the Prix Renaudot (1926). Grasset immediately grasped the Goncourt’s importance and pulled off a rare double with Alphonse de Châteaubriant’s Monsieur des Lourdines and André Savignon’s Filles de la pluie in 1910 and 1911 after extensive manoeuvring on his authors’ behalf. Prizes offered a perfect source of free publicity as, even more so than today, literary journalists were eager to write reams of copy about the manufactured drama of these occasions. They also provided an additional spur to paid publicity as publishers of winning authors typically launched a wave of new advertising on the back of their triumphs.

---

796 Marcel Berger, L’Opinion, June 14, 1926, GRS 262, Fonds Grasset, IMEC, Caen, 337 verso.
799 See Boillat, La Librairie Bernard Grasset, 1: 150-159. In absence of the relevant correspondence, it is impossible to ascertain Grasset’s precise efforts to obtain the Goncourt in these cases, but as Boillat puts it: “[...] les méthodes employées avec [Émile] Clermont en 1913 [when Grasset had lobbied furiously, albeit unsuccessfully, to win the Grand Prix de l’Académie française for Clermont’s Laure] nous permettent d’imaginer aisément toutes les démarches que dut entreprendre Grasset. Il fit vraiment tout ce qu’il put pour ameuter la foule des critiques, l’opinion publique – qui représente aussi une forme de pression sur un jury – et forcer la décision des Dix.” (1: 152).
Frustrated by a dry run in the years after the First World War, when the Prix Goncourt alternated between Gallimard, Plon and Albin Michel, Grasset even created a literary prize of his own, Le Grand Prix Balzac (thinly veiled as the “Prix Zola” in Vient de paraître) for manuscripts by little-known authors. Despite the Prix Balzac only existed for two years and failed to deliver immediate commercial successes, the contest, won by Jean Giraudoux’s Siegfried et le Limousin in 1922, brought a new generation of authors into Grasset’s orbit including Montherlant and Joseph Delteil.

Along with Grasset’s ability to bully uncooperative journalists, the prize boom marked a shift in power from the press to book publishers. For though the Goncourt jury included literary journalists such as Léon Daudet, its decisions carried an aura of authority and independence that newspapers had by now long since lost. In truth, favouritism often coloured their selections (notably in the case of Proust’s À l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs), but the influence of authors and publishers now seemed to count for more than that of the press. As they waited to hear the result of the first Prix Balzac in 1922, one reporter captured the mood among his colleagues inside the author’s old house in Passy (where the meeting to decide the award was being held):

   Et les journalistes commencèrent d’attendre. C’est une des choses qu’ils savent faire. Ils en ont pris l’habitude de bonne heure, dans le métier. La salle à manger de Balzac leur offrait un asile agréable et tempéré. Avec des cigarettes et quelques plaisanteries, le temps passe. S’ils avaient dû voter, eux aussi, qui aurait eu le prix? Un petit pari mutuel à deux sous s’organisa bientôt.

The journalists here have become passive figures. Whereas in Balzac’s own time the press itself held sway, now its judgements about the relative merits of the authors under consideration apparently interest no-one except themselves. Photographs of reporters huddled outside the Drouant restaurant awaiting the result of the Goncourt further illustrate where the balance of

800 See Boillat, La Librairie Bernard Grasset, 3: 9-79.
literary power now seemed to lie. Those same journalists would create the Prix Renaudot in 1926, but, despite often displaying greater critical perspicacity (reflected in the choices of Céline and Aragon – both overlooked by the Goncourt – during the 1930s), theirs has always remained a consolation prize.

A handful of critics such as Billy and Paul Souday retained a position of real prestige and influence, but none could now pretend to the universal esteem once and even still reserved for Sainte-Beuve’s weekly feuilleton in Le Journal des débats. As Albert Thibaudet remarked in La NRF in 1923, there was only one “recueil d’articles qui non seulement n’ait pas perdu, mais qui ait gagné en vieillissant, qui se soit mieux que maintenu, pour le public qui lit, à sa température primitive. Ce sont les Lundis de Sainte-Beuve.” (Such a judgement underlines the iconoclasm of Proust’s critique of the biographical approach to literary history espoused by Sainte-Beuve in his unfinished essay-cum-novel Contre Sainte-Beuve [1954], partly reprised in the Recherche, which would in time contribute to the emergence of an opposing doxa.) What now mattered, as Grasset understood, was less the approval of individual critics than the total acreage of newsprint, be it advertising, reviews or gossipy titbits, devoted to a book. And increasingly it was publishers rather than critics who called the shots. Billy himself conceded as much in his book Le Monde des journaux (1924 – co-authored with fellow journalist Jean Piot): “Un livre peut très bien réussir sans la critique et même contre elle, et la critique ne contribue guère à la formation des réputations […]. La critique ne ‘lance’ plus les livres. On se demande si à aucune époque elle les a lancés.”

802 See Toute l’édition, Dec. 10, 1932, 1.
804 Quoted in Boillat, La Librairie Bernard Grasset, 3: 56.
V. Gaston’s progress

Gallimard has traditionally been portrayed in a different light to Grasset. From its beginnings, La NRF adopted a posture of Horatian disdain towards the mob and its vulgar distractions. As we saw in Chapter Three, Gide had vowed that the magazine would fight against “le journalisme, l’américanisme, le mercantilisme et la complaisance de l’Époque envers soi-même.” When he and the other founders brought in Gallimard and began publishing books in 1911, little suggested they would deviate from the dilettantish, unworldly approach associated with the librairie spéciale. Discovering some typographical errors in the initial printing of his novella Isabelle (one of the first three books published by Éditions de la NRF), Gide even insisted that he and Gallimard personally destroy the entire run. 805

In contrast to the shamelessly acquisitive Grasset, a lofty aura of detachment and aesthetic purity thus settled around the publishing house that emerged as his principal rival. As Mauriac recalled shortly before his death, Gide, Gallimard, and their collaborators were “de beaux esprits d’un goût qui se voulait infaillible, que n’impressionnaient pas les grands succès de public et qui au contraire étaient en garde contre eux.” 806 In his history of Éditions Grasset, Gabriel Boillat similarly says of their attitude in the early 1920s: “On se méfiait encore, du côté de chez Gallimard, de la publicité et de tout ce qui touchait à l’argent.” 807 Jean-Yves Mollier also brackets La NRF with the Mercure and La Revue blanche as three petites revues-turned-publishing houses that espoused “[l]e rejet des méthodes commerciales, ou, plus encore, des finalités mercantiles des éditeurs ayant pignon sur rue.” 808

805 See Assouline, Gaston Gallimard, 48.
808 Mollier, Une autre histoire de l’édition, 280.
Yet, like Mercure de France, Gallimard’s actual approach differed markedly from its reputation. A certain cunning was already on display in the Isabelle incident. For Gide craftily held back half-a-dozen copies, unbeknownst to his new colleague, later selling them at auction for an enormous sum. And in its dealings with the press, the publishing house’s methods came to bear a clear resemblance to Grasset’s. As we saw in Chapters Two and Three, La NRF itself displayed an ambivalent attitude towards newspaper journalism. Schlumberger’s introductory “Considérations” caution authors at once against indiscriminately recycling “la matière qui revient de droit au journal” and against cutting themselves off from “les événements journaliers” entirely; the magazine disdained the contemporary trend for publishing “enquêtes” yet published other forms of reportage; and, under Rivière’s and then Paulhan’s editorship, La NRF devoted increasing space to political journalism. That equivocal sense of openness to the mass press was echoed in fictional works published in the magazine by Martin du Gard, Gide, and Proust among others that drew on newspaper journalism or gave literary form to journalistic actualité. Moreover, despite his repeated broadsides against the press, Gide sought to cultivate individual journalists, notably Souday, and obtain favourable press coverage for the magazine.

These efforts extended to the books published under the magazine’s aegis. Though irritated when Alain-Fournier first reported the launch of La NRF’s publishing arm in the literary gossip column of Paris-Journal, Gide nevertheless sought to exploit this connection by suggesting to the future author of Le Grand Meaulnes that he reveal Paul Claudel to be the author behind the initials P.C. on the cover of the play L’Otage, one of the first books published by Éditions de la NRF. Gide also took charge of dispatching personalized copies of Isabelle to individual journalists whilst providing Gallimard and Rivière with a list of newspapers and magazines to be sent regular press

---

809 See Assouline, Gaston Gallimard, 47-48.
810 See Alban Cerisier, Une histoire de La NRF, 185-186.
copies.\textsuperscript{811} Meanwhile, with Gide’s approval, Gallimard composed an accompanying press release – known as a “prière d’insérer” – for the book, as he had already done for \textit{L’Otage} and their re-edition of Charles-Louis Philippe’s fictionalized memoir \textit{La Mère et l’Enfant} (1900). The publication of Philippe’s \textit{Lettres de jeunesse} (1911) a few months later was followed by an indignant letter from Gide complaining that Alain-Fournier had not received a copy and fretting about the lack of press coverage: “Je m’inquiète beaucoup de ce service [de presse]. Comment expliquer le silence général sur le livre?”\textsuperscript{812} The following year, a trip to Italy brought new instructions from Gide to send out press copies of several books to an unidentified local newspaper, which, he assured Gallimard, would then write about them.\textsuperscript{813} In a 1913 letter, he also discusses prepublications of their edition of Philippe’s posthumously published novel \textit{Charles Blanchard} (1913), ultimately leaving the choice of individual passages up to Gallimard (and a substantial extract duly appeared in \textit{Le Figaro}’s literary supplement).\textsuperscript{814}

Such missives illustrate both Gide’s imperious attitude towards Gallimard in the early years of their collaboration and his eagerness to see that their books should be widely publicized in the press. Gide took not merely a passing interest in the nascent publisher’s promotional activities but seems to have been attempting to micro-manage those efforts even when off on one of his regular jaunts around the Mediterranean.

A few years later, these controlling tendencies provoked a bitter clash with Gallimard over their edition of Péguy’s \textit{Œuvres complètes}.\textsuperscript{815} The row started when Gallimard turned down Paul Souday’s request for press copies of the complete collection, which ultimately ran to twenty

\textsuperscript{811} See Gide to Gallimard, June 14 and 15, 1911, Gallimard Archives, Paris.
\textsuperscript{812} Gide to Gallimard, n.d. [late 1911], Gallimard Archives, Paris.
\textsuperscript{813} Gide to Gallimard, April 10, 1912, Gallimard Archives, Paris.
volumes, published between 1916 and 1955, on the grounds that this would represent an unacceptably costly offering for such a limited print run published by subscription. Souday duly complained to Gide, with whom he exchanged occasional letters over the years, who in turn took the critic’s side against Gallimard, giving vent to his spleen in a lengthy and prophetic letter to Rivière:

[I]e gérant et administrateur d’une maison d’édition qui travaille à se faire un ennemi du critique le mieux placé, le mieux qualifié, et le mieux disposé pour la servir – et qui n’est pas un imbécile (le gérant) je dis qu’il obéit alors à des mobiles complètement en dehors de ses fonctions et attributions. Et dans ce cas là [sic], qu’il signe, et que je m’écarte – car ce n’est plus la maison des éditions de la N.R.F. – c’est la maison Gallimard.816

Soon it would indeed be Gallimard’s name that adorned the publishing house. But he did not arrive at that position through antagonizing the press. And while his refusal, partly grounded in personal animosity, to give Souday Péguy’s Œuvres complètes can justly be considered clumsy, the reasons offered for this decision also hint at a more advanced conception of how to use newspapers as a promotional tool. “[L]e service d’une collection qui me coûterait 130 frs.,” he wrote to Gide, “me rapporterait moins qu’une annonce de 50 francs dans le Temps [sic].”817 Gallimard here indicates that he shared Grasset’s faith in the impersonal power of advertising. Both Gide and Gallimard understood the importance of the press for the success of their venture, but whereas the former adopted a traditional and essentially artisanal approach that consisted of maintaining good relations with journalists and sending out personalized press copies, the latter was developing a more industrial conception of the most efficient ways to use newspapers as a promotional tool. Gide was by no means wrong to take the old-fashioned view. Martin du Gard’s Jean Baroîs and (as we saw...
in Chapter Two) Valéry’s *La Jeune Parque* both owed their success to articles by Souday. But the future seemed to lie with Gallimard’s more predictable and systematic modus operandi.

The full scale of that commercial vision only took shape after the First World War, but Gallimard’s affinity with the mass press was apparent from the beginning of his career. Prior to his involvement with *La NRF*, he had worked as a secretary to the journalist and playwright Robert de Flers, frequently ghosting articles that appeared under his employer’s by-line as well as writing pseudonymous pieces of his own for *Le Figaro* and the less prestigious weekly *Le Journal amusant*. Indeed, as Pierre de Lanux and the artist Francis Jourdain recalled in discussions with Auguste Anglès, these associations had initially made Gide and Schlumberger reluctant to bring Gallimard on board: “car il venait de la zone interdite, celle de l’argent, du Boulevard, du *Figaro*.” As we saw in Chapter Three, Gide would later tell Proust that they had rejected *Du côté de chez Swann* for similar reasons.

Gallimard’s own journalistic tastes were eclectic, running from obscure *petites revues* to *La Dépêche de Rouen*, where he encountered Alain’s “Propos d’un Normand.” He then wrote to the author offering to publish a selection of these articles in book form. By Gallimard’s account, Alain consented to the proposal, appending the unusual condition that he receive no royalties, and


Gallimard duly became his regular publisher after the First World War while the philosopher also began to contribute “Propos” to La NRF in 1927.\footnote{Gallimard makes this claim in his final interview with L’Express (see Chapsal, “Gaston Gallimard parle...” 24 and Assouline, Gaston Gallimard, 47). Les Propos d’Alain was published by Éditions de la NRF in 1920. It is unclear whether Alain in fact received no royalties.}

During the conflict, Gallimard managed to evade the call-up and made two formative trips to the United States, where he met numerous writers, critics, publishers, and even printers. By his own recollection, these experiences convinced him of the need to embrace modern industrial methods in his own publishing house: “[J’]avais compris qu’il fallait donner à la maison une assiette commerciale, une organisation pour qu’elle soit viable, sinon ce ne serait qu’une entreprise d’amis dont la bonne volonté ne suffisait pas toujours.”\footnote{Quoted in Assouline, Gaston Gallimard, 95.} After the war, this entrepreneurial epiphany led to a multi-faceted programme of expansion that made full use of the promotional power of the mass pass. Instead of discreet 50-franc notices in Le Temps, the publisher began to invest heavily in large, visually striking newspaper advertisements. A favoured outlet for these publicity campaigns was the weekly literary newspaper Les Nouvelles littéraires, created by Maurice Martin du Gard (cousin of Roger) in 1922 with the backing of the Larousse publishing house. Allying the high-mindedness of a petite revue to the arresting layout and financial muscle of a newspaper, the new publication, in which Gallimard himself possessed a small share while also sitting on its board, boasted a circulation of 120,000 by 1923, many times more than even La Revue blanche at the height of its success, and became a central platform of literary debate throughout the inter-war period.\footnote{See Jean-Yves Mollier, Édition, presse et pouvoir en France au XXe siècle (Paris: Fayard, 2008), 31.} Les Nouvelles littéraires typically carried at least one prominent advertisement for Gallimard books in each issue, and by 1930 the publishing house was spending over 200,000 francs per year (over 100,000 euros at today’s prices) on advertising in this
newspaper alone, more even than Grasset and second only to Larousse itself, then as now primarily a publisher of schoolbooks, dictionaries, and encyclopaedias rather than new literary works.\textsuperscript{824}

Gallimard books also received abundant and frequently laudatory coverage in \textit{Les Nouvelles littéraires}, which never hinted at the publisher’s financial interest in its own pages. The very first issue anointed Larbaud’s recently reissued \textit{A.O. Barnabooth} “le livre de la semaine” in an article by Benjamin Crémieux, a friend of the author’s, who frequently discussed other Gallimard publications in his regular column for the newspaper and eventually became a member of the publisher’s “comité de lecture” in 1925.\textsuperscript{825} He continued to combine his role at Gallimard with prolific literary journalism throughout the 1920s and 30s, a conflict of interest he seems to have been eager to exploit on the publisher’s behalf. For example, when preparing two articles for \textit{Les Annales politiques et littéraires} about contemporary young writers in 1928, Crémieux wrote to Jean Paulhan that he would be “content que tu me dises comment tu aimerais que fût mon feuilleton, comment tu le concevrais si tu avais à le rédiger (choix des auteurs, groupement, directions).”\textsuperscript{826} The first article duly devoted particular praise to the work of André Beucler and Pierre Bost, two novelists published by Gallimard.\textsuperscript{827} Another letter to Paulhan followed: “Je voudrais qu’il te plût un peu mieux. Celui du 15 lui fera suite. Il finit par \textit{Nadja} de Breton que je mets assez haut.”\textsuperscript{828} Sure enough, Crémieux’s second article lavished further praise upon Bost and

\textsuperscript{824} See the December 1930 balance sheet of the “Compagnie auxiliaire de publicité,” (CB26D08, Fonds Larousse, IMEC, Caen), a subsidiary that sold advertising in \textit{Les Nouvelles littéraires} and a few smaller periodicals published by Larousse (as per Jean-Yves Mollier and Bruno Dubot’s account in their \textit{Histoire de la librairie Larousse (1852-2010)} [Paris: Fayard, 2012], 441).


\textsuperscript{826} Crémieux to Paulhan, n.d. [circa Aug. 1928], PLH 124.1, Fonds Jean Paulhan, IMEC, Caen.


\textsuperscript{828} Crémieux to Jean Paulhan, Sept. 1 or 2, 1928, PLH 124.1, Fonds Jean Paulhan, IMEC, Caen.
Beucler whilst devoting almost a whole page to Nadja (also published by Gallimard) “dont l’importance,” he noted, “non seulement littéraire, mais encore morale, me paraît considérable.”

The publishing house also began to make prominent use of quotations from favourable reviews in its advertising and catalogues. Gallimard had pushed for this change as early as 1919, but press quotations only started to appear in the catalogues a few years later.

---


830 Gallimard initially made this proposal in a 1919 letter to Jacques Rivière. (Gallimard to Rivière, Sept. 1919, in Gaston Gallimard and Jacques Rivière, Correspondance 1911-1924, ed. Pierre-Edmond Robert and Alain Rivière [Paris: Gallimard, 1994], 141). There were still no press quotations in 1921. By 1923 these “extraits de presse,” accompanied by author photographs, were a prominent feature of Gallimard catalogues.
Gide remained unimpressed by Gallimard’s growing embrace of such promotional methods. “Je ne me console pas de voir,” he despaired in a 1922 letter, “lentement, progressivement, certains procédés de réclame nous faire perdre le bénéfice de notre précédente discrétion.” Gide even forbade Gallimard from publishing announcements of his own forthcoming books and vowed to apply a veto “dès que les moyens et procédés d’annonce tourneront à la réclame, au raccolage [sic].” But Gallimard now clearly held the reins at the publishing house Gide had co-founded a decade earlier, notwithstanding the latter’s increasing literary success. Whereas before the war he had ordered Gallimard around like a factotum, Gide’s attitude in the early 1920s shifted to exasperation in the face of decisions he was increasingly powerless to alter from afar. And despite his periodic broadsides against advertising, he himself could be somewhat inconsistent on the subject. As he wrote to Gallimard in late 1923 concerning his recently reissued translation of Joseph Conrad’s classic sea yarn: “N’y a-t-il rien à faire (très honnête réclame) pour donner à entendre que Typhon est un excellent livre d’étrennes, pouvant être lu à tout âge, par tous les sexes, et glissé entre toutes les mains ?...” It’s not clear whether Gallimard obliged Gide’s new-found promotional fervour on this occasion, but he had already placed two advertisements for his edition of Conrad’s Complete Works in *Les Nouvelles littéraires* earlier that year.

Meanwhile, press copies of Gallimard books were now being sent out in considerable quantities. Before the war, one hundred copies had been the standard quantity set aside for both

---

831 Gide to Gallimard, July 7, 1922, Gallimard Archives, Paris.
832 Gide to Gallimard, July 8, 1922, Gallimard Archives, Paris.
834 *Les Nouvelles littéraires* 2, no. 42, Aug. 4 1923, 2; no. 44, Aug. 18, 1923, 4.
the press and the author’s personal use.\textsuperscript{835} This had increased to two hundred copies specifically for the press in a draft contract between the publisher and the reporter-novelist Joseph Kessel drawn up in 1925.\textsuperscript{836} Paul Claudel was ultimately even entitled to an unlimited quantity of copies for the press and his personal use.\textsuperscript{837} When Gallimard published his \textit{L’Oiseau noir dans le soleil levant}, a series of reflections on Japanese culture, in 1929, the publisher sent out 330 ordinary copies to the press as well a number of de-luxe “Hors-Commerce” copies to leading critics such as Billy and Souday whilst spending at least 30,000 francs (around 17,000 euros in today’s money) on advertising.\textsuperscript{838} It was thus without exaggeration that Gallimard wrote to Morand in a for-the-time-being unsuccessful attempt at poaching him back from Grasset in 1928: “Je ne crois pas que vous auriez à vous plaindre de nous. J’ai fait mes classes. Je saurais ‘créer l’événement’ et lancer au moment opportun mes ‘vagues d’échos.’”\textsuperscript{839}

Gallimard eventually went beyond Grasset by launching a series of popular magazines, as Calmann-Lévy had done during the previous century, that brought the publishing house both profit and additional publicity.\textsuperscript{840} The first of these, \textit{Détective}, a weekly magazine blending crime fiction with real \textit{faits divers}, began publication in 1928 and became an immediate commercial success,
attaining a print run of 250,000 copies within six weeks.\footnote{See Cerisier and Fouché, Gallimard 1911-2011, 29. On the history of Détective – the idea for which came to Gallimard as a result of reading Gide’s fait-divers column in La NRF (which was discussed in Chapter Three) – see also Amélie Chabrier and Marie-Ève Thérenty, Détective: fabrique de crimes? 1928-1940 (Nantes: Joseph K. 2017), specifically p. 24 for the connection with Gide.} Voilà, a weekly magazine of reportage, and Marianne, a weekly literary and political newspaper, followed in 1931 and 1932 respectively. The benefits of this diversification were three-fold. Firstly, Détective and Voilà, though not Marianne, proved at least initially to be extremely lucrative with the first of these publications earning profits of four million francs (over two million euro at today’s prices) in its second year of operation.\footnote{See Cerisier and Fouché, Gallimard 1911-2011, 29.} This allowed Gallimard to subsidize the losses of the more prestigious but less commercial parts of its operations, just as the Natanson brothers’ satirical weekly Le Cri de Paris had, if Vallette’s reminiscences are to be believed, helped support La Revue blanche.\footnote{See Bourrelier, La Revue blanche, 601.} As Gallimard succinctly put it in a 1931 letter to Paul Léautaud: “Je perds de l’argent avec La Nouvelle Revue française, mais j’en gagne avec Détective.”\footnote{Quoted in Bourrelier, La Revue blanche, 186.} Secondly, these publications offered work to Gallimard authors including Joseph Kessel (Détective’s first co-editor), Georges Simenon, and even the Surrealist playwright Antonin Artaud among others who might otherwise have been tempted away by competitors such as Fayard, which had launched its own literary and political weekly Candide in 1924. As Marianne’s editor Emmanuel Berl put it in a later interview with Patrick Modiano: “Marianne a été fait pour défendre le patrimoine littéraire de la N.R.F. contre la ‘débauche’ de romanciers que faisait [sic] Fayard avec Candide, et Horace de Carbuccia avec Gringoire.”\footnote{Emmanuel Berl, Interrogatoire par Patrick Modiano suivi de Il fait beau, allons au cimetière (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 64.} That “débauche” had a political dimension. Whereas Candide, Gringoire, and later Je suis partout served as platforms for the extreme right, while other weeklies such as Monde and Vendredi backed the Communists, Marianne, like La NRF, adopted an editorial line close to the
moderate socialist left (Berl himself nonetheless ended up as Marshal Pétain’s speechwriter in the early days of the Occupation). Thirdly, like Les Nouvelles littéraires, Gallimard’s own magazines provided a reliable source of publicity for the publishing house. Indeed, advertisements for Gallimard books appear on almost every page in Marianne.\textsuperscript{846} The publishing house also launched several collections targeted at the readers of Détective and Voilà (one being called “Détective”). By the mid-1930s, Gallimard had clearly become as much a publisher of popular journalism as of books, and these two sides of its activities were deeply intertwined.

That willingness to become actively involved in the mass press and to fully exploit its promotional power is what distinguished Gallimard from other modernist and avant-garde publishers founded after the First World War, whose existence proved ephemeral. For example, having emerged from the Surrealist magazine Littérature, Au Sans Pareil enjoyed some success in the early 1920s with books by Aragon, Breton, and Cendrars among others, gaining a reputation as the publisher of France’s most radical new literary voices. But there was nothing novel about its lofty disdain for the mass press, which rivalled the most determinedly recondite petites revues of the late nineteenth century. For example, Le Figaro’s Frédéric Lefèvre, among the era’s most prominent critics, wrote to the poet Paul Éluard, one of Au Sans Pareil’s founders, wondering why they never sent out press copies of their books and promising to review them if they were to make an exception for him.\textsuperscript{847} Max Jacob, who published a single collection of poems, Le Laboratoire central, with Au Sans Pareil in 1921, similarly complained about their extreme reluctance to send out press copies and thereafter defected to Gallimard.\textsuperscript{848} Given such indifference to publicity, it is


\textsuperscript{847} See Pascal Fouché, Au Sans Pareil (Bibliothèque de Littérature française contemporaine de l’Université Paris 7, 1983), 26.

\textsuperscript{848} See Fouché, Au Sans Pareil, 29.
little surprise that, with Surrealism a fading force by the end of the decade, Au Sans Pareil ran into serious financial difficulties and disappeared with Gallimard acquiring a portion of its catalogue.  

La Sirène, another new publishing house founded in 1917 by the financier Paul Lafitte and noted for the quality of its graphic design, may not have shared Au Sans Pareil’s overtly anti-commercial ethos, but it did suffer from a similar failure to develop an effective promotional strategy. Here again, Jacob, who published his experimental novel Cinématoma with La Sirène in 1920, complained of their failure to provide enough copies for the press: “ces gens sont avarés de livres.” By Lafitte’s own account, La Sirène actually provided one hundred press copies for the first thousand copies put on sale, a proportion comparable to the quantities set aside by Grasset and Gallimard. But unlike these competitors, La Sirène, which published original works by Apollinaire, Cendrars, and Cocteau as well as the first French translation of Joyce’s A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, did not invest significantly in advertising, which was usually limited to notices in La NRF or La Bibliographie de la France. Only occasionally did small advertisements appear in Les Nouvelles littéraires where they were typically dwarfed by those for Grasset and Gallimard’s latest publications. And in contrast to Grasset’s frenetic efforts at creating news stories around his books, La Sirène adopted a passive approach. “Quant à la publicité,” as Pascal Fouché puts it in his book on the publishing house, “il se contente toujours de profiter des événements.” Combined with poor general management, such lassitude ensured a

849 See Fouché, Au Sans Pareil, 92.
850 Quoted in Pascal Fouché, La Sirène (Bibliothèque de Littérature française contemporaine de l’Université Paris 7, 1984), 81.
851 See Fouché, La Sirène, 61-63.
852 See the “annonces” recorded for each of La Sirène’s publications in Fouché, La Sirène, 253-254.
853 See, for example, the small advertisement for the Catholic author Henriette Charasson’s collection of short stories Grigri, published by La Sirène, on page 2 of Les Nouvelles littéraires’ Sept. 8, 1923 edition as opposed to the two large advertisements placed by Gallimard on page 4 of the same issue.
854 Fouché, La Sirène, 171.
swift decline once Lafitte withdrew his backing in 1922.\textsuperscript{855} The following year La Sirène was absorbed by Georges Crès and then entered liquidation in 1926.\textsuperscript{856}

Mercure de France, Grasset, and Gallimard succeeded where Au Sans Pareil and La Sirène failed because, like Calmann-Lévy before them, they managed to combine literary quality with commercial aptitude and, in particular, a keen sense of the importance of press publicity. Vallette, Grasset, and Gallimard all had taste. They were also talented businessmen. And Gallimard was the most talented of the lot because he managed to make it all look so effortless. Whereas Grasset never missed an opportunity to flaunt his commercial prowess and brag about the sums he spent on advertising, even writing several turgid books outlining his vision of the trade, Gallimard kept his counsel, seldom granting interviews and claiming in private that he deeply regretted his own success and the decision to put the publishing house on a solid commercial footing after the First World War. As he wrote to his wife in 1924:

\begin{quote}
Il y a que je vais contre ma destinée et que tout ceci vient de cet effort que j’ai fourni depuis 1919, de cette obligation à contrefaire ma nature. De cette déception intime que me donne même la réussite, de cette misanthropie qu’augmentent chaque jour mes relations avec des artistes. Alors je rumine, je rumine, je me déforme, j’ai une situation et je me sens un raté, puisque je ne suis pas devenu ce que je souhaitais mais un autre.\textsuperscript{857}
\end{quote}

In spite of such ambivalence, Gallimard worked doggedly to build up his empire, using many of the same promotional techniques as Grasset whilst relentlessly intriguing to poach successful authors from his rivals. That he did so with relative subtlety and discretion contributed to a Medici-like aura that set him apart from the boastfully acquisitive “Napoléon de la librairie.” Like an iceberg, the public image of an austere little magazine and publishing house devoted to literary quality was sustained by a vast bummock of popular journalism where all the criminal and political

\textsuperscript{855} See Fouché, \textit{La Sirène}, 141.
\textsuperscript{856} See Fouché, \textit{La Sirène}, 157 and 176.
\textsuperscript{857} Quoted in Cerisier and Fouché, \textit{Gallimard 1911-2011}, 218.
passions of the age were on display. Notwithstanding Gide’s impotent protests and Gallimard’s own hand-wringing, such concessions to commercial necessity hardly undermined the publishing house’s artistic integrity. And yet an extended metaphor in Proust’s La Prisonnière nonetheless seems to capture something of the publishing house’s ambiguous position in the world of Parisian letters:

La petite bande avait la solidité impénétrable de certaines maisons de commerce, de librairie ou de presse par exemple, où le malheureux auteur n’arrivera jamais, malgré la diversité des personnalités composantes, à savoir s’il est ou non floué. Le directeur du journal ou de la revue ment avec une attitude de sincérité d’autant plus solennelle qu’il a besoin de dissimuler en mainte occasion qu’il fait exactement la même chose et se livre aux mêmes pratiques mercantiles que celles qu’il a flétries chez les autres directeurs de journaux ou de théâtres, chez les autres éditeurs, quand il a pris pour bannière, levé contre eux l’étendard de la Sincérité. […]

L’associé de l’“homme sincère” ment autrement et de façon plus ingénue. Il trompe son auteur comme il trompe sa femme, avec des trucs de vaudeville.

A literary institution founded on a pledge to tackle “le journalisme” and “le mercantilisme” had indeed, by the time this passage was authored in 1922, long since acquiesced in the mercantile practices of the mass press. And when Gallimard became the target of a sustained press campaign in the early 1920s alleging, not without foundation, that the publishing house exerted disproportionate influence over the Quai d’Orsay’s overseas cultural service, Gallimard sought to discredit the writer-journalist Henri Béraud behind the charge and got Les Nouvelles littéraires to take up cudgels on his behalf. On the whole Gallimard nonetheless managed to preserve a somewhat unworldly reputation. As the character based on Grasset remarks in Vient de paraître:

“Chamillard n’a jamais su lancer un bouquin de sa vie! Il en est encore à croire que, pour vendre

858 Proust, RTP, 3: 684-685 (Pierre-Edmond Robert deems this passage an allusion to Gide, Gallimard, and their collaborators [see his notes in Proust, RTP, 3: 1737]).
859 Jean-Yves Tadié dates the authorship of this passage to 1922 in his Marcel Proust: une biographie (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 836.
860 See Assouline, Gaston Gallimard, 146-147 and Béraud, La Croisade des longues figures. As we saw in Chapter Three, this row had a political dimension, with the nationalist Béraud attacking La NRF’s support for Franco-German reconciliation.
That dilettantish image paradoxically served Gallimard well. For what ultimately set his enterprise apart from its rivals was that it appeared to be truly different whilst actually operating like any other publicity-hungry publishing house. In the long run, Gallimard would thus far outstrip Grasset in both commercial and literary terms.

VI. Hustling in the ivory tower

What was the importance for literature itself of the proximity between these publishers and the press?

The openness, albeit ambivalent, displayed by Mercure de France, Grasset, and Gallimard towards popular journalism signalled a broad aesthetic affinity between these publishing houses and some of their authors. These publishers’ eagerness to exploit the promotional power of newspapers to sell literary works of intimidating difficulty and originality brought together high art and low commerce in ways that coincide with the modernist spirit of those books themselves. As we have seen, interactions between literature and the mass press are central to works including Apollinaire’s *Alcools* and *Calligrammes*, Larbaud’s *A.O. Barnabooth*, Gide’s *Les Caves du Vatican* and *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, and Proust’s *Recherche* as well as much of Péguy’s writing. The publishers of these books (Mercure, Grasset or Gallimard in each case) were living their own version of that drama on a day-to-day basis as they juggled press copies, advertising, Argus clippings, and even bribes. Their struggles with the press thus paralleled those of their authors. Indeed, author and publisher frequently undertook those struggles together.

As he prepared to jump ship from Grasset to Gallimard in May 1916, Proust alluded to what was at stake in a letter to the latter outlining his treatment of the ongoing war in what would

---

861 Bourdet, *Vient de paraître*, 229.
862 Grasset’s 1911 edition of Péguy’s *Œuvres choisies* was the only collection of his writing to appear in book form during the author’s lifetime.
become *Le Temps retrouvé*: “Tout cela ai-je besoin de dire n’a rien d’antimilitariste, tout au contraire. Mais les journaux sont très bêtes (et fort maltraités dans mon livre). Ils peuvent crier. Je vous dis t[ou]tes les objections d’avance.” Given the gale of chauvinistic commentary in the press that would greet the award of the 1919 Prix Goncourt to *À l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* (pipping Roland Dorgelès’s war novel *Les Croix de bois* by two votes), Proust’s premonitions about journalistic hostility to his work proved well founded. Gallimard was undeterred: “Peu importe la longueur de votre livre. L’audace de vos peintures ne m’arrête pas. Et si elle choquait les lecteurs ou la presse, ou attirait à notre maison des coups, comme vous dites, je serais heureux de vous servir ainsi.” Author and publisher thus cast themselves in the familiar role of literary paragons who are set to be assailed by a gaggle of mendacious journalists. Yet whereas an earlier generation of authors and publishers had, during Symbolism’s heyday, frequently purported to remain above the journalistic fray, Proust and Gallimard’s attitude is assertive and even confrontational rather than loftily indifferent with the latter vowing to roll with the punches on behalf of his author’s fictional critique of the war-time press. Rather than fleeing the Behemoth of the mass press, both author and publisher are determined to reckon with its destructive power.

Gallimard would later declare in an interview with *Toute l’édition* that journalism and literature could in fact be reconciled: “Il n’y a aucun inconvénient à ce que les écrivains soient des journalistes.” And he deliberately sought to exploit such overlaps through *Détective* and *Voilà*, which yielded novels such as Kessel’s *Wagon-lit* (1932) and some early detective stories by Georges Simenon, who would eventually become a Gallimard author. Though frequently

---

dismissive of journalists and their craft, Gallimard was also clearly receptive to literary works that bore the traces of interactions with the press.

Grasset shared none of his competitor’s ambivalence and frequently enthused about the literary benefits of writing for the press: “Comment ces écrivains sincères,” he once declared in a newspaper article of his own, “venus au journalisme par un pur besoin de cette forme d’expression, n’auraient-ils pas pour le public tout prêt, qui ainsi recueille le plus spontané d’eux-mêmes, une gratitude et des égards que ne connaissent pas les autres?” And even Vallette, so vituperative about the mass press in his early articles for the Mercure, later expressed a more equivocal attitude in an interview with Toute l’édition (part of the same series for which Gallimard was interviewed): “On a des exemples d’écrivains que la presse a gâchés. Mais il s’en trouvera toujours qui, sans repousser les avantages offerts par la presse, sauront se garder pour des œuvres mûries, celles qui constituent les fonds d’édition durables.”

One author who indeed reconciled the claims of journalistic immediacy and literary posterity was Apollinaire, a long-term contributor to the Mercure, where he frequently reused copy, at least once with the editor’s blessing, that had already appeared in newspapers. The poet also manoeuvred to obtain press coverage of his books (as Vallette did on behalf of others), often appealing to his own friends in the press. That spirit of journalistic camaraderie infuses Alcools,
with its salute, in “Zone,” to “le plus ancien de tes camarades René Dalize” and its “Poème lu au mariage d’André Salmon” (Dalize and Salmon both being writer-journalists).\footnote{Apollinaire, \textit{Op}, 40 and 83.} The collection also includes several poems dedicated to other writer-journalists, such as the \textit{Mercure}’s editorial secretary Paul Léautaud (who had first recommended Apollinaire’s work to Vallette\footnote{See Campa, \textit{Guillaume Apollinaire}, 267.}), Félix Fénéon, Apollinaire’s editor at \textit{L’Intransigeant}, Léon Bailby (who would, as we shall see in Chapter Five, fire the poet from his position as art critic soon afterwards), and André Billy. The latter duly penned a favourable notice about the book in the newspaper \textit{Paris-Midi}.\footnote{In a striking display of Vallette’s commitment to editorial impartiality, the \textit{Mercure}’s own review of \textit{Alcools} by Georges Duhamel dismissed the collection as “une boutique de brocanteur” (Georges Duhamel, “Revue de la Quinzaine,” \textit{Mercure de France} 103, no. 384, June 16, 1913, 800). Billy’s article then mocked Duhamel and reprinted a letter to the \textit{Mercure} by Max Jacob, which rebutted Duhamel’s assertion that Apollinaire was simply imitating Jacob’s own poetry (see André Billy, “Gazette des lettres,” \textit{Paris-Midi}, July 2, 1913; reprinted in “Le Dossier de presse d’\textit{Alcools},” \textit{Que Vlo-Ve?} 2, no. 22 (April 1987): 17-24).} Belying Mercure’s somewhat fusty reputation, Apollinaire’s first collection emerged within the culture of vibrant and often squabblesome literary-journalistic exchange that underlay Vallette’s magazine and publishing house.

Péguy’s socialist principles meant he always viewed the unrestrained commerce of popular journalism with deep skepticism. Yet, as we saw in Chapter Two, he too became increasingly eager to secure favourable publicity for his struggling \textit{Cahiers}, bemoaning Anatole France’s failure to support the project in \textit{Le Figaro}. By contrast, his friend Alain-Fournier did devote regular space to Péguy’s publication in \textit{Paris-Journal}. And when Grasset agreed to publish a selection of Péguy’s writings in 1911, the author told his publisher that he considered the book’s promotional campaign to be “une des choses capitales” of his life.\footnote{Quoted in Boillat, \textit{La Librairie Bernard Grasset}, 1: 244.} Grasset duly began dispatching press copies of the \textit{Œuvres choisies} and soliciting articles from journalists whilst badgering the rather
lackadaisical author to follow through on a promise to exploit his own contacts in the press, such as Julien Benda and Maurice Barrès. The editor of the *Cahiers* knew what had to be done but seemed hesitant about getting his hands dirty. It is as if, in an inversion of Saint Augustine’s prayer, he wanted Grasset to help him become *impure*, but just not yet.

Barrès ultimately secured the Académie Française’s Prix Estrade-Delcros for Péguy’s book, which attained some relative commercial success, buoyed by extensive if not always favourable press coverage, even if Grasset was typically inclined to exaggerate the book’s sales. As we saw in Chapter Two, Péguy would go on to flay Gustave Lanson for the latter’s *feuilletons* in the tawdry pages of *Le Matin.* But his assent to Grasset’s aggressive promotional methods further underlines the ambivalence, the cognitive dissonance even, of his attitude towards the mass press. If Péguy attacked Lanson’s journalism with such ferocity in “L’Argent suite,” it is because the editor of the *Cahiers* bitterly understood how much his own publications relied on publicity in newspaper *feuilletons* to succeed. He despised and resented that power all the more for being forced to enlist it on his own behalf (and even then, as Robert Burac notes, the press coverage of *Œuvres choisies* did nothing to boost sales of the *Cahiers*). Péguy was now living in Grasset’s world.

Another reluctant participant in the cut-and-thrust of literary promotion was André Gide, who fretted constantly about press coverage of *La NRF* and its books, even if he shunned the flashier methods gradually adopted by Gallimard. Valery Larbaud similarly took a keen interest in the journalistic reception of their publications, promising – over-optimistically – that his

---

875 See Boillat, *La Librairie Bernard Grasset*, 1: 102 and Grasset to Péguy, May 22, 1911, Fonds Charles Péguy, Centre Charles Péguy, Orléans. I am grateful to André Parisot for having sent me scanned versions of all the letters from Grasset to Péguy held at the Centre.


877 See Burac, *Charles Péguy*, 260.
translation of Arnold Bennett’s short story “The Matador of Five Towns,” published in the August 1912 issue of La NRF, would be quoted in “tous les journaux sportifs.” Around the same time, he also played an active role in sending out press copies of an unidentified book (probably Claudel’s translation of Coventry Patmore’s poems, prefaced by Larbaud), which he hoped would enhance the fledgling publisher’s reputation in England. And when Gallimard alerted him to Henri de Régnier’s review of their edition of Léon-Paul Fargue’s Poèmes in Le Journal des Débats, Larbaud responded with unbridled enthusiasm: “L’autorité de Régnier, le journal où l’article a paru, la demande faite, en somme, par Régnier auprès de ce public en faveur de Fargue, tout cela est très beau, et j’en suis furieusement content.” As we saw in Chapter Two, A.O. Barnabooth similarly portrays the press as essential to attaining literary success, albeit in more jaundiced tones. As in Gide’s Les Caves du Vatican, the prominence of journalism in Larbaud’s novel attests to the author’s absorption in the culture of the mass press, which in turn reflected the imperatives of book publishing. Both authors found themselves writing about the press in their literary works as they struggled to ensure the magazine and publishing house they had helped create received vital coverage in the press.

VII. Launching the Recherche

Having been turned down by Éditions de la NRF and two other publishers, Du côté de chez Swann was ultimately published by Grasset at the author’s own expense, which Proust himself insisted on, though it is unlikely the publisher would have agreed to any other terms. Grasset took an active interest in publicizing Proust’s novel, meeting the author at his own initiative in late

---

878 Larbaud to Gallimard, n.d. [circa Aug. 1912], Gallimard Archives, Paris. I have been unable to locate any mention of Larbaud’s translation in any contemporary newspapers, sporting or otherwise.

879 See Larbaud to Gallimard, n.d. [1912], Gallimard Archives, Paris. Claudel’s translation of Patmore’s Poèmes was published by Éditions de la NRF in February 1912 (see Anglès, André Gide et le premier groupe de la NRF, 2: 134).

October 1913 to discuss promotional activities and then writing to him the following day: “Il y a trois façons de parler d’un livre journalistiquement, qui sont, dans l’ordre chronologique: les ‘indiscrétions,’ les ‘extraits’ et les ‘articles de critique’ […]”881 Within a month, examples of all three had appeared in Parisian newspapers. In accordance with Grasset’s programme, first came the “indiscrétions” as he convinced his author to ask René Blum, who had originally approached the publisher on Proust’s behalf, to publish a short notice about the forthcoming volume in Gil Blas, where Blum was the editorial secretary. “[J]’ai passé ma vie à me pendre aux basques des gens pour qu’on ne parle pas de moi,” wrote Proust to his journalist friend, “[[…] et voilà que par déférence pour mon éditeur je réclame une ‘Indiscrétion littéraire.’”882 The novelist doth protest too much here. Beginning in March the previous year he had published four articles in Le Figaro consisting of extracts from the evolving manuscript of the Recherche with the avowed intention of getting his name back into public circulation and thus promoting the future book.883 As François Leriche puts it, Proust displayed “un sens publicitaire aigu” from an early age.884 Even as a teenager, his ambition to create a “un grand journal d’art” with Daniel Halévy betokened a desire to impose himself within the Parisian Press.885 And as Jean-Yves Tadié remarks of Proust’s

883 Proust thus wrote concerning planned prepublications in October 1912 to Eugène Fasquelle, whom he wanted to publish his book: “[J]e me figure comme j’ai quelques amis dans la presse et que je publie très rarement, qu’ils parleront un peu dans leurs feuilles de ces fragments […], d’autant plus que ces fragments étant fort ‘décents’ cela leur sera peut-être plus facile que de parler du livre lui-même, qui ne le sera pas du tout. Il en résultera donc, à cette apparition des fragments, je n’ose pas appeler cela un peu de bruit, car c’est sans doute trop dire, mais enfin une nuance d’attention dont le volume profiterait […].” (Proust to Fasquelle, late Oct. 1912, in Proust, Corr., 11: 264). Proust hoped to prepublish more “fragments” from his novel in La Revue de Paris and La NRF, but only Le Figaro obliged (see the notes in Proust, Corr. 11: 265), thanks to his friendship with its editor Gaston Calmette. Three out of four of these “fragments” had already appeared by the time he wrote to Fasquelle, and his comments to the publisher indicate he considered these a promotional device.
promotional manoeuvres on behalf of La Bible d’Amiens (1904): “[I]l y a mis autant d’efforts et de solicitations que les modernes attachés de presse.”

But the difference in 1913 was that Proust was following a plan concocted by Grasset; and whereas articles about his Ruskin translation appeared only after publication at widely spaced intervals, press for Du côté de chez Swann came in a concentrated burst. Proust was never shy about using newspapers to publicize his works, but until he encountered Grasset those efforts had remained unfocused and ineffective.

Now his novel garnered an impressive journalistic haul even before the public had a chance to read it, beginning with Blum’s “indiscrétion” in Gil Blas on November 9. Meanwhile, Grasset himself had written to Blum suggesting they plot a “petit plan de campagne” over lunch or dinner to promote Proust’s book. Proust also approached Robert de Flers at Le Figaro, again at Grasset’s prompting, and the newspaper thereafter published a front-page “écho” on November 16, two days after Du côté de chez Swann had reached bookshops. There followed extracts in Gil Blas, Le Temps, which had earlier published a lengthy interview with the author in its November 13 edition, and Les Annales politiques et littéraires. His friend Jean Cocteau

886 Tadié, Marcel Proust: biographie, 520.
889 See Proust to Flers, Nov. 6, 7 or 9, 1913, in Proust, Corr. 12: 298-299. A later letter (Proust to Calmette, Nov. 12, 1913, in Proust, Corr., 12: 308-310) asked the paper’s editor Gaston Calmette to publish an article about his interview with Le Temps of November 13. The article that eventually appeared on November 16 was written, anonymously, by Robert Dreyfus and did not mention the interview, but Proust nonetheless thanked Calmette, assuming him to be the author, in another letter (Proust to Calmette, Nov. 16, 1913 in Proust, Corr., 12: 324-325). See the introduction to Proust, RTP 1: 1051 for the date of Du côté de chez Swann’s arrival in bookshops.
published a short puff piece, illustrated with a photograph of Proust’s head atop a plinth, in the November 23 edition of the newspaper *Excelsior*. And on November 27 came the first genuine “article critique,” effusive in its praise, by Proust’s friend Lucien Daudet on the front page of *Le Figaro*.

Fig. 4.3. Jean Cocteau, “La Galerie des bustes: Marcel Proust,” *Excelsior*, Nov. 27, 1913, 3 (Source: Gallica)

Other articles followed, and by mid-December, the first printing of 2200 copies was seemingly on the verge of selling out. By the outbreak of war the following year, nearly 3000 copies had been sold, representing at that time an impressive commercial performance for a book of such length and difficulty. That achievement clearly owed much to the press campaign accompanying publication. Many of the early articles about *Du côté de chez Swann* were written by Proust’s own friends, but it was Grasset who pushed his author to use those connections in a

---

co-ordinated manner.895 The publisher also distributed nearly 300 press copies whilst providing Proust with over 200 for his own personal use, some of which were sent to prominent journalists such as the aforementioned Daudet (along with his brother Léon).896 And even before it had gone on sale, Grasset apparently instructed Proust to submit the novel to both the Prix Goncourt and the Prix Femina (then known as the Prix Vie Heureuse), though it did not come close to winning either.897 His actual opinion of Du côté de chez Swann at the moment of publication is difficult to determine. A friend of Grasset’s later claimed he had said the novel was “illisible,” but the publisher’s letter to Blum about organizing a publicity campaign describes it as “ce beau livre.”898 His own published reminiscences reveal he had been unable to finish the book and suggest some initial ambivalence: “la grandeur de l’ouvrage me saisit, sans qu’il me fût possible d’y pénétrer, et qu’ainsi je devins éditeur de l’œuvre, qui est peut-être la plus importante de ce temps, pour ainsi dire avant de la connaître.”899 Whatever he really thought of the book and even though Proust had undertaken to pay for both the publication and any promotional efforts (including several newspaper “échos,” some of which Proust wrote himself900), there can be no doubt that Grasset’s skills as a publicist played an instrumental role in bringing about Du côté de chez Swann’s

895 See Boillat, La Librairie Bernard Grasset, 1: 179
896 See Tadié, Marcel Proust: biographie, 706-708.
897 “Mon éditeur qui m’avait fait envoyer mon livre à la Vie Heureuse (trop tard), l’a fait de même au jury Goncourt,” wrote Proust to the literary salonnière Marguerite Aimery Harty de Pierrebourg soon after Nov. 8, 1913 (Proust, Corr., 12: 304). As Leriche has noted, Proust had already suggested submitting the novel for the Goncourt as he sought to persuade Grasset to publish it in February 1913 (see Proust to René Blum, Feb. 23, 1913, in Proust, Corr., 12: 91 and Leriche, “Proust, un sens publicitaire aigu,” 90).
898 Grasset to Blum, Nov. 4, 1913, in Proust, Corr., 12: 290. The “illisible” remark is quoted in a footnote.
899 Quoted in Boillat, La Librairie Bernard Grasset, 1: 176.
surprisingly rapid success. Proust himself indirectly acknowledged his erstwhile publisher’s mastery of the dark arts when, as previously noted, he wrote to René Blum of his fear that Grasset would retaliate against him for defecting to Gallimard by stirring up a wave of hostile publicity.

No such campaign ever materialized, though Grasset deeply regretted losing the author to his chief rival and made repeated attempts to hold on to Proust, whom he offered exceptionally advantageous terms (royalties of nearly 20% and no cession of rights). It was not enough to counter the growing prestige, complimented by Gallimard’s personal charm, of the publishing house that had turned down Du côté de chez Swann. Gallimard duly published the rest of the Recherche from À l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs onwards as well as a revised edition of Du côté de chez Swann.

Freed from the subordinating influence of the compte d’auteur, Proust came to make frequent demands of his new publisher about promoting his books. For example, following publication of Sodome et Gomorrrre II in 1922, he wrote to Gallimard that he should place an advertisement in the women’s newspaper Ève using the same uncannily appropriate tagline “À ne pas laisser lire aux jeunes filles” as one that had just appeared there for Paul Morand’s Ouvert la nuit (also published by Gallimard). The publisher did as instructed, but soon Proust was complaining that his brother Robert had chided him: “Tu peux te vanter d’avoir un éditeur qui ne fait pas un sou de publicité pour tes livres.” The author may have left Grasset, but clearly the spirit of Grasset had not entirely left the author.

---

901 See Boillat, La Librairie Bernard Grasset, 1: 184.
902 Proust to Gallimard, May 5, 1922, in Proust and Gallimard, Corr. 518. Proust perhaps remembered a remark in a June 1914 review of Du côté de chez Swann by Colette’s husband Willy about the scene where the novel’s hero glimpses Vinteuil’s daughter embracing another woman: “Et gardez-vous de laisser lire aux jeunes filles, si vous en connaissez d’innocentes – tout arrive – les pages où Proust nous montre une sadique sentimentale, presque enfant, bilitiser avec une amie plus âgée [...]” (Quoted in Eva Ahlstedt, La Pudeur en crise: un aspect de l’accueil d’À la recherche du temps perdu de Marcel Proust 1913-1930 [Gothenburg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1985], 30; as Ahlstedt notes, it’s not clear what Proust thought of this article, though he seems to have read it.).
Summoned, Gallimard replied with a letter detailing at length his promotional efforts on behalf of *Sodome et Gomorrhe II*, which included an advertisement in the weekly magazine *L’Illustration*. He also noted that he considered “la publicité dans les quotidiens comme absolument inefficace.” This remark suggests the publisher was moving towards a more targeted advertising strategy in which *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, founded a month after this letter, and, later, Gallimard’s own publications such as *Détective* and *Marianne* were to play a central role. And yet up to that point, Gallimard had frequently drawn Proust’s attention to advertisements for his books as well as paid extracts in newspapers such as *Le Figaro*, *Le Temps*, and *Le Gaulois*. Indeed, the author himself became actively involved when *L’Action française* refused to publish a paid “écho” for *Le Côté de Guermantes II-Sodome et Gomorrhe I* both because of the second title and because the proposed insert included a laudatory quotation from the Jewish journalist Fernand Vandérem. Not wanting to insult either Léon Daudet at *L’Action française* (who had gotten him his Prix Goncourt) or Vandérem himself, the old Dreyfusard insisted that no direct quotations be used without naming the latter such that Vandérem’s words were instead anonymously paraphrased while the article concluded with the prudish disclaimer à propos the volume’s final section that “[l]e titre en est tel qu’on hésite à le reproduire, et le sujet à l’unisson.”

Proust also approved – with instantly surmounted reservations – Gallimard’s proposal to inflate the sales figures of *À l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* in publicity for the book, ruefully

---

904 Gallimard to Proust, Sept. 19, 1922, in Proust and Gallimard, *Corr.* 612-616. Gallimard boasted that he spent 4,000 francs (roughly 4,000 euros in today’s money) on this half-page advertisement (published on p. 11 of the “Annonces” section in the magazine’s April 22, 1922 issue) without noting that Proust’s was only one of nine books featured.


906 See, for example, Gallimard to Proust, June 28, 1919; April 12, 1922; and April 29, 1922, in Proust and Gallimard, *Corr.*, 180-181, 506-507, and 512-513.

907 See Proust to Gustave Tronche, June 19 or 20, 1921 and June 20, 1921 in Proust and Gallimard, *Corr.*, 370-373.

conceding that “il est absurde d’aller à la bataille les mains vides, si tous les autres ont une épée.”

Gallimard thus embraced a practice pioneered by Grasset, and his comments to Proust justifying this piece of promotional subterfuge clearly betray his concern for keeping up with the original publisher of *Du côté de chez Swann*: “Je crois en effet que ce genre de probité que j’avais est nuisible à l’auteur et à l’éditeur. Il est fatal qu’une maison d’édition qui a de tels scrupules paraisse moins commerçante auprès de celles qui savent annoncer, pour le moindre volume, des milliers d’exemplaires vendus.”

In other words, probity had become an unaffordable luxury in the cutthroat world of interwar French publishing. As we have seen, just over a decade earlier, Gide had vowed that *La NRF* would stand against “le mercantilisme.” Now his handpicked collaborator was arguing that the publishing house that emerged from that *petite revue* had to start actively lying about its commercial exploits in order to match its competitors.

As in *La Prisonnière*’s thinly veiled portrait of Gallimard and his associates, those lies were surrounded by emphatic public declarations of sincerity. For instance, newspaper advertisements for Guy Mazeline’s *Les Loups*, which pipped Céline’s *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (rejected by Gallimard) to the Prix Goncourt in 1932, include what purports to be a facsimile of the “dépôt légal” certificate confirming that over one hundred thousand copies of the novel had been printed:

---

909 Proust to Gallimard, Dec. 4 or 5, 1921, in Proust and Gallimard, *Corr.*, 434.
Gallimard’s personal dealings with journalists displayed a similarly deft touch. Whereas Grasset openly threatened and bullied newspaper publishers with boasts of his financial prowess, Gallimard exploited his own connections with subtlety and tact. Shortly after the publication of À l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs, he thus wrote to his old boss Robert de Flers at Le Figaro, reminding him of advertisements for the novel that had already appeared in the newspaper, and wondering whether he himself might write an article about his old Condorcet school mate.911 Flers replied that he was eager that Proust’s books should receive exceptional treatment in Le Figaro, noting that two articles about À l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs had already appeared in the newspaper with a third on the way, whilst nonetheless demurring from Gallimard’s specific suggestion.912 Such was Gallimard’s influence with Flers that he was subsequently able to persuade him, with Proust’s complicity, that Le Figaro littéraire’s review of Sodome et Gomorrhe

912 See Flers to Gallimard, Aug. 21, 1919, in Proust and Gallimard, Corr., 195.
II should be written by none other than Jean Schlumberger. Gallimard then reprinted an extract from the unsurprisingly laudatory review in an advertisement for the novel in the August 1922 edition of La NRF while Proust in turn got a friend to publish an extract in L’Action française.

Such manoeuvring was a constant feature of Gallimard and Proust’s often fractious exchanges, belying each man’s lofty reputation. Yet in an interview with the newsmagazine L’Express, the last of the handful he gave throughout his life, which was published in January 1976 less than a month after his death at the age of 94, Gallimard, offered not the slightest hint of their shared intrigues. “Oh, il était gentil, très gentil!” said Proust’s publisher. “Il ne m’a jamais demandé d’avance d’argent. Jamais. Ni de publicité.” Even from beyond the grave, Gallimard continued to keep the press itself in the dark about his most celebrated author’s eagerness to exploit its promotional power. After all, the unedifying spectacle of publisher and author conspiring to inflate sales figures and squabbling over advertising hardly corresponds to the image that Gallimard sought to project in its own publicity. Behind those iconic off-white covers lay some rather grubby episodes.

VIII. Publicity in the Recherche

The narrator of the Recherche himself knows well that you shouldn’t always believe what you read in the papers. As he remarks of Mme de Saint-Euverte’s hospitality in Sodome et Gomorrhe:

De tels salons, moins recherchés que fuis, et où on va pour ainsi dire en service commandé, ne font illusion qu’aux lectrices de “Mondanités”. Elles glissent sur une fête vraiment élégante celle-là, où la maîtresse de la maison pouvant avoir toutes les duchesses, lesquelles brûlent d’être “parmi les élus”, ne demande qu’à deux ou trois, et ne fait pas mettre le nom de leurs invités dans le journal. Aussi ces

915 Chapsal, “Gaston Gallimard parle...” 22.
femmes, méconnaissant ou dédaignant le pouvoir qu’a pris aujourd’hui la publicité, sont-elles élégantes pour la reine d’Espagne, mais méconnues de la foule, parce que la première sait et que la seconde ignore qui elles sont.916

The newspaper gossip column is here subject to a kind of manipulation similar to that which Grasset, Gallimard, and Proust himself exercised on behalf of his books. Just as they pulled strings to co-ordinate coverage in *Le Figaro* or *Les Journal des débats*, so Mme Saint-Euverte’s only real talent is to obtain glowing write-ups of her wearisome parties. Like Balzac’s Vautrin, the narrator seems to pride himself on being able to see through such artifice and grasp her soirées’ real social value by reading between the lines. Yet despite his admiration for those hostesses who do not court publicity, he is also perforce impressed by the power the press has acquired. The most elegant salonnières are ignorant or disdainful of that power while the newspaper-reading crowds remain oblivious to its hold over them; only the narrator grasps its importance without falling under its spell, just as Proust himself successfully used the press to launch his novels without sacrificing the integrity of his work. By contrast, those clinging to the splendid isolation of their elegant, yet largely invisible soirées belong to a vanishing world. Within a decade of *Sodome et Gomorrhe*’s publication in 1921-1922, the Queen of Spain herself had been deposed by the Second Spanish Republic.

The outbreak of war in *Le Temps retrouvé* nonetheless brings about an inevitable shift in journalistic priorities with salutarily retrogressive effects on salon life:

Sans doute, dans les temps habituels de la paix, une note mondaine subrepticement envoyée au *Figaro* ou au *Gaulois* aurait fait savoir à plus de monde que n’en pouvait tenir la salle à manger du *Majestic* que Brichot avait diné avec la duchesse de Duras. Mais depuis la guerre, les courriéristes mondiaux ayant supprimé ce genre d’informations (s’ils se rattrapaient sur les enterrements, les citations et les banquets franco-américains), la publicité ne pouvait plus exister que par ce moyen enfantin et restreint, digne des premiers âges, et antérieur à la découverte de Gutenberg: être vu à la table de Mme Verdurin.917

---

916 Proust, *RTP*, 3: 70.
917 Proust, *RTP*, 4: 312.
The narrator here clearly delights in the return to an oral, un-mediatised culture in which news travels only from person to person, creating a haven of truth and civilization amid the relentless propaganda of the war-time press whose power on the social circuit has, for now at least, fallen into welcome abeyance. If the narrator previously cast himself in an omniscient Vautrinesque role pivoting between uninformed newspaper readers and lofty salonnières, his apparent satisfaction at the enforced demise, be it temporary, of journalism’s intrusion upon the ancient rituals of sociability could suggest he only ever assumed that intermediate position with great reluctance and is now relieved to be freed of such semiotic imperatives, much as Gallimard always insisted that he had embraced modern commercial methods in publishing malgré lui. And yet the end of the paragraph reveals that the revival of oral gossip brings new perils due to another tool of modern communication:

Après le dîner on montait dans les salons de la Patronne, puis les téléphonages commençaient. Mais beaucoup de grands hôtels étaient, à cette époque, peuplés d’espions qui notaient les nouvelles téléphonées par Bontemps avec une indiscrétion que corrigeait seulement par bonheur le manque de sûreté de ses informations, toujours démenties par l’événement.

In a multiple irony, the “restrained” publicity of the dinner table becomes a potential threat to the Allied war effort alleviated only because the telephone tittle tattle relayed by Mme Bontemps, wife of a senior civil servant, proves to be just as inaccurate as pre-war newspaper reports about the Saint-Euverte salon. What had initially struck the narrator as a welcome return to medieval custom quickly succumbs to the vicissitudes of modernity’s unintended consequences. If newspaper gossip represents mediatized falsehood, then its antediluvian alternative offers neither truth nor retrieval of lost innocence. Flight into the past transpires to be just as deceptive as the mendacious culture of the present. Only by keeping abreast of both kinds of deception is it possible to live without illusions and grasp the truth of what’s really going on. And once again the narrator here
appears to be uniquely well informed, more so even than the spies themselves, who remain unaware of Mme Bontemps’s unreliability.

That perspicaciousness reflects the narrator’s willingness to immerse himself in all aspects of the culture of his time, from high art to low gossip. Throughout the novel, inspiration thus repeatedly springs, as a result of involuntary memory, from the most unlikely sources, typified by the legendary tea-soaked madeleine first encountered at Aunt Léonie’s house in Combray. And despite his apparent disdain for the distortions of newspaper publicity in *Sodome et Gomorrhe* and *Le Temps retrouvé*, the narrator also remarks in *Albertine disparue* that even the banal inducements of commercial advertising have the capacity to prompt such unexpected epiphanies:

À partir d’un certain âge nos souvenirs sont tellement entre-croisés les uns sur les autres que la chose à laquelle on pense, le livre qu’on lit n’a presque plus d’importance. On a mis de soi-même partout, tout est fécond, tout est dangereux, et on peut faire d’aussi précieuses découvertes que dans les *Pensées* de Pascal dans une réclame pour un savon.\(^918\)

Quite what may be discovered in a soap advertisement is never specified. But the confluence here of classical literature and modern publicity further attests to the narrator’s disposition to triangulate between past and present for the sake of gaining a more complete sense of his relationship to the world.

That hunger for understanding is never truly satisfied and even represents a doomed obsession when it comes to his pursuit of the ever-elusive Albertine, which forms the context of the digression about Pascal’s *Pensées*. Indeed, a man scouring soap advertisements for hidden meaning seems unlikely to attain much peace of mind. As Gilles Deleuze has argued, the narrator’s relentless search for truth is thus constantly frustrated by the volatile relationship between signs and their objects within the novel.\(^919\)

---

\(^{918}\) Proust, *RTP*, 4: 124. It is clear from the preceding passage that this “réclame” is in a newspaper.

transpires – of his ability to manipulate what he views as an essentially stable social order underpinned by the common denominators of money and sex, Proust’s narrator knowingly inhabits a consistently unpredictable world, which defeats even the most heroic attempts at comprehension. Only through the creation of a work of art that abstracts what he calls the “vertigineux kaléidoscope” of signs from their origins can the narrator hope to develop a coherent picture of reality.

And yet when confronted with newspaper publicity about Mme de Saint-Euverte’s salon in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, the narrator easily penetrates the veneer of mediatized elegance to detect the hostess’s manipulations. Affairs of the heart remain perhaps eternally unfathomable in the *Recherche*, but decoding journalistic artifice presents no such challenge. Underlying that Vautrinesque mastery of the signs found in a newspaper is Proust’s own experience of promoting his work in co-ordination with Grasset and Gallimard. He knew exactly how such puff pieces came to be published because, at his publishers’ prompting, he had personally orchestrated similar articles on his own behalf. Press publicity did indeed become as much a part of Proust’s world as Pascal’s *Pensées*.

He too had scoured the press in search of advertisements for his books, angrily reproaching Gallimard when he felt they failed to appear in sufficient quantities. Fittingly, the veiled portrait

---

920 Balzac’s anti-hero ultimately overestimates his semiotic mastery with fatal consequences for his protégé Lucien de Rubempré. As Christopher Prendergast puts it: “Vautrin’s elaborate plan comes crashing to the ground; the doublings of which he is the author release forces which run beyond his apparently omnipotent control; creator of disorder, he cannot himself fully command the field of that disorder.” (Christopher Prendergast, *The Order of Mimesis: Balzac, Stendhal, Nerval, Flaubert*, paperback ed. [1986; repr., Cambridge University Press, 1998] 98).

921 Proust, *RTP* 4: 100. See “Les Signes de l’art et l’essence,” in Deleuze, *Proust et les signes*, 51-65 (though Deleuze himself does not refer to the kaleidoscope metaphor). As we saw in Chapter Three, the same metaphor is also used in the *Recherche* to illustrate the arbitrariness of fluctuations within the social hierarchy, notably in the context of the Dreyfus Affair, and has recently been interpreted by Yuji Murakami as indicative of the narrator’s implicit Dreyfusard sympathies (see “L’Affaire Dreyfus dans l’histoire de l’antisémitisme: de “L’affaire Lemoine” par Michelet’ (1908) à la métaphore du kaléidoscope” in his doctoral thesis “L’Affaire Dreyfus dans l’œuvre de Proust,” 249-328).
of Gallimard and his associates’ duplicity in *La Prisonnière* is an extended simile for Albertine’s “petite bande” of sexually ambiguous girlfriends. The *Recherche’s* depiction of the narrator’s feverish unrequited love thus contains a direct echo of Proust’s frustrations with his publisher, who had of course rebuffed the author’s initial approach in 1912. And when the narrator subsequently evokes the potential for stumbling upon enlightenment in a soap advertisement amid a bout of furious cogitation concerning Albertine’s whereabouts, it is as if some of that frustrated erotic energy has been sublimated into the *réclame* itself. Like whimsical young ladies, advertising often holds out the promise of unprecedented satisfaction, yet what is actually on offer seldom lives up to such expectations. Throughout Proust’s final letters to Gallimard in 1922, the author’s incessant demands for more advertising, even if commercially justifiable, similarly seem to betray a deeper lack of fulfilment. “Cher ami je suis très fatigué,” Proust wrote in early July 1922, “j’aurais trop de choses à vous dire. Je ne figure sur aucun de vos catalogues, annonces etc dans cette revue-ci.”922 Two months later, he quotes his brother’s account of a fruitless tour of railway bookshops: “Dans toutes les gares, et j’ai fait un chemin énorme, j’ai demandé Sodome. Dans aucune on n’a pu me le donner.”923 The letter concludes: “C’est un si gros effort d’écrire après de telles crises que je vous envoie une lettre incomplète. Pardon.” Anxieties about publicity and distribution have come to parallel the author’s physical decline. And in those frantic demands for more books and more advertising, there lurks the same relentless desire to arrest the march of time and attain a form of immortality through art that is finally consummated in *Le Temps retrouvé*. For without the commercial apparatus of money, influence, ink, and paper wielded by Grasset and then Gallimard, that immortal work of art would have remained like a string of dead letters.

922 Proust to Gallimard, July 2 or 3, 1922, in *Proust and Gallimard, Corr.*, 552.
IX. “Industrial literature” beyond the *feuilleton*

Proust’s experiences of newspaper publicity during the early twentieth century, as well as those of other authors including Apollinaire, Péguy, Gide, and Larbaud, show how the mass press could function as a literary laboratory in a broader sense than habitually understood. As used by Marie-Ève Thérenty and other scholars, the laboratory metaphor specifically applies to the presence of literary writing within the press itself. As we saw in the Introduction, they show how genres such as prose poetry and the *roman-feuilleton* were forged within the columns of mid-nineteenth-century newspapers. Apollinaire, Péguy, and Proust all continued to publish preoriginals in newspapers and *grandes revues*, albeit less systematically than some of their precursors. By contrast, prepublications of Gide’s works were limited to little magazines such as *L’Ermitage* and *La NRF* as were those of Larbaud’s works (though he did write some journalism for the Argentine newspaper *La Nación*924).

What united all these authors was an acute sense of the importance of getting their names into the newspapers, be it in articles about their works or in paid advertisements. Contributing to that hunger for journalistic attention was their publishers’ shift towards deploying massified promotional methods on behalf of modernist literary works, which created a new point of contact between authors and the press, and thereby expanded the scope of literary-journalistic interactions beyond the act of serial publication itself. The rapid expansion of the press during the mid-nineteenth century had, thanks to the innovation of the *feuilleton*, created a journalistic marketplace for literary works, which Sainte-Beuve (himself among the era’s highest-paid *feuilletonistes*) decried as “industrial literature.” The expansion of literary book publishing in the early twentieth century extended that process of commodification from newspapers to books. At the same time,

---

924 See Larbaud’s interview with Joseph Van der Melle in *Toute l’édition* (March 3, 1934, 4). Gide himself later wrote a regular column entitled “Interviews imaginaires” for *Le Figaro* during the Second World War.
publishers continued to rely heavily on press publicity in both the traditional form of thinly disguised puff pieces as well as the new impersonalized solicitations of illustrated advertising.

 Whereas small-time Parnassian and Symbolist publishers such as Lemerre and Vanier had remained mostly indifferent to the imperatives of actually selling books, Mercure de France, Grasset, and Gallimard all learned to exploit the power of the press, frequently in collaboration with their authors, who became actively involved in sending out press copies, cultivating journalists, and purchasing advertising. Such promotional acumen was not unprecedented in French literary publishing. Calmann-Lévy had invested heavily in publicity and created its own press group during the mid-nineteenth century. What sets apart the new generation of publishers, particularly Gallimard, was their willingness to adopt similar methods (though it is not clear any of them actively drew on the example of Calmann-Lévy) in the service not just of literary quality, but of a whole series of difficult modernist works that displayed no obvious commercial appeal. Even Grasset, despite his legendary acquisitiveness, must have known that Péguy’s Œuvres choisies were unlikely to become a runaway bestseller given the Cahiers de la quinzaine’s paltry sales figures. Yet those investments ultimately proved to be highly profitable, in every sense of the term, as Mercure de France, Grasset and Gallimard grew into permanent features of the French literary landscape.

 Their success rested on their ability to transform the aesthetic heritage of recondite petites revues into a thriving system of book publishing. And, in line with the pre-existing experience of numerous petites revues, which themselves depended on newspaper publicity for survival, the mass press served as a pivotal cog in that transformation. Newspapers made writers into public figures and their books into merchandise, which could indeed, thanks to a well-placed review, interview, extract or advertisement, sell like soap cakes. From Sainte-Beuve to Theodor Adorno,
that process of commodification has been portrayed as a malign and corrupting diversion from the path of artistic righteousness. Yet in early twentieth-century France works such as Gide’s *Les Caves du Vatican*, Larbaud’s *A.O. Barnabooth*, Péguy’s “L’Argent suite,” and, most of all, Proust’s *Recherche* emerged not in spite of modern publishing’s mercantile knavery but because of it. Grasset and Gallimard both allowed Gide, Larbaud, Péguy, and Proust to reach a far wider audience than they would have done in the days of the *librairie spéciale* and fed the ambivalent fascination for publicity that lurks within their writings, which was further augmented, in Gide and Larbaud’s case, by their own hands-on involvement in the struggle to put Éditions de la NRF on the literary map. “[I]l faut bien vendre;” Gallimard wrote to Gide in 1922 when trying to justify his promotional methods, “c’est une question de vie ou de mort. Et il faut que nous vendions davantage encore l’année prochaine.”925 Such wrangling is the stuff that books are made of.

925 Gallimard to Gide, July 12, 1922, Gallimard Archives, Paris.
CHAPTER FIVE

Journalistic Aporias in the Poetry of Apollinaire and His Friends

Nous pouvons donc espérer, pour ce qui constitue la matière et les moyens de l’art, une liberté d’une opulence inimaginable. Les poètes font aujourd’hui l’apprentissage de cette liberté encyclopédique. Dans le domaine de l’inspiration, leur liberté ne peut pas être moins grande que celle d’un journal quotidien qui traite dans une seule feuille des matières les plus diverses, parcourt des pays les plus éloignés.

Guillaume Apollinaire, “L’Esprit nouveau et les poètes” (1917).926

[L]a littérature avec un grand “L”, ce rêve de tous les feuilletonistes et de milliers et de milliers de journalistes !

Blaise Cendrars, L’Homme foudroyé (1945).927

I. New Spirit – old bottles

Guillaume Apollinaire wanted to create a new literary world. “Ce qui manque à présent,” he wrote in 1909, “ce sont les organes, revue, journal, éditeur, théâtre. Il s’agit de créer tout cela.”928 This proved to be far more than bluster as Apollinaire went on to co-found Les Soirées de Paris in 1912, having previously co-edited the little magazines Le Festin d’Ésope in 1903-1904 and La Revue immorale (a title possibly borrowed from Gide’s novel L’Immoraliste [1902])929, subsequently known as Les Lettres modernes, in 1905. Les Soirées de Paris duly became a vital literary laboratory for Apollinaire himself and other writers in his circle such as Blaise Cendrars, Max Jacob, and André Salmon.

But the other supposedly missing “organs” that would help launch and sustain what Apollinaire later called “l’esprit nouveau” had in many cases already been established by 1909,

---

principally the *Mercure de France* and its publishing arm, *La Nouvelle Revue française* (which would publish books of poetry by Cendrars, Jacob, and Salmon after the First World War), and Éditions Grasset (which would publish Cendrars’s most celebrated novels *L’Or* [1925] and *Moravagine* [1926] as well as the fictionalized reportage of Rhum during the 1920s and 30s). Indeed, Apollinaire’s lecture “L’Esprit nouveau et les poètes,” which, as we saw in Chapter Three, called on poets to embrace new media such as film and the phonograph and open themselves up to “le monde entier […] tous les arts et tous les artifices,” was delivered at the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier, affiliated with *La NRF*, in November 1917 and then published after the poet’s death the following year in the *Mercure*, where he had authored a monthly column “La Vie anecdotique” from 1911 onwards. Mercure de France also published his two landmark poetry collections *Alcools* (1913) and *Calligrammes* (1918). Backing the New Spirit was thus a magazine and publishing house that had been thriving for more than two decades, in part thanks to Alfred Vallette’s discreet flair for publicity. Apollinaire and his contemporaries also had their own little magazines, and Cendrars even founded a short-lived publishing house, Éditions des Hommes Nouveaux, in 1912, but these authors did not ultimately create a wholly new set of literary institutions so much as find a berth within existing ones forged by the slightly older generation that had emerged from turn-of-the-century petites revues.

The foundations laid by men and women such as Vallette, Rachilde, the Natanson brothers (as we saw in Chapter Three, Apollinaire also wrote for *La Revue blanche*), Grasset, Gide, and Gallimard were what enabled the poets of the New Spirit to build literary careers of their own.

II. The wages of bohemia

Like many of the writers who came of age around 1890 such as Fénéon, Gide, Jarry, Mallarmé, Péguy, and Proust, Apollinaire and his friends were fascinated by the expansion of the
mass press and the challenge it posed to literary creation. But whereas their precursors largely remained at the edge of the journalistic whirlpool, writing infrequently for newspapers themselves, Apollinaire, Cendrars, and Salmon plunged themselves into the maelstrom and became true men of the press.

This journalistic endeavour was, first and foremost, a matter of survival. With no teaching or civil-service jobs to support them (unlike Mallarmé, or Fénéon prior to his trial), let alone the personal fortunes of Gide and Proust or even the modest dowry that sustained Péguy, newspapers offered a steady albeit gruelling and seldom lucrative way of living by one’s pen. As Apollinaire put it in a letter to Gide in 1912: “Je suis extrêmement las de tout et particulièrement de devoir rester à Paris, de devoir aller dans les journaux, d’avoir tant de mal à vivre misérablement.”

That misery was enforced through a system whereby most journalists were paid per line of published copy (at a typical rate of two to five sous i.e. ten to twenty-five centimes) and received no fixed salary. The emphasis was on quantity rather than quality. Whereas Mallarmé and Proust used the press as a means of intervening in current debates, promoting their books, or occasionally publishing a poem or piece of prose, Apollinaire was obliged to produce hackwork on a daily basis just to earn, during a very good month, around 250 francs (less than 1000 euros in today’s money). The poet also received 50 francs per month from the Mercure for writing “La Vie anecdotique” and, in 1913-1914, even another 50 francs from Les Soirées de Paris once the petite revue began to receive a subsidy from Serge Férat. By the eve of the First World War, Apollinaire could, moreover, count on significant royalties from his short-story collection.

932 See Jacqueline Gojard, “Sources et ressources d’Apollinaire et de quelques-uns de ses contemporains,” 27.
L’Hérésiarque & cie, published by Éditions Stock in 1910, and even Alcools as well as regular fees for editing and prefacing books of vintage curiosa, bringing his estimated monthly earnings to around 800 francs.934 But this relatively comfortable income represented the peak of his prosperity. In earlier years some months might see him take home no more than 100 francs entirely derived from journalism.935 As he wrote to his old school friend Ange Toussaint-Luca in 1908: “Et quand trouverai-je les 300 francs par mois nécessaires pour que je puisse me livrer à la littérature poétique de mon cœur sans être oblige d’écrire de stupides circulaires et d’encore plus stupides articles de Bourse pour gagner ma vie.”936

Cendrars was more fortunate, becoming a sought-after star reporter during the 1930s and commanding correspondingly handsome rates – 20,000 francs (over 15,000 euros in today’s money) in 1935 alone for a handful of articles.937 But the author of the Prose du Transsibérien, who came late to journalism, was the exception proving the rule that writer-journalists continued, for the most part, to churn out reams of copy for meagre rewards. Like Apollinaire, Salmon earned around 200-250 francs per month for writing newspaper art criticism from 1908 onwards once the inveterate bohemian had decided to take up regular employment for the sake of his family.938 From late 1898 to early 1900, Jacob similarly earned 20 francs per article writing art criticism for Le Moniteur des arts, a weekly magazine, and was then appointed editor of a successor publication, La Revue d’Art, later becoming editorial secretary of Le Sourire, an illustrated satirical weekly before mostly abandoning his journalistic career in 1901.939

934 See Gojard, “Sources et ressources d’Apollinaire,” 30. In 1908, Apollinaire agreed a contract with Éditions Briffaut to edit a collection of expurgated versions of classic erotic works by authors such as Pietro Aretino and the Marquis de Sade. (See Campa, Apollinaire, 259).
935 See Caizergues, Apollinaire journaliste, 39.
Unlike Cendrars, Salmon, and Jacob, Apollinaire’s immersion in the press was continuous, beginning during his schooldays in Nice and lasting until death. Each morning the future author of *Alcools*, then known as Wilhelm de Kostrowitzky, would arrive at the Lycée Masséna with a bag stuffed full of books and newspapers, which he would then share with Toussaint-Luca. And whenever their teacher’s watchful eye kept his classmate from reading those newspapers himself, Apollinaire would regale his friend of “tous les petits faits” and “tous les potins littéraires et artistiques” that he had already memorized. The two teenagers duly founded their own manuscript newspaper in 1897, entitled *Le Vengeur* or *Le Transigeant* so as to cock a snook at the anti-Dreyfusard *L’Intransigeant* and its editor Henri Rochefort. And whereas the schoolboy poets at the Lycée Condorcet in 1883 had, as we saw in Chapter Two, stuck to literature in their magazine *Le Fou*, it is clear from Toussaint-Luca’s account of their now-lost “organe de combat” that politics, both in Paris and the school-yard, was his and Apollinaire’s primary concern: “[…] il nous plaisait infiniment de faire pièce à Henri Rochefort. […] *Le Transigeant* contenait des articles de fond contre nos professeurs, nos maîtres d’études, et même certains de nos camarades.”

A few years later in 1899, having in the meantime sought without success to become a local correspondent for the radical Parisian newspaper *La Volonté*, Apollinaire came face-to-face with his journalistic nemesis in Monte Carlo, prompting a desultory encounter that sets the tone for the ambivalent trajectory of the poet’s own journalistic career:


---

941 Toussaint-Luca, *Guillaume Apollinaire (Souvenirs d’un ami)*, 5.
942 Toussaint-Luca, *Guillaume Apollinaire (Souvenirs d’un ami)*, 18.
943 Toussaint-Luca, *Guillaume Apollinaire (Souvenirs d’un ami)*, 18.
Bel Respiro. Après avoir détourné les yeux du journal et m’avoir regardé un instant
le Vieux à la face étrange m’expliqua, ce que je savais d’ailleurs mieux que lui, que
la rue continuait dans la campagne et ne ramenait pas dans la Principauté. (Il n’a
pas remarqué L’Aurore je crois). Après l’avoir remercié je le quittai, maudissant
cette maudite timidité qui m’empêcha de lui parler quand j’avais une si belle
occasion.\textsuperscript{945}

Having set out to provoke a clash with Rochefort by brandishing the Dreyfusard newspaper
\textit{L’Aurore} against Édouard Drumont’s anti-Semitic \textit{La Libre Parole}, Apollinaire ends up meekly
asking the polemicist for directions along a route he already knows. And the journalistic path trod
by the poet indeed followed a familiar course of steadily diminishing political radicalism, like the
erstwhile Communard sympathizer Rochefort, that took Apollinaire from writing fiery (and unpaids) contributions for the satirical socialist weekly \textit{Tabarin} to being the regular art critic for
\textit{L’Intransigeant} itself, a billet he inherited from Salmon in 1910, and eventually striving to
ingratiate himself with Charles Maurras, the extreme nationalist editor of \textit{L’Action française}.\textsuperscript{946}

Though Apollinaire’s politics drifted to the Right, his views on art and literature never took
a correspondingly conservative turn. At \textit{L’Intransigeant}, Apollinaire became the leading
journalistic defender of his friends Picasso, Braque, and “Le Douanier” Rousseau. Indeed, as we
saw in Chapter Three, he frequently insisted in his own articles that the boldness of his aesthetic
judgements set him apart from his fellow critics. Such ardent advocacy on behalf of Cubism, a
concept Apollinaire helped define and popularize in his journalism, ultimately proved too much
for \textit{L’Intransigeant}’s editor Léon Bailby, who had replaced Rochefort in 1907. “Je me suis montré
plus que libéral aussi longtemps que possible,” he wrote to Apollinaire in March 1914, “mais vous
êtes obstiné à ne défendre qu’une école, la plus avancée, avec une partialité et un exclusivisme qui

\textsuperscript{945} Apollinaire to Toussaint-Luca, February 1899, \textit{Corr.}, 1: 23.
\textsuperscript{946} Regarding his contributions to \textit{Tabarin}, see Campa, \textit{Guillaume Apollinaire}, 93-94. See also Apollinaire to Maurras, March 15, 1918, \textit{Corr.}, 3: 507-511.
détonnent dans notre journal indépendant [...]”

The poet-journalist duly moved from *L’Intransigeant* to the rival newspaper *Paris-Journal*, where Salmon, by this time writing for *Gil Blas*, had again preceded him as art critic.

Not all or even most of Apollinaire’s journalism dealt with such lofty material. For, as he complained to Toussaint-Luca, prior to the First World War the poet was indeed forced to write innumerable “stupides articles de Bourse” for publications such as *Le Guide du rentier* and *Le Financier*. These articles, like much of Apollinaire’s journalism, were unsigned and thus remain, in most cases, unidentified. As we saw in Chapter Three, in an early foray into the mass press, Apollinaire also co-authored *Que faire?*, a *roman-feuilleton* pseudonymously published in *Le Matin* in 1900. And while that helter-skelter story of a master criminal being tracked by a reporter and a doctor is no masterpiece, as Jean Marcenac has argued, the work nonetheless experiments irreverently with scientific and religious themes that re-emerge in Apollinaire’s later writings such as *L’Hérésiarque & cie, Le Poète assassiné*, and *Alcools*.

During the First World War, Sergeant Kostrowitzky even helped produce a trench newspaper, *Le Tranchman’Echo*. After receiving a near-fatal head wound in 1916, he was then assigned to the censor’s office and finally to the press office at the Ministry of War, where he edited the *Bulletin d’informations coloniales étrangères*. Apollinaire simultaneously translated foreign news reports into French each morning for the newspapers *Paris-Midi* and *L’Information*,

---

948 One exception is his interview with the Moroccan Finance Minister Muhammad al-Muqri for *Le Financier* in 1908, attributed to Apollinaire based on the recollections of his friend Louis Latourrette (see Apollinaire, *Opc*, 3: 402-405 and 1249).  
949 See Campa, *Guillaume Apollinaire*, 84-86.  
where he would apparently fabricate much of his copy, telling André Billy: “Il n’y a pas de meilleure façon d’influer sur les événements.”

These onerous duties clearly took their toll. As he wrote to a friend in 1917:

La vie m’a obligé à prendre une situation journalistique qui est de mettre au point pour le journal Paris-Midi les informations politiques de l’étranger de 6 h. du matin à 10 heures du matin, ce qui m’oblige à me lever à 5 h. ensuite de 2 h. à 5 ½ je suis à la Censure où je m’occupe des journaux de province.

Such a punishing schedule of journalistic work can scarcely have aided Apollinaire’s recovery from his wounds, which likely contributed to his death from influenza on November 9, 1918, as was officially acknowledged on the death certificate declaring him “mort pour la France.”

Apollinaire lived by the press; his final unloved “situation journalistique” may also have helped to kill him. He had predicted as much in a pre-war letter to Gide alluding to his exhausting journalistic labours: “[…] la vie me presse qui [sic] me force à des besognes vénéneuses, dont je mourrai.”

By the time of Apollinaire’s death at 38, those “besognes” – be they poisonous or not – had encompassed every conceivable journalistic genre from reportage, chroniques, and échos to criticism, short fiction, and indeed poetry across dozens of newspapers, grandes revues, and petites revues. The vast bulk of his writings were first published in the press. Journalism in all its ephemeral glory and turpitude is what made Apollinaire the writer he was.

III. A poetic laboratory

As we saw in Chapter Three, most of the poems in Alcools originally appeared in petites revues such as Le Festin d’Ésope, La Revue blanche, the Mercure de France, and Les Soirées de

---

952 André Billy, Apollinaire vivant (Paris: La Sirène, 1923), 93.
956 See Caizergues, Apollinaire journaliste, 11.
Paris that published works of poetry and imaginative prose alongside newspaper-style journalism. That spirit of literary-journalistic eclecticism is duly mirrored in Apollinaire’s “Zone,” first published in Les Soirées, with its opening declaration equating prose and newspapers, as well as in Cendrars’s “Titres,” also published in Les Soirées, which similarly portrays newspaper journalism as a source of literary inspiration. Moreover, the calligrams Apollinaire published in Les Soirées reflect his immersion in the world of Cubism as an art critic for L’Intransigeant and Paris-Journal along with his penchant for recycling textual and visual oddments in his journalism. Newspapers thereby indirectly shaped poetry that appeared in the petites revues associated with Apollinaire and his circle.

Newspapers themselves also served as a primary literary laboratory for two poems that were included in Alcools. In the case of “Le Brasier,” a mystically charged evocation of lost faith and poetic renewal, the version published in the book contains few changes from the poem originally published under the title “Le Pyrée” in Gil Blas in 1908.\(^{957}\) And though “Le Brasier”’s central theme of creative destruction seems in keeping with the experiences of a jobbing poet-journalist constantly moving from one article to the next and recycling material across his literary and journalistic works, the effect of pre-publication in a newspaper did not have an obviously decisive effect on the poem’s composition.

By contrast, “La Maison des morts” underwent a profound transformation following its first publication in Le Soleil, edited by the father of his schoolfriend René Dalize.\(^{958}\) The original published version of this macabre work, in which dozens of corpses break out of a Munich mortuary and wander about the countryside, was a prose short story entitled “L’Obituaire.” Apollinaire then cut the story into lines of free verse whilst making only minor changes to the text.

\(^{958}\) Guillaume Apollinaire, “L’Obituaire,” Le Soleil, Aug. 31, 1907, 3.
itself. The latter version first appeared under its original title in the little magazine *Vers et prose* in 1909, prompting Apollinaire’s colleagues at *L’Intransigeant* to chide him:

Il est bon parfois, mon cher poète, de faire des vers libres.

Mais ce qui n’est pas bon, c’est de prendre une nouvelle, qu’on a publiée dans un journal du matin, de la recopier en écrivant à la ligne au bout de quelques syllabes et d’envoyer ça à une revue comme poème inédit, en vers libres.

N’est-ce pas, mon cher confrère?

Beginning as a “poète,” Apollinaire ends up as a mere “confrère” – i.e. just another journalist. And by the same token, “L’Obituaire” is here implicitly dismissed as a piece of hack work for a newspaper that Apollinaire had attempted to pass off as an authentic work of poetry. The journalists of *L’Intransigeant*’s literary rubric “La Boîte aux lettres,” to which Apollinaire himself contributed, thereby assume the guise of a language police enforcing the boundary between journalism and poetry. The unnamed target of their censure replied in an unpublished letter that “L’Obituaire” had in fact begun life as a poem, which he then turned into a piece of prose for *Le Soleil*, where, he notes, it was published not as a short story but as a “variété” – a catch-all heading for literary newspaper articles that seems to underline the work’s ambiguous status. In a similar spirit of variegation, Apollinaire goes on to insist that sharply drawn critical boundaries between verse and prose should not stand in the way of authorial prerogative: “[J]e fais de mes propres productions littéraires ce qui me plaît. Je puis les mettre en vers ou en prose, pensée, sans qu’on ait à me le reprocher.” That fluid approach also guided the composition of “Un Fantôme de nuées,” which Apollinaire began writing, according to Billy, as a prose short story for the illustrated newspaper *Excelsior* before transforming the text mid-draft into a poem, whose

---

959 See the notes in Apollinaire, *Op*, 1050.
961 Apollinaire to “Les Treize,” Sept. 5, 1910, in Apollinaire, *Corr.*, 1: 341-343. In the absence of the original manuscript, it is impossible to verify Apollinaire’s claim.
journalistic origins help account for the strong narrative thrust underlying its portrayal of a troupe of surreally talented saltimbanques, a subject that recalls Baudelaire’s prose poem “Le Vieux Saltimbanque,” itself initially published in La Revue fantastiste and the daily newspaper La Presse.962

Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé had all gravitated from verse towards hybrid forms of prose poetry. By contrast, in “L’Obituaire/La Maison des morts” Apollinaire shifts in the opposite direction. Rather than blurring the distinction between verse and prose, he uses both as alternate frames for a single literary work. Baudelaire had described his Petits poèmes en prose as an amorphous serpent without head nor tail. “L’Obituaire/La Maison des morts” is more akin to the ambiguous figure of the duck-rabbit, which is not a single hybrid creature, but two perceptually distinct animals sharing the same visual space. His work, in other words, has two heads where Baudelaire’s prose poetry has none. Apollinaire’s short story-cum-poem is not a blend of prose and verse, or indeed of journalism and poetry. Rather, the text inhabits each of these categories within different contexts and thereby transcends generic boundaries without dissolving them.

By transforming “L’Obituaire” from a short story into a poem (or perhaps the other way around), Apollinaire both criss-crosses and reasserts the traditional division between verse and prose. As we saw in Chapter Three, “Zone” makes a still more audacious leap by equating poetry with advertising and prose with newspaper journalism, whilst implicitly maintaining a clear distinction between prose and poetry themselves, thereby simultaneously subverting and reaffirming poetic tradition once again. When justifying his decision to eliminate all punctuation from Alcools, Apollinaire similarly invoked the traditional prosodic qualities of “le rythme et la coupe des vers,” which, he told the critic Henri Martineau, constituted “la véritable ponctuation,”

962 See André Billy, Apollinaire vivant, 53-54, the notes in Apollinaire, Op, 1084, and the notes in Baudelaire, Oc, 1: 1318.
adding that “il n’en est point besoin d’une autre.”\textsuperscript{963} That decision has also been variously attributed to the novel examples of Mallarmé’s \textit{Un coup de dés}, Cendrars, and Marinetti, who had specifically called for the abolition of punctuation in his “Manifeste technique de la littérature futuriste” (1912).\textsuperscript{964} But whereas Marinetti wanted to do away with verse – even free verse – entirely, Apollinaire did not share that mania for total rupture with literary precedent. Lurking within “Zone”’s “mille titres divers,” there is, after all, still…a “vers.” That verse – which is, as we saw in Chapter Three, an alexandrine – also suggests a parallel source of journalistic inspiration for the “de-punctuation” of \textit{Alcools}. For the newspaper headlines it describes were themselves typically unpunctuated. Apollinaire thereby combines poetic tradition with journalistic modernity, in keeping with the simultaneously passéist and presentist spirit of Baudelaire’s vision of art in “Le Peintre de la vie moderne.”

As Lionel Follet has suggested, the transformation of “L’Obituaire” from short story into a free-verse poem also plausibly anticipated the “de-punctuation” of \textit{Alcools}.\textsuperscript{965} For the shift from prose to terse lines of free verse introduces a halting, suspenseful rhythm that both evokes the movement of the walking dead and, at least in this instance, substantiates Apollinaire’s contention that punctuation marks are superfluous. Consider, for example, the laconic depiction of the return to the graveyard towards the end of the poem:

\begin{verbatim}
Bientôt je restai seul avec ces morts
Qui s’en allaient tout droit
Au cimetière
Où
Sous les Arcades
Je les reconnus
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{963} Apollinaire to Henri Martineau, July 19, 1913, in Apollinaire, \textit{Corr.}, 1: 535.
Couchés
Immobiles
Et bien vêts
Attendant la sépulture derrière les vitrines[.]

Whereas the absence of punctuation in “Zone” makes the poem hard to follow, here the lines are so truncated that punctuation would make little difference to how we read the stanza. The line breaks alone suffice to convey the rhythm of the verse. And if that realization indeed emerged in part as a result of rewriting “L’Obituaire,” then the newspaper’s influence as a primary literary laboratory extends across the entire collection. For the process of turning one piece of journalism into poetry would thus underlie Apollinaire’s most striking stylistic innovation.

Several other poems by Apollinaire seemingly borrow directly from his own journalism. “Le Dromadaire,” a quintain in *Le Bestiaire* (1910) depicting the charmed life of “Don Pedro d’Alfaroubeira” and his four camels, had been inspired, Apollinaire told a friend, by his encounter with a Moroccan Finance Minister, whom he had interviewed for *Le Financier*.967

And when Apollinaire was briefly imprisoned in September 1911 under suspicion of having stolen the *Mona Lisa*, he recorded his experiences in “Mes Prisons,” an article published a few days after his release in *Paris-Journal*, which exhibits direct textual parallels with the poem “À la Santé,” first published in *Alcools*.968 The latter’s opening verses – “Avant d’entrer dans ma cellule/ Il a fallu me mettre nu” – thus closely resemble the article’s recollection of how “je dus me mettre nu dans le corridor.” Like many other real and fictional inmates, the poet then emphasizes the inhumanity of his surroundings by identifying himself with his cell number – “Je suis le quinze de la/ Onzième” – which is also recorded in the article: “le quinzième de la onzième

---

division.” And in the third part of the poem, he compares himself to a trapped bear – “Dans une fosse comme un ours/ Chaque matin je me promène” – just as the article refers to the prison van that brought him to the Palais de la Justice as “une sorte de cage,” from which he emerges to face a crowd of photographers, who look at him as if he were “une bête curieuse.” More generally, as in “L’Obituaire/ La Maison des morts,” the poem and newspaper article share a terse, understated style that subtly conveys the author’s emotional devastation.

Those literary-journalistic overlaps are further emphasized by a sentence in “Mes prisons,” a title borrowed from Verlaine’s prison memoir, describing the poetic efforts of a previous inmate: “J’eus une émotion beaucoup plus agréable en lisant quelques vers naïfs laissés par un prisonnier, qui les a signés: ‘Myriès le chanteur.’” Apollinaire then adds: “J’en composai aussi et la poésie me consola presque de l’absence de la liberté.” That detail suggests Apollinaire had already begun writing “À la Santé,” which concludes with the date “Septembre 1911,” in his prison cell. A preliminary unpublished draft, which differs substantially from the version published in Alcools and includes the lines “Vienne la nuit sonne l’heure/ Les jours s’en vont et je demeure,” later incorporated in “Le Pont Mirabeau,” indicates that the poem is unlikely to have acquired its definitive form (and there were no pre-publications) while Apollinaire was still a guest of the Republic.969 “Mes prisons,” was, by contrast, published on September 14, 1911, which suggests that the image of being forced to strip naked, the bestial analogy, and the reference to his cell number may all have originated in the newspaper article and then been subsequently incorporated in the poem. It seems clear, in any event, that the poem and newspaper article began to take shape simultaneously as Apollinaire sat in his cell at La Santé. The arrest stemmed, moreover, in part from his position at Paris-Journal, which had offered a reward for the return of three statues that

had been stolen from the Louvre by Géry Pieret, a small-time crook and friend of the poet’s, who later sold two of them to Picasso. When the artist and Apollinaire resolved to return the statues via *Paris-Journal*, which then received a visit from the thief himself bearing the third statue in search of the reward, suspicions naturally settled on the hapless author himself.

Journalism got Apollinaire locked up; writing about his incarceration for *Paris-Journal* then helped him get a poem out of the experience, thus providing an ironic vindication of the maxim: “Le journalisme mène à tout, à condition d’en sortir.”

“Cors de chasse,” a laconic account of heartbreak towards the end of *Alcools*, similarly reprises imagery that first appeared in two articles Apollinaire published in *L’Intransigeant* in April and May 1911. The first is a review of the Salon des Indépendants that mentions Thomas De Quincey and his unrequited passion for “The Prostitute Ann”; the second is a review of the official Salon where Apollinaire alludes to dabbling in opium himself, noting that the drug’s “charme” outweighs its “défauts” and “inconvénients.” These motifs are duly brought together in the second stanza of “Cors de chasse”: “Et Thomas de Quincey buvant/ L’opium poison doux et chaste/ A sa pauvre Anne allait rêvant[…]” As in “Mes prisons,” journalism here seems to have served as a preliminary filter for Apollinaire’s thoughts and experiences, which then acquire distilled poetic form. But whereas “Mes prisons” and “À La Santé” share a single sustained focus on the trauma of his imprisonment, “Cors de chasse” has more in common with the eclectic spirit of “Zone.” For there’s no obvious reason why a love poem should emerge from two humdrum exhibition reviews. That penchant for creating poetry out of diffuse, commonplace materials

---

underlay Georges Duhamel’s rebuke, which was discussed in Chapter Four, that *Alcools* resembled “une boutique de brocanteur.”

**IV. Finding poetry in the news**

It was not just Apollinaire’s own journalism that yielded a rich trawl of poetic flotsam. “Les Doukhobors,” an early poem that remained unpublished during Apollinaire’s lifetime, appears to have been inspired by articles Apollinaire read about the persecution of the titular Russian Christian sect during the 1890s.⁹⁷³ The latter poem’s anguished apostrophe to “mes frères lointains” attests to the teenage author’s fervent Catholicism. That faith may have faded over time, but Apollinaire continued to find inspiration in the press. Pierre-Marcel Adéma has thus identified an anonymous piece of doggerel in a trench newspaper as a possible source for the posthumously published quatrain “Le Singe.”⁹⁷⁴ Furthermore, as we saw in Chapter Three, the image of the telegraph pole in “Voyage” was taken from the masthead of *Le Matin*; and the epiphany at the start of “Zone” about the superannuated relics of antiquity and the already ancient automobiles of modernity may have originated in a contemporary newspaper photograph of Port-Aviation.

*Alcools*’ title at first evokes an image of fiery purity. But the collection’s eclecticism, typified by its journalistic borrowings, suggests that its titular metaphor has two dimensions. For Apollinaire’s poetry seems to contain both a dose of concentrated spirit and traces of the mash from which it has been extracted. *Alcools* does not resemble a fine cognac so much as rough-and-ready moonshine sloshing about a dirty glass.

That sense of impurity had displeased Duhamel. And Apollinaire’s works are in fact composed of far less than what the *Mercure de France*’s critic had contemptuously dismissed as

---

⁹⁷³ See the notes in *Apollinaire, Op*, 1158-1159.
bric-à-brac. For the wares displayed in a flea market or thrift shop tend to have at least some monetary and aesthetic value. They may even include a few hidden gems. The same can hardly be said of the old newspaper clippings Apollinaire recycled into verse. His poetry emerged from the refuse of his journalistic life. And what would otherwise have been destined to serve, at best, as wrapping for fried potatoes instead took its place within an oeuvre that combines the boisterous éclat of the popular press with a Pascalian feel for paradox and philosophical provocation.

Paul Claudel is said to have similarly remarked of Baudelaire’s work: “C’est un extraordinaire mélange du style racinien et du style journalistique de son temps.” But though Apollinaire and Baudelaire certainly shared an ambivalent fascination for the press and its novel vocabulary, the former’s style seems too improvised and variegated to bear much comparison with Andromaque or Phèdre. Whereas Baudelaire’s verse consistently respects classical forms, Apollinaire’s does so only intermittently. Some lines in “Zone” even count more than twenty syllables. Such exceptional lengthiness (not present throughout the whole of Alcools) helps create the sense of motley abundance that dismayed Duhamel. If the verses overflow the margins, it’s because they are packed with all the colour of modern street life – “les prospectus les catalogues les affiches […] mille titres divers” – as well as echoes of the distant past. A “boutique de brocanteur” might be just as crowded with artefacts and curios, but the vibrant media culture that suffuses Alcools will be absent. And whereas a brocanteur trades only in the past, Apollinaire strove to capture the spirit of his own times. Like Baudelaire and Mallarmé, he often found it in a newspaper.

V. Performing the press and assassinating poetry

As we saw in Chapter Three, by the final years of his life, Apollinaire seemed more enthused by the literary potential of new media such as the cinema and the phonograph than by the poster art and newspaper headlines that had inspired him in “Zone.” And he himself was eagerly trying to get in on the act. In 1917, he and André Billy co-authored *La Bréhatine*, an unmade film script about the suicide of a broken-hearted young woman.977 But the two writer-journalists seemed incapable of leaving their dubious profession behind. The story thus revolves around a writer who meets the eponymous Bréhatine (named for the island off the coast of Brittany) and turns her story of lost love into a *roman-feuilleton*, adding a sensationalist twist whereby her erstwhile fiancé becomes a murderer and is eventually guillotined. The original Bréhatine then recognizes herself in the newspaper and, believing the rest of the story to be true, kills herself like the fictionalized heroine. As in several of Apollinaire’s early short stories (which were discussed in Chapter Three), journalism thus serves as a narrative device that blurs the boundary between fiction and reality. But whereas the journalists in “Le Passant de Prague” and “Le Juif errant” (including the narrator himself) seemed hapless and muddled in the face of malevolent supernatural forces, here it is the *feuilletoniste* himself who exploits the Bréhatine’s emotional turmoil and wreaks inadvertent havoc. Apollinaire’s view of his own profession thus seems to have darkened considerably during the intervening fifteen years. And while he frequently complained about his journalistic lot prior to the First World War, the lies and distortions of wartime propaganda had further alienated him. As he wrote to his lover Louise de Coligny (typically referred to as “Lou”) in 1915: “[Les journaux] sont au-dessous de tout; non seulement la censure les gêne, mais encore ils sont rédigés par des savetiers plutôt que par des écrivains.”978

Apollinaire himself was not entirely blameless when it came to such “bourrage de crâne.” In April 1917, he wrote an article for *Paris-Midi* about the Nivelle Offensive along the Aisne declaring: “L’armée allemande est désormais à notre merci.” In reality, the attack was a costly failure that sparked a wave of mutinies throughout the French Army. Writing at the beginning of the offensive, Apollinaire could perhaps not have predicted that disastrous outcome. But, contrary to the impression given by the dateline “Aux armées, le 16 avril,” there’s no evidence he was reporting from the front itself. The article appears to have been cobbled together from the Army’s own communiqués. Apollinaire also wrote numerous other articles for the same newspaper, purporting to be dispatches from London, Zurich, and Petrograd, which are filled with chauvinist clichés of the kind satirized in Proust’s *Le Temps retrouvé*.

And yet, when wearing his other hat, Apollinaire continued to display a mordant grasp of journalistic folly. His eccentric pro-natalist play *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, first performed in June 1917 and ostensibly set in Zanzibar, thus opens with a newspaper kiosk stage left. But whereas the kiosk’s profusion of portraits and headlines had been a source of inspiration in “Zone,” here disappointment awaits the eponymous hero’s husband when, his wife having renounced procreation, he decides to create a son out of bits of torn-up newspaper, ink, glue, and a pair of scissors. The journalist who emerges fully formed from the cradle duly attempts to blackmail his own father with threats of spreading scurrilous rumours throughout the press. By Apollinaire’s own account, he had authored *Les Mamelles* in 1903, but according to Marcel Adéma and Michel Décaudin, it seems likely the work (which includes timely references to Braque and Picasso) only took definitive shape in late 1916 and early 1917 after the writer and theatre director Pierre Albert-Birot had asked him to come up with a play that would break with what Apollinaire had dubbed

---

“l’odieux réalisme” in an interview with Albert-Birot’s little magazine SIC.981 To distinguish the work from both realist-cum-Naturalist and Symbolist convention, Apollinaire duly uses the term “surréaliste” (his own recent coinage) in his preface to the play, which promotes an aesthetic approach blending imagination with real experience.982 Unlike later Surrealist art and writing, Les Mamelles does not seek to plunge into the depths of the unconscious. But the play does exemplify the anarchic spirit that would be embraced by Aragon, Bréton, and their followers. Much of that topsy-turvy quality comes from its satirical portrayal of the press as a source of gratuitous nonsense. And in mid-1917, when the French war effort appeared on the verge of collapse amid rampant disillusionment with official propaganda, such a mordant portrayal of journalism clearly had topical resonance, just as its pro-natalist theme addressed a long-term French anxiety rendered still more acute by the loss of over a million men since 1914.

Apollinaire had already expressed his own disillusionment with journalism in Le Poète assassiné, a quasi-autobiographical collection of loosely connected short stories published the previous year (though it had been essentially completed by the outbreak of war).983 The murder foretold in the book’s title comes about because of a newspaper article by a “savant chimiste-agronome Horace Tograth” arguing, in pseudo-Platonic style, that the growth of poetry poses a grave threat to civilisation and must be vigorously repressed.984 This obloquy is seconded by “les journaux d’informations et d’affaires” around the world, with dissent confined to “quelques journaux littéraires,” whereupon Tograth pens a second article calling for all poets to be

981 See the notes in Apollinaire, Op, 1178.
982 Apollinaire, preface to Les Mamelles de Tirésias, in Op, 865. Apollinaire had previously referred to “sur-réalisme” (with a hyphen) in his programme notes for Erik Satie’s Parade in May 1917, where he uses the concept to describe the confluence of dance and painting in Satie’s ballet (Apollinaire, Opc, 2: 865). Only in the preface to Les Mamelles does the term acquire a fuller theoretical meaning.
983 See the notes in Apollinaire, Opc, 1: 1153.
984 Apollinaire, Opc, 1: 290.
massacred. Apollinaire’s fictional alter ego Croniamantal – “le plus grand des poètes vivants” – then confronts Tograth in Marseille only to be torn to pieces by an anti-poetic mob. Journalism, in other words, ends up killing poetry. And yet, though the book includes more original, previously unpublished material than L’Hérésiarque & cie, Alcools, and Calligrammes, several stories at the end of Le Poète assassiné had previously appeared in newspapers such as Le Matin and Paris-Journal. Like the Petits poèmes en prose, Le Poète assassiné thus disparages the journalistic culture from whence it came.

As we saw in the Introduction, Baudelaire portrayed Constantin Guys’s newspaper sketches as the acme of artistic modernity in “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” published in Le Figaro in 1863, just a year after twenty of his prose poems had appeared in La Presse. Apollinaire similarly offers two radically divergent visions of journalism in Le Poète assassiné and “Zone,” which were both composed around the same time. In the former, the press literally instigates a global massacre of poets; in the latter, advertising and journalism represent the future of literature. Mallarmé’s writings display a similar sense of ambivalence, but, as we saw in Chapter One, he ultimately seems to move towards a coherent vision of literary-journalistic hybridity in “Quant au livre.” By contrast, Le Poète assassiné and “Zone” stand in stark, unresolved opposition.

VI. A poet-journalist at war

Les Mamelles de Tirésias, La Bréhatine, and numerous comments in Apollinaire’s letters display growing antipathy for the press during the First World War. But he also continued, on occasion, to express admiration for individual pieces of journalism. For instance, in November 1914, he wrote to Lou that he had read in Le Petit Niçois “une merveilleuse page militaire, le récit

---

985 Apollinaire, Opc, 1: 291.
986 Apollinaire, Opc, 1: 298.
987 See the notes in Apollinaire, Opc, 1: 1298-1321.
de la bataille de l’Ourcq qui sauva Paris et fut une phrase importante de la bataille de la Marne. C’est ce que l’on a écrit de mieux depuis la guerre. Et du moment qu’on peut encore écrire si bien le français tout va bien.”

Apollinaire was only sent to the front in April 1915 so his enthusiasm for this article might well have reflected the fact that he had yet to see the brutal reality of war for himself. Heavy bombardment awaited him near Reims during his first days at the front, prompting a shift in his attitude towards the war-time press. As he wrote to Lou in early April 1915: “Les journaux ne reflètent nullement ce qu’est la guerre. C’est que les journalistes qui la décrivent ne la connaissent point.” Similar comments punctuate his letters throughout the rest of 1915.

And yet, not all newspapers attracted his ire. In mid-1915, Apollinaire became involved in the creation of a manuscript trench newspaper, Le Tranchman’Echo, an experience he later recounted in detail in the Mercure, though only the template of the third and final issue he personally submitted to the Bibliothèque nationale survives. It is unclear whether Apollinaire actually wrote for Le Tranchman, but his account in the Mercure clearly portrays himself as being actively involved in its creation. Moreover, as J.G. Clark has spotted, a drawing of a pair of crossed canons (the symbol of the French artillery in which Apollinaire served) that adorns the masthead of Le Tranchman is nearly identical to the one that appears in the poet’s calligram “Madeleine” (where it is surrounded by a bawdy piece of Italian street slang – “far tiz rose”).


990 Le Tranchman’Echo, no.3, 1915, RES 4-LC6-271, BnF-François Mitterrand, Paris/ Gallica.


The latter poem was first published in *Case d’Armons* (named for the personal storage locker on an artillery train), a manuscript volume of Apollinaire’s poetry printed, like *Le Tranchman*, on a duplicating machine at the front. And in both cases, the drawing of the canons was made not by Apollinaire himself but by the unit’s chief sergeant, René Berthier, whose contribution was duly credited on the final page of *Case d’Armons* as well in the *Mercure* article. 993 *Case d’Armons* was printed on June 17, 1915 while the template of the aborted third issue of *Le Tranchman* seems to have been printed about a week later. 994 Though Apollinaire notes that Berthier had provided similar illustrations for *Le Tranchman*’s first two issues, it is thus uncertain whether the drawing of the crossed canons originated in the newspaper or in *Case d’Armons*. Even so, the drawing’s presence in “Madeleine” (named for his lover Madeleine Pagès) evokes the lively spirit of improvisation and camaraderie that comes across in Apollinaire’s account of *Le Tranchman*. The poem and trench newspaper were simultaneous collaborative efforts that both display irreverent humour in the face of war’s drudgery and horror. Notwithstanding Apollinaire’s disdain for the newspapers being printed back in Paris, overlaps between journalism and poetry thus remained a salient feature of his time at the front.

That crossover also has a material dimension. For, like the manuscript of *Alcools* (which was discussed in Chapter Three), *Case d’Armons*, whose poems were republished in *Calligrammes*, is partly composed of recycled ephemera. In the copy Apollinaire personally submitted to the Bibliothèque nationale, one poem, “1915,” is written by hand on the back of a military-issue postcard. 995 And this copy also uses an issue of the *Bulletin des armées*, the army’s...

994 Apollinaire’s unit received orders to change position on June 25, 1915, just as the third issue of *Le Tranchman*’ Echo was about to be printed (see Campa, Guillaume Apollinaire, 571).
995 Apollinaire, *Case d’armons*, 33.
in-house newspaper, in its binding. The war may have taken the poet-journalist away from the press, but the press seems to follow him everywhere.

Apollinaire even mentions the same newspaper in a short epistolary poem addressed to his old school friend, the poet and critic Louis de Gonzague Frick in July 1915 (one month after Case d’Armons had been printed): “Je ne lis pas le Figaro/ Mais le Bulletin des armées/ Et d’ailleurs je ne lis pas trop.”996 The final verse then dismisses the politician Joseph Reinach’s military column in Le Figaro, published, as we saw in Chapter Three, under the pseudonym “Polybe,” as “élocubrations.” And yet the army’s own propaganda sheet, widely derided by soldiers and politicians alike, can scarcely have been any less dismal.997 The poet disavows one newspaper only to pick up an equally vapid journalistic offering, yet, by the end of the poem, he still can’t seem to let Le Figaro go. Even in a dugout on the Western Front, Flaubert’s jibe remains imperishable: “JOURNAUX: Ne pouvoir s’en passer – mais tonner contre.” Moreover, a poem in Case d’Armons, “14 juin 1915,” portrays the arrival of newspapers at the front, or perhaps the experience of producing Le Tranchman’Echo, as a welcome source of comfort: “Pas de lettres/Mais l’espoir/ Mais un journal.”998 Journalism might not deliver the same satisfaction as love letters from Lou or Madeleine. But, faute de mieux, newspapers seem to offer the poet at least some respite from the misery and tedium of war.

Much of that relief came at the enemy’s expense as the French press collectively embraced vitriolic Germanophobia throughout the war. And Apollinaire himself, unlike Proust, was susceptible to such Boche-bashing. An epistolary poem sent from the front in May 1915 to the illustrator André Rouveyre thus compliments his friend’s anti-German journalistic caricatures: “Je

996 Apollinaire, Op, 802.
998 Apollinaire, Op, 231.
vois de tes dessins dans *le Parisien* / Tu croques à ravir les gueules de ces Boches.”

The following year, Apollinaire published a piece of patriotic doggerel, “On les aura!” (a title borrowed from Marshal Pétain), in *Le Rire aux éclats*, a trench newspaper published by the 74th Infantry Division between 1916 and 1919, which includes another ritual swipe at “les Boches” whilst celebrating the creation of this newspaper itself as “une idée exquise et crâne.”

The propaganda Apollinaire peddled in his unsigned articles for *Paris-Midi* and *L’Information* was written to order for the sake of earning a living. But he was under no obligation to fan the flames of journalistic chauvinism in his own verse. While poking fun at the “Boches” may not have amounted to the full-blown “bourrage de crâne” obliquely satirized in *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, the poet was clearly far from immune to the dominant discourse of the war-time press.

Apollinaire’s flirtation with journalistic chauvinism is typical of his broader ambivalence towards the war itself. Whereas English war poets such as Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen depict the conflict as an endless round of futile slaughter overseen by callous and incompetent generals, Apollinaire’s verse frequently stresses heroism and camaraderie at the front as well as the eerie beauty of rocket fire. Indeed, he has often been read as glorifying war itself. As early as 1920, Louis Aragon expressed reservations about *Calligrammes*’ aestheticized portrayal of life at the front: “Encore qu’il se soit malheureusement astreint de changer les obus, fusées en phantasmes, je crois qu’Apollinaire n’éprouva jamais à la guerre de plus forte émotion que de prendre la mesure d’un doigt pour une bague d’aluminium.”

By 1935 during the Second

---

999 Apollinaire, *Op*, 791. See, for example, Rouveyre’s sketch “Le Dernier espoir de Germania,” depicting General Hindenburg with a Teutonic maiden in his arms (*Le Petit Parisien*, March 5, 1915, 1).


Abyssinian War, with Aragon now ensconced as French Communism’s leading cultural satrap, that skepticism had hardened into outright hostility: “Apollinaire pratiquait avec une habileté incomparable cette mystification de la guerre qui reste la honte et l’éclat de ce grand poète.”

And the poet’s far-from-unequivocal association with Marinetti, who had gone to fight with the Fascists in Abyssinia, is here twisted into a posthumous blood-thirsty alliance with Mussolini’s court poet, said to occupy “ce rôle officiel qu’ambitionnait autrefois Apollinaire.”

Others have saluted what they see as an enriching celebration of martial virtue. The scholar Roger Shattuck, who had flown a combat cargo plane during the Second World War, introduced his 1948 translation of Apollinaire’s poetry with an effusive portrayal of his subject’s supposed enthusiasm for military life: “He found beauty in the spectacle of war, admiration for the ingenuity of its methods, and security in the human companionship it offered. Apollinaire appreciated the army as he did the streets and bars of Paris. […] He found in both cases a place in life, a cause, and a loyalty which absorbed his swelling vitality.” André Billy similarly wrote of his old friend in 1965: “[…] il s’était adapté aux rudes exigences de la vie militaire avec une déconcertante facilité. Il avait mieux fait que de s’y adapter, de s’y soumettre, il les avait faites siennes, il les avait faites siennes, il les avait incorporées à sa façon d’être et de penser, il les magnifiait, il les exaltait, il les chantait […].” More recent critics have tended to dismiss such readings as stemming from an overly literal interpretation of Apollinaire’s war poems. For example, Martin

---

1005 André Billy, preface to Apollinaire, *Op*, XXXIV.
Sorrell finds these works on balance to be a testament to “the horrors of war” and “the murderous absurdity of what was going on.”

Given such radically divergent accounts, what in fact is going on in Apollinaire’s war poetry? The most contentious individual work is “L’Adieu au cavalier”:

Ah Dieu! que la guerre est jolie  
Avec ses chants ses longs loisirs  
Cette bague je l’ai polie  
Le vent se mêle à vos soupirs

Adieu! Voici le boute-selle  
Il disparut dans un tournant  
Et mourut là-bas tandis qu’elle  
Riait au destin surprenant[.]

Taken in isolation, the first verse sounds like a demented battle cry worthy of Joan Littlewood’s 1963 anti-war stage musical *Oh, What a Lovely War!* (later adapted into a film at the height of the Vietnam War). In his 1935 attack on Apollinaire, Aragon duly quotes this line no less than four times in a seven-page article. And while the whole poem is quoted at the beginning of the text, Aragon only ever comments on the first verse, which he equates with Marinetti’s strident declarations about the beauty of war in his November 1935 manifesto “The Futurist Aesthetic of War” (also quoted shortly afterwards in Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”). Those omissions seem decidedly tendentious since the second stanza clearly disrupts the poem’s initial sense of exaltation by portraying the cavalryman’s death

---


1007 The source for Littlewood’s title was the First World War music-hall hit “Oh! It’s a Lovely War” (see Peter Rankin, *Joan Littlewood: Dreams and Realities* [London, Oberon Books, 2014], 149). Since the song apparently dates from 1917 (when the sheet music was first published by Star Music Publishing in London), it is unlikely to have had an influence on Apollinaire’s poem, which he included in separate 1915 letters to Louise Faure-Favier, Louise de Coligny, and Madeleine Pagès (see Apollinaire, *Op*, 1096).

in jarringly bathetic style, concluding with the grotesque image of his treacherous lover celebrating his death. Apollinaire might have depicted a ghastly but necessary sacrifice. Instead the cavalryman’s death appears entirely pointless.

“Cote 146,” of which Apollinaire sent versions to both Lou and Madeleine, similarly depicts a desolate battlefield littered with “chairs putréfiées.”

And yet several other poems do portray if not quite a lovely war, then, at the very least, one worth fighting in tones that recall the skyward raptures of “Zone”. First published in early 1916 in L’Élan, a petite revue edited by the painter Amédée Ozenfant (later associated with Le Corbusier), “Guerre” skirts around the horrors of its titular subject to exalt the rapid technological progress brought about by the conflict:

Les jeunes de la classe 1915  
Et ces fils de fer électrisés  
Ne pleurez donc par les horreurs de la guerre  
Avant elle nous n’avions que la surface  
De la terre et des mers  
Après elle nous aurons les abîmes  
Le sous-sol et l’espace aviatique[.]

Air power had by this time become a crucial feature of the battlefield, as Apollinaire, an artilleryman, was well placed to understand. Observer planes now used wireless telegraphs to send precise firing coordinates to gunners behind the lines in real time. Two inventions that had excited the poet in “Zone” and his pre-war calligrams thus combined to wreak unprecedented devastation such that artillery accounted for the majority of casualties on the Western Front whilst turning swathes of Northern France into a lunar wasteland. Submarines, meanwhile, had

---

1009 Apollinaire, Op, 613.
1010 Apollinaire, Op, 228.
1011 By 1916, the French air arm had perfected techniques of artillery observation using wireless telegraphy (see John H. Morrow, Jr., The Great War in the Air: Military Aviation from 1909 to 1921 [Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993], 138). Regarding Apollinaire’s experiences co-ordinating artillery fire, see Campa, Guillaume Apollinaire, 593.
1012 For WWI casualty figures, see J.B.A. Bailey, Field Artillery and Fire Power (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2004), 5.
transformed “les abîmes” into a new field of battle, precipitating the United States’ eventual entry into the war. And the deadlock on the Western Front had also led to the development of underground warfare as teams of miners competed to dig tunnels under each other’s lines and blow their enemies sky high. All these deadly innovations are clearly evoked in “Guerre.” Through a double entendre, the soldiers themselves – “ces fils de fer électrisés” – even seem to have merged into technology. And yet the poem’s tone is one of heroic ardor, even bravado, rather than lamentation for this dehumanizing transformation. “Guerre” also goes on to articulate a revanchiste vision far exceeding the punitive terms of the Versailles settlement:

Nous prendrons toutes les joies
Des vainqueurs qui se délassent
Femmes Jeux Usines Commerce
Industrie Agriculture Métal
Feu Cristal Vitesse[.]

That hunger for conquest takes on an erotic dimension in “Désir,” which Apollinaire sent to Madeleine from the front in early October 1915 and later published in Calligrammes:

Mon désir est la région qui est devant moi
Derrière les lignes boches
Mon désir est aussi derrière moi
Après la zone des armées

Mon désir c’est la butte du Mesnil
Mon désir est là sur quoi je tire[.]

Longing for his absent lover here becomes intermingled with the artilleryman’s martial fervor during the Battle of Champagne, fought between late September and early October, where the Butte du Mesnil had been a crucial (and unattained) French objective. That symbiosis of sexual desire and destruction becomes even more pronounced in the poem’s final stanza, which describes

1013 Apollinaire, Op, 263.
the eve of the first assault as a “Nuit qui criait comme une femme qui accouche.” Recycling the ancient trope linking motherhood and battle (as in The Iliad, where Thetis endows her son Achilles with “the glorious arms of Hephaistos” prior to his assault on the Trojans, and where the pain Agamemnon suffers from wounds incurred during a previous skirmish is compared to that of childbirth), the poet thus portrays the coming bloodshed as a form of rebirth.\textsuperscript{1015} He yearns, in other words, to make love \textit{and} war.

Had Aragon invoked “Guerre” and “Désir” (or indeed “À l’Italie,” which strikes an equally martial tone) in his attack on Apollinaire rather than the ambiguous “L’Adieu au cavalier,” his case would have appeared much stronger. For far from prefiguring “the hollow-eyed numbness” of shell shock, as Sorrell claims, “Guerre” and “Désir” seem to be authentic expressions of the war fever that gripped so many at the beginning of the conflict.\textsuperscript{1016} “La Petite Auto,” which describes his return with Rouveyre to Paris at the outbreak of war in August 1914, concludes on a similarly exultant note: “Et bien qu’étant déjà tous deux des hommes mûrs/ Nous venions cependant de naître.”\textsuperscript{1017} In a September 1915 letter to Madeleine, Apollinaire even described the experience of co-ordinating artillery fire with observer planes as “très amusant.”\textsuperscript{1018} And that enthusiasm for battle only intensified during the rest of the year. From mid-1915 onwards, he thus repeatedly expressed a desire to be transferred to the infantry, partly in the hope of obtaining a commission but also because he felt that the artillery was not truly in the thick of the action.\textsuperscript{1019} As he wrote to Lou in December 1915: “[L’]artillerie n’est pas intéressante du tout – C’est en ce moment une

\textsuperscript{1015} On this trope, see Helen Cooper, Adrienne Munich and Susan Squier, “Arms and the Woman: The Con[tra]ception of the War Text,” in \textit{Arms and the Woman: War, Gender, and Literary Representation}, ed. Cooper, Munich and Squier (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 9-10.

\textsuperscript{1016} Sorrell, introduction to Apollinaire, \textit{Selected Poems}, XXIV.

\textsuperscript{1017} Apollinaire, \textit{Op.}, 208.


\textsuperscript{1019} David Hunter, \textit{Apollinaire in the Great War} (London: Peter Owen, 2015), 133.
arme de grand-père et d’eunuque. […] La seule arme intéressante et formidablement tragique c’est cette infanterie d’ici où la lutte est inimaginablement infernale.”

Having already experienced extensive combat, Apollinaire wanted to move closer to the inferno. And, the previous month, he had indeed been appointed, at his own request, second lieutenant in charge of a platoon of frontline infantry – “almost certainly the most dangerous rank in the army.”

There are signs the infantry officer’s war fever finally broke once he reached the heart of the conflagration. The opening line of “Du coton dans les oreilles” (written in February 1916) – “Tant d’explosifs sur le point VIF!” – evokes the raw terror of bombardment, and the rest of the poem is devoid of the bellicose elucubrations that characterize “Guerre” and “Désir.” The title itself suggests a desire to block out the deadly racket of shellfire to which the calligram simultaneously gives fragmented visual form. Apollinaire’s letters from this period are also noticeably less gung-ho. As he wrote to Madeleine on March 13: “[Je] voudrais bien voir finir cette guerre.” Four days later, Apollinaire’s own war indeed came to end when he was struck on the head by shrapnel, whilst reading the Mercure de France in his trench, and consequently invalided out of combat.

But, unlike Owen and Sassoon, Apollinaire’s belief in victory never wavered, and he remained steadfastly supportive of what he called “cette grande et puissante guerre” in an August 1918 letter to Marinetti, which concludes with a salute to the French Army’s generalissimo and two recent Allied successes on the Western and Italian Fronts: “Vive Foch, gloire à la Marne,

---

1021 Hunter, Apollinaire in the Great War, 133.
1022 See Campa, Guillaume Apollinaire, 633-634.
1025 See Campa, Guillaume Apollinaire, 639.
gloire au Piave.”

This sign-off, which Apollinaire quoted in a September 1918 article, seemingly originated with Marinetti himself. The same article, published in *L’Europe nouvelle*, a weekly political magazine, also hailed his comrade’s celebration of martial virtue: “Les futuristes ont toujours vanté les bienfaits de la guerre. Aussi Marinetti est-il à son affaire dans cette guerre, qu’il a souhaitée avec cette mâle éloquence si moderne, qui caractérise ses manifestes, où se trouve le meilleur de son œuvre.”

There may of course be some irony here. Apollinaire had, after all, satirized Marinetti’s manifesto-mania in *L’Antitradition futuriste*. But, as we saw in Chapter Three, that mock manifesto can also be read as an oblique homage that anticipates the formal innovations of *Calligrammes*. And given Apollinaire’s myriad earlier bellicose declarations, he had clearly experienced the same enthusiasm for combat as Marinetti, even if that fervour waned during his final months in the front line. Whatever their other differences, Apollinaire and the Futurist supremo both found glory in the Great War.

And yet Apollinaire’s poetry also displays an acute sense of what Wilfred Owen called “the pity of War.”

If Marinetti was enamoured by war wherever he found it, while Owen and Sassoon’s verse is anti-war, then Apollinaire does not fit easily into either category. For his poetry veers between bellicose exaltation and lucid portrayals of human waste. In *Calligrammes*, the poet both echoes chants of “on les aura!” and recoils from “les airs entraînants” of the parade ground, which stir “quelque chose de déchirant quand on les entend à la guerre.”

Apollinaire is thus at once a chest-beating chauvinist, an aesthete transfixed by war’s tragic glamour, and a critical observer of the brutality around him.

---

1029 Apollinaire, *Op.*, 290; italicized in the original.
Such unresolved ambivalence similarly characterises his attitude towards both the wartime press and journalism in general. In his pre-war life as a jobbing poet-journalist, the press had represented the principal arena of his day-to-day confrontation with modernity. Journalism supplied his livelihood, his primary means of publication, and material for his literary works. Apollinaire’s world was overrun with newspapers and magazines. His poetry and prose thus repeatedly seek to come to terms with that deluge without being smothered by it. As for Baudelaire’s “Peintre de la vie moderne,” the challenge embraced by Apollinaire’s work consists of being at the centre of the journalistic crowd whilst remaining, if not exactly hidden, then at the very least distinct.

By confronting the poet with new and violent forms of modernity, namely rapid technological innovation and the transient horror of combat, the First World War posed a similar problem. How was he to write about a conflict that both attracted and appalled him? The answer he gave was to depict those competing emotions in his poetry. What emerges is arguably a more complete picture of the war than the one found in the work of the English war poets. For Sassoon admitted to finding exhilaration and freedom at the front in his diaries; Owen similarly told his mother he had “fought like an angel” one month before his death; and Robert Graves even referred to the Battle of Loos as “a great experience” in a letter to his parents. But they did not record such impressions in their poetry, which, in Sassoon’s case, became a direct political statement opposing continued British involvement in the war. Their verse is typically celebrated for its realism and honesty. A poem such as “Dulce et Decorum Est” indeed seems to capture what it must have been like to experience a gas attack on the front line. Owen’s bitter denunciation of the

“old Lie” that dying for one’s country is sweet and honourable may well be the most morally compelling lesson to take from the war.⁷⁰³¹ And yet such ferocious disillusionment necessarily represents a partial (in both senses of the word) account of the conflict. For, as Owen and his contemporaries’ diaries and letters illustrate, they themselves were susceptible to the atavistic lure of battle that their poetry decried. By contrast, Apollinaire’s war poems churn with misery and destruction, but also patriotic fervour, exaltation, and even bloodlust.

That fragmented panorama also encompasses the experience of struggling to come to terms with what he had witnessed after his return from the front in 1916. A year previously, Captain Charles S. Myers of the Royal Army Medical Corps had published the first scientific paper about “shell shock,” the recently invented term for psychological disturbance attributed to prolonged exposure to shell fire.⁷⁰³² Trauma among soldiers was nothing new. But the unprecedented destruction of the First World War along with the emergence of modern psychology meant the conflict soon became synonymous with the debilitating after-effects of combat, which included extreme anxiety, amnesia, dulled sensations and, in the long run, nightmares, guilt, and loss of mental cohesion. As things fell apart, so did the existential integrity of those who fought.⁷⁰³³ A sense of dislocation that was already acute in “Zone” thus engulfs the poet’s self-perception in “Ombre,” first published in Calligrammes:

Vous voilà de nouveau près de moi
Souvenirs de mes compagnons morts à la guerre
L’olive du temps
Souvenirs qui n’en faites plus qu’un
Comme cent fourrures ne font qu’un manteau

---

⁷⁰³³ As Susan Kingsley Kent puts it: “Sufferers of shell shock frequently spoke of the fragmentation of their mental processes. An earlier sensation of psychic wholeness, autonomous separateness, continuity, meaning, and attachment had come apart, leaving a felt condition of rupture, disintegration, and shattering that threatened to leave the individual in pieces.” (Susan Kingsley Kent, Aftershocks: Politics and Trauma in Britain 1918-1931 [London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009], 11-12).
The poet here is estranged from his own memories of fallen comrades. Those images are sensible yet somehow detached from his own mind. And the poem duly becomes an attempt to give tangible, concentrated form to his shifting remembrances. The initial metaphor of the olive seems to offer a stable and pacific memorial for the dead. The coat made of a hundred pelts similarly evokes a sense of permanence and collective endeavour. But then the newspaper article strikes an ambiguous note. Whereas Apollinaire had been inspired in late 1914 by the “merveilleuse page militaire” in Le Petit Niçois before setting off for the front, a soon-to-be-forgotten newspaper article that turns thousands of casualties into a few lines of copy carries no such exalted connotations.

One death might be a tragedy, but a hundred thousand deaths becomes a mere statistic, as an unnamed French diplomat is reported to have said in the 1920s. The struggle to give cohesive shape to memory thus seems to founder when the poet’s wavering mind turns to journalistic accounts of the war. Experience that had begun to acquire vivid metaphorical form becomes “impalpable” and “sombre” once the press comes into view. For the sense of unity and wholeness expressed by the olive and coat turns into a sinister abstraction when it assumes statistical guise in a cursory newspaper article, which can scarcely do justice to the individual suffering it describes. Yet the latter simile also describes the poet’s own faltering struggle to grasp the reality of what he has witnessed. His inability to disaggregate the individual memories of his fallen comrades ends

---

1034 Apollinaire, Op, 217. According to Philippe Soupault, Apollinaire wrote this poem at his request after returning from the front. See the notes in Apollinaire, Op, 1088.
1035 "Der Krieg? Ich kann das nicht so schrecklich finden! Der Tod eines Menschen: das ist eine Katastrophe. Hunderttausend Tote: das ist eine Statistik!“ Quoted in Kurt Tucholsky, Lerne lachen ohne zu weinen (1931; repr., Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2008), 148. Versions of this quotation are sometimes apocryphally attributed to Stalin.
up mirroring the anonymity of the newspaper casualty report. Words fail poet and journalist alike. And that failure itself conveys the enormity of what he had lived through. It is not journalism’s “bourrage de crâne” but language itself that proves inadequate for expressing the overwhelming experience of war and its long-term effects on the soldier-poet’s fractured psyche. “Zone” depicts a world fuelled by the energy of the mass press. That energy becomes entropy in “Ombre.” And the descriptive powers of both poetry and journalism seem to be dwindling in parallel. For reality has outstripped verbal comprehension. The distortions of the press merely betoken a universal slide towards numbness and desolation.

VII. War reportage in free verse

The sense of mental fragmentation that defines “Ombre” is already apparent in several poems Apollinaire wrote while still in the trenches. But whereas the later poem describes the poet’s struggle to retain a clear mental picture of his experiences, poems such as “Cote 146” and “Il y a” all offer vivid albeit disjointed glimpses of day-to-day life at the front. The effect is akin to a cinematic montage as these poems jump between fractured pieces of imagery. The first line of “Cote 146,” sent to Madeleine on July 2, 1915, thus offers a rapid sketch of the battlefield whose scrambled syntax evokes the poet’s fear and discomfort: “Plaines Désolation enfer des mouches Fusées le vert le blanc le rouge.”

“Il y a,” sent to Madeleine on September 30, 1915 and then published in Calligrammes, similarly brings together topographic and human vignettes of the battlefield connected only by the poem’s titular verb at the beginning of each line:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Il y a mille petits sapins brisés par les éclats d’obus autour de moi} \\
\text{Il y a un fantassin qui passe aveuglé par les gaz asphyxiants} \\
\text{Il y a que nous avons tout haché dans les boyaux de Nietzsche de Goethe et de Cologne[.]}
\end{align*}
\]

1036 Apollinaire, Op, 613. Apollinaire also sent an earlier, very different version of the poem to Lou (Apollinaire, Op, 484-485).
1037 Apollinaire, Op, 280. “Goethe,” “Nietzsche,” and “Cologne” were all the real names given to German positions shelled by Apollinaire’s unit (see Campa, Guillaume Apollinaire, 594).
Whereas “Zone” blends a kaleidoscopic portrait of contemporary Paris with a radical aesthetic vision, here raw description predominates, leaving no space for high-flown reverie. Indeed, the enemy positions named for two particularly ruminative German authors have been symbolically blown to pieces.

Such unadorned realism adds a new strand of literary-journalistic hybridity to Apollinaire’s oeuvre. For, as Els Jongeneel has written, his war poems provide an eye-witness account of life at the front that replicates the subjectivity and immediacy of reportage. Those affinities with journalism are emphasized by the poet’s consistent use of what Jongeneel calls a “‘je-reporter’ orienté vers l’actualité historique et biographique.” As in contemporaneous works of newspaper reportage by journalists such as Albert Londres, that first-person perspective conveys a sense of authenticity absent from the military’s own communiqués, which formed the basis of much journalism about the war. Apollinaire and Londres record not merely what happened but how they themselves experienced those events. Facts and descriptions are thus combined with personal impressions to create reports of the fighting that balance subjectivity with objectivity.

Apollinaire’s epistolary war poetry also makes disclosures that remained off limits to newspaper reportage. Like the press itself, Apollinaire’s letters from the front were potentially subject to censorship. He thus devised a code with Lou whereby, for example, the phrase “Il fait beau” would signal an ongoing battle. And yet his epistolary poems in fact include an extraordinary amount of information about the poet’s whereabouts and conditions at the front that

---

1040 See Campa, Guillaume Apollinaire, 556.
breach the restrictions imposed by the War Ministry. For instance, the title alone of "Cote 146" represents a piece of militarily sensitive information as does a reference to recent casualty figures. As we have seen, "Il y a" similarly lists enemy positions named for German authors and cities. "Désir" even includes the verses "Nuit du 24 septembre/ Demain l’assaut," which announce an imminent French offensive in Champagne. What allowed Apollinaire to get away with such indiscretions was the sheer volume of post – some five million items per day – being dispatched from the front, which meant that only an estimated two to four percent of the total was ever actually inspected. By contrast, the press was systematically censored such that newspapers often arrived in kiosks bearing large blanks where entire articles had been suppressed. Apollinaire would himself end up wielding the blue pencil after being invalided out of combat, and André Billy even describes the poet-censor inspecting the proofs of SIC, the same little magazine to which he gave an interview about the future of literature in 1916. Having broken all the rules in his poems to Lou and Madeleine, he clearly knew what to look for.

In several letters from the front, Apollinaire disparaged Stendhal for suggesting that individual soldiers could not grasp what was happening across the battlefield. But his own epistolary war poems mostly depict isolated moments of chaos, misery, and exaltation that recall Fabrice’s fragmented view of the Battle of Waterloo at the beginning of La Chartreuse de Parme. They read as immediate records of his experiences, seemingly written on the hoof, that avoid the sanitized, over-optimistic generalizations of contemporary newspaper reports, which, he frequently reminds his correspondents, are not to be trusted, as well as the “élucubrations” of

---

1041 On postal censorship at the front, see Laurent Albaret, La Poste pendant la Première Guerre mondiale (Amiens: Yvert et Tellier, 2006), 94-98.
1042 These figures come from Albaret, La Poste pendant la Première Guerre mondiale, 62 and 97.
1043 See Billy, Apollinaire vivant, 91-92.
1044 See Billy, Apollinaire vivant, 84 and Campa, Guillaume Apollinaire, 602.
armchair strategists such as *Le Figaro’s* Polybe. It is as if his verse provides Lou and Madeleine with a kind of clandestine personalized newspaper that cuts through journalistic propaganda. “Guerre” and “Désir” themselves express chauvinistic sentiments of the kind found throughout the press. But other poems reveal aspects of the conflict that were unlikely to have been addressed in any newspaper. Such unprintable candor was not limited to the operationally sensitive information discussed above. Descriptions of rotting flesh in “Cote 146” and soldiers cutting down trees for coffins in “Il y a,” which might have had a demoralizing effect, would similarly have risked falling afoul of the censor, as would the prosopopoeic account of a homesick Senegalese soldier in “Les Soupirs du servant de Dakar,” which alludes to the racism underlying France’s colonial empire. These poems do not merely mimic *reportage* as many late nineteenth-century novels had done, provoking indignant commentary, as we saw in Chapter One, from Ferdinand Brunetière among others. Faced with the lies and omissions of the war-time press, Apollinaire turns his verse into exclusive reports from the front, thereby blurring the distinction between poetry and journalism that had been maintained in “Zone.”

Apollinaire’s 1917 lecture “L’Esprit nouveau et les poètes” gives theoretical shape to that penchant for poetic-journalistic hybridity, already apparent, as we saw in Chapter Three, in pre-war works such as “Lundi rue Christine” and “Lettre-Océan,” with its call for poets to embrace the freedom of newspaper journalism:

> Dans le domaine de l’inspiration, leur liberté ne peut pas être moins grande que celle d’un journal quotidien qui traite dans une seule feuille des matières les plus diverses, parcourt des pays les plus éloignés. On se demande pourquoi le poète n’aurait pas une liberté au moins égale et serait tenu, à une époque de téléphone, de télégraphie sans fil et d’aviation à plus de circonspection vis-à-vis des espaces.

---

The second sentence suggests that Apollinaire now views the newspaper as a point of departure rather than an artistic horizon. As we have seen, what most animates him in “L’Esprit nouveau et les poètes” are new technologies such as the telephone, cinema, and phonograph, which would indeed be embraced by the Surrealists. And, as previously noted, Apollinaire told André Billy in 1918 that the typographical experiments in *Calligrammes*, which draw heavily on the visual example of the newspaper, marked the end of an era. *Le Poète assassiné, Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, and *La Bréhatine* further complicate “L’Esprit nouveau et les poètes”’s vision of the press as a font of poetic liberation. Even after using verse as a medium of war reportage, Apollinaire remained torn between admiration and antipathy for journalism’s cultural power.

**VIII. Cendrars’s journeys**

Blaise Cendrars initially shared some of Apollinaire’s ambivalence. Echoing Hegel’s comment about the newspaper being the “realist’s morning prayer,” the opening stanza of Cendrars’s *Le Panama ou les aventures de mes sept oncles*, written during 1912-1914, portrays journalism as a poor substitute for religion:

```
Des livres
Il y a des livres qui parlent du Canal de Panama
Je ne sais pas ce que disent les catalogues des bibliothèques
Et je n’écoute pas les journaux financiers
Quoique les bulletins de la Bourse soient notre prière quotidienne.1046
```

The poet here shuns published accounts of the Panama Affair, which, a later verse claims, consumed much of his family fortune. And whereas Hegel’s aphorism portrays journalism as a noble political calling, Cendrars’s own newspaper prayer strikes a bleak note of spiritually hollow

---

1046 Cendrars, *Du monde entier*, 67. Hegel wrote in a posthumously published notebook: “Reading the morning newspaper is the realist’s morning prayer. One orients one’s attitude toward the world either by God or by what the world is. The former gives as much security as the latter, in that one knows how one stands.” (G.W.F. Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, ed. Jon Stewart [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002], 247).
resignation. During a transatlantic crossing, the poet yearns nonetheless for journalistic unction: “Je voudrais lire la Feuille d’Avis de Neuchâtel ou Le Courrier de Pampelune! Au milieu de l’Atlantique on n’est pas plus à l’aise que dans une salle de rédaction.”

The sense of agitation he feels both aboard the ocean liner and in a newsroom points to Le Panama’s central theme of wanderlust. For if the poet at first disdains books and newspapers, it is because he himself longs to experience the adventures they describe. What stirs that restlessness is the disruption caused by his downwardly mobile home life following the Panama debacle combined with a letter received from an uncle working as a butcher in Galveston, Texas that he describes as “plus grouillante que toute la création.” Tales from six other uncles scattered about the globe similarly feed the poet’s imagination, as does “[l]e beau joujou de la réclame.” Indeed, Le Panama seems to realize “Zone”’s vision of poetry by filling an entire page with the facsimile of a “prospectus” (which includes the word itself) from the Denver Chamber of Commerce. References to “le Petit Journal Illustre [sic]” and the “Daily Chronicle” further attest the poet’s absorption in the press and thence his affinity with the second strand of “Zone”’s conception of literature. And though Le Panama itself does not make the connection, the increasingly lucrative calling of reportage would clearly offer a way of fulfilling the dreams of globe-trotting derring-do expressed towards the end of the poem:

Si j’avais le temps de faire quelques économies je prendrais part au rallye aérien
J’ai réservé ma place dans le premier train qui passera le tunnel sous la Manche
Je suis le premier aviateur qui traverse l’Atlantique en monocoque[…]

1047 Terry Pinkard interprets Hegel’s aphorism as an expression of “his interest in political realism,” which led the philosopher to become editor of the Bamberger Zeitung in 1807 (see Terry Pinkard, Hegel: A Biography [Cambridge University Press, 2000], 242). I am grateful for a conversation with Frederick Neuhouser, who pointed me towards Pinkard’s biography and helped explain the context of Hegel’s aphorism.

1048 Cendrars, Du monde entier, 73.
1049 Cendrars, Du monde entier, 69.
1050 Cendrars, Du monde entier, 79.
1051 Cendrars, Du monde entier, 78 and 83.
1052 Cendrars, Du monde entier, 85.
By contrast, literary café society in Montparnasse holds little appeal in the penultimate stanza:

“Les cancans littéraires vont leur train/ Tout bas/ À la Rotonde.”1053

That desire to escape the cloistered world of *petites revues* and their internecine squabbles also emerges in “Ma danse,” itself first published in the *petite revue Montjoie!* in 1914: “Il faut échapper à la tyrannie des revues/ Littérature/ Vie pauvre/ Orgueil déplacé[.]”1054 And while a sense of world-weariness even infuses the poem’s depiction of travel, the final stanza suggests that lassitude can be overcome only by throwing oneself into the “danse-paysage” with renewed vigour:

Je suis un monsieur qui en des express fabuleux traverse les toujours mêmes
   Europes et regarde découragé par la portière
Le paysage ne m’intéresse plus
Mais la danse du paysage
Danse-paysage
Paritatitata
Je tout-tourne[.]

Instead of the “express fabuleux” taken by “Ma danse”’s anonymous “monsieur” (a thinly veiled allusion to Valery Larbaud’s literary alter ego Barnabooth1055), Cendrars’s own poetic journey took him aboard the “[b]ilboquets diaboliques” of the Trans-Siberian Railway.1056 Beginning with descriptions of Moscow on the eve of the 1905 Revolution, his *Prose du Transsibérien* goes on to paint a vivid portrait of the chaos enveloping the Russian interior during the Russo-Japanese War:

J’ai vu
J’ai vu les trains silencieux les trains noirs qui revenaient de l’Extrême-Orient et
qui passaient en fantômes
Et mon œil, comme le fanal d’arrière, court encore derrière ces trains
À Talga 100 000 blessés agonisaient faute de soins
J’ai visité les hôpitaux de Krasnoïarsk

1053 Cendrars, *Du monde entier*, 86.
1055 See the notes in Cendrars, *Du monde entier*, 372.
1056 Cendrars, *Du monde entier*, 57.
As in Apollinaire’s epistolary war poetry, the *Transsibérien*’s first-person perspective and emphasis on eye-witness testimony replicate the style of *reportage*. The verse describing the agonies of 100,000 dying soldiers could also be a line from a newspaper article (though “Talga” must be a corruption of “taïga,” which itself could be referring to several different parts of Russia). Comparing their wounds to musical organs then re-establishes a distinctly poetic register while the dancing limbs in the following verse introduce a surreal and macabre note that anticipates the final stanza of “Ma danse.” That blend of poetic and journalistic language adds a further strand of “simultaneity” to the *Transsibérien*, whose original 1913 edition combined Cendrars’s text with abstract illustrations by Sonia Delaunay printed on a six-foot-long parchment.

Unlike Apollinaire’s poems dispatched from the front, the *Transsibérien*’s depiction of the Russo-Japanese War and 1905 Revolution did not have the timeliness of newspaper *reportage* when Cendrars’s poem was published in 1913 (though its proclamation of “la venue du grand Christ rouge de la révolution russe” would in due course acquire a prophetic ring). Moreover, though the *Transsibérien* purports to offer a first-hand account of the fallout from that conflict across Siberia, it is unclear that the teenage Cendrars, who had lived in Saint-Petersburg from 1904 to 1907 while working for a Swiss watchmaker, ever actually took a trip on the Trans-Siberian railway. Or as he put it when questioned in 1934: “Qu’est-ce que ça peut te faire, puisque je vous l’ai fait prendre à tous!”

Indeed, the poem itself hints at its own artifice in an allusion to original published accounts of the conflict: “Tout ce qui concerne la guerre on peut le lire dans les

1058 Cendrars, *Du monde entier*, 46.
That propensity for recycling journalism into poetry resurfaces in “Dernière Heure,” which was written in 1914 and first published in *Dix-neuf poèmes élastiques* in 1919. Beginning with the date line “OKLAHOMA, 20 janvier 1914,” the poem recounts a prison break ending in the deaths of three convicts. As the last line – “Télégramme-poème copié dans *Paris-Midi*” – concedes, that story was adapted from a *fait divers* published in the same newspaper where Apollinaire would end his days rewriting wire copy. The poem duly echoes Cendrars’s “Titres,” also written in 1914 and republished in *Dix-neuf poèmes élastiques*, which, as we saw in Chapter Three, heralds a new approach to poetry consisting of “simples nouvelles” such as “les accidents des fées.” Aside from the absence of punctuation and Cendrars’s use of the present in place of the past tense, the main difference between “Dernière Heure” and the article in *Paris-Midi* comes at the end, when a former congressman, who had in reality been killed during the incident, is said to have congratulated a surviving hostage. The poem thereby replaces the article’s original factual conclusion with a fictional melodramatic dénouement that lends the tale a more distinctly literary or even cinematic flavour. Yet Cendrars’s “literized” version seems trite, whilst the unvarnished newspaper report conveys a dismal sense of moral truth (much like Fénéon’s *Nouvelles en trois lignes*). Whereas Apollinaire encouraged his correspondents to see through the lies of the war-time press, here it is poetry rather than journalism that cannot be trusted. And by explicitly identifying its own journalistic origins, “Dernière Heure” invites comparison with the

---

1061 See Goldenstein, *Dix-neuf poèmes élastiques*, 73.
1062 As Goldenstein puts it: Cendrars alters the *fait divers* “conformément aux canons mélodramatiques dont use et abuse le cinema muet de l’époque : le bon récompensé et les méchants punis.” (*Dix-neuf poèmes élastiques*, 143).
article in *Paris-Midi*, which duly reveals how hackneyed literary convention can distort the blunt authenticity of *reportage*.

Cendrars’s vision of literary-journalistic hybridity acquires a more exalted character in *Dix-neuf poèmes élastiques*’ first poem “Journal,” which was first published in *Les Soirées de Paris* in 1914. As in *Le Panama*, the opening lines here evoke a crisis of faith: “Christ/ Voici plus d’un an que je n’ai plus pensé à Vous.” But whereas *Le Panama*’s newspaper prayer has a hollow ring, “Journal” seems to envision journalism as a means of alleviating that crisis:

Passion  
Feu  
Roman-feuilleton  
Journal  
On a beau ne pas vouloir parler de soi-même  
Il faut parfois crier[.]

The Passion of Christ here gives way to belief in the crucible of press, not as a means of transforming society but as a form of self-affirmation. In place of Christian asceticism and collective devotion, newspaper journalism offers the chance to make one’s voice heard. Cendrars’s first major poem *Les Pâques à New York*, written and published in 1912, had similarly depicted his crisis of faith. Indeed, the first line of “Journal” echoes the last words of *Les Pâques à New York*: “Je ne pense plus à Vous.” But only in the later poem does journalism seem to become an unlikely source of redemption.

The First World War, which cost Cendrars his right arm, interrupted that evolving literary-journalistic epiphany. Save for three short poems entitled “Shrapnells,” Cendrars, who had joined the French Foreign Legion in 1914, did not record his experiences of the war in verse. And he

---

1063 Cendrars, *Du monde entier*, 89.  
1064 Cendrars, *Du monde entier*, 41.  
later disparaged Apollinaire for writing “des gentilles petites poésies” at the front. That jibe, which might have some tenuous validity when applied to pictorial poems such as “Madeleine,” seems an entirely unfair description of poems such as “Il y a” that directly portray the horrors of war. By contrast, Cendrars’s “Shrapnells” do not depict death or front-line combat. But these poems’ descriptions of distant bombardment and sparks flying from soldiers’ boots as they march along a road do convey a sense of journalistic immediacy resembling the reportorial style of Apollinaire’s epistolary war poetry. Corporal Sauser (Cendrars’s real name) may not have brought back much poetry from the trenches. But the one work he did write during his year as a legionnaire seems to turn verse into a medium of reportage.

Cendrars’s major poetic work from this period, *La Guerre au Luxembourg*, published in late 1916, a year after he had lost his arm, adopts a more elliptical approach that evokes the war through descriptions of children playing at soldiers in Paris’s Luxembourg Garden, as if the poet’s trauma was too severe to be directly expressed. Newspapers here remain a source of inspiration, albeit for the children’s war games rather than the poet himself:

À présent on consulte les journaux illustrés
Les photographies
On se souvient de ce que l’on a vu au cinéma
Ça devient plus sérieux
On crie et l’on cogna mieux que Guignol[.]

Whereas the *Transsibérien* and “Dernière Heure”’s journalistic borrowings carried no negative connotations, the tone has clearly darkened in these lines as the children act out a bowdlerized version of the conflict whose true horror they can scarcely imagine. The poem thus hints at disdain for the “bourrage de crâne” perpetrated by the press. *La Guerre au Luxembourg*’s final section similarly imagines a victory parade where years of suffering will be blotted out in a carnival of

---

1066 Quoted in the notes in Cendrars, *Du monde entier*, 400.
1067 Cendrars, *Du monde entier*, 128.
perfume, frocks, and flowers. Even the wounded, the poet predicts, will magically stop limping. And the poem concludes by portraying the French press as a repository of chauvinistic bombast: “Et les mille voix des journaux acclameront la Marseillaise/ Femme de France.”

Cendrars’s fascination for the press nonetheless reasserted itself after the war, beginning with the publication of Dix-neuf poèmes élastiques in 1919, which brought together “Journal,” “Ma danse,” “Dernière Heure,” “Titres,” and other poems evoking journalistic dynamism. In 1924, Cendrars then published Kodak (Documentaire), which, rather like the Transsibérien, brings the reader on an imaginary journey around the United States. The poet justified his title by describing the work as consisting of “photographies verbales,” suggesting these free-verse poems were based on his own experiences. But, as Cendrars would later admit in his memoir L’Homme foudroyé (1945), the bulk of the poems transpire to have been adapted from Le Mystérieux Docteur Cornélius (1912-1913), a serial novel by Cendrars’s friend Gustave Le Rouge.

Only in Feuilles de route, a series of poems describing an extended trip to Latin America in 1924, does Cendrars’s verse become a medium of authentic, factually based reportage. These poems are filled with informative aperçus about his experiences composed in a blandly prosaic style. For instance, a visit to Gorée Island off the coast of Dakar, where Cendrars made a brief

---

1068 Cendrars, Du monde entier, 130.
1069 The title was subsequently changed to Documentaires due to legal threats from the eponymous photographic giant (see Cendrars, Du monde entier, 383).
1070 Cendrars, Du monde entier, 384.
1071 “[J]’eus la cruauté d’apporter à Le Rouge un volume de poèmes et de lui faire constater de visu, en les lui faisant lire, une vingtaine de poèmes originaux que j’avais taillés à coups de ciseaux dans l’un de ses ouvrages en prose et que j’avais publiés sous mon nom!” (Blaise Cendrars, Œuvres autobiographiques complètes, 1: 328-329; quoted in Gustave Le Rouge, Le Mystérieux Docteur Cornélius etc., ed. Francis Lacassin [Paris: Robert Laffont, 1986], 1184). Cendrars’s confession is somewhat evasive since he identifies neither Le Rouge’s original prose work nor his own publication. Lacassin has determined that 41 out of 44 poems in Kodak (more than double the number admitted by Cendrars) are adapted from Le Mystérieux Docteur Cornélius and that only 56 verses out of 790 in those 41 poems originate with Cendrars (see Le Rouge, Le Mystérieux Docteur Cornélius, 1187). Moreover, of the remaining three poems in Kodak, two were adapted from a book about big-game hunting in the Belgian Congo (see Cendrars, Du monde entier, 388-389).
stop-over, prompts some observations about the state of the local housing market, rather
awkwardly juxtaposed with a description of former slave dungeons:

Dans cet ancien repaire de négriers n’habitent plus que les fonctionnaires coloniaux
qui ne trouvent pas à se loger à Dakar où sévit également la crise des loyers
J’ai visité d’anciens cachots creusés dans la basaltine rouge on voit encore les
chaînes et les colliers qui maintenaient les noirs[.]

Only the line breaks and absence of punctuation distinguish such verses from an ordinary piece of
newspaper reportage. And whereas Le Panama and the Transsibérien alternate between prosaic
description and highly figurative language, the tone of Feuilles de route remains consistently
humdrum. Moreover, the nervous energy and self-doubt of the earlier works seem to have deserted
Cendrars, who takes obvious delight in his growing renown:

Vitesse klaxon présentations rires jeunes gens Paris Rio Brésil France interviews
présentations rires
Nous allons jusqu’à la Grotte de la Presse
Puis nous rentrons déjeuner en ville
Les plats ne sont pas encore servis que déjà les journaux parlent de moi et publient
la photo de tout à l’heure
Bonne cuisine du pays vins portugais et pinga[.]

Where the newspaper prayer at the beginning of Le Panama strikes an ambivalent note, here the
press acquires the exalted religious status of a grotto. But the real object of veneration is clearly
the poet himself, who seems less interested in what’s going on around him (aside from the contents
of his glass and plate) than the interest being paid to him.

Feuilles de route proved to be Cendrars’s final collection of poetry. He would later
claim to have renounced poetry as early as 1917 because “la poésie qui prenait vogue à Paris me
semblait devenir la base d’un malentendu spirituel et d’une confusion mentale qui, je le devinais,

1072 Cendrars, Du monde entier, 206.
1073 Cendrars, Du monde entier, 222.
1074 Feuilles de route-I. Le Formose was published by Au Sans Pareil in September 1924. Cendrars republished these
and other poems under the title Feuilles de route in his Poésies complètes (Paris: Denoël) in 1944 (see the notes in
Cendrars, Du monde entier, 389-391).
ne tarderaient pas à empoisonner et à paralyser toutes les activités de la nation française avant de s’étendre au reste du monde.”1075 Cendrars added that he had marked this literary rupture by secreting an unpublished poetic manuscript “que je venais de parachever selon une technique nouvelle et une inspiration qui m’avait surpris à force d’actualité, seule source éternelle de la poésie” in a wooden case that he had never reopened. As ever with Cendrars, reality has here been shrouded in colourful legend. For he did in fact continue to write poetry after 1917 (even publishing scattered new work as late as 1929). Cendrars’s concern for “les activités de la nation française” and disdain for avant-garde poetry are nonetheless consistent with his increasingly rightward drift during the 1920s and 30s while his enthusiasm for actualité led the writer to embrace a journalistic career that brought him fame and financial success.

Cendrars’s first sustained work of journalism, “L’Affaire Galmot,” was published serially in the illustrated magazine *Vu* in 1930 and then by Grasset as a book retitled *Rhum*. Subtitled *L’Aventure de Jean Galmot*, the dedication “aux jeunes gens d’aujourd’hui fatigués de la littérature” self-referentially proclaimed that “un roman peut aussi être un acte.” This “roman” was based on the true story of a journalist, businessman, and politician who had been imprisoned in 1921 amid controversy over his involvement in the Guyanese rum trade and whose death in 1928 sparked a wave of political murders in Cayenne.1076 Though *Rhum* frequently fails to separate legend from fact, Cendrars had nonetheless undertaken a genuine investigation into Galmot, drawing on interviews and original documents.1077 *Rhum* can thus be described as a non-fiction novel or fictionalized work of reportage. And that sense of literary-journalistic hybridity also

encompasses Cendrars’s poetic hinterland. For instance, the book frequently uses one-sentence paragraphs that have the abrupt cadence of free verse:

De 1917 à 1921 Jean Galmot vécut ses années les plus ardentes, les plus riches en péripéties, les plus dramatiques aussi.

C’est l’ascension.
On le laisse faire.
Son succès surprend.
On travaille avec lui.
Puis, on commence à s’étonner.1078

As in poems such as “Journal” and “Ma danse,” the truncated line breaks here create a sense of movement and dynamism. Cendrars’s earlier poetic experiments thus seem to underlie the liveliness of his journalistic prose.

When evoking Galmot’s rum plantation in French Guyana, the author even quotes directly from Le Panama:

... La forêt de chênes-lièges qui pousse sur les 400 locomotives abandonnées par l’entreprise française.

Cadavres vivants.
Le palmier greffé dans la banne d’une grue chargée d’orchidées.
Les canons d’Aspinwall rongés par les toucans.
La drague aux tortues.
Les pumas qui nichent dans le gazomètre défoncé.
Les écluses perforées par les poissons-scie.
La tuyauterie des pompes bouchée par une colonie d’iguanes...

Voilà le Panama, le Panama de Lesseps.
Ces vers que j’ai écrits en 1912, sur les rives des chantiers alors abandonnés, ne s’adaptent-ils pas aussi aux établissements, comptoirs, usines, avions, bureaux, ateliers de la Maison Jean Galmot, au lendemain de sa ruine?...1079

Of course, Cendrars never did stand on the banks of the Panama Canal in 1912, just as he never went to French Guiana to report on Galmot (contrary to the impression conveyed by photographs

1079 Cendrars, Rhum, 70.
attributed to the author that were originally published alongside the text in *Vu*). Though *Rhum*, despite its inaccuracies, has a closer relationship to the truth than *Le Panama* or the *Transsibérien*, Cendrars had not abandoned his old myth-making habits. Indeed, the fantasy has intensified in *Rhum* since *Le Panama* describes the images of the abandoned Canal works as coming from a photograph sent by the poet’s uncle (a detail concealed by the ellipsis at the start of the passage). Whereas “Dernière Heure” had recycled a *fait divers* found in a newspaper, *Rhum* transforms the author’s own verse into fabricated *reportage*. Rather than journalism serving as a literary laboratory, poetry here becomes a journalistic laboratory. With reference to Galmot’s own career, *Rhum* quotes the old maxim: “Le journalisme mène à tout à condition d’en sortir.” But Cendrars himself was travelling in the opposite direction.

During the 1930s, he duly wrote much *reportage* for newspapers such as *Excelsior* and *Paris-Soir* about topics including the French underworld, the inaugural transatlantic voyage of the SS Normandie, and the Hollywood studio system. Journalism thus allowed Cendrars to realize the wanderlust expressed in *Le Panama* and the *Transsibérien*. And, as in *Rhum*, his poetic hinterland occasionally surfaces in these writings. For instance, the description of a Marseilles drug den in *Panorama de la pègre* (1935) again replicates the appearance and rhythm of free verse:

Dans sa chambre, la femme alluma une bougie. La pièce était vide. Il n’y avait pas un meuble. Mais, par terre, étaient rangées des centaines et des centaines de bouteilles de cocaïne, des petites bouteilles brunes, les fameux bouteillons de Darmstadt.

Dans un coin, un tapis.
Au coin du tapis, le bougeoir.
Devant le bougeoir, un vieux livre à reliure de maroquin.
Et rien d’autre.
La femme était debout sur le tapis.
J’écoutais.
Elle disait:

---

– Avec un tailleur bleu marine, trois paires de gants frais, un oeillet rouge, on est toujours chic, pas? [sic]\(^{1082}\)

The repetitions here also echo the incantatory rhythm of *Le Panama* and the *Transsibérien*. And the juxtaposition of crime and cheap glamour parallels the latter work, where the poet describes fending off a band of thieves who attempt to steal his stock of cut-price German jewellery.

Cendrars was clearly in his element when undertaking such raffish escapades. And the rough-and-tumble style he developed as a poet lends itself naturally to recounting the world of crooks and hustlers in Paris and Marseilles. But the self-absorption already apparent in his *Feuilles de route* frequently mars his journalism about other countries. For example, in a 1938 article about a Rio de Janeiro prison, which Cendrars purports to have visited with Albert Londres in the mid-1920s, the most frequently quoted individual is Cendrars himself, who recalls explaining to his fellow journalist that “ces nègres sont bons chrétiens” (the first of numerous racist observations).\(^{1083}\) Here, as in *Feuilles de route* and much of his reportage, the real story seems to be less the ostensible subject of the article than Cendrars’s visit. Underlying that egotism is what Gérard Bildan calls “l’inflation de l’utilisation de la première personne du singulier” in line with contemporary journalistic convention, which turned reporters themselves into celebrities whose articles were heralded by head shots on the front page.\(^{1084}\) For example, the first paragraph alone of an article Cendrars published about his passion for hunting in *Paris-Soir* in August 1939, contains more than a dozen first-person pronouns.\(^{1085}\) And whereas the first-person serves as a

\(^{1082}\) Blaise Cendrars, *Panorama de la pègre*, in *Tout autour d’aujourd’hui*, 13: 35.


\(^{1084}\) Gérard Bildan, “Écrire dans les journaux,” in *Cendrars au pays de Jean Galmot*, ed. Touret, par. 9.

mark of authenticity in Londres’s journalism as well as earlier works of reportage published in the Cahiers de la quinzaine and La Revue blanche that were discussed in Chapter Two, Cendrars’s excessive reliance on this device here conveys only pomposity: “J’adore la chasse. Je sais ce que c’est que d’abattre d’une balle foudroyante un être bondissant. Au front, on venait toujours me chercher. J’étais le meilleur fusil de la compagnie.”

Such nombrilism also seems to have blinded Cendrars to the reality of what was going around him. As Maria Teresa de Freitas puts it in her survey of Cendrars’s Brazilian journalism: “L’image que Cendrars répand du Brésil en France dans ses ‘reportages’ brésiliens est […], apparentem, une image figée, où foisonnent des stéréotypes, où s’étalent des clichés.”

Londres’s journalism was not devoid of exoticized stereotypes. But he also challenged dominant narratives about colonialism and exposed abuses in French penal colonies. By contrast, Cendrars never displayed any inclination to speak truth to power in his reportages, whose tenor conforms to the prejudices of the publications that employed him. For example, in September 1936, he accepted a commission from the extreme-right newspaper Gringoire to investigate secret French arms shipments to the Spanish Republican Government, which had been fighting Franco’s insurrection since July. A month later, Cendrars delivered a lengthy article to his editor full of pro-Franco propaganda, which nonetheless failed to supply any hard evidence of French aid and duly ended up on the spike. Yet Léon Blum’s Popular Front Government continued to make limited

---

1086 Maria Teresa de Freitas, “Le Brésil en revue: ‘reportages’ brésiliens de Blaise Cendrars,” par. 35.
1088 See Cendrars, Blaise Cendrars, 490-495.
covert deliveries of aircraft until the end of 1936.\textsuperscript{1089} Cendrars thus missed a genuine story whilst peddling an uninformed pro-Franco line. And, as the Fascist leader prepared to enter Madrid in February 1939, the writer-journalist gave an interview to the Paris-based Francoist magazine \textit{Occident} where he offered a spectacularly edulcorated account of what he had seen in Spain: “Ce qui m’a le plus frappé, et d’une façon vraiment agréable, c’est que ce peuple s’était levé pour suivre le général Franco et pour remettre l’Espagne dans son véritable chemin, sans qu’aucune ombre ait attristé son esprit. Il faisait la guerre avec la même bonne humeur qu’il avait joui de la paix […]”.\textsuperscript{1090}

The Cendrars of the \textit{Transsibérien} had vividly evoked the horrors of a war he may never have actually witnessed. A quarter of a century later, the poet-turned-journalist portrayed the Spanish Civil War as a jolly good lark. Having abandoned his initial ambivalence towards the press, Cendrars became an unscrupulous hack for hire, oblivious or indifferent to the suffering around him. “To see what is in \textit{front} of one’s \	extit{no}se needs a constant struggle,” wrote George Orwell, himself a veteran of the Spanish Civil War, who had exposed Soviet-directed purges on the Republican side in \textit{Homage to Catalonia} (1938).\textsuperscript{1091} Cendrars failed that test during the 1930s, leaving the promise of literary-journalistic hybridity expressed in both his early poetry and \textit{Rhum} unfulfilled. And the irony of his political and literary evolution is that he saw more clearly when forced to rely on his imagination, as in \textit{Le Panama} and perhaps the \textit{Transsibérien}, than when given the opportunity to report from direct experience. Once the newspaper’s “éclair claquemuré” finally burst forth in Cendrars’s writing, it ravaged his critical faculties. Rather than providing a new


source of globe-trotting inspiration, *reportage* sucked the poetry out of Cendrars and hastened his descent into reactionary self-caricature.

**IX. Salmon’s lost illusions**

André Salmon ultimately followed a similar literary and ideological path to Cendrars.

At first, however, his poetry and short stories seemed relatively unaffected by the lure of journalism. Unlike Cendrars’s *Dix-neuf poèmes élastiques*, Salmon’s pre-First World War verse, which adapts a Symbolist aesthetic to depictions of Left Bank street life, does not display any clear affinity with the mass press.

The short stories collected in *Tendres Canailles* (1913) were mostly first published in newspapers such as *Paris-Journal*, which accounts for their light *feuillet*onesque tone.¹⁰⁹² And these tales of Parisian bohemia include numerous depictions of newspaper sellers and writer-journalists. But such representations of journalism amount to local colour. *Tendres Canailles* never evokes the fascination for journalism’s cultural potential that infuses Apollinaire and Cendrars’s work from this period. Newspapers may have already been an unavoidable part of Salmon’s world before the First World War, but they had not yet become the centre of his writing life.

Detachment changes to antipathy in *Prikaz*, a long free-verse poem about the Russian Revolution that Salmon published in 1919. Combining arcane historical detail with allusive portrayals of contemporary violence, the poem itself, whose title translates as “Order,” is characterized by a kind of free-wheeling obscurity comparable to Ezra Pound’s *Cantos* (1925). Salmon’s intentions become clearer, however, in the paratext at the end where he defines “PRIKAZ” as the “traduction du sentiment transmis par les inconnues plus fortes qu’aucune

---

¹⁰⁹² *André Salmon, Tendres Canailles* (Paris: Ollendorff, 1913). I am grateful to Jacqueline Gojard for providing details of *Tendres Canailles*’ pre-publications and of Salmon’s journalistic career.
‘information’ de l’événement le plus poétique de ce temps, la révolution bolchevik.”1093 The poet, who had not set foot in Russia for nearly twenty years, here reprises the traditional opposition between journalistic “information” and literature’s supposedly greater penetrative powers. Like the first stanza of Cendrars’s Le Panama, Prikaz thereby disdains press reports of a world-historical event in favour of its author’s own poetic intuition. And the poem’s ambivalent though by no means unsympathetic portrayal of a revolution whose idealism was doomed to collapse into brutality proved accurate. As the anti-Stalinist Marxist Victor Serge, who had joined the Bolsheviks in 1919, put it in his journal during the mid-1940s:

Quelle saisissante intuition dans ces vers d’André Salmon, écrits dans Prikaz en 1918, à propos de la rév. russe qui commençait sans traîtres et sans assassins:

Les traîtres sont des saints
Et les cœurs les plus purs sont ceux des assassins.1094

By contrast, the American journalist John Reed, who lived through the October Revolution in Petrograd and thereafter became a Communist militant himself, never expressed any doubts about Bolshevik virtue in his Ten Days That Shook the World (1919), where he styles himself a “conscientious reporter.”1095 As in Cendrars’s Transsibérien, distance seems to have given Salmon a sense of perspective not necessarily available to those on the ground. And yet, while Salmon’s poem does not offer recognizable descriptions of any specific episode during the revolution, he clearly relied on the press to keep abreast of what was happening 2,000 miles to the east. For example, in an unusually lucid stanza, Prikaz concludes with an evocation of pro-White foreign

1093 André Salmon, Prikaz (Paris: La Sirène, 1919).
intervention in the Russian Civil War during the winter of 1918-1919 (when the Bolsheviks seemed on the brink of defeat):

Maintenant il se peut que les étrangers soient vainqueurs,  
Rétablissant l’amende et la dîme et la règle,  
L’oiseleur et l’oiseau, l’empereur avec l’aigle;  
Les hommes auront un jour vécu selon leur cœur.  
Et qui peut prévaloir, Dieu, si le cœur des hommes n’est pire ni meilleur?  
Décembre 1918-janvier 1919.1096

Such a timely account of the conflict must have been based on contemporary news reports. And the dates at the end further add to the stanza’s journalistic flavour. Whilst belittling “information” in the paratext overleaf, Prikaz itself thus ends up resembling a piece of poetic reportage. Indeed, though Salmon eschews the first-person, some earlier verses have the feel of a contemporary eyewitness account. For example, even if the “cuirassiers” here add a faintly anachronistic touch, the accumulation of granular detail suggests the presence of an unidentified observer:

Trente cuirassiers soûls hurlent au fort de l’ivresse,  
Vautrés sur les coussins ponceau du wagon de la grande duchesse,  
Ils ont de l’alcool et des armes,  
Des conserves et des cartouches,  
Ils pendent au signal d’alarme[.]1097

(Possibly) like Cendrars’s Transsibérien, Prikaz here brings us on an imaginary train ride across Russia that could be mistaken for the real thing. For while the poet does not explicitly situate himself on board, he never owns up to being far away in Paris either. And as for Cendrars, in spite of Prikaz’s apparent disdain for the press, that poetic journey seems to presage Salmon’s own future career as a globe-trotting reporter. Salmon’s pre-First World War poetry had occasionally explored Baudelairean fantasies of Africa and the Orient. In Prikaz, a distant revolution stirs his

1096 Salmon, Prikaz, section 16.  
1097 Salmon, Prikaz, section 9.
poetic imagination. A life on the road now beckoned. But, for the most part, what he found there was “information” rather than poetry.

Having been a newspaper art critic prior to the First World War, Salmon became a reporter for newspapers such as Le Matin and Le Petit Parisien during the 1920s and 30s. The final volume of his memoirs Souvenirs sans fin, published in 1961, wearily presents that career path in terms of pure necessity: “N’étant pas doué pour la bonne affaire en littérature, j’ai choisi un second métier: le journalisme. Ça m’a promené de Londres à Varsovie, d’Amsterdam à Belgrade, de Madrid à Zagreb et Ankara, de Damas à Prague et Vienne et je ne sais où encore […]”. And yet his poetry of the early 1920s expresses enthusiasm for the press’s cultural dynamism reminiscent of Apollinaire. In Peindre (1921), he thus describes a figure in a portrait by André Derain as “Tenant dans un JOURNAL tout le réel/ Et l’éternel.” Just as Baudelaire had portrayed Constantin Guys’s newspaper sketches as wresting the eternal from the transitory, so the newspaper here seems to transcend its ephemerality within Derain’s art. And L’Âge de l’humanité (1921) echoes Hegel’s newspaper prayer, here stripped of the ambivalence discernable in the first stanza of Cendrars’s Le Panama: “Il y a une intention de prière dans le roulement d’un tambour/ Il y en a dans les petites annonces du JOURNAL et les nouvelles en trois lignes du MATIN.” By invoking Fénéon’s haiku-esque faits divers, the poem elevates the newspaper to an exalted literary and spiritual plane. The reference to classified advertisements in Le Journal also recalls the identification of advertising with poetry in “Zone.” Peindre and L’Âge de l’humanité thus seem to embrace the culture of “information” Salmon had disparaged in Prikaz.

1098 Salmon, Souvenirs sans fin, 3:10.  
1100 Salmon, Créances suivi de Carreaux, 295.
That turn towards a vision of literary-journalistic hybridity proved fleeting. As Salmon noted in *Souvenirs sans fin*, his journalistic peregrinations did inspire some later poetry. He does not mention any specific works, but “L’Horloger d’Amsterdam” and “Romancero du voyageur,” written during the mid-1920s, both seem consistent with that self-assessment.\footnote{André Salmon, *Poètes d’aujourd’hui* 53, ed. Pierre Berger (Paris: Pierre Seghers, 1956), 147-152, and 165.} The three terse stanzas of 1925’s “Chronique judiciaire” also reflect Salmon’s experiences as a court reporter.\footnote{Salmon, *Poètes d’aujourd’hui* 53, 169.} But none of these essentially anecdotal works replicates the world-historical sweep and political insight of *Prikaz*. Like Cendrars, the more Salmon travelled, the less observant he seemed to become. By his own admission, what he found on those travels rarely surprised him since he had already read so much about the places he visited.\footnote{See Salmon, *Souvenirs sans fin*, 3:10.} Journalism of no great distinction thus increasingly took the place of poetry in Salmon’s oeuvre. During the 1930s, Salmon only published three short books of verse.\footnote{André Salmon, *Troubles en Chines* (Niort: René Debresse, 1935); *Saint André* (Paris: Gallimard, 1936); *Le Jour et la Nuit* (Sainte-Marguerite de la Mer: Îles de Lérins, 1937).} And, while *Saint André* (1936) contains a few echoes of Salmon’s journalistic activities, the exalted depictions of newspapers in *Peindre* and *L’Âge de l’humanité* give way to self-deprecating irony and ambivalence:

\begin{verbatim}
A l’enseigne de Saint André
J’offre les produits de mon industrie
Œuvres de qualité
Petite pacotille
[…]
Fouillez, chacun y cherchera son bien
Avec méthode ou de hasard
La camelote et l’œuvre d’art
Et les défauts et les merveilles
L’avenir enveloppé dans un journal de la veille[.]
\end{verbatim} \footnote{Salmon, *Saint André*, 85.}
The juxtaposition of junk and art here recalls Apollinaire’s poetic vision at the start of “Zone.” But whereas “Zone” equates poetry with the commercial detritus of leaflets, catalogues and posters, Salmon’s poem re-establishes an opposition between such refuse and his artistic works. The image of the future wrapped in yesterday’s newspaper (a common trope for ephemerality) then suggests that the worthless part of his writerly industry is constituted of journalism.

Looking back at his journalistic career in Souvenirs sans fin, Salmon briefly wondered, in general terms, whether reportage could ever have a fruitful literary afterlife: “Le reportage peut-il vraiment, avec le reste, alimenter une poésie fondée sur le réel à transposer ou si la miraculeuse tyrannie poétique sauve des misères du reportage le poète devenu journaliste et dont, le premier, Théophile Gautier lamente les servitudes? C’est dans Émaux et Camées.”1106 The second part of this elliptical question seems to answer the first. For the thought that reportage might fuel poetry is left undeveloped and abruptly yields to the counter-hypothesis that poetry might, at best, offer some salvation to authors condemned to the servitude of journalism. The latter view is then seconded with an implicit nod to Gauthier’s poem “Après le feuilleton,” published in Émaux et Camées, which greets the publication of the poet’s weekly theatrical feuilleton as a temporary deliverance from his crude journalistic labours. The irony is that Gauthier systematically published his own poems in the press, including “Après le feuilleton” itself, which first appeared in the Revue nationale et étrangère, a fortnightly grande revue, in 1861.1107 Contrary to the impression conveyed by Salmon, the press did serve as a poetic laboratory for Gauthier.

By contrast, Salmon’s later journalism brought him nothing but misery and permanently tarnished his reputation. In 1936, he was dispatched by Le Petit Parisien to cover the civil war in

1106 Salmon, Souvenirs sans fin, 3: 11-12.
Spain, where he took a pro-Franco line.\textsuperscript{1108} Salmon continued writing for the same newspaper under the Occupation and supported Pétain’s “Révolution nationale,” which led to his being condemned to five years of “indignité nationale” after the Liberation.\textsuperscript{1109} At a ceremony commemorating Apollinaire in Père Lachaise in 1943, Picasso refused to shake the hand of his old friend.\textsuperscript{1110}

Like Cendrars, Salmon had an obvious flair for using poetry as a medium for what might be called “imaginary reportage.” But when thrown into the heat of the journalistic action, he got burned.

**X. Parody and poetic reportage in Max Jacob**

Max Jacob followed a similar path to Cendrars and Salmon but in the opposite direction. After dabbling in journalism in the late 1890s, Jacob embraced a bohemian existence in the early 1900s, turning his hand to both poetry and painting, occasionally supported by odd jobs as a clerk and fortune-teller.\textsuperscript{1111}

For the poet, popular journalism came to represent generalized cultural decline. As he put it in the preface to his collection of prose poetry *Le Cornet à dés* (1917):

\begin{quote}
Dans les grandes époques artistiques, les règles de l’art enseignées dès l’enfance constituent des canons qui donnent un style: les artistes sont alors ceux qui, malgré les règles suivies dès l’enfance, trouvent une expression vivante. […] L’auteur ayant situé son œuvre peut user de tous les charmes: la langue, le rythme, la musicalité et l’esprit. \textit{Quand un chanteur a la voix placée, il peut s’amuser aux roulades}. Pour me bien comprendre, comparez les familiarités de Montaigne avec
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{1108} See, for example, Salmon’s article celebrating the highly symbolic victory of “les héros de l’Alcazar,” who were relieved by Francoist troops in September 1936 after a two-month siege of Toledo’s Moorish palace by Republican forces. (André Salmon, “Dans Tolède avec Franco et les ressuscités de l’Alcazar,” \textit{Le Petit Parisien}, Oct. 1, 1936, 1).


\textsuperscript{1111} See Mousli, \textit{Max Jacob}, 31-40 and 82.
celles d’Aristide Bruant ou les couloiments du journal d’un sou avec les brutalités de Bossuet bousculant les protestants.  

Just as Apollinaire had called on artists in his book on Cubism to bury their creative forebears whilst keeping their feet rooted to the soil of tradition, Jacob here espouses a vision of literature that seeks to transcend the opposition between inheritance and originality. Or as Anna J. Davies puts it in her commentary on the preface: “A paradoxical coalescing of craftsmanship with the capacity to reach beyond it is the hallmark of the true artist.” Jacob himself expresses that tension in terms of “style” and “situation,” identifying the former with eternal artistic rules and the latter with a work of art’s contingent relationship to its creator and audience or “l’atmosphère spéciale où elle se meut,” a distinction that recalls Baudelaire’s account of eternity and modernity in “Le Peintre de la vie moderne.” And whereas Jacob sees Montaigne and Bossuet as having struck an appropriate balance, the cabaret singer Aristide Bruant and contemporary journalists are implicitly dismissed for lacking a grasp of classical style. The newspaper’s “couloiments,” Jacob suggests, make journalism too eclectic and undiscriminating, thence dominated by its “situation.”

And yet Le Cornet à dés itself ends up rubbing shoulders with the mass press. As suggested by titles such as “Roman feuilleton,” “Encore le roman feuilleton,” and “La Presse,” Jacob’s collection contains numerous overt parodies of journalism. For example, “Fausses nouvelles! Fosses nouvelles!” mocks journalists for their inaccuracies, laziness, cowardice, and jingoism within a single paragraph written in the style of a surrealist fait divers about a shooting at the opera. “La Situation des bonnes au Mexique,” similarly sends up the press’s mania for carrying

---

1114 Jacob, Œuvres, 349.
1115 Jacob, Œuvres, 381, 392, and 395. For close readings of “Roman feuilleton” and “Encore le roman feuilleton,” see Davies, Max Jacob, 84-87.
1116 Jacob, Œuvres, 352-353. See also Davies, Max Jacob, 76-78.
out extensive surveys about seemingly random topics, which extended, as we saw in Chapter Two, to *petites revues* such as the *Mercure de France*, here portrayed as having initiated an *enquête* about the condition of maids in Mexico. These prose poems recall the intra-journalistic satire of *Le Chasseur de chevelures* and *La Revue blanche*. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter Two, *La Revue blanche* itself published a parodic version of Julet Huret’s *Enquête sur l’évolution littéraire*. But whereas the Natanson brothers’ *petite revue* also published genuine *enquêtes* and pieces of *reportage* about topics of real historical and contemporary significance as well as works of literary-journalistic hybridity such as Mallarmé’s “poèmes critiques” and Mirbeau’s *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre*, *Le Cornet à dés*’s journalistic “coudoiements” all convey a sense of playfully ironic disdain that never yields to a vision of how journalism itself might transcend the indignities of the mass press or acquire real aesthetic value. Jacob’s prose poetry thus displays none of the enthusiasm for journalism’s literary potential that emerges in the work of his contemporaries Apollinaire, Cendrars, and Salmon, let alone Mallarmé (and *Le Cornet à dés*’s title itself parodies a poet reproached for being “guindé et obscur” in the preface). Indeed, in *Art poétique* (1922), a collection of aesthetic aphorisms, Jacob would call for the “[s]uppression dans toute poésie (même non moderne) du style critique cérébral, philosophique, journalistique.”

Jacob’s “Écrit pour la S. A. F. (Société des amis de ‘Fantomas’),” first published in *Les Soirées de Paris* in 1914, does briefly raise the possibility of a rapprochement between poetry and journalism:

> “Moi, Fantômas, je saute à mon septième étage  
> Pour montrer mon adresse  
> Ou montrer mon courage,  
> Pour mettre du lyrisme aux Nouvelles Diverses?  
> Non, non! c’est pour montrer à ceux que j’intéresse

---

1117 Jacob, *Œuvres*, 393-394. See also Davies, *Max Jacob*, 78-79.
1118 Jacob, *Œuvres*, 1361.
Qu’un homme chic a toujours sur lui des cartes d’adresse.”

Adopting the perspective of the eponymous anti-hero of Allain and Souvestre’s crime novels, which, as we saw in Chapter Three, also inspired poems by Apollinaire and Cendrars (co-founders of the so-called S. A. F), the poem introduces and immediately scotches the suggestion that Fantômas might aspire to add a bit of villainous poetry to the newspaper’s fait-divers column. Instead, the criminal mastermind here purports to commit his robberies just for the sake of cutting a dash, typified by the visiting cards he leaves behind him (an allusion to a plot point in the first Fantômas book). Moreover, the poet goes on to present Fantômas as a hero to those whose lives are governed by the quotidian rhythms of the newspaper:

Je parle pour tous ceux qui sont “au jour le jour”,
Sans autre grand souci que de manger et boire,
Lisent plus le journal quotidien que l’histoire,
Forcés, pour l’exploiter, de connaître le temps;
Pour eux, pour moi, pour vous, Fantômas est vivant.

The dashing cat burglar offers these poor drudges an escape from the banality of regimented toil and uninspiring journalism. Having already disdained the newspaper’s “Nouvelles Diverses,” the poem here further emphasizes the opposition between Fantômas and the press. Though the Fantômas stories were themselves published serially, albeit in book form, Jacob suggests they belong to an entirely different cultural sphere than the plodding romans-feuilletons he parodies in Le Cornet à dés. By contrast, as we have seen, Apollinaire and Cendrars’s poetry conveys fascination for both Fantômas and newspaper journalism. Indeed, Jacob’s enquête-mocking poem “La Situation des bonnes au Mexique” carries a dedication to Apollinaire, as if to poke fun at his friend’s journalistic labours and enthusiasms.

---

1119 Jacob, Œuvres, 463.
1120 Jacob, Œuvres, 464-465.
As Émilien Sermier has argued, Jacob’s later novels, such as *Filibuth ou la montre en or* (1922) and *Le Terrain bouchaballe* (1923), do draw on themes and techniques associated with the *roman-feuilleton* such as abrupt chapter endings, abundant use of dialogue, and stock characters.¹¹²¹ *Le Terrain bouchaballe* also includes extracts from a fictional newspaper, whose editor plays a central role in the commercial and political skulduggery portrayed in a fictionalized version of the author’s hometown of Quimper. As in *Le Cornet à dés*, those journalistic echoes often have a parodic resonance. For instance, Sermier notes that *Filibuth* contains no mention of any character called Filibuth, leaving the novel without an obvious hero and thence subverting a basic principle of the traditional *roman-feuilleton*. Both *Filibuth* and *Le Terrain bouchaballe* also portray journalists themselves as greedy and corrupt, reprising a commonplace of nineteenth-century novels such as *Illusions perdues* and *Bel-Ami*. Like Baudelaire’s *Petits poèmes en prose*, Jacob’s novels thus denigrate the press within parodies of journalistic writing. But whereas Baudelaire mounted that assault from within the confines of the *feuilleton* itself, by publishing twenty of his prose poems in *La Presse*, Jacob kept his distance, never serializing his novels in the press. And whereas Baudelaire would go on to portray Constantin Guys’s newspaper sketches as a vibrant font of modernity, perhaps obliquely commenting on his prose poetry’s own journalistic origins, Jacob’s prose never suggests that the newspaper itself might serve as a literary laboratory.

Only in one of Jacob’s final poems, “Reportage de juin 1940,” does antagonism give way to a more nuanced view of journalism.¹¹²² Written shortly after the Fall of the France, the poem turns the flood myth into an allegory for that cataclysm and incorporates imagery drawn from Jacob’s own eye-witness experiences as well as contemporary newspaper reports.¹¹²³ For once,

¹¹²² Jacob, *Œuvres*, 1557-1560.
¹¹²³ See the notes in Jacob, *Œuvres*, 1798.
Jacob’s journalistically themed title thus seems to have no parodic resonance. His “reporting” gives vivid form to the destruction of the French Army, which emphasizes the need for cosmic deliverance represented by the flood’s mythical survivors:

Viennent Pyrrha, Deucalion
après ce déluge et dans les sillons,
sur des morts inconnus étendre de la chaux,
semer des haies d’affûts, des carcasses d’autos
et brandir les fourgons boiteux vers l’horizon.

And as in newspaper reportage, the first-person here lends an air of authenticity to the poem’s depiction of routed and leaderless soldiers, whom Jacob had witnessed near Orléans:

J’avais passé la nuit dans l’ombre à ma fenêtre
où montaient les pauvres voix des soldats piétes:
Une armée! elle ne savait se diriger!
D’un côté, c’est Sully! de l’autre Châteauneuf!
Où aller? des drapeaux les bataillons sont veufs.

Unlike Cendrars, whose stabs at integrating reportage and free verse in Feuilles de route ultimately seem bluntly prosaic, Jacob here expresses his journalistic observations in alexandrines, thereby striking a balance between what he had called “style” and “situation” in his preface to Le Cornet à dés. As he put it in a 1943 letter justifying the poem: “Il fallait aussi que des anecdotes fussent serties dans une vague d’ensemble. Autrement c’était un torchon ou par trop un ‘reportage.’”

Classical verse and mythical-cum-religious allegory provide that “vague d’ensemble” in “Reportage de juin 1940,” which thus gives timeless shape to the dismal zeitgeist of defeat and occupation. By then Apollinaire was long dead, Salmon was churning out whimsical collaborationist articles for Le Petit Parisien, and Cendrars had retreated into silence. Of all the

---

1124 For an account of this poem’s genesis and reception, see Antonio Rodriguez, “‘Reportage de juin 1940,’ un texte engagé? Genèse et postérité d’un poème emblématique,” Les Cahiers Max Jacob, no. 9 (2009): 63-80.
1125 Quoted in Rodriguez, “Reportage de juin 1940,” 71.
poets who had cut their teeth at Les Soirées de Paris, Jacob, the most consistently resistant to journalism, alone remained to give malgré lui a journalistic account of June 1940 in verse.

Unlike the young Cendrars, Salmon, or indeed Mallarmé, Jacob, a convert to Catholicism, did not turn to the press as a substitute for traditional religion. His “Reportage de juin 1940” duly concludes with a plea for “la vertu renaissant, la Foi et la Raison.” Jacob’s earlier religious poetry tends to depict his own spiritual development in isolation from worldly events. But the scale of the moral crisis brought on by the Fall of France pushed him to look outwards and bear witness to that upheaval within a piece of poetic reportage (his unique foray into the genre). That poem evokes none of the journalistic dynamism that had inspired Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Cendrars, and Salmon. Indeed, the press itself has vanished amid the chaos: “Ici plus de nouvelles, de postes, plus d’argent.” Gone too is any trace of a rapturous vision akin to Mallarmé’s prophecy of the “Poème populaire moderne.” “Reportage de juin 1940” instead humbly insists on the writer’s primary duty to record what he had seen:

Je suis votre témoin, louis d’or auprès d’un titre,
le témoin de fusils sur treize coussins brodés
d’un coffre militaire auprès d’une layette
entre un cadavre d’homme et celui d’une bête,
les longs calculs d’un tir, les secrets du stratège
envolés dans un champ de seigle.

Just as Apollinaire’s epistolary war poetry had provided his correspondents with an uncensored account of life in the trenches, Jacob here cuts through the propaganda of the Second World War, when the French press again seemed to inhabit a parallel universe of ever-imminent victory before falling into line behind Vichy after the Armistice. “Reportage de juin 1940” may not, as Antonio Rodriguez has argued, offer an explicitly pro-Resistance message, but its despairing apocalyptic overtones evidently clash with the strident rodomontades of Pétain’s “Révolution nationale,”
which his friend Salmon was regurgitating in *Le Petit Parisien*. Poetry, in other words, became an outlet for moral and journalistic truth excluded from the mass press.

**XI. The twilight of poetic reportage**

After June 1940, the newspapers, magazines, and publishing houses that had sustained Apollinaire and his circle, if they had not already disappeared during the intervening years, either accepted collaboration with the Nazis or, as in the case of *Mercure de France*, suspended their activities. Clandestine periodicals and publishers in turn emerged, most notably Éditions de Minuit, that would reshape the post-war French literature in a thematically and stylistically austere mould, leaving little space for the kind of free-wheeling eclecticism embraced by Apollinaire and Cendrars a generation earlier. Indeed, Cendrars’s own autobiographical tetralogy of the mid to late 1940s, except for the final volume *Le Lotissement du ciel* (1949), adopts a noticeably plainer and more restrained tone than both his poetry and interwar prose works.

Gallimard kept a foot in both camps during the war, handing the editorship of *La NRF* to the fascist novelist Pierre Drieu la Rochelle and buckling to German censorship, whilst also providing some assistance to Aragon and Paulhan’s clandestine newspaper *Les Lettres françaises*. After the Liberation, the publisher then became the home of *Les Temps modernes*, where Sartre published his essay-cum-manifesto *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?* in 1947, arguing that poetry was an essentially hermetic form where words cease to designate objects in the world. By these lights, politically committed poetry becomes a “sottise” because poetic

---

1126 The poem was also first published in 1942 in the Lyon-based magazine *Confluences*, which subtly opposed the Occupation, publishing works by authors involved in the Resistance such as Louis Aragon and Paul Éluard. Indeed, the issue containing “Reportage de juin 1940” was banned by the Vichy regime. (See Rodriguez, “Reportage de juin 1940,” 64).


1128 “[Les poètes] ne songent pas non plus à nommer le monde et, par le fait, ils ne nomment rien du tout, car la nomination implique un perpétuel sacrifice du nom à l’objet nommé ou pour parler comme Hegel, le nom s’y révèle l’inessentiel, en face de la chose qui est essentielle.” (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?* [1948; repr., Paris: Gallimard, 1985], 17).
language is incapable of expressing a clear political message. And though Sartre never specifically addresses the question, poetic reportage, with its focus on describing contemporary political or military realities, would also fall afoul of such strictures.

As we shall see in Chapter Six, journalism remained a central preoccupation for Sartre as well as Aragon, Beauvoir, Camus, Mauriac, and other politicized writers of the 1930s and the post-war era. While they generally treated the press as a tool of political change rather than a literary laboratory, both Aragon and Camus drew inspiration from journalism in their literary works. But only in Aragon’s Hourra l’Oural (1934), inspired by his 1932-1933 visit to the Soviet Union, does poetry acquire the characteristics of reportage. And that work’s odes to collective farming and Comrade Stalin are a journalistic travesty given that famine was sweeping Ukraine and the Southern Urals as Aragon travelled through the latter region. The author, who remained a loyal Communist until his death, would eventually even admit, albeit with some equivocation, to having been the victim of “bourrage de crâne” in a postface to Hourra’s 1975 edition.

Hourra may not have been a “sottise” for the theoretical reasons later outlined by Sartre. Its political message is extremely clear. But ideological servility here negates the truth-telling imperative of reportage as well as the puckish spirit of aesthetic freedom that underlies

---

1129 Sartre, Qu’est-ce que la littérature?, 24.
1130 In Looking for the Stranger: Albert Camus and the Life of a Literary Classic (University of Chicago Press, 2016), Alice Kaplan points to an incident reported in L’Écho d’Oran as a likely source for the climactic murder in Camus’s L’Étranger (see 210-217). The novel also features a lengthy meditation about a grisly fait divers, which later formed the basis for Camus’s play Le Malentendu, that Camus had probably read in an Algerian newspaper (see the notes to Albert Camus, Œuvres complètes, ed. Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi and Raymond Gay-Crosier et al., 4 vols, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade [Paris: Gallimard, 2006], 1: 1329). As we shall see in Chapter Six, Louis Aragon’s debt to journalism is clearer still in Le Paysan de Paris (1926), which includes exact reproductions of newspaper clippings. He later drew on his own journalism in Hourra l’Oural, Les Cloches de Bâle (1934), and Les Communistes (1949-1951) [see Marysse Vassevière, “Aragon journaliste à L’Humanité: du reportage à l’écriture,” in Boucharenc, “L’Universel reportage,” 147-163; and Yves Lavoine, “Aragon journaliste communiste: les années d’apprentissage [1933-1953],” [Doctorat d’État, Université des sciences humaines de Strasbourg, 1984], 389-397].
Apollinaire, Cendrars, and Salmon’s journalistically influenced poetry. They saw journalism as a way of revolutionizing poetry, thereby reaffirming the old Romantic commitment to “l’art pour l’art.” Even Salmon’s politically charged Prikaz conveys no defined ideological vision. For Aragon, the Revolution itself was what counted. The ambivalent experimentation of the New Spirit thus gave way to crude dogma in Hourra.

All in all, by the end of the Second World War, material and intellectual circumstances had shifted away from the anomalous symbiosis between literary bohemia, modern art, and the mass press that had engendered a wave of poetry depicting those eclectic interactions. Underlying the open, spontaneous style of Apollinaire and his circle was the anxious, headlong optimism and dynamic literary-journalistic culture of the pre-1914 world. Some of that rambunctious spirit survived the First World War and occasionally surfaces in Cendrars and Salmon’s interwar works. Defeat and occupation then stirred a mood of moral seriousness among post-Second World War writers, who paid little heed to their precursors’ experiments at fusing poetry with journalism. “Reportage de juin 1940” thus constitutes a dismal belated coda to the sense of excitement and possibility that had originated in Les Soirées de Paris three decades earlier. Where Apollinaire and Cendrars had portrayed the newspaper as a spur to poetic liberation, Jacob, who had kept his distance from the press, ends up finally turning to poetic reportage in a mood of apocalyptic despair. And where Cendrars and Salmon, like Mallarmé before them, had heralded journalism itself as a source of spiritual renewal, “Reportage de juin 1940” bleakly attempts to summon both pagan and Christian gods in defence of vanquished ideals.

All those prayers went unanswered. Having spawned increasingly gruesome excrescences during the 1920s and 30s such as Gringoire and Je suis partout, the mass press, with rare exceptions, zealously embraced collaboration under the Occupation and counted Mallarmé’s old
disciples Jean Ajalbert and Camille Mauclair among its most ardently pro-Nazi contributors. And Jacob, despite his conversion to Catholicism, was arrested in early 1944 and died in the Drancy internment camp two days before he was due to be deported to Auschwitz.

XII. The ruins of the Book

“All, au monde, existe pour aboutir à un livre,” Mallarmé had written. As we saw in Chapter One, journalism was central to that transcendent vision of literature. When Apollinaire and his circle opened up the Book to reportage, the results proved to be far from harmonious. Instead of a “Poème populaire moderne” forming the basis of a new civic religion, Apollinaire, Cendrars, Jacob, and Salmon’s forays into poetic reportage were predominantly concerned with war, which they all depicted with insight and immediacy (even when, as in the Transsibérien and Prikaz, the poets may not have witnessed the conflicts they described), while Cendrars and Salmon’s prose reportage was mostly banal and frequently veered into reactionary propaganda.

Un coup de dés, which Mallarmé intended as the first instalment of his “Livre,” also conveys a sense of crisis and turbulence that evokes poetry’s struggle to find its place in the world at a time when the rise of the mass press seemed to represent an existential challenge. But, as we saw in Chapter One, Mallarmé ultimately aspired to create a coherent synthesis of journalism and literature where “les cassures du texte” would become seamless. In the works of Apollinaire and his circle, those fractures only grew more jagged as Europe sank into a three-decade cycle of violence.

Mallarmé had vowed, in his autobiographical letter to Verlaine, to sacrifice all vanity and satisfaction to feed the furnace of his Great Work. Apollinaire, Jacob, Cendrars, and Salmon all ended up sacrificing much more – the first two, their lives; the latter two, their self-respect. No
Great Work in the Mallarméan mould ever emerged from their travails. But, amid the ashes, the poetry they left behind captured the turbulent spirit of their times.
CHAPTER SIX
Journalism and the Crisis of the Novel

Je suis obligé de trafiquer de ma plume! Je suis un vil commerçant!
Jean Lorrain (1903).1133

J’avais à arracher, du ventre des bouquins, le germe des articles qui me faisaient vivre […]
Jules Vallès, L’Insurgé (1886).1134

I. Who will save the novel from the press?

*Crise de vers, crise de la librairie, crise du roman* – turn-of-the-century French letters were riven with talk of existential strife. In poetry, the crisis revolved around a clash between tradition and innovation (represented by *décadence*, Symbolism and free verse as well as the growth of the mass press). Whatever their respective merits, that new quarrel of ancients and moderns was nothing if not lively and prolific. Mallarmé duly celebrated “une exquise crise, fondamentale” that held out the possibility of a rapturous new poetic synthesis harnessing the formal rigour of the past and the energy of the present.1135 And his *Coup de dés* offered a glimpse of how poetry could transcend that crisis. Apollinaire also enthusiastically confronted the challenge of reconciling his poetic inheritance (including Mallarmé’s work) with the clamour of modernity. For both, crisis represented an opportunity rather than an affliction.

By contrast, contemporary commentary surrounding the overlapping crises of publishing and the novel strikes a consistently dismal note. As we saw in Chapter One, books themselves were widely thought to be on the way out due to the irresistible lure of newspapers. And countless observers found French novelists to be stuck in a complacent rut of their own making. Some

---

1135 Mallarmé, “Crise de vers,” in *Oc*, 2: 204.
deplored the vulgarity of contemporary novels.\textsuperscript{1136} Indifference to public taste was another common complaint.\textsuperscript{1137} And many concluded that the novel was in fact already dead.\textsuperscript{1138} Naturalism remained the dominant literary school into the 1890s. But even its leading lights took a pessimistic view of their own craft. “[L]e roman est un genre usé, éculé, qui a dit tout ce qu’il avait à dire,” Edmond de Goncourt told Jules Huret in 1891.\textsuperscript{1139} Zola similarly concluded: “La matière du roman est un peu épuisée, et pour le ranimer il faudrait un bonhomme! Mais, encore une fois, où est-il? Voilà toute la question…”\textsuperscript{1140}

That “bonhomme” still appeared elusive three decades later amid an ongoing epidemic of collective critical hand-wringing. In Michel Raimond’s estimation: “Cette littérature critique consacrée à la crise du roman n’a jamais été plus florissante que dans la première décennie de l’entre-deux-guerres.”\textsuperscript{1141} The ideological tenor of that criticism had shifted in some cases. Conservative and reactionary critics of the Belle Époque such as Maurice Barrès denounced Naturalist literature as unpatriotic and pornographic.\textsuperscript{1142} By contrast, after the First World War, André Breton attacked realist novels in the first Manifeste du surréalisme (1924) for failing to capture the dark currents of the unconscious whilst celebrating works of art imbued with “[l]’esprit de démoralisation.”\textsuperscript{1143} And yet, as we shall see, when it came to Breton’s view of the mass press, little had changed.

\textsuperscript{1136} See, for example, comments by Maurice Barrès, Charles Morice, and Joseph Caraguël in Huret, Enquête sur l’évolution littéraire, 43, 95, and 197. 
\textsuperscript{1137} See Michel Raimond, La Crise du roman: des lendemains du naturalisme aux années vingt (Paris: José Corti, 1968), 93. 
\textsuperscript{1138} See Raimond, La Crise du roman, 88. 
\textsuperscript{1139} Huret, Enquête sur l’évolution littéraire, 155. 
\textsuperscript{1140} Huret, Enquête sur l’évolution littéraire, 160. 
\textsuperscript{1141} Raimond, La Crise du roman, 11. 
\textsuperscript{1142} See Barrès, Maurice Barrès contre Zola (Paris: La Patrice française, 1908). 
\textsuperscript{1143} André Breton, Œuvres complètes, ed. Marguerite Bonnet et al., 4 vols, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1988-2008), 1: 322.
Breton came to loathe Barrès, whilst continuing to admire his early anarchist-influenced writing, and presided over the mock Dadaist tribunal in 1921 that condemned the nationalist author and politician for “crime contre la sûreté de l’esprit.”\textsuperscript{1144} The first \textit{Manifeste} also accuses Barrès and Proust of being infected by “[l]’intraitable manie qui consiste à ramener l’inconnu au connu, au classable” in works where “[l]e désir d’analyse l’emporte sur les sentiments.”\textsuperscript{1145} Despite that antagonism, Barrès and Breton’s shared opposition to realist-cum-Naturalist literature displayed a similar set of aesthetic preoccupations. Their instinctive reaction to such works was one of boredom. “Oui, nous sommes las,” wrote Barrès in 1885, “comme le public entier, de l’anecdote détaillée en quatre cents pages, las du roman machiné aux identiques péripéties, las de documenter des niaiseries.”\textsuperscript{1146} And in a 1908 article opposing Zola’s interment in the Panthéon, he said that his archenemy’s novels simply made him yawn when they did not disgust him.\textsuperscript{1147} Breton similarly felt that descriptive novelists, such as Dostoyevsky, who restricted themselves to “le style d’information pure et simple” lacked ambition and that “[l]e caractère circonstanciel, inutilement particulier, de chacune de leurs notations, me donne à penser qu’ils s’amusent à mes dépens.”\textsuperscript{1148}

Barrès and Breton also shared a deep contempt for the journalistic culture of their times. In his interview with Huret, as we saw in Chapter One, the former, himself a prolific journalist, had accused Naturalist authors of being in thrall to “le parti-pris de se tenir dans le fait-divers,” much as Ferdinand Brunetière had intoned a decade earlier against “le reportage dans le roman.” That hostility then acquired hyperbolic form in Barrès’s novel \textit{Les Déracinés} (1897), which portrays the Parisian press as a sewer of corruption and vice, secretly subsidized by the Ministry of the

\textsuperscript{1144} On Breton’s initial admiration for Barrès and the latter’s “trial,” see Mark Polizzotti, \textit{Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton}, rev. ed. (Boston: Black Widow Press, 2009), 140-143.
\textsuperscript{1145} Breton, \textit{Oc}, 1: 315.
\textsuperscript{1146} Barrès, “Chronique parisienne,” \textit{La Vie moderne}, Aug. 8, 1885; quoted in Raimond, \textit{La Crise du roman}, 71.
\textsuperscript{1147} Barrès, “Émile Zola comme littérateur,” \textit{L’Écho de Paris}, March 10, 1908, 1.
\textsuperscript{1148} Breton, “Manifeste du surréalisme,” \textit{Oc}, 1: 314.
Interior, whilst also using a *fait divers* as a narrative device, not unlike the Naturalist authors Barrès decried. Journalism here leads two of the titular rootless sons of Lorraine to commit murder as they steal money and jewellery from an Armenian socialite to keep their failing newspaper afloat, an episode based on a real case – the Lebiez Affair of 1878. Journalistic skulduggery remains a central theme of the later parts of Barrès’s *Roman de l’énergie nationale* trilogy, *L’Appel au soldat* (1900) and *Leurs Figures* (1902), which follow the surviving central characters of *Les Déracinés* through the Boulangist Crisis of 1889 and the Panama Affair of 1892. The third book offers a counterpoint in the shape of two nationalist newspapers – *La Cocarde*, edited by Barrès himself in 1894-1895, and Édouard Drumont’s *La Libre Parole*, the latter having broken the story of the Panama Canal Company’s wholesale corruption of the French political class. Their journalism acquires a heroic guise in *Leurs Figures*, which is dedicated to Drumont, firmly established as France’s leading anti-Semitic journalist by the time of the novel’s publication. And yet the novel owes more to Barrès’s own journalism of the early 1890s for *Le Figaro* (which had, like *La Cocarde*, been on the Panama payroll) and even takes its title from an article about the Panama Affair he had published in that newspaper. *Les Déracinés* similarly reprises themes originally expressed in Barrès’s journalism for *La Cocarde*. Barrès also made many changes to

---

1149 Lebiez was a medical student who participated in the murder of a Parisian widow in April 1878 and sought to give a scientific justification for his crime at his trial (see the notes in Maurice Barrès, *Les Déracinés*, ed. Jean-Michel Wittmann and Emmanuel Godo [Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004], 400).


his text after it was first published serially in *La Revue de Paris*, even altering the title of one chapter – “L’Arbre de M. Taine” – to that of an article about the novel in *Le Figaro* by his mentor Paul Bourget (to whom the book is dedicated). As François Broche puts it: “[C]es livres ne sont, dans son esprit, que la prolongation, le développement et l’élargissement de son œuvre de journaliste militant.” Like *Illusions perdues*, *Charles Demailly*, and *Bel-Ami*, Barrès’s novels of journalism revile the world from whence they came.

Breton, who did not write for the mass press, also castigated newspapers and their influence on literature. “L’attitude réaliste,” decries the first *Manifeste*, “[…] se fortifie sans cesse dans les journaux.” And the second *Manifeste* of 1929-1930 excommunicated the poet and novelist Robert Desnos for having given himself over to “une des activités les plus périlleuses qui soient, l’activité journalistique […].” Desnos’s contributions to popular newspapers such as *Paris-Soir* had, Breton alleged, led him to betray the Surrealist cause and offer praise for the treacherous Clemenceau. But there was nothing particularly revolutionary – either politically or aesthetically – about Breton’s denunciations of journalism, which echo Barrès and earlier realist novelists. Such vitriol may very well have been justified given the depredations of the inter-war mass press. But, coming from an author who viewed Surrealism as a “nouveau mode d’expression pure,” it seems like yesterday’s news. Hostility to journalism, in other words, united the

---


1155 Breton, *Oc*, 1: 313.

1156 Breton, *Oc*, 1: 812.

1157 See Breton, *Oc*, 1: 812-813.

revolutionaries of the 1920s and 30s with their despised nineteenth and early twentieth-century predecessors.

II. Crisis? What crisis?

Amid all the repetitive talk of intractable crisis and stagnation during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, French literature was in fact evolving. In poetry, Symbolism came and went, whereupon Apollinaire and his circle supplied a fresh jolt of puckish energy. In theatre, Maeterlinck and Claudel pioneered an abstruse, meditative approach while the anarchic spirit of Jarry’s *Ubu roi* (1896) prepared the way for the subsequent experiments of Ionesco, Artaud, and Beckett among others. And though Naturalism, contrary to predictions in Huret’s *Enquête*, never truly died, the form of the novel became increasingly varied and hard to define. Moreover, as some readers became reluctant to willingly suspend disbelief when faced with traditional forms of fictional verisimilitude where, in the words of the critic Pierre Lièvre, writing in 1925, “l’auteur est la première dupe, parfois la seule,” novels emerged that self-consciously draw attention to their own artifice and origins, frequently by introducing central characters who are themselves writers.\(^{1159}\) In Raimond’s summation:

La crise du roman, certes, c’était d’abord cette effervescence de débats et de polémiques; mais c’était aussi le trouble profond dont tous ces propos n’étaient que les remous de surface. Telle était l’ambiguïté de cette crise: paroles en l’air et métamorphoses en profondeur. […] C’est un fait que, depuis la fin du XIX\(^e\) siècle, et peut-être même dès l’entreprise de *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, commencent à apparaître des œuvres romanesques qui, plus ou moins timidement, se sont proposé un but tout autre que celui de rapporter les différents moments d’une histoire captivante. Ce n’est pas ici le lieu d’applaudir ou de déplorer; mais de suivre pas à pas cette mutation qui conduit de Zola à Alain-Fournier, de Bourget à Gide, de Balzac à Proust; du récit objectif au monologue intérieur; du roman écrit par un auteur omniscient au récit disloqué où l’événement est successivement vécu dans la conscience de chaque personnage; du roman fondé sur l’agencement d’une intrigue au roman qui s’applique à moduler des thèmes; du roman rempli de

Most of these developments were far from unprecedented. A form of interior monologue appears in seventeenth and eighteenth-century novels such as *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678) and *La Vie de Marianne* (1731-1742). Fragmented narrative structure is also a defining feature of eighteenth-century fiction. And Bourget, Flaubert, and Zola are hardly overflowing with “personnages idéalisés.” Nor did Alain-Fournier, Gide, and Proust abandon the realist heritage of the nineteenth century. Their novels continue to tell broadly coherent stories set in familiar, richly detailed worlds populated by plausible, psychologically complex characters. Their use of first-person narrative perspectives certainly adds a heightened sense of introspection and ambiguity to that underlying realist framework. But that shift away from the omniscient third-person perspective that dominates nineteenth-century French novels seems like a case of going back to the future, reflecting the authors’ immersion in works such as *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *David Copperfield* (1850) in Alain-Fournier’s case; Henry Fielding, Samuel Richardson, and Daniel Defoe again in Gide’s; and Montaigne and Saint-Simon in Proust’s.  


---

1161 On Alain-Fournier’s admiration for *David Copperfield* and *Robinson Crusoe*, see Marie-Hélène Boblet’s introduction to Alain-Fournier, *Le Grand Meaulnes*, ed. Boblet (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2009), 17. Among its very few direct literary allusions, *Le Grand Meaulnes* itself compares the eponymous Meaulnes to Robinson (72). In the *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs*, amid reflections about writing a “pur roman” that anticipate Édouard’s aesthetic vision in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* itself, Gide remarks that “les Anglais [...] sont parvenus d’emblée à une beaucoup plus grande pureté dans le roman de De Foë, Fielding, et même de Richardson.” (Gide, *Romans et récits*, 2: 543-544). Proust’s *Recherche* is full of explicit references to Saint-Simon, and while Montaigne is never mentioned in the *Recherche*, his influence on Proust has been frequently noted. See, for example, Michèle M. Magill’s “Les Grands Absents d’À la recherche du temps perdu” (*Romance Notes* 29, no. 1 [1988]: 15-20), which notes Proust and Montaigne’s shared attempts to describe “le Moi aussi complètement que possible” (19) by adopting a first-person narrative voice.
composition – has its roots in Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Diderot as well as ancient works such as *One Thousand and One Nights*. When first outlining his penchant for works of art where “on retrouve […] transposé, à l’échelle des personnages, le sujet même de cette œuvre,” such as Velázquez’s *Las Meninas* and *Hamlet*, Gide pointed to medieval coats of arms, which occasionally contain miniature images of themselves, as the best example of what he dubbed *mise en abyme*.1162

Here again, as Apollinaire would put it, there is seemingly nothing new under the sun. Alain-Fournier, Gide, and Proust among others created original literary compounds, but they did so using eternal aesthetic elements. Even their commitment to the novel itself at a time when other artists were drawn to new media such as photography, the phonograph, and cinema suggests they were, as Sartre disparagingly quipped of Baudelaire, moving forward whilst staring at the rear-view mirror.1163 That blend of passéïsm and anxious inventiveness was the essence of their modernism.

III. Thundering against the press – Flaubert, Huysmans, Lorrain, Bloy

As suggested by Barrès and Breton’s shared disdain for the press, there is another more specific continuity within French modernist novels between the 1880s and the 1920s, which frequently tell the same old story of journalistic corruption and philistinism. Few novelists accepted “Zone”’s assessment that “pour la prose il y a les journaux.” Rather, they tended to share

---

1162 Gide, *Journal*, 1: 171 (Sept. 1893). Gide’s account of the *mise en abyme* is notoriously vexed. Firstly, it is not clear that he correctly uses the term “en abyme” in the context of heraldry (see Lucien Dällenbach, *Le Récit spéculaire: essai sur la mise en abyme* [Paris: Seuil, 1977], 18). Secondly, he does not define the *mise en abyme* so much as offer a vague outline of its constitutive features – principally, the presence of a kind of internal mirror image within a work of art, whose subject is also said to “retroact” upon itself – whilst offering various examples from art and literature without exploring in detail how they instantiate the concept. Subsequent theoretical accounts of the *mise en abyme*, of which Dällenbach’s is the best known, vary widely in their interpretations of the concept’s basic meaning. In light of such difficulties and since purported individual applications of *mise en abyme* can be more precisely described through other vocabulary, I have mostly avoided the term in this dissertation. For our purposes, the primary significance of Gide’s coinage in his *Journal* is its passéïsm as he founds the concept – typically seen as integral to modernist and post-modern art and literature – in medieval design.

the perspective of the *Le Poète assassiné* that the rise of the mass press represented a ruinous affliction.

That tendency is already apparent in *L’Éducation sentimentale* (1869), where Jacques Arnoux’s newspaper *L’Art industriel* at first epitomizes its proprietor’s crude acquisitiveness and then, renamed *Le Flambard*, becomes an instrument of the unscrupulous journalist Hussonnet’s rise through Parisian society.\(^{1164}\) The novel’s detached narrative voice and meticulously detailed portrait of provincial and urban life during the 1840s and early 1850s inspired Zola and his Naturalist followers. But its episodic structure and general aura of inertia also seem to presage the elliptical style and paralytic mood of works by Huysmans, Proust, and Aragon. Those modernist features are still more pronounced in Flaubert’s unfinished, near-plotless novel *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881), where the press plays a less prominent narrative role. Yet here again, newspapers occasionally appear as an inevitable prop to bourgeois stupidity and sterile political debate.\(^{1165}\) Newspaper articles also contribute to the heroes’ ill-fated forays into agriculture and geology before they too put pen to paper and author an unpublished article for the local newspaper proposing various fanciful administrative reforms.\(^{1166}\) And, as we have seen, *Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, probably intended as a section of the novel, includes the entry: “JOURNAUX Ne pouvoir s’en passer – mais tonner contre,” which implies that those who decry newspapers most loudly end up mimicking strident journalistic rhetoric.\(^{1167}\) That *bon mot* both reprises an attitude expressed by the hero’s father in the first abandoned version of *L’Éducation sentimentale* and


\(^{1167}\) On the *Dictionnaire*’s relation to *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, see Herschberg’s introduction to Flaubert, *Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, 10-11.
reflects something of Flaubert’s own position.\textsuperscript{1168} For he too had a “dégout profond du journal” and, unlike the overwhelmingly majority of his contemporaries, avoided writing journalism.\textsuperscript{1169} But, as we saw in Chapter Three, \textit{Madame Bovary} was possibly inspired by one or more real \textit{faits divers}. And its serialization in \textit{La Revue de Paris} led to an unsuccessful prosecution for obscenity that turned the novel into a \textit{succès de scandale}.\textsuperscript{1170} Flaubert also relied heavily on newspapers as a documentary source when writing both \textit{L’Éducation sentimentale} and \textit{Bouvard et Pécuchet} (rather like the heroes of the latter work when undertaking their own hare-brained research).\textsuperscript{1171} Moreover, while Flaubert’s novels may not \texttt{thunder} against newspapers in the style of a pompous provincial bourgeois (or indeed a newspaper editorialist), they do repeatedly prick at the cretinism and venality of the mass press. Those tensions between his fictional practice and the \textit{Dictionnaire}’s satirical received idea suggest that literary critiques of journalism risk turning into the object of their disgust.

As we saw in Chapter One, Huysmans also disdained the press yet displayed phenomenal assiduity in keeping track of what newspapers said about him, pasting thousands of press clippings into a set of scrapbooks. That ambivalent obsession occasionally surfaces in his novels. Des Esseintes, the hero of \textit{À Rebours} (1884), affects Olympian disdain for the press, recoiling from “des balivernes patriotiques et sociales débitées, chaque matin, dans les journaux” and a man in the street “qui paraissait agiter un monde de pensées, tout en dévorant, les sourcils contractés, les tartines et les faits divers d’un journal.”\textsuperscript{1172} When he cuts himself off in a provincial mansion, des

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{1168} See the notes to Flaubert, \textit{Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues}, 198.
\textsuperscript{1172} Huysmans, \textit{À Rebours}, 77 and 99.
\end{flushleft}
Esseintes duly ensures that the postman “n’avait à lui remettre aucun journal, aucune revue, aucune lettre.” And the mostly actionless novel itself seems defiantly removed from the narrative conventions of both realist fiction and reportage. Yet des Esseintes’s magnificent library turns out to contain some choice examples of old journalism, namely collections of articles by the Legitimist politician Alfred de Falloux (1811-1886) for Le Correspondant, a moderate Catholic magazine, and by Louis Veuillot (1813-1883), the Ultramontane editor of L’Univers, a hard-line Catholic daily. While Falloux’s refined aristocratic approach seems more in keeping with des Esseintes’s world view, it is ultimately the raffish, rabble-rousing Veuillot who truly excites him: “Tenu en défiance par l’Église qui n’admettait ni ce style de contrebande ni ces poses de barrière, ce religieux arsouille s’était quand même imposé par son grand talent, ameutant après lui toute la presse qu’il étrillait jusqu’au sang dans ses Odeurs de Paris […]” Against the grain of his own elitism, des Esseintes cannot resist the lure of a scrappy journalistic street-fight, just as Huysmans himself obsessively collected articles from newspapers he abhorred and eagerly participated in the literary-journalistic fisticuffs of Huret’s Enquête.

Huysmans’s interview with Huret was published in L’Écho de Paris on April 7, 1891 alongside the 47th instalment of his novel Là-Bas, which the author casually describes as “mon feuilleton de l’Echo.” And yet the novel’s hero Durtal, an author and Catholic convert like Huysmans himself, reprises À Rebours’s vision of splendid aesthetic isolation: “Ah! s’écrouer dans le passé, revivre au loin, ne plus même lire un journal, ne pas savoir si des théâtres existent, quel rêve!” Many other anti-journalistic comments punctuate the novel, which, as we saw in Chapter

---

1173 Huysmans, À Rebours, 117.
1174 See Fumaroli’s notes to Huysmans, À Rebours, 389-390.
1175 Huysmans, À Rebours, 240.
One, opens with a furious denunciation of Huysmans’s erstwhile Naturalist affiliates, dismissing Zola’s recent novels as “de simples anecdotes, des faits divers découps dans un journal.”

That introductory broadside makes Là-Bas into what Raimond calls a “roman du roman,” anticipating the reflexivity and fictional self-consciousness of Les Faux-Monnayeurs and the Recherche, which are similarly preoccupied with the question of what it means to write a novel. Moreover, a parallel discussion between Durtal and his friend des Hermies about how the former should write the life of Gilles de Rais evolves into a putative book-within-the-book recounting the hero’s researches into Joan of Arc’s notorious general, who became an occultist and child-murderer. Underlying that display of fictional erudition is Durtal’s initial vow to preserve “la vérité du document, la précision du détail, la langue étoffée et nerveuse du réalisme” whilst abandoning its scientistic pretentions and thereby creating what he dubs “un naturalisme spiritualiste.” As Yves Hersant puts it, Là-Bas thereby opposes “le naturalisme en renchérisissant sur ses méthodes.”

For Huysmans did undertake extensive research both into Gilles de Rais and the contemporary mania for occultism, leading L’Écho de Paris to introduce the work as a scandalous roman à clef featuring “une femme moderne, bien connue dans le monde clérical.” The newspaper even insisted, purportedly on Huysmans’s authority, that the entire story was actually true: “Si étranges que puissent sembler ces récits, M. Huysmans en garantit l’absolue vérité.” And, in a less sensationalist tone, the author himself later wrote that the novel offered

1178 Huysmans, Là-Bas, 29.
1179 See Raimond, La Crise du roman, 243-254.
1180 Huysmans, Là-Bas, 30-31.
1181 Hersant, preface to Huysmans, Là-Bas, 21.
1182 “Là-Bas: étude sur le satanisme, par J.-K. Huysmans,” L’Écho de Paris, Feb. 13, 1891, 1. The “femme moderne” is Hyacinthe Chantelouve, who initiates Durtal into the world of the occult. Among several models for the character were Huysmans’s mistress Henriette Maillat, whose letters to the author are reproduced almost word-for-word in the novel, as well as the wife of the Catholic writer Charles Buet (see Hersant’s “Répertoire” in Huysmans, Là-Bas, 377-378).
“un itinéraire complet du Satanisme” containing “de portraits véridiques.” Those paratextual disclosures encourage us to read Là-Bas, for all its anti-journalistic invective and modernist innovation, as a thinly veiled work of reportage.

Huysmans’s close friend Jean Lorrain similarly played up the contemporary echoes of his novel Monsieur de Phocas about a des Esseintes-like aesthete, which was first published serially under the title Astarté during 1899 and 1900 in Le Journal, for which Lorrain concurrently wrote a weekly column “Pall-Mall Semaine” under the pseudonym Raitif de la Bretonne. The novel also contains allusions to the ongoing Dreyfus Affair, which betray Lorrain’s own anti-Semitism. Less contentiously, an entry dated August 20, 1898 in the eponymous Phocas’s fictive diary mentions a small statue, which the anti-hero compares to “la Poupée des Valois, exposée, il y a trois mois, rue de Sèze, à la galerie Georges Petit.” Just such a medieval figurine had indeed been displayed in that gallery according to the “Pall-Mall Semaine” of May 15, 1898, which notes: “Tout Paris a tenu à examiner de près la fameuse poupée du temps des Valois.”

A later column, published in January 1900, about the painter Antonio de La Gándara even refers readers to a passage in Phocas for a description of his studio, implying that La Gándara is a model for the degenerate artist Claudius Ethal, whom Phocas murders in the novel’s penultimate chapter, which appeared in Le Journal on July 28, 1900. Lorrain also recycled numerous other pieces of his earlier journalism, including “Haricot vert,” a short story-cum-chronique featuring a thinly

---

1183 Huysmans, “Une préface de Huysmans,” in Huysmans, Là-Bas, 366.
1185 For instance, Phocas lambasts “les ceusses de mon cercle, pour parler leur argot ignoble, depuis le banquier juif qui les a eues toutes et racole cyniquement pour l’Affaire, jusqu’au gras journaliste qui a son couvert, lui aussi, chez toutes [...].” (Lorrain, Monsieur de Phocas, 109).
1186 Lorrain, Monsieur de Phocas, 124.
veiled Robert de Montesquiou, published in *L’Écho de Paris* in 1892, which, with some alterations, became *Phocas*’s first chapter, thereby identifying the legendary dandy with Phocas. Despite those journalistic origins and intertextual allusions, Phocas rails against “le ressassage des opinions toutes faites et des jugements appris, le vomissement des articles lus, le matin, dans les feuilles et qu’on reconnaît au passage, leur désespérant désert d’idées […].”

Like *Là-Bas, Monsieur de Phocas*, which shares the elliptical, mostly actionless structure of Huysmans’s novels, duly ends up epitomizing a journalistic culture that the text itself deplores.

Lorrain deepens his fictional critique of journalism in *La Maison Philibert* (1904), narrated by a journalist called Jacques Ménard who becomes immersed in the world of Parisian and provincial prostitution. The novel, which was published in book form by La Librairie Universelle, a publishing house linked to *Le Journal*, though never published in the newspaper, thus reprises the old realist trope depicting the press as, in Balzac’s phrase from *Illusions perdues*, “ces lupanar de la pensée.” In that vein, Ménard proclaims himself eager to commit “des bassesses devant un document humain.” He duly sets out to betray the confidence of Philibert, an old friend-turned-brothel-keeper, for the sake of a sensational story. And as Robert Ziegler notes, *Philibert*’s episodic style and the narrator’s “failure to give a provocative climax to the story that he had been following” suggest the inadequacy of journalism itself. Ziegler further argues that the narrator’s gradual effacement (he significantly misses the pivotal event of Philibert’s murder whilst

---

1191 Lorrain undertook the assignment to help pay a fine he had incurred for libelling the artist Jeanne Jacquemin in an article for *Le Journal*. It is unclear why *Philibert* was never serialized in the newspaper (see Éric Walbecq, “Le Procès de Jeanne Jacquemin contre Jean Lorrain en mai 1903,” in Jean Lorrain, *produit d’extrême civilisation,* ed. Jean de Palacio and Éric Walbecq [Publications des universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2009], 189-206).
holidaying in Venice) “allows for [sic] the novelist himself to emerge and reorient a wandering intrigue.” Literature thereby seems to assert its superiority and exact revenge upon the mass press, mirroring Lorrain’s own intensifying disenchantment with journalism in the wake of his 1903 conviction for libel, following which he felt ostracized by many newspaper editors. And yet *Philibert* clearly owes much to Lorrain’s own journalistic experience. Newspaper articles read by the characters here echo and foreshadow the events of the plot, which gives the impression that the novel consists of a series of fictionalized *fait divers*. And, like *Là-Bas*, Ménard’s journey to the underworld of contemporary prostitution has the flavour of thinly veiled *reportage*. Moreover, if *Philibert*’s fragmented structure indeed conveys the journalistic narrator’s failure to get a grip on his story, then that episodic style also evokes a lack of traditional novelistic artifice. And, as in *Phocas*, the lack of a firm central narrative line points to Lorrain’s background writing short stories and serial novels for newspapers.

By contrast, Lorrain’s posthumously published *Maison pour dames* (1908) reprises the theme of journalism as harlotry – the women’s magazines *Femina* and *La Vie heureuse*, thinly veiled in the text, here literally become fronts for prostitution – within a conventionally plotted story that concludes with the writer-heroine’s delivery from vice and return to dignified provincial obscurity. Her flight from journalism thus yields a traditional morality tale, whereas Lorrain’s own immersion in the press had previously generated the structurally fragmented, morally ambiguous *Phocas* and *Philibert*. Lorrain wrote those eerie modernist novels *because of*, and not in spite of his journalistic career. Yet he himself despaired of the press’s influence. As he wrote to a friend in 1904: “[J]e sens et je déplore non moins amèrement ce que le journalisme m’a fait

---

Despite their hatred of journalism, both Huysmans and Lorrain settled for a lucrative *modus vivendi* with the mass press. Lorrain was one of the highest-paid journalists in France at the peak of his career. As we saw in Chapter One, Huysmans was similarly well remunerated, receiving 6,000 francs for publishing *Là-Bas* in *L’Écho de Paris*, having graduated from the impecunious pages of *La Revue indépendante*.

By contrast, Huysmans and Lorrain’s *frère-ennemi* Léon Bloy could never bring himself to swallow his bile and compromise with what he called “la grande vermine.” The ultra-Catholic polemicist did publish articles and short stories in newspapers including *L’Univers, Le Figaro*, and *Gil Blas*. But Bloy’s peerless flair for alienating editors ensured those contributions tended to be short-lived, and he never found a secure journalistic berth like Lorrain’s “Pall Mall Semaine.” As he wrote to Edmond de Goncourt in 1885, a year after his exit from *Le Figaro*: “Je suis un désespéré, vomi par toute la presse.” That letter unsuccessfully solicited money to support his own ephemeral little magazine *Le Pal*, whose introductory article proclaimed without exaggeration: “J’ai longtemps cherché le moyen de me rendre insupportable à tous mes contemporains.”

Bloy poured that bitter journalistic experience into his first novel *Le Désespéré* (1887), a fictionalized portrait of the author’s brief, tempestuous spell at *Le Figaro* (thinly veiled as “le

---

1197 See Anthonay, *Jean Lorrain*, 568.
Basile,” then “le Pilate” in later editions) and the creation of Le Pal (redubbed “le Carcan”). The novel borrows from numerous articles Bloy had published or attempted to publish in newspapers and magazines. Its final section even includes two fictional articles recycled from Le Pal, the second of which, taken without alteration from the proofs of the magazine’s unpublished fifth issue, reprises the attack on Le Figaro, here under its real name, and its influential critic Albert Wolff. Whereas Huysmans and Lorrain only glance at their disdain for journalism in À Rebours, Là-Bas, and Monsieur de Phocas, Le Désespéré reads as an extended letter of hatred to the Parisian Press. And the journalistic failures of Bloy’s fictional surrogate Marchenoir serve to underline his own untimely rectitude and idealism. “Je ne suis pas des vôtres,” he tells his colleagues at Le Pilate, “et je l’ai senti dès mon entrée. Je suis une façon d’insensé, rêvant la Beauté et d’impossibles justices. Vous rêvez de jouir, vous autres, et voilà pourquoi il n’y a pas moyen de s’entendre.” As in the Gospels, a radical breach with social conformism, here epitomized by the press, alone offers a glimpse of salvation.

Journalism is far from Marchenoir’s only enemy. Le Désespéré execrates the whole world of contemporary letters, reserving particular scorn for the recently deceased Victor Hugo whilst also taking swipes at the usual Naturalist suspects Maupassant and Zola. Among living authors, only Verlaine and Bloy’s mentor “l’immense artiste” Barbey d’Aurevilly receive unqualified praise. Unlike Illusions perdues, there is no “groupe fervent et cénaculaire de jeunes écrivains”

---

1204 Bloy, Le Désespéré, 347.
1205 On Bloy’s parallel contempt for both journalism and literature, see Marie-Françoise Melmoux-Montaubin, L’Écrivain-journaliste au XIXe siècle: un mutant des lettres (Saint-Étienne: Cahiers intempestifs, 2003), 101-117.
amongst whom Marchenoir might find refuge. For those erstwhile idealists are, we learn within the first few pages, “dispersés maintenant dans les entrecolonnements bréneux de la presse à quinze centimes.” And, in direct contrast to Balzac’s Lucien, what dooms Marchenoir is precisely his refusal to sacrifice his integrity and play the game. As his treacherous former friend Alexis Dulaurier (modelled on Paul Bourget) tells him in a letter:

La littérature vous est interdite. Vous avez du talent sans doute, un incontestable talent, mais c’est pour vous une non-valeur, un champ stérile. Vous ne pouvez vous plier à aucune consigne de journal, et vous êtes sans ressources pour subsister en faisant des livres. Pour vivre de sa plume, il faut une certaine largeur d’humanité, une acceptation des formes à la mode et préjugés reçus, dont vous êtes malheureusement incapable.

Le Désespéré itself embodies its hero’s rejection of conventional literary forms. Blending ex cathedra invective with pastiche of romanticism, fictive letters, and recycled journalism, the novel resembles a mutant religious allegory, where the chaos of the form seems to mirror the moral and spiritual disorder of world it depicts. And, anticipating the self-consciousness of Là-Bas, Le Désespéré situates itself within a short line of “une littérature des désespérés,” of which Baudelaire and, more still, Lautréamont are the only true exemplars.

Of Les Chants de Maldoror, it is said: “Quant à la forme littéraire, il n’y en a pas. C’est de la lave. C’est insensé, noir et dévorant.” That volcanic metaphor evokes Lautréamont’s disfigured borrowings from both classical literature and contemporary romans-feuilletons. The lava of his prose poetry devours other works and reconstitutes them in parodic form. Le Désespéré

---

1207 Bloy, Le Désespéré, 67.  
1208 Bloy, Le Désespéré, 67.  
1209 Bloy, Le Désespéré, 85. Dulaurier’s name echoes that of Frédéric Moreau’s intermittently faithless friend Charles Deslauriers in L’éducation sentimentale.  
1210 Bloy, Le Désespéré, 88. Bloy originally included the poet Louise-Victorine Ackermann, the Catholic essayist Ernest Hello, Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, Verlaine, Huysmans and Dostoyevsky in his pantheon of “désespérés” but removed their names from later editions (see the notes in Bloy, Le Désespéré, 413).  
1211 Bloy, Le Désespéré, 90.  
1212 On Lautréamont’s borrowings from romans-feuilletons, particularly the works of Eugène Sue and Ponson du Terrail, see Michel Nathan and Roger Bellet, Lautréamont: feuilletoniste autophage (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1992).
similarly seems to swallow up its literary precursors and spit them back up in grotesque style. Epitomizing that aesthetic of deformation are the actions of the hero’s mistress Véronique, who sells her hair and teeth, just like Fantine in Les Misérables. Whereas Fantine’s sacrifice is carried out for the sake of her daughter Cosette, Véronique disfigures herself in the (unfulfilled) hope of physically repelling Marchenoir and thereby delivering them both from sinful temptation. In contrast to Hugo’s novel, nothing redeems Véronique’s suffering as, driven mad by unsatisfied desire, she ends up in an asylum while Marchenoir is fatally injured in a collision with a cart just after committing her and then dies before received the last rites. Véronique’s literal disfigurement thus connotes the metaphorical disfigurement of Hugo’s romantic vision, which yields to near total spiritual pessimism.

Underlying Bloy’s dismal parable is a theological view of humanity itself as being essentially monstrous. As Marchenoir tells a sympathetic priest: “Chaque homme est, en naissant, assorti d’un monstre. Les uns lui font la guerre et les autres lui font l’amour. Il paraît que je suis très fort, comme vous le dites, puisque j’ai été honoré de la compagnie habituelle du roi des monstres: le Désespoir.”¹²¹³ The hero appears to choose war over love. In the attack on Albert Wolff recycled from Le Pal, he duly denounces the critic as “le monstre pur, le monstre essentiel.”¹²¹⁴ But both epithets have an equivocal flavour here. Purity is what Marchenoir fruitlessly seeks in a vitiated world, and an essential monster is one we cannot live without. Le Désespéré also extols Les Chants de Maldoror as “un monstre de livre” resembling “quelque effroyable polymorphe sous-marin” that heralds eternal damnation – a Satanic prophecy welcomed by the novel as a prelude to the Final Judgement.¹²¹⁵ And Bloy himself plumbs the depths of

---

¹²¹³ Bloy, Le Désespéré, 199.
¹²¹⁴ Bloy, Le Désespéré, 378.
¹²¹⁵ Bloy, Le Désespéré, 89.
monstrousness in *Le Désespéré*, itself a polymorphous work, as if to carry on that perverse theological mission.

At the centre of the abyss lies the press, setting up an unavoidable reckoning. As Bloy puts in the first issue of *Le Pal*:

Le Journalisme moderne [...] a tellement pris toute la place, malgré l’étonnante petitesse de ses unités, que le plus grand homme du monde, s’il plaisait à la Providence de nous gratifier de cette denrée, ne trouverait plus même à s’accroupir dans le rentrant d’un angle obscur de ce lupanar universel des intelligences.\(^{1216}\)

Faced with such a behemoth, Marchenoir, a mere “homme supérieur,” can scarcely avoid being sucked into the journalistic whorehouse.\(^{1217}\) The composition of *Le Désespéré* mirrors its hero’s submersion in the press as Bloy both recycles his own journalism from *Le Pal* and indulges in the gossipy practices of newspapers such as *Le Figaro* as well as Naturalist novels about journalism such as *Charles Demailly* and *Bel-Ami* (which Bloy attacked in *Le Pal* even before its publication).\(^{1218}\) That resort to journalistic score-settling reaches its zenith in *Le Désespéré*’s fourth section, which depicts numerous thinly veiled literary and journalistic personalities (among them Maupassant) at a banquet organized in Marchenoir’s honour by the editor of *Le Pilate*.\(^{1219}\) As Mauriche Bardèche puts it: “[I]l dénonce, il clame, il révèle, peintre perfide, mêlant vie privée et imposture littéraire, non pas juvénal comme il croit l’être, mais échotier [i.e. a gossip columnist].”\(^{1220}\) Bloy, in other words, attacks his literary and journalistic contemporaries by adopting techniques from those novelists and journalists themselves. A novel that parodies and disfigures its literary precursors duly ends up being itself disfigured by journalism.

\(^{1216}\) Bloy, *Le Pal*, 34.

\(^{1217}\) Bloy, *Le Désespéré*, 199.

\(^{1218}\) Bloy, “*Bel-Ami!*” in *Le Pal*, 86-87.

\(^{1219}\) Bloy provided a key to one his friends, identifying the model for each of the novel’s characters (see the notes in Bloy, *Le Désespéré*, 508-526).

Much of the material for those squibs came from conversations with Huysmans, who navigated the Parisian press more judiciously than his fellow Catholic revivalist. Bloy then returned the favour, sharing his insights into religious arcana when Huysmans was writing *Là-Bas*. But the resulting novel dismayed Bloy, who publicly accused Huysmans of having negligently recorded these lessons in a “monstrueux cahier de notules sans discernement et sans cohésion.”

And while *Le Désespéré* itself drags the reader through the mire of Parisian bohemia, Bloy reproached his friend for offering no transcendent vision and wallowing in a spiritual abyss. The monstrousness that Bloy portrays as an unbreakable existential shackle in *Le Désespéré* becomes an excuse for a bit of literary slumming when confronted by Huysmans. Moreover, as P.A. Jolivet has argued, Bloy’s motives for attacking his friend were themselves doubtless far from exalted. For Huysmans had failed to mention Bloy in his interview with Huret, whereas Bloy had praised Huysmans in a concurrent lecture series in Copenhagen. Once again, it was journalism that drove Bloy to apoplexy. And Bloy repaid Huysmans’s affront in the same coin by publishing his criticisms in a scathing article in *La Plume*.

Bloy was a great hater. And the objects of his hatred exerted a powerful, ambiguous attraction over him. He indulged in grotesque anti-Semitic caricature yet simultaneously viewed the Jews as indispensable agents of man’s salvation whose conversion would herald the Second Coming. He castigated *Là-Bas* for delving further into man’s infamy along a course *Le Désespéré* had already charted. And Bloy continually execrated the press, but, unlike Huysmans’s des Esseintes and Durtal, he displayed little inclination to cut himself off from its indignities. After

---

being sacked from *Le Figaro*, he flung himself into journalistic provocation with *Le Pal*. Bloy then plunged still deeper into the fray with *Le Désespéré*, where Marchenoir leaves a monastic retreat to wage polemical war within the Parisian press. As he conceded in *Le Pal*: “*[J]e parle tant des journaux – trop, sans doute, au gré de la vile fortune qui me refuse ses faveurs […]*”¹²²⁶ No-one thundered more forcefully against newspapers, and no-one seemed more dependent on the bilious fuel they provided.

**IV. Anti-modern ironies and continuities**

Like many clichés, the notion that newspapers are at once contemptible and indispensable contains an original grain of wisdom. One might deplore how the mass media report and comment on the news, but since there is no other way of finding out what’s happening in the world (short of becoming a reporter oneself, which even then will only bring direct access to a narrow slice of human events), it is necessary to rely on them for information, however mutilated. And, as per another old saw, one must know one’s enemy in order to fight it.

Barrès, Huysmans, Lorrain, and Bloy all lived up to that injunction in their fictional tussles with the mass press. Their novels debunk the complacency, hypocrisy, and self-regard of the journalistic culture they inhabited. And they often do so with intoxicating verve and éclat. Underlying those anti-journalistic jeremiads was their broader antipathy towards the Third Republic, whose twin crowning achievements of free public education and press freedom enabled the era’s exponential newspaper boom. Against the positivistic doxa of what was retrospectively dubbed the Belle Époque, Barrès, Huysmans, Lorrain, and Bloy portray a civilization in the throes of existential crisis, where the rise of the newspaper connotes steep cultural and spiritual decline. Their works are duly laden with some ugly atavistic baggage – anti-Semitism being the inevitable

---

common denominator. But, much as the monarchist Balzac was, in Engels’s estimation, the greatest chronicler of the decay of aristocratic order, so Barrès and Bloy’s traditionalist ardour allows them to expose contemporary myths of equality, progress, and press freedom in a way that the Third Republic’s literary mascot Victor Hugo never could (though Barrès, unlike Bloy, did admire the author of *Les Misérables*).\(^{1227}\) Meanwhile, Lorrain and Huysmans, less preoccupied by politics, attest to the occult revival that coincided with the ascendancy of official laicity as well as the appeal of a warped, misanthropic version of “l’art pour l’art” in a republic that venerated the revolutionary principles of the Rights of Man.

Despite their varied nostalgias and shared disdain for progress, Barrès, Huysmans, Lorrain, and Bloy were not simple reactionaries. They were rather “anti-moderns” in the sense articulated by Antoine Compagnon – “les modernes qui le furent à contrecœur, modernes déchirés ou encore moderne intempestifs.”\(^{1228}\) Politically, they all ultimately belonged to the Right and sought antidotes to the hollowness of orthodox republican ideology in religion, aristocracy or nationalism. However, Barrès, the only one to become a politician, always remained a republican of an anti-parliamentarian bent and initially flirted with anarchism and socialism while *Le Désespéré* looks fondly on “[l]es dynamiteurs allemands ou russes” as harbingers of a salutary political apocalypse.\(^{1229}\) Culturally, their position was more ambiguous still. Des Esseintes’s library contains both a comprehensive collection of Latin literature (the subject of an entire chapter in *À Rebours*) and two volumes of Mallarmé’s then little-known verse, which offer him “de nouvelles

---

\(^{1227}\) Engels wrote to the English journalist Margaret Harkness in 1888 that Balzac’s “satyre [sic] is never sharper, his irony never bitterer than when he sets in motion the very men and women with whom he sympathizes most deeply – the nobility.” Quoted in Thomas M. Kemple, *Reading Marx Writing: Melodrama, the Market, and the “Grundrisse”* (Stanford University Press, 1995), 247. Georg Lukács expanded on this argument in his 1937 study *The Historical Novel* (trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell [London: Merlin Press, 1962]), which interprets Balzac’s reactionary disillusionment as the source of a more thoroughly realistic portrait of French society than that found in the works of Zola, whom Lukács sees as having been blinded by pseudo-scientific progressive republican ideology.


ivresses.” Monsieur de Phocas finds the same deathly hypnotic stare in Greek statuary and the Symbolist paintings of Lorrain’s contemporary Gustave Moreau. Bloy execrates most of eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature yet celebrates Lautréamont. Les Déracinés has little to say about modernist art or literature. The sensualist individualism of Barrès’s earlier trilogy Le Culte du moi (1888-1891) owes much to Mon cœur mis à nu, but Baudelaire seems absent from Les Déracinés, which instead venerates the conservative historiography of Hippolyte Taine and the thoroughly consecrated Hugo, describing the latter as “un des éléments de la montagne sainte qui nous donnerait le salut” at the end of an epic description of the poet’s 1885 funeral and interment in the Panthéon (whereas Le Désespéré depicts the same event in scornful tones). And yet as Thibaudet and Raimond have argued, Les Déracinés is a formally innovative work structured around a series of thematic antitheses. Indeed, while praising the novel’s traditionalist politics, the conservative critic René Doumic described its composition as rambling and incoherent in the Revue des Deux Mondes. Echoing Barrès’s own earlier criticisms of Naturalism, Doumic also reproved him for giving his novel a dénouement based on a real fait divers, which he compared to a vulgar roman-feuilleton.

In an otherwise laudatory article about Les Déracinés in Le Figaro, Paul Bourget similarly hints at disapproval for the novel’s formal innovations: “[L]e problème politique se trouve appeler des solutions toutes nouvelles, et que les jeunes générations commencent à chercher. La fièvre de cette recherche, encore incertaine, anime, soulève, enflamme tout ce roman des Déracinés.

---

1230 Huysmans, À Rebours, 292.
Incertaine? Dans sa forme, mais non dans son fond.” Bourget’s *Le Disciple* (1889) tells a similar tale of morally wayward youth, itself partly based on the Lebiez Affair. But it does so within a tightly woven plot, where authorial commentary is limited to the preface. By contrast, *Les Déracinés* blends sermon-like digressions and descriptive set pieces with an ending akin to that of a *roman-feuilleton*. The discordance between the novel’s fragmented, elliptical structure and its traditionalist philosophical ethos is precisely what makes it the work of a “moderne déchiré.” Huysmans, Lorrain, and Bloy all similarly portray moral and aesthetic decay in novels whose disjointed form seems to mirror the crumbling of traditional certainties.

Yet they left one pillar of nineteenth-century French literature undisturbed. The mass press looms over their novels, epitomizing all that is wrong with the world, as it does in the works of Balzac, Champfleury, the Goncourts, and Maupassant. Even Zola, despite his advice that writers should embrace journalism, depicts the press in similarly dark tones in *L’Argent* (1891), one of the last instalments in the Rougon-Macquart cycle, where newspapers become a crucial instrument of stock-market manipulation.

Like their realist precursors and Naturalist rivals, Barrès, Huysmans, Lorrain, and Bloy wrote extensively for the mass press. That experience both informed their disdain for journalism and shaped their literary works, which were often published serially in newspapers and magazines. Their novels also frequently recycle their own articles and use the techniques of *reportage*. (Indeed, the later parts of Barrès’s *Roman de l’énergie nationale* have not aged well precisely because of how closely they resemble political journalism.) But the tension between their loathing of journalism and their genetic debt to the press is never addressed in these works. The reflexivity

---

and fictional self-consciousness that animate their discussions of art and literature are absent in their anti-journalistic vituperations. For them, the mass press always seems to be the antipode of art and truth, with exceptions made only for reactionary polemicists who execrate their fellow journalists, such as Veuillot in Là-Bas and Drumont in Leurs Figures. Yet these novelists seem loath to confront the journalistic monster, as Bloy would call it, lurking within their own art. Bloy alone comes close to such a reckoning when he says he talks too much about newspapers in his own magazine Le Pal. But no such admission appears in Le Désespéré. Otherwise, Barrès, Huysmans, Lorrain, and Bloy seem unable, as Nietzsche put it, to look around their own corner. Rather than explore the ambiguities of their own relationship to the press, as Mallarmé does in Divagations, or wrestle with the competing urges of fascination and repulsion stirred by journalism, as Apollinaire does throughout his work, they all continually fulminate against their own journalistic shadow. And they duly seem trapped in the cliché of Flaubert’s Dictionnaire.

V. Thunder from the Left – Mirbeau, Schwob, Mac Orlan, Rolland, Barbusse, Dorgelès

Antipathy towards the mass press was not restricted to conservative and reactionary authors. As we saw in Chapters Two and Three, anarchist-influenced petites revues such as La Revue blanche regularly published satirical items sending up the inaccuracies and hypocrisy of their counterparts in newspapers and grandes revues. And La Revue blanche also published Octave Mirbeau’s serial novel Le Journal d’une femme de chambre, which portrayed the mass press as the enemy of social and political justice at the height of the Dreyfus Affair.

---

1237 “Even that filigree art of grasping and comprehending in general, those fingers for nuances, that psychology of ‘seeing round the corner’, and whatever else is characteristic of me, was learnt only then and is the true gift of that time when everything in me was being refined, observation itself as well as all the organs of observation.” (Friedrich Nietzsche, Ecce Homo [1888], trans. Duncan Large [Oxford University Press, 2007], 8.) The phrase “seeing round the corner” here suggests that Nietzsche believes he has attained an exceptionally detached view of his own state of mind.
Mirbeau’s involvement in *La Revue blanche*, guided by his ardent Dreyfusism, was unusual for a writer who spent most of his financially lucrative career writing for newspapers such as *L’Écho de Paris*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Gaulois*, and *Le Journal*, whose political line lay far from his own anarchist convictions. And yet the articles Mirbeau published in those newspapers formed the basis for novels that assailed the political and economic order of his time as well as its journalistic mainstays.\(^\text{1238}\)

*Le Jardin des supplices* (1899) consists of a “stupéfiant mixage de textes parus dans la presse” during the preceding decade, ranging from individual *chroniques* about current events to serially published works of fiction.\(^\text{1239}\) Those scattered journalistic origins underlie the novel’s highly fragmented, elliptical structure, wherein an opening account of a dinner-party conversation gives way to the story, narrated in the first-person, of a failed French politician’s journey to the Far East, where he encounters elaborate forms of torture in a Chinese penal colony, which serve, in the style of Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes* (1721), as an allegorical denunciation of France’s own system of penal colonies such as Devil’s Island, where Dreyfus, who is mentioned in the first few pages, had been held until June 9, 1899 – four days prior to *Le Jardin*’s publication.\(^\text{1240}\)

The press in *Le Jardin* is depicted both as a reservoir of violence and perversity, whose *faits divers* fuel the public’s ambivalent fascination for murder, and as the plaything of successful politicians. And, as in Tristan Bernard, Félix Fénéon, and Alfred Jarry’s satirical contributions to *La Revue blanche*, Mirbeau takes a swipe at the French press’s support for colonial expansion and

---

\(^\text{1238}\) For an overview of interactions between journalism and literature in Mirbeau’s work, see Melmoux-Montaubin, *L’Écrivain-journaliste au XIX\(^{e}\) siècle*, 243-294. Melmoux-Montaubin deals primarily with the generic ambiguity of Mirbeau’s work and his antipathy towards literature rather than the representations of journalism within his novels that I discuss here.


\(^\text{1240}\) See Michel’s introduction to Mirbeau, *Œuvres romanesques*, 2: 133.
spurious professions of humanitarianism. A British officer encountered en route to the Far East thus predicts that militaristic French newspapers will hypocritically denounce the recent British invention of the explosive “dumdum” bullet:

Je prévois [...] que la France, lorsqu’elle aura connu ce splendide engin, va encore nous injurier dans tous ses journaux… Et ce seront les plus farouches de vos patriotes, ceux-là mêmes qui crient très haut qu’on ne dépense jamais assez de milliards pour la guerre, qui ne parlent que de tuer et de bombarder, ce seront ceux-là qui, une fois de plus, voueront l’Angleterre à l’exécration des peuples civilisés…  

This passage originated in a short story-cum-chronique, “La Fée dum-dum,” published in Le Journal on March 20, 1898. The same newspaper, a reliable colonialist cheerleader, had attacked British use of dumdums in two articles published earlier that month and called for their proscription in international law (use of expanding bullets in war would indeed be banned the following year as part of the Hague Convention, the result of talks that were ongoing at the time of Le Jardin’s publication in book form). While Bernard and Jarry were sniping at journalistic support for colonialism from the margins of the mass press, Mirbeau managed, like Fénéon in his later Nouvelles en trois lignes, to disparage his own newspaper’s editorial line from within the belly of the beast.

Mirbeau returns to the theme of journalistic support for colonialism in Les 21 jours d’un neurasthénique (1901), which again brings together years of journalistic material (comprising more than fifty articles and short stories first published in newspapers) in a loosely plotted

---

1241 Mirbeau, Œuvres romanesques, 2: 223.
1244 For a list of these articles, see Pierre Michel’s preface to Octave Mirbeau, Les 21 Jours d’un neurasthénique (Angers: Boucher, 2003), 24-26.
account of a trip to a mountain spa, where the narrator (himself a journalist) encounters a gallery of scoundrels and grotesques who seem to sum up the lunacy of the era. Among them is an old general who deplores that France’s colonial mission is not being carried out with more thorough brutality – “Je ne connais qu’un moyen de civiliser les gens,” he says, “c’est de les tuer…” While he has no love for journalists, the general welcomes his interviewer “parce que vous allez donner à mon système de colonisation un retentissement considérable.” And, after draining a glass of absinthe, the narrator professes himself delighted to encounter “de pareils héros… en qui s’incarne l’âme de la patrie.” Mirbeau thereby satirizes his journalistic colleagues for providing a megaphone to the colonial lobby. But, as in Le Jardin des supplices, there is never any acknowledgement that the press could also play the opposite role by attacking colonialism. This chapter of Les 21 Jours again offers a case in point since the mock interview with the general originated as another short story-cum-chronique in Le Journal.

Mirbeau briefly considers the paradox of his own position at the start of La 628-E8 (1907), an idiosyncratic, semi-fictional travelogue and ode to the automobile: “Vous savez que j’ai collaboré, durant neuf ans, au Journal… Comment ai-je pu, sans rien abandonner de mes idées, sans hypocrisie et sans intrigues, me maintenir aussi longtemps dans cette feuille publique?… Ce n’est pas ici le lieu de le dire, et d’ailleurs, je l’ignore.” After years of undermining journalistic certainties within one of France’s largest newspapers, Mirbeau seems utterly stumped by how he

---

1245 Mirbeau, Œuvres romanesques, 3: 78.
1246 Mirbeau, Œuvres romanesques, 3: 78.
1247 Mirbeau, Œuvres romanesques, 3: 79.
1250 Mirbeau, Œuvres romanesques, 3: 289.
got away with it, almost as if he believed, like Richard Terdiman, as we saw in Chapter Two, that the mass press was, by its nature, incapable of going against the grain of the “dominant discourse.”

Mirbeau’s anarchism meant he viewed the mass press as what a character in his play *Les Affaires sont les affaires* (1903) calls “l’arme puissante et terrible du capitalisme moderne.”

The protagonist Isidore Lechat, partly modelled on *Le Journal*’s proprietor Eugène Letellier, duly describes his newspaper as a “levier” of political and financial influence, which has no space for frivolous literary distractions: “[D]ans mon journal… pas de littérature… pas d’écrivains et de leurs phrases…” Yet, as we saw in Chapter One, this depiction bears little relation to *Le Journal*, which styled itself “un journal littéraire à un sou” and published many literary works by authors including Barrès, Remy de Gourmont, and even Mallarmé. It did so not out of altruism but because a cheap literary newspaper proved to be an outstandingly successful business model, ultimately selling over a million copies per day. *Le Journal*’s contributors did not have to share the proprietor’s ideological perspective. They merely had to attract readers. And that is why Mirbeau was able to thrive at *Le Journal* even though his writing contradicted its ideological line. Ignoring the implications of the title of his play, he failed to see, due to his own ideological blind-spot, that capitalists are less interested in justifying capitalism than in making money. And since Mirbeau helped Letellier achieve that goal, there was no fundamental incompatibility between the author’s anarchist views and the ethos of the “feuille publique” that published them.

Mirbeau’s friend Marcel Schwob (himself an anarchist sympathizer), also took a dim view of the mass press. That perspective acquires scabrous form in his mock “Traité du journalisme” *Mœurs des diurnales*, which compares newspapers to piles of excrement left by birds

---

on a tropical island and concludes with a dismal prediction: “Dans la société de l’avenir, le journalisme, qui a vulgarisé la littérature, la remplacera auprès du peuple. Les tours d’ivoire s’écroulent. Place au public!”\textsuperscript{1254} As we saw in Chapter Two, such satirical treatment of journalism was typical of petites revues such as the Mercure de France, where the work was first published in 1903.\textsuperscript{1255} As we saw in Chapter One, Schwob also published numerous idiosyncratic literary works in L’Écho de Paris among other newspapers, including the fantastical short stories later collected as Cœur double (1891) and Le Roi au masque d’or (1892).

And, in 1894-1896, Le Journal published his still more innovative Vies imaginaires and La Croisade des enfants. Blending scholarly erudition with innovative fictional techniques such as interior monologue, Vie imaginaires consists of 22 biographical snapshots of illustrious or infamous figures such as the pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles and the seventeenth-century Scottish pirate Captain Kidd as well as intriguing historical nobodies such as Alain le Gentil, a child soldier in the service of Charles VII, who was hanged for murder. La Croisade des enfants similarly recounts the disastrous Children’s Crusade of 1212, from the perspectives of both Pope Innocent III and forgotten participants. The heterogeneity of these potted “lives,” which Ann Jefferson has seen as contributing to the renewal of biography as a literary form around the turn of the century, evokes a discontinuous, fragmented view of history, reminiscent of La Chartreuse de Parme, that gives equal weight to ordinary people’s stories and to the exploits of Great Men.\textsuperscript{1256} Radical for its time, Schwob’s bottom-up approach to history provides an ironic rejoinder to

\textsuperscript{1254} Schwob, Œuvres, 1015.
Mœurs des diurnales’s lament for crumbling ivory towers and journalism’s “vulgarization” of literature.

Unlike Mirbeau, Schwob did not thunder against the mass press within newspapers themselves. But his own innovative literary journalism certainly belies the dismal scatological vision of Mœurs des diurnales. And while the recondite themes of his biographical portraits depart from journalistic convention, their brevity reflects the newspaper’s formal constraints. Schwob’s abstruse laconism also suggests a response to the crisis of the novel that bypasses the descriptive maximalism of much nineteenth-century fiction in favour of terse, hybrid forms such as those found in the works of Jorge Luis Borges, who prefaced Spanish translations of Vies imaginaires and La Croisade des enfants and acknowledged Schwob’s influence over his own book of fictionalized biography A Universal History of Infamy (1935), itself a collection of stories originally published in an Argentinian newspaper.1257

Another admirer of Schwob’s was Pierre Mac Orlan (the pseudonym of Pierre Dumarchey), whose novel La Clique du Café Brebis (1918) praises the story of Captain Kidd in Vies imaginaires as a testament to “la supériorité d’un écrivain en marge de l’aventure sur un autre écrivain qui vécut lui-même cette aventure.”1258 And like Borges, who locates Vies imaginaires’ “peculiar zest” in its vacillations between fiction and reality, what inspires Mac Orlan in La Clique du Café Brebis are the imaginative possibilities signaled by Schwob and other authors such as Robert Louis Stevenson of turning literary and historical trivia into “une aventure hallucinante tout

That theoretical sketch anticipates Mac Orlan’s vision of “l’aventurier passif,” who, according to his *Petit Manuel du parfait aventurier*, published in 1920 (by which time Mac Orlan had himself become a *grand reporter* for newspapers such as *L’Intransigeant*), should avoid superfluous wanderings and concentrate on writing adventure novels fueled by eclectic reading and his own imagination. And his pre-First World War novel *Le Rire jaune* about a lethal pandemic of uncontrollable laughter already offers an example of “une aventure hallucinante” that simultaneously evokes real historical and contemporary anxieties about incurable infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis, and the growing international influence of China and Japan (dubbed the “Yellow Peril”). With hindsight, Mac Orlan’s macabre tale of abrupt civilizational collapse acquired the aura of prophecy. For laughter here connotes generalized fecklessness in the face of encroaching disaster, epitomized by the insouciance of the numerous journalists populating the story (including the narrator himself), who, in a case of “bourrage de crâne” *avant la lettre*, publish only fragmented reports of the pandemic’s devastating progress whilst offering bogus hygienic advice and equally fanciful promises of an imminent cure.

First published during 1913 in the aptly named cultural newspaper *Comœdia, Le Rire jaune* also presciently satirizes newspaper-reading armchair generals who (not unlike Mac Orlan’s cherished “aventurier passif”) “connaissent mieux que n’importe qui au monde le fonctionnement des mitrailleuses, et sans avoir quitté leur appartement conjugal […] ils vous racontent vos propres campagnes […]” That satirical jibe anticipates the war-time newspaper columns of writer-journalists such as Barrès, which are full of such derivative strategizing, a tendency already apparent in *Les Déracinés*, which offers a confident, second-hand diagnosis of the sources of

---

civilizational decline largely based on Taine’s critique of Jacobinism’s centralizing legacy.\textsuperscript{1263} 

*Le Rire jaune* itself evokes a crisis of Belle Époque civilization, whose strident gaiety and journalistic persiflage, mirrored in the novel’s own topsy-turvy style, belies the underlying fragility of the pre-1914 world. But, unlike Barrès, the vaguely anarchist Mac Orlan has no tidy political or cultural explanation for the sense of malaise lurking within his jocular tale.

As we saw in Chapter Three, Romain Rolland’s *Jean-Christophe*, serially published in Péguy’s *Cahiers de la quinzaine* between 1904 and 1912, concludes with a more directly prophetic evocation of “l’imminence d’un conflit franco-allemand.” Meanwhile, throughout Rolland’s *magnum opus*, the mass press seems oblivious to that approaching cataclysm. And whereas journalists hound the hero, a modernist composer, with philistine commentary, distorted quotations, and libellous accusations of plagiarism, the novel itself explores the significance of contemporary political controversies such as the Separation of the Churches and State and the rise of socialism. Fiction, in other words, here seems to offer a more thoughtful and truthful account of its times than the press.

That paradox deepens in novels about the First World War itself. In Henri Barbusse’s *Le Feu* (1916) and Roland Dorgelès’s *Les Croix de bois* (1919), the press is repeatedly depicted as a repository of chauvinistic nonsense held in contempt by ordinary soldiers. By contrast, the novels themselves, both written by war veterans, provide an implicit counterpoint that purports to convey war’s true horror. As Barbusse wrote in a preface to a 1917 edition of *Le Feu* addressed “Aux soldats vivants”: “[V]ous avez aimé mon livre parce que c’est un livre de vérité.”\textsuperscript{1264} He then

---

\textsuperscript{1263} On *Les Déracinés*’ debt to Taine, see Wittmann and Godo’s introduction to Barrès, *Les Déracinés*, 40-44.

lambasts “des journalistes équivoques” who had depicted his book as an ideologically motivated fabrication. Dorgelès similarly disparaged Barrès and his fellow “stratèges de rédaction” whilst insisting on the authenticity of his own book: “Ce n’est pas du roman, ce ne sont pas des Choses vues: c’est, en quelque sorte, de la réalité recréée.”

Though Barbusse and Dorgelès would be criticized in turn by their fellow veteran Jean Norton Cru for what he saw as their books’ literary artifice, inaccuracies of detail, and anti-militarist ideological baggage, many contemporary readers, both combatants and non-combatants, shared those self-assessments. Indeed, the censor forced Dorgelès to cut several chapters from the original edition of Les Croix de bois on the basis that “toutes les vérités ne sont pas bonnes à dire.” And even an army officer who accepted Cru’s accusation of historical inaccuracy concluded that Le Feu nonetheless had merit because “Barbusse dit exactement le contraire de tous ces articles et récits qui nous donnent sur les nerfs.”

At the centre of Le Feu’s assault on “les bourreurs de crâne” is its account of a visit to the front by a group of journalists, who are amazed to encounter “de vrais poilus,” whom they approach “un peu timidement” as if they were African tribesmen on display in a human zoo. The soldiers mock their visitors as “les sidis qui pondent les journaux [et] nous bourrent le crâne.” One of them then launches into a parodic recitation of exhortatory journalistic clichés: “Les Allemands n’ont plus de munitions […]. On les aura quand on voudra, l’arme à la bretelle.

1269 Barbusse, Le Feu, 90.
1270 Barbusse, Le Feu, 91.
[...] nous n’avons pas envie d’quitter l’existence des tranchées; on y est si bien, avec l’eau, le gaz, les douches à tous les étages.”\textsuperscript{1271} As Denis Pernot notes, the primary object of Barbusse’s satire here is most likely Barrès, whose journalism both celebrated human sacrifice and depicted life in the trenches as a largely commodious affair, sustained by a steady supply of warm clothes, care packages, and fresh meat.\textsuperscript{1272} Early in \textit{Les Croix de bois}, a soldier similarly deplores triumphalist newspaper reporting about a recent battle: “Tous les mecs qu’ont écrit des conn… là-dessus dans les journaux, ils auraient mieux fait de n’pas l’ouvrir. Moi, j’y étais, hein, j’sais comment que ça s’est passé.”\textsuperscript{1273} And yet, at the end of the novel, when he has been invalided out of combat, the same soldier finds his own memories of battle pale in comparison to the heroic accounts of derring-do he reads in the press. He duly ends up fabricating stories that mimic the grandiose style of war reportage.\textsuperscript{1274} In \textit{Le Feu} too, the soldier who parodies journalistic style is said to be the first who would complain “s’il fallait que vous vous passiez des journaux…”\textsuperscript{1275} Barbusse and Dorgelès’s characters thus seem in thrall to the cliché of Flaubert’s \textit{Dictionnaire}.

A similar irony underlies the composition of the novels themselves. For the press played a defining role in the genesis of \textit{Le Feu}, which was first published in the leftish, anti-militarist newspaper \textit{L’Œuvre} between August and November 1916. Barbusse had not even completed the novel when the first instalment appeared.\textsuperscript{1276} And it was only in late August that he vowed to publish \textit{Le Feu} as a book.\textsuperscript{1277} Moreover, as Pernot notes, the demands of imminent serial publication underlay the choice to frame the story as a loosely structured soldier’s diary.\textsuperscript{1278} So

\textsuperscript{1271} Barbusse, \textit{Le Feu}, 91-92.
\textsuperscript{1273} Roland Dorgelès, \textit{Les Croix de bois} (1919; repr., Paris: Albin Michel, 2016), 18.
\textsuperscript{1274} Dorgelès, \textit{Les Croix de bois}, 270.
\textsuperscript{1275} Barbusse, \textit{Le Feu}, 92.
\textsuperscript{1277} See Meyer, “‘Le Feu’ d’Henri Barbusse,” 27.
\textsuperscript{1278} See Pernot, “Présentation,” in Barbusse, \textit{Le Feu}, 29.
presented in the pages of *L’Œuvre*, nothing aside from its position in the *feuilleton* immediately identifies *Le Feu* as a work of fiction. And, as Pernot further notes, the novel’s basis in recent eyewitness experience, emphasized by its first-person perspective, also gives *Le Feu* the character of *reportage*.\(^{1279}\)

Like Barbusse, who, as we saw in Chapter One, published over a hundred short stories in *Le Matin* between 1910 and 1914, Dorgelès had worked as a journalist before the war and continued to write occasional articles for the Parisian press even while at the front. Some of these articles satirized French propaganda and attacked Barrès and other “patrouilleurs de l’arrière.”\(^{1280}\) But, as Dorgelès explained to his lover Madeleine Borgeaud, it was impossible to publish journalism about more sensitive topics such as executions for insubordination, which became the subject of a chapter in *Les Croix de bois* entitled “Mourir pour la patrie” that Dorgelès surreptitiously inserted in his novel after the manuscript had been cleared by the censor.\(^{1281}\) Fictionalizing such material in a book, along with a bit of cunning, offered a means of circumventing restrictions imposed on the press, which was subject to more thorough censorship than book publishing.\(^{1282}\) And yet, as Thabette Ouali has argued, the concision of *Les Croix de bois* seems to reflect Dorgelès’s journalistic experience while the novel’s fragmented structure adheres to “le précepte balzacien de fresque en feuilleton,” here applied within a single novel rather than across the cycle of *La Comédie humaine*.\(^{1283}\) Moreover, Dorgelès had previously co-written *La Machine à finir la guerre*, a *roman-feuilleton* published in the newspaper *L’Heure* in late 1916,


\(^{1280}\) Quoted in Ragache, *Roland Dorgelès*, 85.

\(^{1281}\) See Ragache, *Roland Dorgelès*, 83-85.


that anticipates the anti-militarist theme of Les Croix de bois and its companion novel Le Cabaret de la belle femme, also published in 1919, which brought together material originally destined for an initial longer version of Les Croix de bois. The press itself thus served as a laboratory for Dorgelès’s anti-militarist and anti-journalistic novel.

Though he belonged to the bohemian circle of Apollinaire, Mac Orlan, and Salmon in Montmartre, Dorgelès generally displayed traditional literary tastes before the war. The gritty verisimilitude and argot-rich dialogue of Les Croix de bois duly seems in keeping with his pre-existing admiration for Zola. By contrast, as we saw in Chapter One, Barbusse began his literary career as a Symbolist poet in the 1890s in the orbit of figures such as Mallarmé and Jarry. And his episodic novel L’Enfer (1908) about a lonely voyeur blends Huysmansesque solipsism with a critique of social anomie reminiscent of Mirbeau. Like Les Croix de bois, Le Feu then seems to mark a revival of Zolist Naturalism. And yet, unlike Zola’s own novel about the Franco-Prussian War La Débâcle (1892), both Les Croix de bois and Le Feu are structurally fragmented and lack a central narrative arc. These novels’ first-person narrators play a peripheral, observatory role, and their actions contribute little to their episodic plots (whereas the historical fresco of La Débâcle is underlain by the personal drama of Jean Macquart and Maurice Levasseur, concluding in romanesque style with Macquart killing Levasseur during the Commune). Le Feu and Les Croix de bois thereby seem to offer a highly realistic vision of war’s random chaos where moments of terror interrupt great stretches of tedium. That approach is consistent with the general trend of modernist French literature after 1880 towards what Raimond, as we have seen, calls “le récit

---

1285 See Dupray, Roland Dorgelès, 49-51.
disloqué.” Le Feu and Les Croix de bois’s disjointed narrative form also reflects Barbusse and Dorgelès’s journalistic hinterland, which moulded them into authors of concise, punchy prose that privileges immediacy over emplotment. As in the works of Lorrain and Mirbeau, the material constraints of journalism here facilitate a fragmented modernist aesthetic. And like Bloy and Huysmans, both Le Feu and Les Croix de bois include reflections about story-telling itself, such as the veteran’s resort to fabricated anecdotes in Dorgelès’s novel, that further suggest their modernist affinities. Here again that self-consciousness does not extend to Barbusse and Dorgelès’s own debt to journalism. And whereas their precursors typically portray journalism as the scourge of artistic integrity and civilization, the stakes seem even higher in Le Feu and Les Croix de bois, where the press becomes a kind of enemy within that both promotes endless warfare and saps the morale of the French fighting man.

Barbusse and Dorgelès did not hate journalism in and of itself. It was “bourrage de crâne” that revolted them, and they welcomed the opportunity to tackle that affliction in the pages of newspapers such as L’Œuvre and Le Canard enchaîné (where Dorgelès contributed occasional articles from 1917 onwards1288). Le Feu and Les Croix de bois never allude to that anti-militarist press, but they do not issue an ukase against the entire journalistic enterprise either. And both Barbusse and Dorgelès continued to pursue journalistic careers thereafter, with the latter probably coining the phrase “drôle de guerre” in a piece of reportage in October 1939.1289 Like Barrès, they wanted to write journalism on their own terms. But they did not explore that perspective in their novels.

VI. Surrealism’s search for consistency in the face of the mass press

The Surrealists had little love for Barbusse, whom they unsuccessfully sought to displace as French Communism’s leading cultural arbiter during the mid-1920s. Whilst offering some faint praise for Le Feu – “plutôt un grand article de journal, d’une valeur d’information incontestable” – Breton denounced its author in 1926 as “un fumiste de la pire espèce” for failing to bring enough revolutionary spirit to the literary pages (edited by Barbusse) of L’Humanité, adjudging the Communist daily “puérile, déclamatoire, inutilement crétinisante.”1290 Like Barbusse, Breton was not opposed to journalism in and of itself. But only Surrealist journalism, represented by the movement’s magazine La Révolution surréaliste (1924-1929) and its successor publication Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution (Le S.A.S.D.L.R – 1930-1933), met with his approval.

That total animosity towards the rest of the Parisian press acquires even more vitriolic form in a footnote to Louis Aragon’s Le Paysan de Paris (1926), a generically ambiguous work that incorporates features of the novel, prose poetry, what was later dubbed “autofiction,” collage, and indeed journalism:

Et quand je dis journaliste je dis toujours salaud. Prenez-en pour votre grade à l’Intran, à Comoedia, à l’Œuvre, aux Nouvelles Littéraires, etc., cons, canailles, fientes, cochons. Il n’y a pas d’exceptions pour celui-ci, ni pour cet autre: punaises glabres et poux barbus, vous ne vous terrerez pas impunément dans les revues, les publications équivoques. Tout cela sent. L’encre. Blatte écrasée. L’ordure. À mort vous tous, qui vivez de la vie des autres, de ce qu’ils aiment et de leur ennui. À mort ceux dont la main est percée d’une plume, à mort ceux qui paraphrasent ce que je dis.1291

For Aragon, journalists, like insects, collectively merit extermination, even those writing for L’Œuvre, which shared his anti-militarism, and Les Nouvelles littéraires (co-owned by Gallimard,

1290 André Breton, “Légitime défense,” La Révolution surréaliste 2, no. 8, Dec. 1926, 30-36. Aragon would eventually admit in 1943 that he had in fact admired Le Feu when he read it in L’Œuvre during the war (see Forest, Aragon, 280).
1291 Louis Aragon, Le Paysan de Paris, in Opc, 1: 198.
the book’s publisher), which had called *Le Paysan de Paris* “une œuvre tout à fait importante” as an early version was being serially published in *La Revue européenne*, edited by Apollinaire’s old friend Philippe Soupault.\textsuperscript{1292}

And yet *Le Paysan de Paris* conforms to the familiar pattern of anti-journalistic thunder sustained by numerous journalistic borrowings. The book even includes clippings, preserving their original typography, from newspapers such as *La Chausée d’Antin*, styling itself the “Organe de Défense des Intérêts Politiques et Économiques du Quartier,” which opposed the expropriation of local shopkeepers preceding the demolition of the Passage de l’Opéra in 1925.\textsuperscript{1293} And while Aragon sniffs at the bourgeois pretentions of its editor – “fils d’un ancien député de Paris, nul doute qu’il se prépare à recueillir l’illusoire héritage moral de son père” – he too deplores the destruction of the old arcades, which he calls “les sanctuaires d’un culte de l’éphémère.”\textsuperscript{1294}

That insight anticipates Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*, which quotes the latter comment among several other passages from *Le Paysan de Paris*.\textsuperscript{1295} Indeed, when describing the inspiration for his mammoth attempt at a cultural history of nineteenth-century Paris, Benjamin told his sponsor Theodor Adorno: “It opens with Aragon – *Le Paysan de Paris*.”\textsuperscript{1296} But newspaper journalism features comparatively rarely in the *Arcades Project*, perhaps because, as Martina Lauster suggests, the Marxist Benjamin, despite his eclecticism, viewed the commercial culture of

---

\textsuperscript{1292} Edmond Jaloux, “L’Esprit des livres”, *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, March 21, 1925, 3. Personal animosity probably contributed to this footnote, a late addition to *Le Paysan de Paris* (see “Notes et variantes,” in Aragon, *Op. C.*, 1: 1268-1269), made after *Les Nouvelles littéraires* had referred disparagingly to Aragon’s homosexuality, whereupon a gang of Surrealists vandalized the newspaper’s offices and assaulted its editor Maurice Martin du Gard (see Forest, *Aragon*, 234). But Aragon seemingly had no immediate quarrel with the other publications, and *L’Intransigeant* and *Comœdia* frequently gave publicity to the Surrealists (see Suter, *Le Journal et les Lettres*, 172).


\textsuperscript{1294} Aragon, *Op. C.*, 165 and 152.


the feuilleton as “socially and ideologically suspect and therefore unreliable.”1297 And those titles Benjamin does cite tend to be literary publications such as Le Figaro that had a direct bearing on the era’s cultural life, notably the evolution of Baudelaire’s work. By contrast, the future hard-line Communist Aragon, who would join the party in early 1927 and remain a member for the rest of his life, execrates three leading cultural newspapers of the inter-war years whilst simultaneously preserving truly obscure pieces of banal bourgeois journalism in Le Paysan de Paris.1298 He thereby creates a sanctuary for the ephemeral via actual pieces of ephemera within a book whose depiction of the Passage de l’Opéra and the Buttes-Chaumont itself has the flavour of reportage. And by conveying nostalgia for the disappearing urban landscape of nineteenth-century Paris through the journalistic detritus of his own time, Le Paysan de Paris seems to actualize the past and historicize the present in the spirit of Baudelaire’s “Le Peintre de la vie moderne.” That passéistic approach encompasses the book’s attack on the journalistic canaille, which echoes Baudelaire as well as other precursors such as Balzac. Like them, Aragon remains simultaneously absorbed by the “ordure” left by those nemeses. And newspapers in Le Paysan de Paris duly become a source of what its “Préface à une mythologie moderne” calls the “merveilleux quotidien,” which again echoes Baudelaire’s account of Constantin Guys’s ability to find poetry within the transient spectacle of modern life.1299 Underlying Aragon’s journalistic borrowings is a long literary tradition wherein the press epitomizes the attraction and repulsion exerted by modernity itself.

Breton also recycles contemporary journalism in Nadja (1928), which concludes with the text of a fait divers from Le Journal about a mysterious plane crash preceded by the remark: “Un

1298 On Aragon’s party membership, see Forest, Aragon, 285.
1299 Aragon, Opc, 1: 149.
That journalistic insert can be read as a synecdoche for the story of the eponymous heroine’s own pitiful journey, which ends in mental breakdown. By endowing a random news item with heightened poetic significance, Breton’s autofictional book, which like *Le Paysan de Paris* defies straightforward generic classification, duly assumes, as Patrick Suter notes, the guise of what Mallarmé had called a “grand fait divers.” Unlike *Le Paysan de Paris*, that piece of journalistic borrowing evokes little ambivalence about journalism itself. Indeed, Nadja’s final line, coming immediately after the fait divers, strikes an exultant note: “La beauté sera CONVULSIVE ou ne sera pas.” Given the circumstances of Nadja’s psychological collapse and Breton’s self-important indifference to her plight, such triumphant insouciance seems altogether sinister. And that attitude is consistent with the rubbernecking tone of the original article, which carries the headline: “Un message mystérieux de l’avion de Mrs Grayson: depuis…le silence!” *Nadja* merely renders the newspaper’s morbid fascination more explicit.

As previously noted, Breton’s first *Manifeste du surréalisme* dismisses the press as a repository of out-dated realism. Yet here too newspapers are endowed with aesthetic possibility. The *Manifeste* thus includes a “recipe,” which originated with Tristan Tzara, for creating a poem out of randomly assembled newspaper headlines.

Negotiating such paradoxes was the essence of Surrealism. As the first *Manifeste* puts it: “Je crois à la résolution future de ces deux états, en apparence si contradictoires, que sont le rêve

---

1300 Breton, *Nadja*, in *Oc*, 1: 753.
1302 “Le mépris qu’en général je porte à la psychiatrie, à ses pompes et à ses œuvres, est tel que je n’ai pas encore osé m’enquérir de ce qu’il était advenu de Nadja.” (Breton, *Oc*, 1: 740).
1304 See Breton, *Oc*, 1: 341.
et la réalité, en une sorte de réalité absolue, de surréalité, si l'on peut ainsi dire.”1305 La Révolution surréaliste and Le S.A.S.D.L.R thus make abundant use of newspaper clippings, usually accompanied by acerbic commentary, much like, as we saw in Chapter Two, Fénéon and his collaborators at La Revue blanche, whilst also replicating features of newspaper layout. The point seems to consist of emphasizing the opposition between their own movement and the mass press as a prelude to developing a Surrealist journalistic synthesis in the service of social revolution. As Suter puts it: “La revue [viz. Le S.A.S.D.L.R] adopte certes apparemment les moyens du journal; mais c’est systématiquement pour les retourner contre lui.”1306

By these lights, the Surrealists sought to create a radical, collectively authored hybrid of art and journalism, founded on the ruins of the mass press, that would light the way to utopia. Suter notes the parallel, apparently never acknowledged by the Surrealists themselves, with Mallarmé’s “Livre,” which, as we saw in Chapter One, the poet similarly envisioned as a popular synthesis of book and newspaper: “Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution […] ne refuse le journal traditionnel qu’en s’adjoignant les moyens du Livre – pour se muer en ‘autre journal’. Mais cet équilibre sera éphémère, comme si la fusion entre les pôles opposés de la presse et de l’Œuvre ne cessait d’être problématique […].”1307 Suter does not explain what was problematic about the Surrealists’ fusion of the press and Mallarmé’s Great Work (itself already conceived as a literary-journalistic hybrid). But the answer perhaps has less to do with inherent incompatibility than with the way Breton and his followers set about the project. Whereas Mallarmé detected the germ of the “Poème populaire moderne” in literary works published in contemporary newspapers, the Surrealists by now saw only the morbid and cretinous symptoms of a diseased society in their

1305 Breton, Oc, 1: 319.
1307 Suter, Le Journal et les Lettres, 206.
pages. In other words, Mallarmé viewed the future of literature emerging organically from the press, whereas the Surrealists wanted to destroy their journalistic rivals and build a new civilization from the debris. And whereas Mallarmé conceived of the “Livre” as the basis for a civic religion within the French Republic, the Surrealists sought a revolution that would surpass even Communism by reimagining every aspect of daily life. That highly partisan totalizing vision was bound to be both intrinsically unstable and anything but popular. *Le S.A.S.D.L.R* duly disappeared after six issues in 1933 amid plummeting circulation, strained finances, and squabbles with the Communist Party, which also led Aragon to definitively choose party discipline over avant-garde enthusiasms.¹³⁰⁸

Aragon thereafter became a loyal journalistic servant of the party, working first at *L’Humanité* and then as publisher of the newspaper *Ce Soir* from 1937 onwards. During the 1960s, by which time he was editing his own Communist-financed magazine, *Les Lettres françaises*, he looked back fondly on those formative experiences in a preface to his novel *Les Cloches de Bâle* (1934) about the pre-1914 socialist movement:

[J’]apprenais dans cet humble métier de tous les jours, où l’actualité seule est maîtresse, ce qui m’était indispensable à pénétrer le passé des hommes, et le mien. La vie à *L’Humanité*, et en général dans mon parti à cette époque, n’était ni facile ni plaisante. […] De toute façon, la plupart des écrivains considèrent le journalisme comme un obstacle à leur art, ses obligations comme desséchantes pour leur génie. Moi, je dois tout à ce stage aux travaux forcés.¹³⁰⁹

---


Like Barbey d’Aurevilly, who compared journalism to a ball-and-chain, Aragon here uses the language of penal servitude to describe his career in the Communist press. And yet, he views that coerced labour as a liberation. Compared to the free-wheeling antics of the Surrealists in their early years, party life offered Aragon a sense of order and purpose as well as ready access to influential Communist media. Those certitudes replaced the anxious, paradoxical quest for everyday marvels of *Le Paysan de Paris* and animate his novels of the 1930s, 40s, and early 50s, which, unlike *Le Paysan*, display little generic ambiguity and generally adhere to the precepts of socialist realism. *Les Cloches de Bâle, Les Beaux Quartiers* (1936), and *Les Communistes* (1949-1951) indeed owe much to his own journalism. For example, as he noted in his preface to the first of these novels, the depiction of the 1911-1912 Paris taxi strike in *Les Cloches de Bâle* is based on his own reporting for *L’Humanité* about the 1933-1934 Paris taxi strike. In contrast to the newspaper clippings in *Le Paysan de Paris*, these later journalistic borrowings have a clear documentary and ideological purpose. Like Zola, Aragon aims in his realist novels to offer richly detailed analyses of recent historical cataclysms whilst pointing the way to a radiant socialist future.

Despite his own ambivalent faith in the Soviet experiment, Breton never buckled to Stalinist orthodoxy and was duly expelled from the party’s cultural front organisation the Association des artistes des écrivains révolutionnaires in 1933. He himself simultaneously became increasingly doctrinaire and intolerant of dissent. The enigmatic wanderings of *Nadja* thus

---


gave way to excommunicatory thunder in the second *Manifeste* and quixotic agitation in *Le S.A.S.D.L.R.*

Both Aragon and Breton resolved their quarrel with journalism – the former by embracing the role of Stalinist mage, the latter by rooting out those Surrealists guilty of writing for the bourgeois press whilst trying to revolutionize journalism itself. They thereby sacrificed the eclectic, ambivalent spirit of *Le Paysan de Paris* and *Nadja* in pursuit of ideological consistency. Despite Surrealism’s aura of ludic chaos, Aragon and Breton seem to have been more troubled than their opponents, on both left and right, by the tensions inherent in writing for the mass press or drawing inspiration from articles in bourgeois newspapers whilst simultaneously execrating their cultural and ideological influence. They ultimately sought to move beyond Flaubert’s cliché. But they did so by adopting different sets of received ideas.

**VII. Freedom of the press – Vallès and Leroux**

In depictions of journalism in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century French novels, intense hostility is the norm. But, as we saw in Chapter Five, the fictionalized *reportage* of Cendrars’s *Rhum* – dedicated “aux jeunes gens d’aujourd’hui fatigués de la littérature” – portrays Jean Galmot as a thrusting man of action who launched his career in the press, whilst also saluting his decision to leave journalism behind in pursuit of still greater adventure. And there are other notable exceptions to the anti-journalistic doxa of French literature, where journalism acquires a still more exalted sense of purpose, whilst literature itself is denigrated.

As we saw in Chapter One, Jules Vallès had harsh words for what he dubbed “littérature littératurante” and portrayed himself as a hard-charging reporter in search of truth. His enthusiasm for journalism was that of a recovering “victime du livre,” who had been corrupted by the intoxicating artifice of romantic literature: “Joies, douleurs, amours, vengeances, nos sanglots, nos
rire, les passions, les crimes; tout est copié, tout!”\textsuperscript{1313} For some, the wages of reading is death: “Toutes les femmes qui ont un peu empoisonné leur mari, jeté au feu leur enfant: des victimes du livre!”\textsuperscript{1314} This indictment, published in 1862 in \textit{Le Figaro}, then still a literary newspaper of satirical disposition, should doubtless be taken with a grain of salt. But disdain for imaginative literature is a consistent theme of Vallès’s writing. And, while Vallès’s early journalism also frequently castigates the triviality and meretriciousness of his fellow journalists, the autobiographical \textit{Jacques Vingtras} trilogy of novels he wrote at the end of his career tends to portray the mass press, for all its flaws, as an antidote to bookish illusions, a source of personal freedom, and a tool of political agitation.\textsuperscript{1315} As Roger Bellet puts it: “Le journal ne fut point, pour Vallès, la continuation, l’épreuve et la preuve de la littérature; il en fut la négation vivante.”\textsuperscript{1316}

\textit{L’Enfant} (1879), the trilogy’s first instalment, depicts the genesis of that opposition in literal terms when the hero sells some books that he has received as school prizes and spends the money at a local café where he reads “la feuille de Paris, qui sent encore l’imprimerie, quand le facteur l’apporte.”\textsuperscript{1317} The freshly printed newspaper here evokes autonomy, modernity, the lure of the capital, and a material connection to proletarian culture, whereas Vingtras’s prize – consisting of works by Sainte-Beuve, Bossuet, and the philosopher and ephemeral minister of education Victor Cousin – connotes the bourgeois tedium and misery of the schoolhouse. At the end of the novel, having already been entranced by the industrial glamour of his local printing works, he duly vows to head for Paris and find work as a printer: “J’entrevois l’imprimerie et le

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{1314} Vallès, \textit{Œuvres}, 1: 246.
\textsuperscript{1315} On Vallès’s hostility towards his fellow journalists, see Melmoux-Montaubin, \textit{L’Écrivain-journaliste au XIX\textsuperscript{e} siècle}, 152-154.
\textsuperscript{1316} Roger Bellet, introduction to Vallès, \textit{Œuvres}, 1: XI.
\textsuperscript{1317} Vallès, \textit{Œuvres}, 2: 381.
\end{flushright}
journal, la liberté de se défendre, la sympathie aux révoltés.”

In a remarkable departure from the usual aspirations of nineteenth-century fictional heroes, Vallès’s gifted young student hopes to achieve social déclassement through the press. Whereas literary failure leads Balzac’s Lucien into the meretricious world of journalism, Vingtras sets out to escape literature by embracing the honest toil of printing newspapers. And L’Enfant here seems to replicate Illusions perdues’ misleading dichotomy between literature and journalism whilst inverting its precursor’s aesthetic hierarchy. After all, printing works produce both newspapers and books. And Sainte-Beuve, discarded by Vingtras in favour of a Parisian newspaper, was one of the most celebrated journalists of the 1840s, when this section of L’Enfant is set.

Having arrived in Paris amid the revolutionary upheaval of the Second Republic in Le Bachelier (1881), Vingtras’s age (17 being far too old) and bourgeois origins prevent him from fulfilling his dream of becoming a printer. Following a failed attempt at launching his own newspaper, he ends up earning a living writing articles for clothing merchants in need of copy to fill up their promotional newssheets. And he approaches that task with a meticulousness reminiscent of Baudelaire (who admonished a magazine editor not to change a single comma), then waits three hours outside the printer’s shop for his first article to appear before exclaiming in horror at the sight of his theatre review peppered with reflections about the superiority of off-the-peg topcoats: “Mais on a mutilé ma pensée, il y a une phrase en moins!...” As in “Les Victimes du livre,” a patina of irony seems to belie the intensity of the underlying sentiment. For Vingtras, even a thinly disguised advertisement for men’s clothing provides an opportunity, using the

---

1318 Vallès, Œuvres, 2: 383.
1319 “Je vous avais dit: supprimez tout un morceau, si une virgule vous déplaît dans le morceau, mais ne supprimez pas la virgule; elle a sa raison d’être.” (Baudelaire to Gervais Charpentier, June 20, 1863, in Baudelaire, Corr., 2: 307).
1320 Vallès, Œuvres, 2: 628.
newssheet’s own surreptitious techniques, to advance the cause of revolution. And the deleted passage – which he dubs in characteristically pugilistic style “le coup de poing de la fin” – does indeed contain an insurrectionary image: “Ainsi finissent souvent ceux qui brûlent leurs vaisseaux devant le foyer paternel pour se lancer sur l’océan de la vie d’orages! Que j’en ai vu trébucher parce qu’ils avaient voulu sauter à pieds joints par-dessus leur cœur!”1321 In a book dedicated to those who “nourris de grec et de latin, sont morts de faim,” Vallès here introduces an allusion to the practice of burning one’s boats as a show of defiance, a recurrent topos in ancient history and works of classical literature such as Virgil’s Aeneid.1322 And his fictional surrogate duly mocks his editors’ own apparent lack of erudition: “Sont-ils des classiques?...”1323 The image also resonates with Vallès’s approach to writing for the bourgeois press. Burning one’s boats before even setting out on the high seas seems like a futile gesture. The implication is that truly committed insurgents should use all arms available to them, not least those filched from the oppressors themselves.

Vallès’s fictional surrogate prides himself on his ability to thrive within the seemingly inimical world of the bourgeois press and turn its power against itself. As Vingtras puts it in the final part of the trilogy L’Insurgé (1885), set around 1860-1871, by which time he has attained modest journalistic fame: “Je laisse bien passer le bout de mon drapeau entre les lignes de mes chroniques du Figaro; dans mes bouquets du Samedi, je glisse toujours un géranium sanglant, une immortelle rouge, mais perdue sous les roses et les œillets.”1324 That Vingtras’s subversive geranium is lost beneath more innocuous journalistic flora suggests some ambivalence about his position within the bourgeois press. And yet the passage still seems fired with revolutionary

1321 Vallès, Œuvres, 2: 628; italicized in the original.
1322 Vallès, Œuvres, 2: 445. On the origins of this phrase, see Winston A. Reynolds, “To Burn One’s Boats or to Burn One’s Bridges?” American Speech 34, no. 2 (May 1959): 95-100.
1323 Vallès, Œuvres, 2: 628.
1324 Vallès, Œuvres, 2: 905.
optimism. For when the pallid trimmings have died off, that immortal flash of red will reveal its true colours and illuminate the final struggle. As suggested by this passage, Vallès, contradicting Richard Terdiman’s view of the nineteenth-century French mass press as a conservative monolith, did manage to infiltrate leading bourgeois publications, interpolating not just discrete glimpses of nascent political radicalism in his articles for *Le Figaro* in 1861-1865 but also the overtly revolutionary *Jacques Vingtras* trilogy itself, which was serialized in newspapers and magazines such as *Le Siècle* and *La Nouvelle Revue* as well as Vallès’s own newspaper *Le Cri du peuple*. While *Le Siècle*, to Vallès’s dismay, cut parts of *L’Enfant* that offended its liberal republican sensibilities, the right-wing *Le Matin* regularly published un-edulcorated front-page columns by Vallès in 1884-1885 that include reflections about his participation in the Paris Commune and the brutal folly of then Prime Minister Jules Ferry’s Tonkin expedition. And, as Silvia Disegni has noted, it is plausible that those articles would subsequently have been incorporated into a definitive version of *L’Insurgé*, which Vallès left unfinished at the time of his death in February 1885.

Like Mirbeau, Vallès thus successfully used the conservative mass press as a literary laboratory for politically subversive works of fiction.

In contrast to the author of *Le Jardin des supplices*, he was thrilled rather than puzzled by that irony. And whereas Mirbeau portrayed his former employer Eugène Letellier as the philistine Lechat in *Les Affaires sont les affaires*, Vallès grudgingly respected the dynamism of newspaper barons such as Émile de Girardin and Hippolyte de Villemessant and appreciated their sporadic

---

1325 The *Jacques Vingtras* trilogy gives a somewhat misleading impression of its author’s political trajectory. The Vallès who wrote for *Le Figaro* was not a fully formed revolutionary (see Bellet’s “Notice” to Vallès, *Œuvres*, 1: 1260). His articles nonetheless frequently strike a subversive note that portends his transformation into a revolutionary socialist politician during the Commune.


support for his writing. In _L’Insurgé_, Vingtras’s admiration for Girardin, who had employed Vallès as a literary critic on his newspaper _La Liberté_, even strikes a rather sentimental note: “Si l’on casse la glace dans laquelle il a mis refroidir son masque, on trouve de la bonté tapie dans la moue de ses lèvres, et des larmes gelées dans ses yeux froids. […] Il a donné un coup de couteau dans mon fatras d’illusions, mais il me l’a porté en pleine poitrine.”

This portrait also captures the essence of Vingtras/Vallès’s own character. He too was forced to adopt a mask for much of his journalistic career whilst simultaneously wielding a trenchant rhetorical dagger.

For Vallès, journalism was about action rather than fine phrase-making. He preferred the immediacy of the newspaper to the ponderousness of the book. And like Mallarmé’s _Un coup de dés_, the influence of the press extends to the layout of Vallès novels, where pieces of text occasionally imitate the expansive, compelling appearance of newspaper headlines, such as when Vingtras and his friends vow to create their own newspaper in _Le Bachelier_:

*Il faut lancer un journal.*

_Ce mot, un jour, a traversé l’espace._

Fig. 6.1. Vallès, _Le Bachelier_, third ed. (Paris: Charpentier, 1881), 98 (Source: Gallica)

Yet even journalism strikes Vingtras as a poor substitute for the cut-and-thrust of street-level agitation and revolution itself (Vallès having actively participated in both the revolutionary events of 1848-1851 and the Paris Commune). As the hero laments in _L’Insurgé_ while surveying the laudatory press coverage of his first book (by implication Vallès’s _Les Réfractaires_ [1862], which brought together articles such as “Les Victimes du livre”):

> Mais ces gazettes que voilà sur ma table – comme des feuilles mortes! – elles ne frémissent pas et ne crient point! Où donc le bruit d’orage que j’aime?

---


1329 On Vallès’s concern for layout and “le travail du ‘blanc,’” see Melmoux-Montaubin, _L’Écrivain-journaliste au XIXe siècle_, 208-210.
J’ai plutôt honte de moi, par moments, quand c’est seulement le styliste que la critique signale et louange, quand on ne démasque pas l’arme cachée sous les dentelles noires de ma phrase comme l’épée d’Achille à Scyros.\textsuperscript{1330}

Vingtras here suggests that his writing has failed on his own terms. Rather than stirring the masses to revolt, or at least pricking the \textit{amour propre} of the bourgeoisie, his words instead inspire purely aesthetic admiration among the critics of the same “feuilles mortes” where the book had originated. That praise seems to blunt the force of his political message. The press thus frustrates Vingtras when it adopts a specifically literary tone.

Despite their disdain for literature, Vallès’s novels are full of literary allusions, attesting to his own unloved classical education. And while his ambitions for social revolution came to nothing, Vallès’s distinctive rough-hewn style, which mimics the natural flow of speech, had a durable influence on authors such as Léon Bloy, who grudgingly concedes in \textit{Le Désespéré}, published two years after Vallès’s death, that his ideological \textit{frère-ennemi} was “un gredin de talent.”\textsuperscript{1331} Vallès considered himself a victim of the book. But it was books as much as newspapers that shaped him as a writer and constituted his own legacy. For Vallès, becoming a novelist represented, in Bellet’s phrase, “une insurrection de la littérature contre la littérature.”\textsuperscript{1332} That insurrection certainly yielded literary works of striking originality. But the \textit{Jacques Vingtras} trilogy no more surmounted its literary precursors than the Communards did the Versaillais. In a modified version of Flaubert’s cliché, Vallès thundered against \textit{literature} but ultimately couldn’t live without it.

\textsuperscript{1330} Vallès, \textit{Œuvres}, 2: 907.  
\textsuperscript{1331} Bloy, \textit{Le Désespéré}, 322.  
\textsuperscript{1332} Roger Bellet, introduction to Jules Vallès, \textit{Littérature et révolution: recueil de textes littéraires}, ed. Bellet (Paris: Éditeurs français réunis, 1969), 7; quoted in Melmoux-Montaubin, \textit{L’Écrivain-journaliste au XIX\textsuperscript{e} siècle}, 217. The latter interprets Bellet’s remark, originally applied to Vallès’s literary criticism, as epitomizing Vallès’s position as a novelist.
Enthusiasm for journalism also animates much late nineteenth and early twentieth-century French adventure and detective fiction such as Allain and Souvestre’s *Fantômas* series (1911-1913) and Gaston Leroux’s *Rouletabille* novels (1907-1923), while, as we shall see in the next chapter, the novels of Jules Verne offer a more ambivalent account of the rise of reportage. As we saw in Chapters Three and Five, the *Fantômas* books became an object of cultish fascination for Apollinaire, Cendrars, and Jacob, who all wrote poetry directly inspired by Allain and Souvestre’s tales of a ruthless master criminal pursued by a Parisian police inspector and his journalist sidekick. The extravagant praise accorded these novels – which, as we saw in Chapter Three, Apollinaire called “une des œuvres les plus riches qui existent” – by the poets of the New Spirit (later echoed by the Surrealists) might seem puzzling given what John Ashbery calls their “crude narratives, appropriately garbed in hackneyed prose […],” where “terror almost becomes monotonous.”

But recycling such pulpy materials into art is consistent with Apollinaire’s vision of literature in “Zone,” which hyperbolically equates the still more devalued ephemera of “les prospectus les catalogues les affiches” with poetry. The *Fantômas* stories also represented a blank canvas on which these poets could project their fantasies, unencumbered by anxiety about how their own work compared to the original (just as pulp novels – such as Robert Bloch’s *Psycho* [1959], Mario Puzo’s *The Godfather* [1969], and the *Fantômas* series itself – have often been transformed into great works of cinema, whereas adaptations of literary masterpieces tend to disappoint).

The *Rouletabille* novels would similarly be embraced by the Surrealists, who both praised Leroux as their precursor and recycled fragments of text and imagery from his novels in their own works. In contrast to the *Fantômas* series, these detective stories were neither crude nor

---

hackneyed. Leroux displays both a mastery of emplotment reminiscent of Arthur Conan Doyle and playful flashes of fictional self-consciousness – including several references to Conan Doyle himself – that suggest his affinities with modernist contemporaries and precursors. For example, the narrator Sainclair, a Dr. Watstonesque lawyer and journalist, offers a Magritte-like disclaimer of authorship early in the first novel of the series Le Mystère de la chambre jaune (1907): “Je n’ai point la prétention d’être un auteur. Qui dit: auteur, dit toujours un peu: romancier, et, Dieu merci, le ‘mystère de la Chambre Jaune’ est assez plein de tragique horreur réelle pour se passer de littérature. Je ne suis et ne veux être qu’un fidèle ‘rapporteur’.”1335 This denial that what we are reading is a novel of course merely reminds that we are indeed reading a novel. And Sainclair’s claim that his story can do without literature is later refuted by an obscure literary allusion, whose source is never acknowledged in the text itself, that proves crucial to solving the novel’s titular mystery and is also rich in veiled metaphorical significance. For, as he investigates what appears to be the attempted murder of Mathilde Stangerson, the daughter of an illustrious scientist, the sleuth hero Rouletabille discovers a fragment of a letter containing the phrase “Le presbytère n’a rien perdu de son charme ni le jardin de son éclat,” which transpires to be a coded reference to the victim’s romantic travails – namely a secret failed marriage – that underlie her injuries.1336 That pivotal phrase is almost identical to a sentence in George Sand’s epistolary novel Lettres à Marcie (1837) – “Le presbytère n’a rien perdu de sa propreté, ni le jardin de son éclat” – which concludes a parish priest’s account, seconded by the narrator, of how his niece found lasting happiness by refusing to get married (whereas Le Mystère’s victim had, to her cost, pursued the opposite

1336 Leroux, Premiers exploits de Rouletabille, 39 and 53.
And the chain of allusion was further extended by the Surrealists, who reused Le Mystère’s sentence describing the presbytery on one of the enigmatic handbills – so-called papillons – that they distributed around Paris in 1924-1925.1338

Le Mystère’s literary self-consciousness is paralleled by a still more pronounced emphasis on the novel’s affinities with journalism. Sainclair’s account of the mystery is triggered by what he calls “un article misérable d’ignorance ou d’audacieuse perfidie,” published in an unnamed newspaper to coincide with Stangerson’s elevation to the highest rank of the Légion d’Honneur, that resurrects the story of his daughter’s brush with death years previously.1339 The narrator then quotes at length from two fictional contemporaneous reports of that incident in Le Matin (to which Leroux himself had contributed and which would, as we saw in Chapter One, serially publish later instalments of the Rouletabille series1340). And by presenting himself as “un fidèle ‘rapporteur,’” Sainclair alludes to his own role as a court reporter for a fictional newspaper, the Cri du boulevard. Moreover, the precocious Rouletabille is himself a journalist, who sets out to report on the case because he senses that Le Matin hasn’t gotten the whole story. Le Mystère, which was first published serially in the magazine L’Illustration in 1907, is thus framed as a series of rival journalistic accounts of the same fait divers. The clear losers in that contest are paradoxically newspapers themselves, whose reports of the Stangerson case turn out to be completely mistaken, whereas Rouletabille solves the mystery without ever actually filing a line of copy. As Kate Rees

1338 See Eburne, Surrealism and the Art of Crime, 44.
1339 Leroux, Premiers exploits de Rouletabille, 1.
1340 The second Rouletabille novel Le Parfum de la dame en noir (1908) reproduces an article Leroux had published in Le Matin about a Marseilles street urchin (see Leroux, Premiers exploits de Rouletabille, 323-325 and Leroux, “Le Petit Pêcheur d’oranges,” Le Matin, Feb. 15, 1901, 1). In the novel, the article is attributed to a character called Gaston Leroux, while the urchin becomes Rouletabille, whom Leroux persuades to abandon life in the streets for a career in the press. Leroux here self-consciously blurs fiction and reality whilst emphasizing his novel’s journalistic hinterland. His modernism thus seems inextricably bound up with his debts to journalism.

That predilection for acts over words, which echoes Jacques Vingtras’s frustration with the “feuilles mortes” of newspaper book reviews, gives the teenage Rouletabille his start in journalism when he marches into the offices of the fictional newspaper *L’Époque* clutching the severed foot of a recent murder victim (a crucial piece of evidence that the police had failed to uncover). “Avec ce pied,” proclaims the editor, “je ferai un article de tête.”\footnote{Leroux, *Premiers exploits de Rouletabille*, 12.} If Rouletabille can come up with the stories, in other words, then his punning editor will take care of the actual writing. Indeed, on the single occasion in *Le Mystère* when Rouletabille alludes to any duty to file an article, it is a ruse concocted to explain the presence of Sainclair, who is supposed to deliver the non-existent article to Paris but who has in fact been summoned to help him catch the criminal.\footnote{See Leroux, *Premiers exploits de Rouletabille*, 197.}

Rouletabille also echoes Sainclair’s disdain for literary writing when he mocks “ces agents de la Sûreté imaginés par les romanciers modernes, agents qui ont acquis leur méthode dans la lecture des romans d’Edgar Poe ou de Conan Doyle. Ah! agents littéraires… qui bâtissez des montagnes de stupidité avec un pas sur le sable, avec le dessin d’une main sur un mur!”\footnote{Leroux, *Premiers exploits de Rouletabille*, 170.} Like Jacques Vingtras – albeit without the same ideological intent – Leroux’s characters thus celebrate an action-driven vision of journalism whilst denigrating imaginative literature in a novel that, like Vallès’s trilogy, itself draws heavily on literary precursors. Indeed, as Stéphane Lojkine has noted, the plot of *Le Mystère* seems to be largely modelled on Conan Doyle’s *The Hound of the...
Baskervilles (1902). Here again, praise for journalism and anti-literary thunder belie the dense imbrication of journalism and literature within Leroux’s work.

VIII. Freedom from the press? – Alain-Fournier, Colette, Mauriac

Some authors used the mass press as a literary laboratory or drew on journalistic sources without fixating on journalism itself or its vexed relationship with literature in their novels. In other words, they immersed themselves in journalism, but their novels neither thunder against nor celebrate the press.

As we saw in Chapter Two, Alain-Fournier spent two years of his short professional life working as a literary gossip columnist and critic for Paris-Journal in 1910-1912. Though he found that newspaper to be “répugnant,” he did his best to give publicity to friends such as Charles Péguy and the writers clustered around La NRF. During this period, his sole novel Le Grand Meaulnes (1913) also began to take shape. And, as André Guyon argues, Alain-Fournier’s journalistic experience seems to have left its mark on his evolution as a novelist: “Bien décidément, en dépit des protestations et des malédictions d’Alain-Fournier, ce travail de chroniqueur n’est pas un à-côté dans sa vie d’écrivain, un obstacle à la création, il en aura été – par la grâce sans doute du génie créateur – l’un des laboratoires.”

In his chroniques and échos for Paris-Journal, Alain-Fournier developed a terse paratactic style that sums up the essential details of literary events around Paris in a handful of sentences. Such concision is a hallmark of Le Grand Meaulnes, whose 50 chapters run to just over 350 pages.

---

1346 Quoted in Anglès, André Gide et le premier groupe de la Nouvelle Revue française, 1: 269.
in the first edition.\textsuperscript{1349} The novel’s paragraphs also tend to be short, at times consisting of a single line. And as in his journalism, Alain-Fournier consistently strips away syntactic vincula, letting the story unfold in brisk, suspenseful style, typified by his abundant use of ellipses (another recurrent feature of his newspaper articles). \textit{Le Grand Meaulnes}’s characterization and emplotment also seem to draw on a technique common in these articles, which frequently convey the mood of an event through antithetical epithets, as in this laconic report of a poetry reading in June 1910: “On a lu au \textit{Salon des Poètes}, deux poèmes: \textit{A Simone}, de Remy de Gourmont, qui ont paru d’une agréable fraîcheur. Jules Romains, Georges Duhamel, Charles Vildrac… ont, avec des vers audacieux, forcé les applaudissements d’un public timide.”\textsuperscript{1350} The effect of “des vers audacieux” on “un public timide” here seems to mirror the transformation caused by the arrival of Meaulnes at the start of the novel:

\begin{quote}
Mais quelqu’un est venu qui m’a enlevé à tous ces plaisirs d’enfant paisible. Quelqu’un a soufflé la bougie qui éclairait pour moi le doux visage maternel penché sur le repas du soir. Quelqu’un a éteint la lampe autour de laquelle nous étions une famille heureuse, à la nuit, lorsque mon père avait accroché les volets de bois aux portes vitrées. Et celui-là, ce fut Augustin Meaulnes, que les autres élèves appelèrent bientôt le grand Meaulnes.\textsuperscript{1351}
\end{quote}

\textit{Paisible…doux…heureuse…then grand.} A single defining epithet charts the future course of Alain-Fournier’s “roman d’aventures,” which thrusts its diffident narrator into a topsy-turvy world of adventure and tragedy – “\textit{de tant de mal, de tant de bien},” as the narrator François Seurel puts it a few chapters later, recycling a verse from the mid-nineteenth-century poet Marceline Desbordes-Valmore that Alain-Fournier had previously quoted in an article for \textit{Paris-Journal}.\textsuperscript{1352}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{1349} Alain-Fournier, \textit{Le Grand Meaulnes} (Paris: Émile-Paul Frères, 1913).
\textsuperscript{1350} Alain-Fournier, \textit{Chroniques et critiques}, 34.
\textsuperscript{1352} Alain-Fournier, \textit{Le Grand Meaulnes}, ed. Boblet, 99 and Alain-Fournier, \textit{Chroniques et critiques}, 259. Alain-Fournier described the novel that became \textit{Le Grand Meaulnes} as a “roman d’aventures” in a 1910 letter to his closest friend Jacques Rivière (quoted in Alain-Fournier, \textit{Chroniques et critiques}, 299). Rivière then used that expression (minus the plural) as the title of a series of articles about the future of the novel for \textit{La NRF} in 1913, the
\end{flushright}
Alain-Fournier’s creative vision also seems to have partly taken shape in his journalistic criticism. Like other authors clustered around La NRF, Alain-Fournier became friends with Marguerite Audoux and greatly admired her first novel Marie-Claire (1910), a vivid autobiographical account of her impoverished rural upbringing, which offered the aspiring novelist, according to Guyon, “un premier exemple de la synthèse qu’il cherche entre réalité terrestre, aventure et intériorité.”\(^{1353}\) Alain-Fournier regularly mentioned Audoux in Paris-Journal and also wrote an article about Marie-Claire for La NRF in 1911 praising “la simplicité parfaite et l’extraordinaire grandeur de ce livre.”\(^{1354}\) That phrase could be a description of Le Grand Meaulnes itself. Writing about literature in the press thus helped Alain-Fournier to define the stripped-down aesthetic approach that he would adopt in his own novel. Moreover, the spirit of literary-journalistic camaraderie that animated his relations with, among others, Audoux, Péguy, and Rivière also seems to infuse Le Grand Meaulnes, where friendship is depicted as value higher even than romantic love. Much as the novel’s narrator dedicates himself (unsuccessfully) to facilitating the happiness of Meaulnes and his beloved Yvonne, so Alain-Fournier did his best to publicize his friends’ work (whereas other contemporary journalists were, as we saw in Chapter Four, more inclined to sell their approval to anyone willing to slip them a few hundred francs). In contrast to the backbiting more typical of his milieu, Alain-Fournier’s tenure at Paris-Journal seems to have only enhanced the benevolent outlook that shines through Le Grand Meaulnes.

The press is almost entirely absent from that novel. Newspapers are mentioned a few times but only as pieces of background detail. Given Alain-Fournier’s own immersion in the press and

---
\(^{1353}\) Marguerite Audoux, Marie-Claire (Paris: Fasquelle, 1910); Guyon in Alain-Fournier, Chroniques et critiques, 300.  
\(^{1354}\) Alain-Fournier, Chroniques et critiques, 304.
the frequency with which other late nineteenth and early twentieth-century writer-novelists discuss journalism in their novels, that omission is striking. It is also paralleled by a still more glaring absence, namely discussion of literature itself. *Le Grand Meaulnes* is filled with books: “vieux livres dorés […] gros livres rouges épars sur la table […] un beau livre de prix” etcetera.¹³⁵⁵ Yet those books are seldom identified, and, as we saw at beginning of this chapter, the novel contains only a handful of direct literary allusions.

From Flaubert onwards, the French novel becomes a vehicle for literary criticism, where authors set out to rank their peers and implicitly situate their own works within the canon. That exercise in self-estimation is pursued with ironic detachment in *Madame Bovary* and *L’Éducation sentimentale*, with epic fervour in *Les Déracinés*’ account of Hugo’s funeral, and with scathing vitriol in *Le Désespéré* and *Là-Bas*. By contrast, *Le Grand Meaulnes* seems to leave all that amour propre and score-settling behind whilst simultaneously declining to join in the ongoing fictional tussle between journalism and literature that preoccupied other novelists. Alain-Fournier’s novel occasionally alludes to its own fictionality, but it does so fleetingly, without interrupting the flow of the narrative. For example, the narrator describes his failed initial attempts at helping Meaulnes find his future wife Yvonne as “notre roman d’aventures de l’an passé.”¹³⁵⁶ *Le Grand Meaulnes* thereby wears its self-consciousness lightly whilst largely foregoing implicit comparisons with other novels and dispensing entirely with the anti-journalistic thunder that consumed so many of his precursors and contemporaries.

Comment rester là, devant un livre, à ruminer notre déception, tandis que tout nous appelait au-dehors: les poursuites des oiseaux dans les branches près des fenêtres, la fuite des autres élèves vers les prés et les bois, et surtout le fiévreux désir d’essayer au plus vite l’itinéraire incomplet vérifié par le bohémien […]?¹³⁵⁷

---

So asks *Le Grand Meaulnes*’s narrator as he and Meaulnes stew in the schoolroom after failing to relocate the mysterious “domaine sans nom,” where Meaulnes first encounters Yvonne. Within that rhetorical question lies Alain-Fournier’s response to the crisis of the novel. Rather than dwelling on that crisis, he turned his imagination towards life itself. And while journalism may have honed his writerly craft, it offered no stimulation to compare with the grandeur of nature and youthful adventure. *Le Grand Meaulnes* thus obliquely exemplifies the maxim that journalism can lead anywhere, as long as you manage to escape from it.

For Colette, journalism itself helped her escape from both the gruelling life of a music-hall performer and her plagiarizing first husband Willy, himself a journalist for whom she had occasionally ghost-written articles, perhaps including a series of music reviews in 1903 for *Gil Blas* that were signed “Claudine” at a time when Willy still claimed sole authorship of the *Claudine* novels.\(^{1358}\) Though her novels garnered considerable commercial success, book sales alone never provided enough to live independently and comfortably. Colette duly became a journalist, because, as she explained to a friend in 1914: “[I]l faut vivre.”\(^{1359}\) During her career, she wrote over a thousand articles, encompassing chroniques, book and theatre reviews, short stories, and pieces of reportage for newspapers and magazines including, in rough chronological order, the *Mercure de France*, *La Cocarde*, the feminist newspaper *La Fronde*, *Gil Blas*, the cultural magazine *La Vie parisienne*, *Le Matin*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Journal*, *Vogue*, *Marie-Claire*, and *Le Petit Parisien*.\(^{1360}\) Many of her novels were first published serially. Unusually for a writer-journalist, as we saw in Chapter One, she also occupied an editorial position at *Le Matin*, where she oversaw a regular short-story

---


column between 1919 and 1923, having previously married Henry de Jouvenel, an editor at that newspaper, in 1912.

An interview with Toute l’édition in 1933, as Colette was writing the short novel La Chatte for the newspaper Marianne, gives an insight into how the demands of journalism shaped her writing life:

Là-dessus, un heurt discret à la porte. Un cycliste.
—C’est pour Marianne, Madame.
—Ah! mon Dieu! fait Colette qui sursaute. Mais c’est pas prêt!
Le cycliste attendra.\(^{1361}\)

Colette’s mother feared that such pressures would spoil her talent. “Rien n’use les écrivains comme le journalisme,” she warned her daughter in 1912.\(^{1362}\) And Colette herself would eventually complain in her memoir L’Étoile Vesper (1946): “Le journalisme est une carrière à perdre le souffle. Même jeune, je n’ai jamais pu accommoder mon rythme lent à son allure ‘grand quotidien’.”\(^{1363}\)

But Colette tended to adopt a more phlegmatic attitude. Upon resuming regular journalism after several years away from the press in 1933, she depicted her new responsibilities as a daily columnist for the newspaper La République in coolly skeptical tones that recall her earlier comment about needing to earn a living: “On ne redevient pas journaliste sans appréhension, ni sans coquetterie, ni sans mauvaise foi.”\(^{1364}\) And yet the article goes on to concede that journalism can be a stimulating albeit all-consuming activity: “[T]ous les jours, je courrai l’aventure d’écrire.

---

\(^{1361}\) Roger Giron, “Conversation avec Colette,” Toute l’édition, April 8, 1933, 4. Colette’s third husband Maurice Goudeket similarly recalls how a cyclist would often wait in the kitchen until her copy was ready. See Maurice Goudeket, Près de Colette (Paris: Flammarion, 1956), 28.

\(^{1362}\) Quoted in Dubbelboer, “‘Nothing Ruins Writers like Journalism’: Colette, the Press and Belle Époque Literary Life,” 32.

\(^{1363}\) Colette, Œuvres, ed. Alain Brunet and Claude Pichois, 4 vols, Bibliothèque de la Pléaide (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-2001), 4: 786; quoted in Bonal and Maget, Colette journaliste, 27.

\(^{1364}\) Colette, “Le Journal de Colette,’’ La République, Dec. 15, 1933, in Bonal and Maget, Colette journaliste, 35
Tous les jours un souci s’éveillera en même temps que moi, m’accompagnera en voyage, nagera l’été à mon flanc et s’insinuera dans mon songe.”

Neither degrading servitude, nor heroic calling, journalism for Colette was just another way of writing her way through life.

How did that journalistic adventure affect her novels?

Firstly, Colette’s journalism occasionally explores themes that re-emerge in her novels. As Sophie Robert notes, an article Colette published in *La Vie Parisienne* in early 1908 about a music-hall rehearsal depicts the world of Belle Époque show-business in the same jaundiced light as her autobiographical novel *La Vagabonde*, which was serialized in the same magazine two years later. And the eponymous anti-hero of *Chéri* (1920) and *La Fin de Chéri* (1926) originated in eight short stories Colette published in *Le Matin* before the war, which already contain the essential details of the first novel’s plot about Chéri’s liaison with the middle-aged courtesan Léa and his marriage to a younger woman.

Secondly, the terse intimacy of Colette’s writing would appear to owe much to the formal constraints of journalism. Georges Simenon recalled that the best literary advice he ever received came from Colette after he had submitted a short story to her for publication in *Le Matin*: “Il ne faut pas faire de la littérature.” And both contemporary and recent critics have interpreted the shift from the romantic self-absorption of *La Vagabonde* to the more detached, outward-looking, and laconic approach of her later writing as a consequence of Colette’s increasing involvement in the press. In a review of *Les Heures longues* (1917), a collection of Colette’s war-time
André Billy detected “un certain durcissement [...] le signe, à peine perceptible, de l’emprise professionnelle” and celebrated her writing’s new aura of stoicism: “Loin de geindre ainsi qu’elle faisait naguère, Colette moralise, en appelle au bon sens et à la raison.” Journalism had, as Billy saw it, transformed a somewhat frivolous ex-music-hall performer into a champion of robust, masculine virtues. For all its implicit sexism, the critic’s judgement does find an echo in Chéri, where the eponymous anti-hero compliments his lover Léa as “un honnête homme” and a “chic type,” and more still in La Fin de Chéri, where the listless, effeminate Chéri fails to adjust to life in a post-war Paris populated by assertive, enterprising women, who seem to have been liberated and masculinized by the absence of men during the war.

La Fin de Chéri also evokes its author’s transformation from exploited show girl to successful independent writer through its account of Léa’s own past as an actress, who, according to an anecdote told by her fellow courtesan La Copine, had refused to prostitute herself to advance her theatrical career: “‘Le père Mortier croyait qu’avec de la publicité dans le Gil Blas, il aurait tout ce qu’il voudrait de Léa. Ah! là, là! mes enfants, quel bec de gaz!...’” At first glance, this sentence seems to allude to what Baudelaire’s short story “La Fanfarlo” (1847) called “[l]es facilités du feuilleton,” whereby drama critics would trade laudatory coverage for sexual favours. Gil Blas did have a drama critic called Pierre Mortier, who later edited the same newspaper. But, as Jacques Dupont notes, the most likely target here is the theatrical impresario


Colette, Œuvres, 2: 820, 823. Descriptions of the characters’ physical appearance and behaviour in La Fin de Chéri repeatedly evoke this gender inversion. For example, Chéri’s mother’s hair is said to be “taillée garconnièremment” (Œuvres, 3: 209); the night-club impresario Desmond’s unnamed bookkeeper, who remarks that she would kill for money, is described as “duvetée et hommasse” (190); and Chéri goes for a manicure before blowing his brains out.

Colette, Œuvres, 3: 271.

Baudelaire, Oc, 1: 570.
Michel Mortier, whom Colette called “le père Mortier” in a 1908 letter to the novelist Pierre Louys.\textsuperscript{1374} The press here duly appears to be more corrupted than corrupting. Whereas journalism itself is traditionally portrayed as a form of prostitution in French literature, La Copine’s anecdote puts that self-pitying trope in perspective by emphasizing that actresses really were expected to prostitute themselves (which is also a prominent theme in the autobiographical tales of misery on the road in \textit{L’Envers du music-hall} [1913], where the impoverished performers must by turns rely on gifts from rich lovers and openly solicit clients on the street after they get off stage, and in her novel \textit{Mitsou} [1919], where the actress heroine lives in comfort only thanks to her parallel career as a “femme entretenue”). Moreover, notwithstanding the triumphant tone of La Copine’s story, the anecdote evokes the dismal irony that if Léa maintained her integrity by refusing Mortier’s advances she nonetheless ended up as a courtesan, who having lost her looks in \textit{La Fin de Chéri}, now resembles, in the eyes of her former lover, a bloated, washed-up ham actor reduced to playing jovial stock characters.\textsuperscript{1375} Whereas other female characters in the novel emancipate themselves by adopting masculine characteristics and doing traditionally male jobs, Léa turns into a grotesque caricature of a man as she tries to simulate her vanished feminine charms. What dooms her is her inability to express herself through the male-dominated craft of writing: “Si je savais écrire, ou parler, mon petit, j’en dirais, là-dessus… Oh! naturellement je n’inventerai rien, mais enfin je saurais de quoi je parle.”\textsuperscript{1376} Léa’s lament here evokes the basic difference between Colette and her creation. For what freed Colette from the abject fate of her character, whom she resembles in other respects, was that she did know how to write. And since Colette indeed knew what she was talking about, she avoided hyperbolic comparisons between journalism and prostitution.

\textsuperscript{1375} See Colette, \textit{Œuvres}, 3: 223.
\textsuperscript{1376} Colette, \textit{Œuvres}, 3: 223.
Colette’s uniquely rounded perspective perhaps explains why, despite the extensive genetic connections between her fictional writings and the press, the theme of journalism does not feature prominently in her novels. While she frequently mentions newspapers and magazines, such detail tends to tell us more about her characters than the press itself. For example, in *Claudine à l’école* (1900), the precociousness of the eponymous heroine and her schoolfriends is signalled by the fact that they secretly read publications such as *L’Écho de Paris* and *Gil Blas illustré*. Those choices of reading matter are left to speak for themselves without any commentary about journalism’s vices or virtues. Unlike novels by male contemporaries or near contemporaries such as Bloy, Huysmans, and Lorrain, there is no fundamental opposition here between literature and the mass press. Nor does Colette celebrate journalistic dynamism in the manner of Vallès or Leroux.

As Guillaume Pinson has noted, the press frequently appears in the *Claudine* novels as a facet of the social whirl that the heroine struggles to navigate following her arrival in Paris and marriage to Renaud (himself a sometime journalist). And Claudine seems to arrive at a happy medium in the cycle’s final instalment *La Retraite sentimentale* (1907), where she and her friend Annie withdraw to contented rustic obscurity yet continue to keep a jaundiced eye on the world of Parisian “mondanités” by reading newspapers and magazines, which offer “[u]ne salade amusante de ténors, de chiens, de nageurs, de duchesses-poètes et de chauffeurs titrés […].” Pinson comments: “Loin de Paris, au plus profond de la campagne, dans la douceur d’une sociabilité amicale, la mondanité et la vie des loisirs parisiens ne sont plus qu’un spectacle un peu irréel à observer par méditations interposées, couché sur la surface plane du magazine.” The girls may

---

1377 See Colette, *Œuvres*, 1: 17, 73, 100.
1380 Pinson, *Fiction du monde*, 293.
have escaped the *beau monde*, but they’ve also brought some of its mediatized colour with them. Colette herself similarly keeps journalism at one remove in her novels without excluding the press entirely.

In some unpublished notes, Colette wrote: “Souvenirs d’un reporter. Il n’y a qu’une consigne, qui est ‘Débrouillez-vous!”’\textsuperscript{1381} That remark sums up the nonchalant portrayal of journalism in her novels. For however trying the daily grind of journalism, Colette had experienced far worse. Getting on with the job in that literary laboratory brought her independence, intellectual stimulation, and modest fame. Colette duly found little to thunder against in the press.

A similar sense of detachment emerges in the novels of François Mauriac. Unlike Colette, Mauriac, the scion of a prosperous bourgeois family, did not need to churn out journalism to survive. He nonetheless wrote regular journalism throughout his career, guided primarily by religious and political conviction, for a wide array of newspapers and magazines.\textsuperscript{1382} As in Colette’s work, that journalistic hinterland lingers discreetly in the background of some of his novels.

*Thérèse Desqueyroux* (1927) is based on the real case of Henriette Canaby, who was tried for non-fatally poisoning her husband in Bordeaux in 1906. Mauriac himself attended the trial, which was widely reported in the press.\textsuperscript{1383} While *Thérèse Desqueyroux* is less preoccupied with the events of the case itself than the psychology of the eponymous anti-heroine and how her actions reflect on provincial bourgeois mores, the novel occasionally alludes to the story’s journalistic

\textsuperscript{1381} Quoted in Bonal and Maget, *Colette journaliste*, 37.
\textsuperscript{1382} The website François Mauriac en ligne (http://mauriac-en-ligne.u-bordeaux-montaigne.fr/), maintained by the Université Bordeaux Montaigne, includes a near complete collection of Mauriac’s journalism published between 1905 and 1945, which runs to nearly 1000 articles. For an overview of Mauriac’s journalistic career, see the articles in Benoît Mérand (ed.), *Mauriac au monde comme n’y étant pas: le journaliste, l’histoire et les médias* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2013).
dimension. For instance, her husband Bernard seems less horrified by the fact that Thérèse tried to kill him than by the mediatized notoriety that now haunts them. As he remarks to himself towards the end of the novel: “Thérèse suscitait le drame, – pire que le drame: le fait divers […]”\footnote{Mauriac, Or, 2: 96.} Bernard’s wounded sense of propriety here recalls the anti-journalistic bourgeois dudgeon satirized in Flaubert’s \textit{Dictionnaire}. Unlike Flaubert in \textit{L’Éducation sentimentale} and \textit{Bouvard et Pécuchet}, Mauriac offers no parallel critique of journalism itself in his novel. Bernard’s remark implicitly acknowledges that a real \textit{fait divers} is the source for \textit{Thérèse Desqueyroux}. But the novel does not comment either way on those connections to the press.

The germ of a more detailed portrayal of journalism appears in Mauriac’s \textit{Le Nœud de vipères} (1933), where the narrator Louis, a lawyer who pondered becoming a journalist in his youth, is at once flattered that his successes in the court room attracted much journalistic attention and irritated that such scrutiny prevented him from pursuing a parallel political career. “Les journalistes imbéciles,” he complains, “qui font semblant de s’indigner parce que tel avocat profite de ce qu’il est député ou ministre pour glaner quelques menus profits, feraient bien mieux d’admirer la conduite de ceux qui ont su établir entre leurs passions une hiérarchie intelligente, et qui ont préféré la gloire politique aux affaires les plus fructueuses.”\footnote{Mauriac, Or, 2: 425.} Whereas journalism is typically identified with corruption in French literature, Mauriac’s anti-hero reproaches journalists for adopting a pedantically virtuous attitude towards lawyer-politicians. Some mild abuse of office should, he suggests, be deemed appropriate recompense for foregoing even greater earnings at the bar. That eccentric view of public life’s ethical obligations underlines Louis’s pathological avarice, which poisons his relations with his entire family. As in \textit{Thérèse Desqueyroux}, an allusion to journalism thus serves to illustrate the psychology of one of Mauriac’s characters whilst also taking
a swipe at debased bourgeois values. The press then reappears in Le Nœud de vipères during argument about the Dreyfus Affair, when Louis’s wife praises an article by Édouard Drumont. As in Colette’s works, such references to the press supply background cultural detail, but journalism never occupies the centre of the picture.

Rather than develop Le Nœud de vipères’s vision of the press as a moralizing political force within his fictional writing, Mauriac intensified his own journalistic efforts. Having written regular opinion columns for L’Écho de Paris during the 1930s, Mauriac became a leading political commentator for publications such as the small Catholic magazine La Table ronde, Le Figaro, and L’Express after the Second World War. And his collected columns from the 1950s, 60s, and early 70s run to five volumes. Mauriac, a passionate, albeit belated critic of French colonialism, saw his journalistic career as a Christian duty. And, in 1958, he told two television interviewers that he applied the same effort to his columns as he did to his novels, since he had always viewed journalism as a form of literature.

His journalism and novels, which were usually serialized in the press, evoke similar moral preoccupations. Just as Thérèse Desqueyroux suggests the necessity of forgiveness for even the most horrific deeds, so Mauriac cut a lonely figure immediately after the Liberation when he

---

1386 See Mauriac, Or, 2: 444-445.
published articles in *Le Figaro* opposing the death penalty for collaborators such as the fascist writer Robert Brasillach.\(^{1389}\)

But Mauriac’s novels and journalism otherwise seem distinct. In contrast to his idol Barrès, Bloy, Lorrain, and Mirbeau, his fictional works seldom mention journalism and do not recycle his own columns. Moreover, perhaps because Mauriac equated journalism with literature, neither his journalism nor his novels evoke any tension between those two modes of writing. Like Cendrars and Salmon (as we saw in Chapter Five), Mauriac gravitated away from imaginative literature towards journalism and published few novels after emerging as a grey eminence in *Le Figaro* and *L’Express* during the post-war era. Unlike them, he used his literary prestige and access to mass media to advance noble political causes (albeit combined with uncritical devotion to the career of Charles de Gaulle), becoming a campaigning intellectual in the mould of Zola. For Mauriac, the press thus represented less a literary laboratory than a means of projecting political and cultural influence.

**IX. Crisis to crisis**

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, journalism was a central pivot within the crisis of the novel. The problem confronting novelists had two overlapping dimensions: Firstly, Naturalist novels seemed too reliant on documentation and observation rather than imagination; these literary works were, in other words, too much like *reportage*. Secondly, the rise of the mass press seemed to epitomize the wider political, social, and cultural ills of imperialist capitalist democracy that horrified novelists on both right and left.

\(^{1389}\) On Mauriac’s efforts on behalf of Brasillach, who repeatedly attacked Mauriac during the Occupation, see Alice Kaplan, *The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brasillach* (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 172-173 and 191-192.
The authors discussed in this chapter adopted three distinct literary responses to journalism’s increasing cultural prominence and encroachment upon literature.

The most common consisted of a kind of *fuite en avant* as authors as varied as Huysmans, Barrès, Bloy, Breton, and Aragon, prior to his embrace of Communism, projected intensified hostility towards the mass press in their fictional writings, thereby replicating an existing theme of realist and Naturalist literature, whilst differentiating their works from those precursors through formal innovation, particularly fragmented narrative structure, and a heightened sense of fictional self-consciousness. That self-consciousness did not extend, however, to an examination of their own works’ affinities with journalism, which lurk within them like an indelible stain whose existence is occasionally acknowledged but never fully explored.

In the novels of Vallès and Leroux, the traditional opposition between journalism and literature is turned on its head. Journalists become heroes or idealistic militants, whereas literature is disdained as a tedious or dilettantish distraction. And if Huysmans, Barrès, Bloy, Breton, and Aragon among others avoid confronting their debts to journalism, these devotees of journalism are similarly reticent about the tensions between their debts to other literary works and the anti-literary thunder found in their novels. In other words, Vallès and Leroux offer a resolution to the crisis of the novel that reconciles literature with journalism at the expense of attempting to reconcile literature with itself.

Alain-Fournier, Colette, and Mauriac all bypass this dilemma. Rather than fixate on journalism’s cultural role or their own place in literary history, they took what they needed from the press in novels that renew the traditional art of story-telling by, in Alain-Fournier’s case, combining laconic stylistic precision with adventurous flair, and, in Colette and Mauriac’s case, using the first person and shifting points of view to create a rich sense of introspective
psychological drama. The press continues to lurk in the background of their stories but ceases to represent a source of existential crisis.

Mauriac’s parallel journalistic career also exemplifies a shift in how writers interacted with the press after the Second World War. Like him, Aragon, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, and Jean-Paul Sartre all wrote extensively for newspapers and magazines during the 1940s and 50s. Camus, Sartre, Beauvoir, and Aragon also occupied editorial roles at, respectively, the Resistance newspaper *Combat* and the intellectual magazines *Les Temps modernes* and *Les Lettres françaises*. Aragon recycled his own journalism in several novels while, as we saw in Chapter Five, Camus’s *L’Étranger* seems to be based on a real *fait divers*. Their involvement with the press continued to provoke tensions. But these were primarily political rather than literary. For instance, Camus ceased writing regularly for *Combat* in September 1945 due to what he perceived to be its lack of an ideologically coherent editorial line; and *Les Lettres françaises* collapsed after the magazine opposed the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, leading to a withdrawal of Eastern Bloc subsidies.1390 The question confronting these authors was no longer how to preserve their artistic integrity in a literary world overrun by mercenary newspapers, but how to carve out space for their own visions of journalism, a challenge that becomes a central theme of Beauvoir’s *Les Mandarins* (1954), her fictionalized portrayal of Parisian intellectual life, which revolves around a *Combat*-like newspaper.

Post-war intellectual preoccupations also shifted away from the crisis of the novel towards what Camus called “une Crise de l’Homme,” stemming from a sense of moral decay whereby “la mise à mort d’un être peut être envisagée autrement qu’avec l’horreur et le scandale qu’elle devrait susciter.”1391 Faced with that moral quandary, old complaints about journalism’s meretricious

---

effects on literature temporarily abated. Indeed, Sartre’s *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?*, first published in *Les Temps modernes* in 1947, argues that books hold so little appeal for the working and lower-middle classes that journalism and cinema, which, he insists, both possess “un art littéraire” of their own, offer the only effective means of reaching these social strata. Like Mallarmé, Sartre saw the press as a tool for inspiring the masses and renewing literature itself. But Sartre sought a social rather than a poetic revolution – with equally abortive results as the optimism stirred by the Liberation soon gave way to the colonial outrages and grubby horse-trading of the Fourth Republic, caught between competing US and Soviet hegemonies.

An acute sense of failure thus haunts *Les Mandarins*’ portrait of fruitless personal and political quarrels. And an echo of Flaubert’s cliché can be heard towards the end of the novel when Nadine, the daughter of Robert Dubreuilh, a character largely based on Sartre, remarks: “Je m’en fous des journaux,” only for her father to shoot back: “La preuve que tu ne t’en fous pas!” Journalism, in other words, once again seemed both deplorable and inescapable. The narrator of Camus’ *La Chute* (1956) strikes a similarly dismal note: “Je rêve parfois de ce que diront de nous les historiens futurs. Une phrase leur suffira pour l’homme moderne: il forniquait et lisait des journaux.” A decade on from the exalted sense of mission that animates Camus’s *Combat* articles, newspapers have come to epitomize the bovine mindlessness of consumer society. And a century after Flaubert had set to work on his *Dictionnaire*, French novels were still thundering against the press.

1392 Julien Gracq would, however, soon complain of “une crise du jugement littéraire,” which he attributed, rather like the Surrealists, in large part to the dominant influence of the mass press on public taste (Julien Gracq, *La Littérature à l’estomac* [Paris: José Corti, 1950], 11).
1393 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?*, 322.
CHAPTER SEVEN
Heroic Equivocations from Verne to Proust

Que voulez-vous? Il faut bien satisfaire aux exigences du reportage, aux nécessités si moderne de l’interview!
Jules Verne, Claudius Bombarnac: carnet d’un reporter (1892).1396

Du temps du pauvre Calmette, je faisais de temps en temps le premier article dans
Le Figaro. Les lecteurs étaient bien volés, et le secrétaire de la Rédaction gémissait que ce n’était pas d’actualité.
Marcel Proust, letter to the Abbé Mugnier, February 14, 1918.1397

I. Ambivalent compounds

A crisis traditionally denotes a turning point or decisive moment that portends imminent change. That process can unfold organically, as in medicine (the word’s original context in both French and English), where we may be powerless to affect the outcome of an illness. But in extended use throughout politics, business, and culture, reflecting its roots in the Greek verb κρίνειν, meaning to judge or decide, the word seems to issue an appeal for judgement and action. The discourse of crisis revolves around the injunctions to take a stand and find a way out of turmoil. And great anguish tends to emerge when a decisive resolution appears elusive, thence Antonio Gramsci’s circa-1930 remark that “the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.”1398 A crisis, in other words, can persist indefinitely, becoming a point that seemingly cannot be turned and spawning violent forms of entropy.

Faced with the crisis in letters provoked by the rise of the mass press, a central strand within a broader crisis of the novel around the turn of the century, most modernist French novelists and

1397 In Proust, Corr., 17: 112.
prose writers took a clear position. As we saw in the previous chapter, the majority denounced the press as a cretinous behemoth that was devouring art, culture, and truth. Meanwhile, a handful celebrated the press as a tool of adventure, heroism or social revolution.

Neither of these approaches settled the matter. Those who railed against the press nonetheless drew heavily on journalism in their novels, which indeed present a “great variety of morbid symptoms” – Satanism, murder, anomie, war, and a marked penchant for religious and political extremism – that attest to a sense of unresolved literary-cum-civilizational crisis. And those who celebrated the press tended to portray literature and even writing itself as a dilettantish distraction or corrupting affliction, creating a new set of unexamined tensions since they expressed those dismissals within works of imaginative literature.

A few scattered authors took what they needed from the press without fixating on journalism’s cultural significance in their novels, which suggests that the influence of the press only represented a crisis for those who chose to see it that way. But as journalism was gripped by the political passions of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, French novelists more commonly continued to confront and evaluate that phenomenon in their work. And following a brief flurry of optimism about the transformative power of independent journalism after the Liberation, disillusionment soon acquired a familiar form in novels by Beauvoir and Camus, where newspapers once again seem both wretched and inescapable. The crisis lurched on.

Between hostility, approbation, and nonchalance towards the press, there also existed a fourth approach – that of ambivalence. Just as Mallarmé and Apollinaire had wrestled with competing urges of attraction and repulsion stirred by their own involvement with journalism and its encroachment upon literature, a varied assortment of novelists explored similar conflicts in their work. Some ultimately shifted towards a more consistently hostile view of the mass press. But
others, particularly Gide and Proust, continued to pivot between fascination and hostility without arriving at a definitive judgement. That ambivalence reflects their own debts to journalism and the heightened sense of fictional self-consciousness at the heart of their writing. Journalism troubled them because it was integral to their novels. Whereas Barrès, Huysmans, and Mirbeau among others all avoid confronting their novels’ genetic connections to the press, Proust and Gide acknowledge how their work has been shaped by journalism whilst also reflecting in their novels on the vexed relationship between literature and the press more generally. What emerges from these fictional self-examinations is not a transcendent vision of literary-journalistic hybridity but a brittle symbiosis where journalism becomes at once a model and a repoussoir. Confronting that paradox may not have resolved the crisis of the novel, but such candour did offer a more nuanced picture of the literary-journalistic conflict at its heart.

II. Conflict and hybridity in Verne and Gourmont

An early glimpse of an ambivalent fictional assessment of that antagonism can be seen in the work of Jules Verne. Like Leroux’s Rouetabille series, Verne’s novels, such as L’Île mystérieuse (1875), Michel Strogoff (1876), and Claudius Bombarnac (1892), frequently feature heroic depictions of peripatetic reporters, who seek out adventure and sensational scoops without fretting about their prose style. And yet, as Kate Rees has argued, his novels, which were usually serialized in newspapers or magazines, also satirize the frenetic rhythms of modern reportage and suggest that a more literary approach to understanding the world can fill in journalism’s blind spots.1399

That vision of literary-journalistic interchange is central to Michel Strogoff, which recounts the tumultuous journey of a diplomatic courier for the Russian Tsar charged with delivering a vital

secret message to the Tsar’s brother in Siberia during a fictional Tartar rebellion. Along the way, the eponymous hero repeatedly encounters two rival foreign correspondents, the Englishman Harry Blount and the Frenchman Alcide Jolivet, who are desperate to send news of the conflict back to the Europe. The courier and the journalists are travelling in the same direction, yet they are also at cross purposes. For Strogoff’s mission consists of bringing a secret to the east, whereas Blount and Jolivet hope to reveal all about what’s going on to readers in the west. The success of the adventure novel as a form similarly depends on maintaining a sense of mystery and suspense, contrary to the journalistic prerogative of communicating information as quickly and succinctly as possible. As Rees puts it, *Michel Strogoff* thereby sets “its own novelistic features against techniques of reportage and travelogue as it stages a race between journalism and the mythical message carried by Strogoff.”\(^{1400}\)

Strogoff’s role as an avatar for literature itself is suggested by his unique sensory gifts:

> Il avait appris à se guider sur des symptômes presque imperceptibles, projection des aiguilles de glaces, disposition des menues branches d’arbre, émanations apportées des dernières limites de l’horizon, […] mille détails qui sont mille jalous pour qui sait les reconnaître.\(^{1401}\)

Rees compares Strogoff’s exceptional powers of perception to those of the eponymous heroine of George Sand’s novel *Lélia* (1833), whose poor eyesight is compensated by what Manon Mathias calls her visionary “conceptual eye” that allows her to explore the depths of her own being.\(^{1402}\) But Strogoff’s perceptiveness is directed outwards not inwards. A more pertinent analogy would be Balzac’s Vautrin, who, as we saw in Chapter Three, remarks that “tout est dans la forme” as he counsels Lucien at the end of *Illusions perdues* to decode the signs of the social world whilst

---


dissimulating his own intentions. Strogoff himself seems to have intuitively grasped those precepts, as he proves ever alert to both human and natural perils when travelling incognito to Siberia and even manages to simulate blindness towards the end of the novel. Like Vautrin, he thus exhibits an author-like mastery of his world and self.

By contrast, the two journalists, though themselves intrepid and perceptive in limited ways, lack Strogoff’s overarching semiotic skill. Early in the novel, Blount and Jolivet find themselves, unbeknownst to each other, riding in the same eastward-bound train, where the former stares out a window on one side and records that the surrounding landscape is entirely mountainous (though if he had looked out the other side, as his rival does, he would have seen only plains), whilst the latter clumsily attempts to interview his fellow passengers, who assume he’s a spy and duly remain tight-lipped about the Tartar revolt, which they freely discuss in front of the reserved Englishman. As Rees puts it: “The text thus satirizes the restrictions of the reporters […] but harmonizes the two perspectives so that the reader of Verne’s text ‘sees’ the landscape out of the left and the right side of the train, supplementing the one-track minds of the English and French observers.”¹⁴⁰³ The novel, in other words, integrates two fragmentary journalistic accounts to provide a rounded overall view of what’s happening.

And yet when literature and journalism first explicitly collide in the novel, bedlam ensues. Having resurfaced on the outskirts of a Siberian town that is being fought over by Tsarist and Tartar forces, Blount and Jolivet wind up battling for control of a telegraph office as each aims to stop the other filing dispatches about the ongoing battle. Blount resorts to transmitting verses from the Bible to frustrate Jolivet, who, in turn, takes to quoting the popular songs of Jean-Pierre de Béranger once he’s managed to displace his rival. Literature thus becomes a tool in their ego-

---

driven, self-destructive journalistic competition. Strogoff, meanwhile, lurks unseen in the office, listening to the journalists dictate their competing dispatches, as artillery shells begin to explode outside. The three men are then taken prisoner by the Tartars when they try to escape, which seems like poetic justice for their time-wasting antics and failure to co-operate. Whereas Apollinaire would later embrace the tumult of modern journalism in free verse, Verne here suggests that literature and reportage need a more structured form of hybridity if they are to complement each other.

Later in the novel, Strogoff and the journalists indeed develop a fruitful partnership when they find themselves on a raft heading towards Irkutsk, where the trio bravely fight off a pack of marauding wolves. And once Strogoff saves the city from the Tartars, Blount and Jolivet, now fast friends and collaborators, dispatch “deux intéressantes chroniques relatives à l’invasion tartare […] qui, chose rare, ne se contredisaient guère que sur les points les moins importants.” They then attend Strogoff’s wedding to Nadia, the daughter of a Siberian exile he has met en route to Irkutsk, which they also report to their readers. Everyone lives happily ever after, and, after a few missteps, journalism and literature now seem reconciled in a novel that ultimately channels the unruly energy of reportage into the disciplined conventions of melodrama.

Verne again mocks the limitations of journalism in Claudius Bombarnac, whose eponymous narrator, a roving correspondent for the fictional newspaper Le XXe Siècle, is assigned to deliver a “bon reportage” from aboard the fictional “Grand-Transasiatique” railway en route to Beijing. Bombarnac then repeatedly fails to grasp the reality of what is happening around him and even suffers the humiliation of having one of his articles contradicted by a telegram from his

---

editors. Here again, it might appear that *reportage* needs a firm literary hand to give coherent form to its frantic peregrinations. And yet Bombarnac himself, in contrast to Blount and Jolivet, is eager to transcend the colourless factuality of telegraphic style. Indeed, he is so consumed by his search for an archetypal “héros romanesque” to enliven his articles that he overlooks the actual drama unfolding on the train, where an intrepid stowaway saves the passengers from death at the hands of a master criminal.1406 Bombarnac’s clumsy attempts to be literary blind him, in other words, to what would have been a “bon reportage” filled with genuine novelistic colour. Verne thus satirizes both journalistic and literary conventions, as if to suggest that formulaic preconceptions about what constitutes a good story – be it *reportage* or a novel – tend to become self-defeating.1407 And in contrast to the orderly convergence of literature and journalism at the end of *Michel Strogoff*, *Claudius Bombarnac* yields a jumbled, paradoxical form of literary-journalistic hybridity as the narrator’s failures to find a story for his newspaper – what Timothy Unwin calls his “non-story” – become the story of Verne’s novel.1408 In both works, literature ultimately seems to assert its pre-eminence over *reportage*. But the earlier novel’s harmonious resolution to literary-journalistic conflict unravels in *Claudius Bombarnac*, where that antagonism re-emerges as a source of continuing narrative crisis.

As Unwin notes, the reflexive focus on storytelling in *Claudius Bombarnac* epitomizes an emerging trend in the French novel that culminates in the post-war *nouveau roman*.1409 Michel Butor’s *La Modification* (1957) – about a writer plotting a novel as he travels from London to Rome by train – may even have been directly inspired by *Claudius Bombarnac*.1410 And though

---

Verne’s novel does not feature a novelist writing a novel, the narrator’s eagerness to give his reportage a novelistic flavour suggests that it can be deemed an early example of the “roman du roman,” a form that would become the apotheosis of modernist fictional self-consciousness in Proust’s Recherche and Gide’s Les Faux-Monnayeurs (which, like Claudius Bombarnac, emphasizes its reflexivity through the device of outlining a projected work in fictional diary entries).

As we shall see, those later “romans du roman” also share Claudius Bombarnac’s preoccupation with literary-journalistic conflict. As we saw in Chapters One and Six, that theme is already central to Là-Bas – published the year before Verne’s novel – whose unremitting anti-journalistic thunder exposes the limitations of its self-consciousness given the journalistic background to Huymans’s “roman du roman” itself.

A more rounded and even earlier fictional portrayal of a writer self-consciously struggling to come to terms with the implications of the mass press for his own work is found in Remy de Gourmont’s first novel Sixtine (1890). As we saw in Chapters One and Two, Gourmont published widely in both newspapers and petites revues (a phenomenon he helped define through his bibliography), particularly the Mercure de France, to which he contributed hundreds of articles from its creation in 1890 until his death in 1915. That literary-journalistic milieu forms the backdrop to Sixtine’s portrayal of a hermitic author’s overlapping literary and romantic frustrations. Gourmont’s hero Hubert d’Entragues aspires to write a novel that will demonstrate...
how “un cerveau isolé du monde peut se créer un monde.” Yet he immediately recoils from this solipsistic vision: “[I]l reconnut que son mépris du matérialisme l’entraînait un peu loin: c’était verser dans l’absurde.” If such total aesthetic self-absorption represents one extreme, then the mass press epitomizes its antithesis—a way of life stripped of all reflection and aesthetic preoccupations, which Renaudeau, a friend of Entragues, sums up as follows: “se marier, se faire bourgeois, procréer et ne lire que la première page des journaux, le feuilleton, la bourse et s’interdire les faits-divers comme trop émouvants.” This dismal portrait of social conformity is tellingly uttered in the offices of a fictional petite revue edited by Renaudeau—the logical home for those committed to a bohemian life of letters. And yet Sixtine complicates the familiar opposition between high-minded little magazines and meretricious newspapers by portraying Renaudeau as a faintly lascivious would-be lothario, who agrees to publish an article purely because he finds its female author physically attractive.

While Gourmont’s novel offers no explicit praise for the mass press, the text also occasionally suggests that avoiding the twin pitfalls of solipsistic absurdity and bourgeois cretinism would be facilitated by a spirit of prudent openness towards newspaper journalism. For instance, Calixte, another of Entragues’s writer friends, is said to have turned his back on journalism for the sake of artistic freedom: “Il gagnait peu, par indifférence, car il se serait facilement poussé à une situation lucrative dans le journalisme, mais il aimait, par-dessus tout, à travailler dignement et librement.” Yet the very next sentence echoes Entragues’s earlier comments about the perils of solipsism: “Chez lui, le dédain de la vie était naïf: il l’ignorait, comme on ignore la chimie analytique, et ne se sentait pas plus de goût pour vivre, à la moderne, que pour

---

1412 Gourmont, Sixtine, 205.
1413 Gourmont, Sixtine, 167.
s’enfermer dans une cave avec des cornues [...].” Calixte’s freedom from the indignities of journalism here seems to go hand in hand with his failure to engage with modern life. Cut off, like an un-monied des Esseintes, in an imaginary world populated by literary heroes – “les seuls êtres qui ne fussent pas doués du triste esprit de contradiction” – he attains peace of mind at the expense of confronting the messy tumult of reality. By contrast, Sixtine itself does explore the contradictions of life on Grub Street, where indifference to the mass press and a literary diet restricted to “la première page des journaux” both seem equally fruitless.

That impression of ambivalence may not be what Gourmont intended. For his own journalism portrays journalism as the enemy of literature. “Le jour est proche,” he announced in an article for the Mercure in July 1890, the month he completed Sixtine, “où il faudra, entre la littérature et le journalisme, opter définitivement.”\(^\text{1414}\) Gourmont himself did not heed that vow, as he continued to write journalism for the Mercure and, albeit less frequently, newspapers such as Le Temps. He also, as we saw in Chapter One, published some of his best short stories in Le Journal in 1893-1894. Gourmont thus settled into the familiar groove of a writer-journalist who thunders against the mass press but cannot live without it. And when the theme of journalism reappears in his novel Une nuit au Luxembourg (1906), little trace of ambivalence remains. The book opens with the text of a fictional fait divers that the narrator purports to have read in Le Temps about the death of a journalist friend, who leaves behind a manuscript recounting a mysterious encounter with a Christ-like figure preceding his demise. In the manuscript, the journalist notes that he had also telegraphed a version of the story to his newspaper whilst emphasizing that he cares little for this form of writing: “J’ai télégraphié, parce que c’était mon devoir; j’écris, parce

que c’est mon plaisir.”

As Alexia Kalantzis has argued, that comment, along with remarks by the narrator disparaging inaccurate newspaper coverage of his friend’s death, asserts literature’s superiority over journalism. Indeed, the journalistic dispatch does not even count as writing here. Echoing Mallarmé’s comment in “Quant au livre” – “Un journal reste le point de départ; la littérature s’y décharge à souhait” – Gourmont’s use of a fait divers as a plot device suggests that journalism can at least supply a spark of literary inspiration. Unlike Mallarmé, Gourmont never seemed to imagine that spark could catch fire within the pages of the mass press itself. And the latent tensions of Sixtine duly resolved themselves into a traditional vision of aesthetic hierarchies.

III. Roussel – making sport of the mass press?

A more sustained challenge to aesthetic stratification, encompassing not just journalism but all manner of otherwise devalued cultural artefacts, is found in the works of Raymond Roussel. Heir to a vast stock-broking fortune, Roussel had no need to grind out newspaper articles to survive. Yet, as we saw in Chapter One, this most esoteric of authors first published much of his work, probably at his own expense, in the newspaper Le Gaulois du Dimanche, including the long poem La Vue (in April 1903) and the novels Impressions d’Afrique (between July and September 1909) and Locus Solus (between December 1913 and March 1914). As he explained to Robert de Montesquiou in 1913, Roussel hoped those prepublications would overcome public indifference to his books: “Hélas, mes livres ne se vendent pas, je n’ai qu’un moyen pour tâcher de leur procurer quelques lecteurs, c’est de les publier dans un journal.” Roussel also spent heavily on

1416 See Kalantzis, Remy de Gourmont créateur de formes, 456.
1417 Mallarmé, Oc, 2: 224.
newspaper publicity, devoting at least 4,000 francs (more than 14,000 euros in today’s money) to promoting Impressions d’Afrique in newspapers such as Le Figaro and Le Matin. The author duly became a figure of amused fascination throughout the press both in France and abroad. As the sub-headline of a 1910 article in Cleveland’s Plain Dealer Magazine put it: “He’s So Rich He Doesn’t Know What to Do With His Money, and He’s an Artist on the Piano, but He Turns His Hand to Literature and Makes Sport of All Paris.” Roussel himself doubtless encouraged such curiosity. A 1926 article in La Revue du Touring Club de France about the author’s ultra-luxurious “maison roulante,” which he used to tour Europe, includes numerous photographs of the caravan’s interior, including one of his bathtub, that presumably required his co-operation.

The prepublication of Impressions d’Afrique was far from incidental to the text itself as there are numerous variations between the version published in Le Gaulois du Dimanche and the book published by Alphonse Lemerre the following year. As Pierre Bazantay puts it, those variations constitute “un travail d’enrichissement du texte et font du feuilleton un laboratoire, une œuvre à l’essai.” The novel itself, which recounts a series of fantastic performances in equatorial Africa by a troupe of ship-wrecked circus entertainers and opera singers, also includes several images that evoke its author’s idiosyncratic use of the press as a literary laboratory:

La fraise exigeait une plus grande provision de papier; dans un coin de la remise gisait, jeté là au rebut, un paquet de vieux numéros de la Nature, journal que Laubé recevait régulièrement et dans lequel il écrivait tous ses récits de voyage. Arrachant la couverture bleue d’un grand nombre de publications, Nina parvint à établir une élégante collerette de couleur unie, et bientôt, paré des trois articles soigneusement exécutés par l’adroite ouvrière, Séil-kor fit ses débuts dans la carrière funambulesque […].

---

1420 See the account provided by Lemerre to Roussel dated May 13, 1911, MF 4511, f. 11, Documents concernant ses œuvres, Fonds Raymond Roussel, BnF-Richelieu, Paris.
1422 “La Maison roulante de M. Raymond Roussel,” La Revue du Touring Club de France 36, no. 381, Aug. 1926.
1423 Bazantay, “Roussel et le feuilleton,” 129. By contrast, notes Bazantay, the text of Locus Solus published in Le Gaulois du Dimanche does not differ from the book, which was printed prior to the novel’s serialization.
1424 Roussel, Impressions d’Afrique, 175.
As throughout his works, Roussel expresses no opinion about journalism itself here. What matters is not the intrinsic quality of the old copies of *La Nature*, a popular science magazine, but the imaginative use that Nina, the young daughter of Laubé, a French explorer, makes of them. Earlier in the novel, some old illustrated newspapers are similarly transformed into little hats worn by two children during an improbably extravagant production of *Romeo and Juliet*.\(^{1425}\) Journalism is thereby transformed into an instrument of performance art, just as *Impressions d’Afrique* itself turns the form of the “récit de voyage” into a bewildering fictional pageant. And those transformations evoke Roussel’s own attempts to attract readers by using newspapers as a vehicle for creating an aura of fantastic spectacle about his own person, to wit the man who “Makes Sport of All Paris.”

Refashioning magazines as a clown-like ruff seems, moreover, like a visual echo of Roussel’s singular compositional “procedure,” which draws on Verne’s less baroque word-play (whereby, for example, the name “Nemo” both means “no-one” and is “omen” backwards).\(^{1426}\) As the author explains in his posthumously published account of his literary techniques *Comment j’ai écrit certains de mes livres* (1935), *Impressions d’Afrique* is supposedly derived from two sentences, which are identical save for a single letter, yet have entirely different meanings:

1° *Les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux billard*...  
2° *Les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux pillard.*\(^{1427}\)

The first describes white-coloured lettering written in chalk along the sides of an old billiard table; the second refers to letters written by a white man about an old plunderer’s gangs. Changing a

\(^{1425}\) See Roussel, *Impressions d’Afrique*, 126.  
\(^{1427}\) Roussel, *Comment j’ai écrit*, 11; italicized in the original.
single phoneme thus transports Roussel from his own familiar world of bourgeois leisure to the African fantasy of the novel itself. The rest of *Impressions d’Afrique* is then constructed around a series of lexical associations stemming from those two sentences (which do not appear in the text itself). In the passage about the ruff made from old magazines, we find that “papier” evokes “les lettres du blanc”; as Roussel specifies in *Comment j’ai écrit*, “blanc” also yields “colle,” which means both glue (used to affix the paper around a cube of white billiard chalk) and detention in schoolboy argot, for which a formal synonym is “consigne,” whence the text arrives at “coin de la remise.”1428 And “papier” and “colle” lead naturally to “collerette” as well as “numéro,” “publications,” and “articles” while “adroite” and “funambulesque” both evoke a billiard queue. Furthermore, Laubé’s “récits de voyage” bring us back to the original “lettres du blanc.”

From two gnomic yet banal sentences springs an entire fictional world, whose eccentric richness is typified by a theatrical accoutrement reminiscent of Renaissance portraiture made out of nothing but a forgotten stack of magazines. And while *Impressions d’Afrique*’s elaborate word-play supplies a jolt of novelty, that echo of the sober, dignified paintings of Franz Hals and Rembrandt, along with the performance of *Romeo and Juliet* at the heart of the story, evokes nostalgia for the stability and predictability of the past. Though Roussel was embraced by the Surrealists and *nouveaux romanciers* such as Alain Robbe-Grillet, his strenuous word games and the bizarre contraptions they describe seem like a demented attempt at imposing order on the neurotic entropy of modern bourgeois life as much as an engine of avant-garde disruption.1429

---

Roussel’s vertiginous and seemingly inexhaustible creative method also fascinated Michel Foucault, for whom Roussel’s works exemplified literature’s ability to create surprising new patterns of meaning out of everyday language. According to his 1963 book on the author,

Le langage de Roussel s’ouvre d’entrée de jeu au déjà dit qu’il accueille sous la forme la plus déréglée du hasard: non pas pour dire mieux ce qui s’y trouve dit mais pour en soumettre la forme au second aléa d’une destruction explosive et, de ces morceaux épars, inertes, informes, faire naître en les laissant en place la plus inouïe des significations.¹⁴³⁰

Nothwithstanding its excited, revelatory tone, this account of Roussel’s language does not seem particularly original or remarkable. Creating new meanings out of pre-existing words is a basic feature of language, just as a fixed set of moves in chess can unfold into an infinite range of possible permutations (and Roussel himself was an enthusiastic player, who, as he relates in Comment j’ai écrit, even solved a major chess problem¹⁴³¹). Roussel’s word games certainly emphasize the flexibility of language, but that feature is distinctive neither of his works nor of literature in general.

Foucault concludes his book with the assertion that Roussel is the inventor of “un langage du langage, enfermant son propre soleil dans sa défaillance souveraine et centrale.”¹⁴³² Anticipating the analyses of Les Mots et les Choses (1966), language’s supposed failure here consists of its inability to create a stable signifying relation with the external world, whence emerges what Foucault calls “l’angoisse du signifiant.”¹⁴³³ By these lights, rather than representing things in the world, language only represents itself and becomes an autonomous creative reality.

¹⁴³⁰ Michel Foucault, Raymond Roussel (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), 61.
¹⁴³¹ See Roussel, Comment j’ai écrit, 133-148.
¹⁴³² Foucault, Roussel, 210.
Yet the image of the magazine ruff in *Impressions d’Afrique* suggests that it is not just words that are endowed with the possibility of creating “la plus inouïe des significations” but also things themselves. And it is precisely Roussel’s vivid descriptions of actions and objects that lend his writing its uncanny aesthetic power. For the theatrical feats described in *Impressions d’Afrique* seem at once impossible and eerily real. That tension does not signal an epistemological split between language and the material world so much as the precision with which Roussel renders those fantastic scenes. His words signify individual things in pedantic detail whilst drawing them together in outlandish combinations. The parts seem ordinary, the whole extraordinary. But, contrary to Foucault’s view of Roussel’s language as essentially hermetic, that effect relies on our ability to visualize those bizarre contrivances as if they were real.

The parallel between the metamorphosis of some old magazines into a theatrical ruff and the genesis of *Impressions d’Afrique* itself within the stodgy pages of *Le Gaulois du Dimanche* further emphasizes the material dimension of Roussel’s writing. For that image evokes the circumstances of the novel’s creation, whose extravagant imaginary constructions were underlain by its author’s own practically limitless financial resources and leisure, allowing him both to devote his days to painstaking word-play and to overcome normal limitations on what the mass press was willing to publish. While newspapers throughout the nineteenth century and early twentieth century did frequently offer space to abstruse (albeit usually short) literary works by authors such as Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Apollinaire, there is nothing (except for *Locus Solus*) to compare to *Impressions d’Afrique*’s 300-odd pages of self-indulgent word-play. Even the novel’s title, which if one subtracts a single phoneme, à la Roussel, can be read as *Impressions à
fric, suggests its material origins. Roussel treated the press as his plaything, which he used to project his fictional fantasies as well as his real personal eccentricities around the world.

That game did not go according to plan as his writings were mostly ignored or ridiculed. In *Comment j’ai écrit*, Roussel remarks that his first foray into journalistic vanity publishing had been a relative success: “A vingt-cinq ans j’écrivis la Vue. Ce poème parut dans le Gaulois du Dimanche et y fut remarqué par certains lettrés.” His hopes of building on that modest acclaim with *Impressions d’Afrique* were dashed, however: “*Impressions d’Afrique* parut en feuilleton dans Le Gaulois du Dimanche et y passa tout à fait inaperçu.” The newspaper also seems to have been eager to escape from its obligation to publish *Impressions d’Afrique*, omitting two central chapters and publishing the final instalment as a 16-page, stand-alone supplement as if the work was too bizarre or too boring to continue cluttering its pages.

Following that disappointment, the image of the press darkens significantly in Roussel’s next novel *Locus Solus* about a series of ingenious and macabre contraptions devised by a mysterious scientist named Martial Canterel who possesses a chemical solution capable of resuscitating the dead to re-enact pivotal scenes from their lives.

As in *Impressions d’Afrique*, some discarded newspapers are here transformed into a little hat by a young girl called Lydie. But whereas the hats and magazine ruff in Roussel’s earlier novel become costumes in a series of dazzling performances, in *Locus Solus*, Lydie negligently sets fire to some leftover scraps of newspaper and gets mortally burned in the ensuing conflagration (though the hat itself survives). Having adopted an orphan to try to assuage his grief, Lydie’s father

---

1435 Roussel, *Comment j’ai écrit*, 29.
1436 Roussel, *Comment j’ai écrit*, 30.
1437 See Bazantay, “Roussel et le feuilleton,” 124.
François-Jules then murders his adoptive daughter when she refuses to marry him – a crime the police assume has been committed by his manservant Thierry. When François-Jules’s son François-Charles learns the truth after finding a secreted confession left by his father, who has himself died in the meantime, the shame leads him to commit suicide. Having learnt of Canterel’s Frankenstein-like abilities through a newspaper report and having publicized her son’s plight in the press, Thierry’s mother then persuades the scientist to investigate. By resuscitating François-Charles’s corpse and studying Lydie’s newspaper hat (which contains crucial clues pointing to François-Jules’s confession), Canterel duly proves Thierry’s innocence, obtaining his release from a penal colony. Using Lydie’s newspaper hat and other materials bought from François-Charles’s estate, he then constructs a permanent tableau vivant, where the man’s corpse continually re-enacts his own suicide in front of the scientist’s guests. As in Impressions d’Afrique, newspapers in Locus Solus thereby become an improbable instrument of performance art with Grand Guignol taking the place of Shakespearian tragedy.

The role of the press in this grisly Kafkaesque fait divers has three dimensions. A pile of journalistic refuse sets off the whole horror show (which evokes the fact that Roussel had himself gotten burnt by the press when serializing Impressions d’Afrique); newspapers facilitate justice by first bringing Canterel to the attention of Thierry’s mother and then helping him crack the case; finally, all these elements are immortalized in a morbid work of art. Destruction, salvation, and creation are thus joined by a common journalistic thread. That cycle might be read metaphorically as suggesting that if the press represents a source of literary crisis, then it also holds the possibility of a resolution.

In time, the press did give Roussel at least some of what he wanted. After Locus Solus had failed, like Impressions d’Afrique, to attract all but a handful of appreciative readers, Roussel
adapted the novel for the stage in 1922 in the hope of reaching a wider public, hiring a large boulevard theatre for the purpose. Though he appears to have inserted “échos payés” in many newspapers and devoted the receipts from one performance to the Association de la presse théâtrale française, those inducements did little to influence mainstream critical opinion.\textsuperscript{1439} “Suivant l’expression d’un journaliste,” Roussel recalls in \textit{Comment j’ai écrit}, “ce fut ‘une levée de stylographes’. De nouveau on me traite de fou, de mystificateur; toute la critique poussa des cris d’indignation.”\textsuperscript{1440} Aragon and Breton were among the few to applaud amid a cacophony of boos on opening night.\textsuperscript{1441} And yet that notoriety brought some consolation: “[E]nfin un résultat était désormais acquis: le titre d’un de mes ouvrages était célèbre.”\textsuperscript{1442} The man who “Makes Sport of All Paris” had become a journalistic punching bag. But he preferred to soak up derision rather than be ignored, not unlike Maxime Claremoris, the Wildean gadfly of Valery Larbaud’s \textit{A.O. Barnabooth}, who, as we saw in Chapter Two, identifies journalistic ridicule as the essence of modern glory. And, in time, partly thanks to the support of the Surrealists – themselves no strangers to stirring up publicity – Roussel did attain the literary prestige he craved.

\textbf{IV. Hope and despair in Romains, Martin du Gard, and Giraudoux}

Roussel sought to use the mass press to overcome public indifference to his writing. Even if those efforts backfired spectacularly, at least initially, they were underlain by the plausible assumption that newspapers provided the best means of immediately reaching a broad readership and shaping public opinion. That assessment was shared by several modernist novelists with whom Roussel had little else in common. As we saw in the previous chapter, Vallès’s \textit{Jacques Vingtras} trilogy portrays the bourgeois press, with surprisingly few misgivings, as a vehicle of revolutionary

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1439} See “Courrier des théâtres,” \textit{Le Matin}, Dec. 7, 1922, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{1440} Roussel, \textit{Comment j’ai écrit}, 31.
\item \textsuperscript{1441} See the “Chronologie,” in Breton, \textit{OC}, 1: XLV.
\item \textsuperscript{1442} Roussel, \textit{Comment j’ai écrit}, 31.
\end{itemize}
agitation. In the early twentieth century similar perspectives emerge in the novels of Jules Romains, Roger Martin du Gard, and Jean Giraudoux. These authors, all members of the republican establishment, may not have shared Vallès’s revolutionary ardour – though both Romains and Martin du Gard were sympathetic to socialism – but they too portrayed the press as an inescapable agent of socio-political transformation whilst also being more skeptical than Vallès both of the benefits of such upheaval and of journalism’s emancipatory potential.

That ambivalence is most clearly and succinctly expressed in Romains’s first short novel Le Bourg régénéré (1906), where the mass press helps propel a sleepy provincial town into the modern age. The unnamed town’s initial somnolence and indifference to “les grandes vibrations de la société” are underlain by “une surprenante ignorance que les feuilles locales manifestaient ingénument.”

That quiescence is disrupted by a piece of socialistic graffiti scrawled on a toilet wall, which stirs political debate among the inhabitants, who duly start reading Parisian newspapers, thereby intensifying their new interest in radical ideas. By the end, the town has been completely transformed amid rapid industrialization and a generalized repudiation of religion while books and newspapers have become central to daily life, mirroring broader socio-cultural developments in nineteenth-century France. Le Bourg régénéré suggests that sudden surge of progress is both salutary and painful as contented ignorance gives way to collective neurosis: “Son âme souffre de conflits; jadis apathique, [le bourg] apprend l’angoisse. Ses propres éléments se battent à qui lui sera le plus conscient. Il vit tant qu’il secrète des milliers de douleurs; et il aspire à une purification dernière.”

That sense of anomie is reflected in the novel’s innovative structure, which, as Michel Raimond has noted, dispenses with conventional emplotment and

1444 Romains, Le Bourg régénéré, 72-73.
characterization such that the town’s fractious hive mind itself becomes the protagonist. The press may have helped awaken its inhabitants to the reality of their condition, but the advent of modern ideas and technologies creates a plethora of new tensions.

Underlying *Le Bourg régénéré*’s portrait of collective urban psychology is Romains’s philosophy of Unanimism, which he had outlined in a 1905 article that vowed to create works of art devoted to exploring “les rapports de sentiment entre un homme et sa ville; […] la pensée totale, les larges mouvements de conscience, les ardeurs colossales des groupes humains […]” For Romains, large groups of people are more than the sum of their parts and become an autonomous whole “doué d’une existence globale et de sentiments unanimes.” Many minds, in other words, fuse into a single conscious entity. In *Le Bourg régénéré*, newspapers thus help bring individual minds together by transmitting ideas between them, becoming an essential vector of the town’s emergent collective consciousness.

That quality re-emerges in Romains’s *Sur les quais de la Villette* (1914), a book of loosely connected stories about working-class militancy told by various characters in a Parisian café, where the press both shapes the narrators’ shared political convictions and literally brings people together as they gather round to listen to a newspaper article being read aloud. And yet, as in *Le Bourg régénéré*, this portrait of journalistically inspired Unanimism is far from harmonious. The aforementioned newspaper article – about the Bloody Sunday massacre of January 1905 in Saint Petersburg – here prompts a bitter quarrel; and newspapers themselves are said to be both widely mistrusted and sharply divided along class lines. Rather than creating a single collective consciousness, journalism in *Sur les quais* thus seems to fuel antagonistic collective identities. And

---

even when a left-wing sympathizer sees another man reading the same newspaper as himself, no fraternal rapport ensues: “J’espérais un petit sursaut, un mouvement des lèvres, un plissement du front, un souffle plus brusque. Il n’a pas bronché; et, tournant la page, il s’est mis à lire les résultats des courses.”1449 At once a unifying force and the source of new forms of alienation and sectarianism, the press in *Sur les quais de la Villette* seems to epitomize the broader paradoxes of modern urban life.

The role of the press becomes still more pivotal in Romains’s epic, 27-volume novel cycle *Les Hommes de bonne volonté* (1932-1946). Newspapers provide an abundance of historical background detail in this vast fresco of French society set between 1908 and 1933 and loosely centred around the lives of two friends from the École Normale – Jerphanion, a teacher who becomes a distinguished politician, and Jallez, a League of Nations functionary and author. As in *Sur les quais de la Villette*, they also serve as a fulcrum of Unanimism that both mediates and shapes the collective consciousness of the era with alternately salutary and pernicious results. In the early volumes, his control of a newspaper helps launch the political career of Gurau, an idealistic left-wing parliamentarian, who devotes himself (with little success) to the cause of peace and social progress. But the press is more frequently portrayed as a corrupt and mendacious force that amplifies chauvinistic tensions and then, echoing Barbusse and Dorgelès, becomes an instrument of “bourrage de crâne” during the First World War. Romains’s men of good will thereafter seem increasingly powerless to counter those dark collective passions and arrest the drift towards further carnage that is foreshadowed in the final volumes.

Jallez himself works as a some-time journalist whilst vowing to Jerphanion shortly before the First World War that “[j]e ne veux pas me noyer dans cette lavasse, comme je l’ai vu faire à

tant d’autres.” In the same letter, he also resurrects the familiar opposition between the disinterested virtues of Symbolist poetry and journalistic dissipation: “Samain et Mallarmé s’étaient moins trompés, avaient mieux sauvé l’éternel qu’un Paul Adam, par exemple, qui se crève et se vulgarise à pisser des articles, sur n’importe quoi […]” And yet Jallez simultaneously concedes that writing journalism is preferable to living off his family whilst criticizing Symbolist self-absorption: “Samain, Mallarmé, et d’autres, avaient tout de même vu trop peu de choses, approché trop peu de gens, fait trop peu d’expériences, bougé trop peu de leur petit coin.” Like Sixtine’s Entragues, Jallez aspires to navigate between extremes of solipsism and cretinism to create a work of literature that will capture the life of the mind without retreating from the world at large. That approach evokes Les Hommes itself, where the narrative voice constantly shifts between, on the one hand, introspective diary entries and letters and, on the other, minacious descriptions of socio-political developments, often explicitly rehashed from old newspapers. In keeping with the totalizing thrust of Unanimism, Romain’s efforts to balance the general and particular lead him to pile up material at both ends of the scale, culminating in perhaps the longest novel ever published, where the failure of his men of good will to build a civilized order in Europe seems to mirror his work’s own unruly maximalism. Jallez’s derisive comment about the writer-journalist Paul Adam thus suggests Les Hommes’ own flaws, whose laborious accounts of obscure political controversies (cabinet reshuffles being a favoured topic) often seem as dated as the journalism that Romain relied on to write them. Having toyed with a vision of the press as a force for socio-political progress, Romain, like so many of his precursors, duly ends up at once deploiring and imitating journalism.

1451 Romain, Les Hommes de bonne volonté, 2: 619. Albert Samain was a Symbolist poet and co-founder of the Mercure de France.
1452 Romain, Les Hommes de bonne volonté, 2: 620.
Romains’s friend Roger Martin du Gard traces a similar arc of disillusionment in his oeuvre. *Jean Barois* (1913), his novel about the Dreyfus Affair, initially portrays journalism as a virtuous instrument of political agitation. The eponymous hero co-founds *Le Semeur*, a fictional magazine resembling *La Revue blanche* and Péguy’s *Cahiers de la quinzaine*, that becomes a leading Dreyfusard organ. And whereas even such a devoted newspaperman as Jules Vallès portrays his journalistic career in the *Jacques Vingtras* trilogy as a series of wily tactical compromises, journalism acquires a truly exalted, quasi-religious aura in *Jean Barois*, which is largely composed of dialogue and didascalia in the style of a play script, as if the events had been transcribed by a reporter-like fly-on-the-wall. That heroic image crystallizes on the eve of Dreyfus’s second trial in Rennes in August 1899:

Dimanche après-midi.
Aux bureaux du *Semeur*.
Barois, seul, en manches de chemise, les mains aux poches, arpente son cabinet, préparant un article.
Il est sous pression: son visage exalté, zébré de tics, ses regards mobiles, la joie de son demi-sourire, toute sa personne, enfin rayonne de sécurité triomphante. Les mauvais jours sont passés.\(^{1453}\)

Here we encounter a figure common in modern American cinema but otherwise absent from turn-of-the-century French literature: the fearless crusading journalist determined to advance the cause of Truth and Justice. Unlike Verne and Leroux’s reporter heroes, Barois’s mission is infused with political radicalism as he and his fellow Dreyfusards are embarked upon an existential confrontation with the full might of the French Army and State. And whereas Vingtras hopes to gradually undermine the Second Empire from within the bourgeois press, Martin du Gard’s hero finds himself in the thick of an immediate struggle for the soul of the Third Republic.

---

That campaign cuts across divisions between Dreyfusard newspapers and petites revues, whose unity of purpose is signalled in Jean Barois by a copy of L’Aurore containing Zola’s “J’accuse...” that hangs from the wall of Le Semeur’s offices. Like Vallès and indeed, as Charlotte Andrieux has noted, contemporaneous Cubist art, Martin du Gard also uses newspaper typography in the text. For example, the news of Zola’s interment in the Panthéon in 1908 is conveyed by the headline: “LES CENDRES DE ZOLA AU PANTHÉON.” And, as acknowledged in a footnote, Jean Barois even reproduces in extenso eight pages of the stenographic transcription of Zola’s first trial in February 1898, which was co-published by the Dreyfusard newspaper Le Siècle and Éditions Stock. Barois’s own immersion in journalism is thus mirrored within the text itself.

Despite its primary focus on recent history, the novel also evokes debates that were raging in the press at the time of its publication about a putative contemporary nationalist and religious revival, typified by books such as Henri Massis and Alfred de Tarde’s Les Jeunes Gens d’aujourd’hui, which originated as a series of articles in the newspaper L’Opinion in 1912. According to Massis and Tarde, the rising generation had turned their backs on decadent fin-de-siècle pessimism and were re-embracing the old-fashioned virtues of faith and fatherland. Such sentiments are echoed in the final sections of Jean Barois, where the ageing hero himself undertakes an “enquête sur la jeunesse” and is disconcerted by an encounter with two articulate

---

1455 Martin du Gard, Oc, 1: 462.
1456 Martin du Gard, Oc, 1: 382.
students, who have rejected his Enlightenment positivism in favour of nationalism and Catholicism. Already disillusioned, much like Péguy in real life, by the fracturing of the Dreyfusard coalition and associated political skulduggery, Barois’s belief in progress and science themselves then starts to crumble concluding in a deathbed conversion (which he simultaneously repudiates in his last written testament). That intellectual unravelling also saps his faith in journalism. As he tells an old friend: “Je laisse des livres, des articles, qui ont eu leur actualité… Mais croyez-vous que je suis leur dupe? que je m’illusionne sur la pauvreté de tout ça?” Barois’s shift from quasi-religious fervour at Le Semeur during the Dreyfus Affair to bitter disillusionment in later life offers a cautionary tale. Too much zeal in the first instance contains the roots of an excess of despair thereafter. The Dreyfusard press may not have obtained Dreyfus’s immediate exoneration or achieved its broader aims of moralizing the Third Republic, but its contribution was neither negligible nor ephemeral. And Jean Barois’s own journalistic borrowings point to how such material can acquire durable literary and historical value.

The idea that journalism can be a noble calling re-emerges in Martin du Gard’s Les Thibault (1922-1940), an eight-volume novel cycle set between 1904 and 1918, which follows the destinies of two brothers: the studious, rationally minded Antoine who becomes a doctor, and the impetuous, idealistic Jacques, who revolts against his bourgeois family and becomes a somewhat aimless socialist militant. In the fifth volume, La Sorellina, set in late 1913, Jacques recounts to his brother how some years previously he had sought guidance from a distinguished philosopher and novelist called Jalicourt, who, to his surprise, had told him: “N’y a qu’un feul apprentifiane pour nous: le vournalifme!” Jalicourt’s lisp initially makes this piece of advice seem rather comic. But there follows a stirring peroration, modelled on a preface by Zola and an article by the contemporary

---

1458 Martin du Gard, Oc, 1: 499.
1459 Martin du Gard, Oc, 1: 526.
writer-journalist Fernand Divoire, that portrays journalism as a dynamic, forceful way of life that would allow Jacques to get to grips with the world:


Jacques bitterly regrets his failure to heed Jalicourt’s advice, having opted to pursue a conventional student life instead: “Eh bien, je suis parti comme j’étais venu, Monsieur: comme un imbécile! J’ai retrouvé mes bouquins, mes maîtres, mes camarades, la concurrence, les revues d’avant-garde, les parlotes, – un bel avenir! Un bel avenir!” Whereas Barois laments the “pauvreté” of his journalistic career, here it is literary bohemia and academia that seem a waste of breath. And whilst the former seems overly self-critical, Jacques’s self-reproach about the journalistic road not taken is justified by his failure to make anything else of his life, which ends in horrific ignominy as he embarks in the penultimate volume, L’Été 1914, on a quixotic mission aboard an aeroplane to distribute a self-authored pacifist manifesto over the front lines at the outbreak of the First World War and is maimed in a crash landing, then killed by a group of French soldiers, who mistake him for a German spy. Jacques does turn to journalism in the end, but that desperate gesture merely underlines the diletantish futility of his life.

Meanwhile, as in Les Hommes de bonne volonté, the mass press fans the flames of militarism in L’Été 1914 making Jalicourt’s exhortations about journalism’s formative virtues

seem outmoded. Jalicourt, echoing Zola, had pushed Jacques to embrace journalism as a path to self-realization and cultural understanding. That was plausible advice at a time when the mass press had assumed a position at the centre of French life and when Zola’s journalistic intervention in the Dreyfus Affair had consummated his status as the country’s leading intellectual. Right up until the eve of French mobilization, Jacques himself retains the belief that Jean Jaurès, at once leader of the French Socialists and editor of _L’Humanité_, can play a similarly decisive role by authoring “un article terrible... un pendant au _J’accuse de Zola_” that will launch a Europe-wide general strike against the war.1461 Moments after uttering this optimistic prophecy, he watches as Jaurès is assassinated in a Parisian café. With him dies the hope, however unfounded, that a newspaper article can turn the tide of history. The following day, Jacques is dismayed to find the entire press attempting to posthumously enlist Jaurès in the march to war. As if to symbolize that disillusionment, he then crumples a pile of newspapers into a ball and tosses them into the corner of a bathhouse. What had previously seemed to offer personal and political salvation has become a handmaid of imminent collective self-destruction.

Nostalgia for the optimistic spirit of the pre-1914 world also haunts Jean Giraudoux’s second novel _Siegfried et le Limousin_ (1922) about two old school friends who re-encounter each other after the war in Munich. The trigger for their meeting is a newspaper article that the French narrator reads in the German press, which includes an amusing anecdote about Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria bathing with his wife. Amid an otherwise uninterrupted deluge of anti-French propaganda, the narrator deems this insouciant portrait “ce que j’avais trouvé de plus impartial et

1461 Martin du Gard, _Oc_, 2: 547. As Becker notes, Martin du Gard (or at least Jacques) here gives a misleading account of Jaurès’s projected article, which would not have called for a general strike against a war that the Socialist leader by this time recognized was inevitable. (See “_L’Été 1914_ de Roger Martin du Gard, un ouvrage d’histoire?” 228).
de plus élevé, à beaucoup près, depuis qu’avait commencé ma revue de presse allemande.” He also recognises it as a plagiarized version of a short story that had been published in a French magazine before the war by a friend called Forestier, who went missing in action at the front. The latter transpires to have been mistaken for a German soldier and, suffering from amnesia, has acquired a new identity as a respected intellectual in Germany. That plot device conveys a metaphorical vision of Franco-German reconciliation whereby civilized men can overcome superficial national differences and flourish equally in both cultures. And while the press on both sides of the Rhine is repeatedly criticized in *Siegfried et le Limousin* for stirring up reciprocal animosity, the novel also quotes a fictional article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* that issues a passionate plea for a return to the cosmopolitanism and open borders of pre-1914 Europe:

> Je ne veux pas mourir avant d’avoir revu l’Europe heureuse. […] Je veux voir l’Europe heureuse, je veux me garder intact pour ce jour, et me calfeutrer entre Royat, Néris et Vichy, dans ce triangle auvergnat de santé qui s’élargira peu à peu, à mesure que viendra l’heure heureuse, jusqu’à Marienbad, jusqu’à Constantza, et enfin jusqu’aux eaux de Crimée…

Like the Jules Romains of *Le Bourg régénéré*, *Sur les quais de la Villette*, and the early volumes of *Les Hommes de bonne volonté*, Giraudoux here seems to hold out hope that the press, for all its flaws, can still be a vehicle for enlightened ideas. He himself, having briefly worked at *Le Matin* in his youth, went on to combine his careers as a diplomat, novelist, and playwright with regular journalism about topics as varied as architecture, city planning, and sport. And, in a 1934 article for the newspaper *Marianne*, Giraudoux lamented that literary authors did not write more for the press, which he saw as a matter of civic duty: “[L]’écritain doit devenir, dans le travail du pays,

---

1464 For an overview of Giraudoux’s involvement with the press, which, on the basis of a narrow definition of journalism as reportage, concludes he never was a journalist, see Thierry Noir, “Giraudoux, écrivain et/ou journaliste?” *Cahiers Jean Giraudoux: Giraudoux critique, essayiste et témoin de son temps*, no. 44 (2016): 111-117.
un élément toujours présent, mobilisable chaque jour, un ouvrier de toute heure, un journalier, c’est-à-dire un journaliste.”

Journalism, in other words, was too important to be left to journalists alone.

What unites Giraudoux, Romains, Martin du Gard, and even Roussel is a view of the press as a means to an end. They all grasped that, for better or for worse, journalism makes things happen and could not simply be dismissed as a cultural whorehouse. The first three were primarily concerned with politics, the latter with his literary reputation. Their ambivalence towards journalism duly reflects a series of disappointing outcomes – withered idealism, industrialized slaughter cheered on by the press, and, in Roussel’s case, generalized indifference followed by ridicule. The issue for these authors, unlike Gourmont, was less the traditional antagonism between journalism and literature than the press’s failure to fulfil their own personal and political aspirations. Jalicourt’s peroration in La Sorellina sketches a vision of how journalism could give direction to a restless intellectual conscience, and Jallez reiterates standard criticisms of journalistic dissipation in Les Hommes de bonne volonté, but Giraudoux, Romains, Martin du Gard, and Roussel otherwise avoid addressing the question of journalism’s specifically literary contribution in their novels. For Romains and Martin du Gard, that omission seems particularly glaring given how much they relied on the press as a documentary source in Les Hommes de bonne volonté and Les Thibault. These works are saturated with journalism yet have little to say about what it means to transform newspapers into books.

---

V. Gide – turning “universel reportage” into novelistic gold

A more self-conscious approach to literary-journalistic imbrication is found in the work of André Gide. As we saw in Chapters Two, Three, and Four, Gide purported to loath the mass press and fought against what he saw as Gaston Gallimard’s meretricious promotional methods during the early years of La NRF. “J’appelle ‘journalisme,’” he remarks in his Journal, “tout ce qui sera moins intéressant demain qu’aujourd’hui.”1466 And, as we saw in Chapter Three, Proust’s association with Le Figaro had initially blinded Gide to the virtues of Du côté de chez Swann. Unlike contemporaries such as Bloy and Lorrain, Gide’s anti-journalistic animus did not reflect any financial dependence on the mass press. Cushioned by substantial inherited wealth, Gide was free to indulge his talents within the unlucrative pages of petites revues and seldom wrote for newspapers or grandes revues.1467

And yet, as we also saw in Chapter Three, Gide was simultaneously fascinated by journalism, particularly faits divers, which he assiduously collected, eventually republishing a selection of these in La NRF, where he also published several pieces of his own reportage. Moreover, despite his Journal’s haughty dismissal of journalism, Gide’s own fictional works suggest his interest in what he read in the press often only increased with time. Les Caves du Vatican (1914) is partly inspired by a real pamphlet dating from 1893 and by the fait divers of a prominent freemason who converted to Catholicism in the same year. Like his close friend Martin du Gard in Jean Barois, published by Éditions de la NRF in 1913 with Gide’s support, Gide

1466 André Gide, Journal, 1: 1160. This comment appears in an undated section of the Journal but possibly dates from the early 1920s.
1467 Prior to 1914, Gide’s total contributions to the mass press, according to Jacques Cotnam’s Bibliographie chronologique de l’Œuvre d’André Gide (1889-1973) (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1974), consisted of one article for Le Figaro (“Les Frères Karamazov,” April 4, 1911), one response to an enquête conducted by L’Opinion, which was later published, as we saw in Chapter Three, as an appendix to Souvenirs de la cour d’assises (“Les Jurés par eux-mêmes,” Oct. 25, 1913), and two articles for La Grande Revue (“Dostoievsky d’après sa correspondance,” May 25, 1908; “Charles-Louis Philippe,” Dec. 10, 1910). Only during the 1940s did Gide become a periodic contributor to Le Figaro whilst also publishing several articles in Combat.
explicitly acknowledges the first of those pieces of journalistic borrowing in a footnote. At the beginning of the diary he maintained whilst writing Les Faux-Monnayeurs, which was first published in La NRF in 1926 shortly after the novel itself, Gide similarly records that its titular plotline about a band of schoolboy counterfeiters is based on press reports he had collected detailing a real case in 1906-1907. An appendix to the Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs also reproduces extracts from an article from Le Figaro about that case and from an article about the suicide of a lycée student in 1909, which Gide acknowledged in a separate article for La NRF as the source for the suicide of the tormented schoolboy Boris at the end of the novel.

Another influence, not explicitly acknowledged by Gide, was Mallarmé’s “Crise de vers,” whose concluding distinction between literature and “universel reportage” Gide quotes in a 1913 lecture about Verlaine and Mallarmé, prefaced by a counter-intuitive commentary:

[J]’imagine volontiers qu’un numismate artiste puisse s’éprendre de la beauté des monnaies, de l’éclat du métal et de la noblesse des effigies que porte chacune d’elles – que non seulement il ne puisse supporter sur chacune d’elles la moindre rouille, mais encore qu’il ne se tienne pour satisfait vis-à-vis de la pièce de monnaie, que lorsqu’il ne verra plus en elle qu’une médaille, et qu’elle se sera dépourvue complètement à ses yeux de sa valeur commerciale pour assumer du même coup une valeur d’art, à la fois naïve et exquise, d’un autre ordre, infiniment plus élevé. C’est ainsi que Mallarmé considérait en soi chaque mot.

“Crise de vers,” as we saw in Chapter One, compares everyday utilitarian language – “l’emploi élémentaire du discours” – to a furtive exchange of money between two people. For Mallarmé, such linguistic transactions might be a necessary feature of daily life and journalistic writing, but

---

1468 “Compte rendu de la délivrance de Sa Sainteté Léon XIII emprisonné dans les cachots du Vatican” (Saint-Malo, imprimerie Y. Billois, rue de l’Orme, 4), 1893.” (André Gide, Les Caves du Vatican, in Romans et récits, 1: 1060).
1470 Gide, “Appendice” to Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, in Romans et récits, 2: 559-561. On Gide’s use of the second article as a source for Boris’s suicide, see the “Notice” to Les Faux-monnayeurs (2: 1202).
they are the antithesis of literature. The coin analogy applies only to elementary discourse, not to literature, and evokes a sense of crude directness. Yet Gide interprets that image as a metaphor for the mutability of language in general. By these lights, the commercial chatter of elementary discourse always contains the germ of potential artistic flourishing. The rusty coin of “universel reportage” can, in other words, be transformed into literary gold through the skill of a “numismate artiste.” That might be a tenuous reading of “Crise de vers” itself, but, as we saw in Chapter One, a similar perspective does emerge in Mallarmé’s later journalism, specifically the articles composing “Quant au livre,” which outlines a rapturous vision of literary-journalistic hybridity, with the significant difference that Mallarmé, unlike Gide, does not wish to expunge all trace of “le Livre”’s journalistic origins.

In *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, coinage becomes a central metaphor for competing approaches to literature. The devoted aesthete Édouard titles his own putative novel-within-the-novel “*Les Faux-Monnayeurs*” – itself conceived as a novel about a novelist writing a novel – to disparage rival authors, particularly the Comte de Passavant, a successful novelist much praised by the press, whom he considers “moins un artiste qu’un faiseur.”1472 Passavant is a counterfeiter in Édouard’s eyes because he writes for the sake of temporary journalistic acclaim at the expense of creating a genuine work of art. By contrast, though he is far from indifferent to how the press views his work, Édouard, much like Gourmont’s Entragues, aspires and ultimately fails to write a “roman pur,” stripped of dialogue and descriptions of the external world.1473 In a mirror image of his antagonist’s debased attention-seeking, Édouard’s determination to cut his putative novel off from reality leads to sterile artifice. And by the time he decides that reality should indeed play a role in his “*Faux-
“Monnayeurs,” Édouard has become so tangled up in metafictional speculation that even he recognizes no novel may ever emerge from his preparatory notes, which make up a large portion of Gide’s novel.\footnote{1474} As in *Sixtine*, extremes of self-absorption and conformity to popular journalistic taste thus seem equally fruitless.

Édouard’s young secretary Bernard attempts to steer the novelist towards a less solipsistic vision of literature but gives up in frustration, telling Édouard’s mistress Laura:

> Je trouve absurde cette méthode de travail qu’il nous exposait. Un bon roman s’écrit plus naïvement que cela. Et d’abord, il faut croire à ce que l’on raconte, ne pensez-vous pas? et raconter tout simplement. J’ai d’abord cru que je pourrais l’aider. S’il avait eu besoin d’un détective, j’aurais peut-être satisfait aux exigences de l’emploi, il aurait travaillé sur les faits qu’aurait découvert ma police… Mais avec un idéologue, rien à faire. Près de lui, je me sens une âme de reporter. S’il s’entête dans son erreur, je travaillerai de mon côté. Il me faudra gagner ma vie. J’offrirai mes services à quelque journal. Entre-temps, je ferai des vers.\footnote{1475}

Faced with Édouard’s uncompromising commitment to aesthetic abstraction, Bernard feels like a journalist, echoing the opposition between literature and “universel reportage” in “Crise de vers.” But he is in fact caught between those two poles. As Laura shoots back to him: “[P]rès des reporters, assurément, vous vous sentirez une âme de poète.” Bernard will be no more at home among vulgar newspaper journalists than as Édouard’s underused secretary. And what the frustrated young author proposes here is an aesthetic approach akin to Gide’s gloss of “Crise de vers” that will strike a balance between self-absorption and reportage, wherein the latter supplies a numismatic artist with the raw narrative currency he needs to mint novelistic gold.\footnote{1476} Indeed, it

\footnote{1474} See Édouard’s discussion with Bernard and Laura where he first defines the subject of his novel as “la lutte entre les faits proposés par la réalité, et la réalité idéale,” then declares that he doesn’t care whether he finishes the book because “l’histoire du livre m’aura plus intéressé que le livre lui-même […].” (Gide, *Romans et récits*, 2: 314-315).

\footnote{1475} Gide, *Romans et récits*, 2: 326.

\footnote{1476} Gide identifies himself with Bernard’s perspective in a letter published at the end of the *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs*: “Je ne peux comprendre en quoi le mérite d’une œuvre d’art peut être diminué, de ce qu’elle prenne appui sur la réalité. C’est pourquoi j’ai cru bien de donner en appendice du Journal des Faux-monnayeurs [sic] les faits divers, points de départ de mon livre […].” (Gide, *Romans et récits*, 2: 562; italicized in the original).
is Bernard himself who shows Édouard a counterfeit coin, hoping the novelist will ground his theoretical reflections in this object, only to snatch it back because he senses that “la réalité ne vous intéresse pas.”

_Les Faux-Monnayeurs_ itself seems more in tune with Bernard’s ambivalent vision. For the metaliterary conflict between Édouard and Passavent is juxtaposed with the journalistically inspired stories of the schoolboy counterfeiters and Boris’s suicide as well as several overlapping romantic plotlines that would not be out of place in a _roman-feuilleton_. Gide thus manages, if not to reconcile “universel reportage” with literature, then at least to bring them together under a single unsteady novelistic roof. Indeed, towards the end, Édouard offers to find Bernard a job at a newspaper edited by a friend of his, which at once marks the end of their abortive partnership and hints at Bernard’s reporteresque contribution to a project whose fictional failure masks the achievement of Gide’s novel itself.

In contrast to Mallarmé’s vision of “le Livre,” _Les Faux-Monnayeurs_ does not represent a transcendent synthesis of book and newspaper. Gide’s novel self-consciously explores the tensions between literature and the press without resolving them. As Gide’s biographer Frank Lestringant notes of the competing conceptions of literature represented by Édouard and Passavent: “[Gide] a joué de leurs exigences contradictoires, pour faire grincer en quelque sorte la machine romanesque dans tous ses rouages.”

Journalism is a central cog within that novelistic machine. And the originality of the portrayal of the press in _Les Faux-Monnayeurs_ and its accompanying _Journal_ lies in the glimpse Gide offers us of how that cog actually works. Lestringant’s image makes that process sound a tad mechanical. But it also captures the sense of creative discord in _Les Faux-Monnayeurs_ as Gide, erstwhile scourge of “le journalisme, l’américanisme, le mercantilisme,”

---

1477 Gide, _Romans et récits_, 2: 317.
seems to shift gears and confront his own debts to the press at a time when, as we saw in Chapter Four, Gaston Gallimard was transforming the novel’s publisher into a literary powerhouse thanks to his commercial and promotional acumen.

Publishing the *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs* in *La NRF* shortly after the novel itself suggests that Gide wished to exert some control over that drive for publicity. As Raimond has noted, the development during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of the “roman du roman,” culminating in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* and Proust’s *Recherche*, coincided with the rise of the writer-interview, which stirred public interest in “les ficelles du métier.” Gide gave very few interviews during his life and described the exercise as “un truchement qui, le plus souvent, travestit fâcheusement notre pensée” in his *Interviews imaginaires*, an ironic riff on the genre initially published in *Le Figaro* in 1941-1942. The *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs* thus allowed him to provide an account of how he wrote the novel on his own terms without having to submit to the indignity of journalists’ questions and ensuing distortions. It resembles, in other words, an extended interview minus the interviewer, satisfying readers’ curiosity about the genesis of his work and its author whilst preserving an aura of lofty detachment. As in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* itself, Gide thereby strikes a balance between journalistic reality and his own artistic inclinations.

Gide subsequently continued to maintain a tangential relationship to the mass press. During his philo-Communist phase in the 1930s, he contributed occasional articles to *Commune* and sat on that fellow-travelling magazine’s editorial committee. But, unlike Aragon and Barbusse, he never wrote for Communist newspapers (though *L’Humanité* did republish *Les Caves du Vatican* as a *feuilleton* in 1933 and occasionally published extracts from Gide’s political speeches). And

---

1479 Raimond, *La Crise du roman*, 244.
aside from *Interviews imaginaires*, none of Gide’s literary works were first published in newspapers or *grandes revues*. Gide did not, in other words, use the mass press as a literary laboratory. Rather, he occasionally drew inspiration from what he read in newspapers and magazines. *Les Caves du Vatican* and the *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs* both acknowledge such borrowings. But they do so rather discreetly. The former notes the existence of a pamphlet about the pope being kidnapped only in passing, without reflecting on the significance of that debt to journalism, whilst neglecting to mention the journalistic origins of the plotline about the freemason’s religious conversion. And the latter keeps the acknowledgement out of *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, as if to diminish the taint of journalism within the novel itself. In accordance with Gide’s gloss of the pecuniary metaphor in “Crise de vers,” what we see in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* is the demonetized literary medallion that retains faint traces of the original journalistic coin, whose genetic role only becomes clear in the *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs*. The novel hints at its journalistic borrowings firstly through Bernard’s remark about his “âme de reporter” and then in Édouard’s concluding declaration that he won’t include the story of Boris’s suicide in his “*Faux-Monnayeurs*” because “je n’aime pas les ‘faits divers’. Ils ont quelque chose de péremptoire, d’indéniable, de brutal, d’outrageusement réel…”1482 Édouard’s disdain for such pieces of quotidian drama here explains his failures as a novelist. And yet Gide seems hesitant to make his own reliance on real *faits divers* explicit in the novel itself.

*Les Faux-Monnayeurs* is as much about the tension between “universel reportage” and literature as it is about the evolution of the novel form itself. Indeed, the conflicts between Édouard, Passavent, and Bernard suggest that the crisis of the novel revolves around that opposition. But whereas Édouard’s struggles to write a solipsistic “roman *pur*” sit at the centre of *Les Faux-

---

Monnayeurs, the novel’s exploration of journalism’s literary contribution lurks at the side of the frame. That relative inconspicuousness might evoke Gide’s ambivalence towards the press. Or perhaps the novel’s primary subject has been artfully camouflaged, as in Velázquez’s Las Meninas, one of Gide’s original models of mise en abyme, where the king and queen can be glimpsed in a background reflection. Either way, in a novel of vertiginous complexity where literature seems trapped within competing visions of artifice, it is journalism that, as Gide notes in the above-cited letter at the end of the Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, grounds the story in reality. For all its flaws, the press in Les Faux-Monnayeurs supplies a kind of shaky reserve currency that helps keep the novel’s metafictional extravagances in check.

VI. Proust’s journalism

In contrast to Gide, Marcel Proust wrote frequently, though not prolifically, for the mass press during the formative phase of his career. Between 1893 and his death in 1922, Proust, who, like Gide, had no financial need to write journalism, published, to the best of our knowledge, close to sixty articles in newspapers and grandes revues as well as some fifteen articles in theatre and art magazines, most of which appeared before the First World War.1483 That journalistic hinterland comes to fore on the title page of Du côté de chez Swann, which is dedicated to Gaston Calmette, editor of Le Figaro, where Proust published twenty-six pieces between 1900 and 1914.1484 As we saw in Chapters Two and Three, Proust also contributed to petites revues such as La Revue blanche during the 1890s and, from 1914 onwards, La NRF, whose increased openness to politics after the First World War mirrored the evolution of the Recherche itself. Moreover, Proust regularly

1483 See the bibliography in Yuri Cerqueira dos Anjos, Marcel Proust et la presse de la Belle Époque (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2018), 319-323.
1484 Most of these articles were published in the main newspaper, occasionally on the front page. Proust’s 1907 review of Anna de Noailles’s collection of poetry Les Éblouissements and his 1908-1909 “Affaire Lemoine” pastiches appeared in Le Figaro’s Supplément littéraire.
responded to “enquêtes” from newspapers and magazines about a wide range of literary and non-literary subjects, including one from L’Intransigeant in 1922 that prompted some memorable reflections about what we would do if the world was about to end.\footnote{Maurice Montabré, “Une petite question: et si le monde allait finir...” L’Intransigeant, Aug. 14, 1922, 2.} His receptiveness to such solicitations reflected Proust’s hunger for publicity, which he assiduously courted by giving interviews about his work, obtaining laudatory reviews from friends, and inserting advertisements and paid puff pieces in newspapers. As we saw in Chapter Four, that drive for recognition and book sales also left its mark on the later volumes of the Recherche, where the dark arts of publicity become a recurring motif.

Despite its relative paucity, Proust’s journalism covered a remarkable variety of subjects – ranging from society gossip columns, articles about fashion, and profiles of prominent contemporaries to reviews of books, plays, art exhibitions, and concerts, critical essays, literary pastiche, and chroniques about topical issues such as the Separation of the Churches and State. Proust remained attached to these writings, a selection of which were republished by Gallimard as Pastiche et mélanges in 1919.\footnote{See Nathalie Mauriac Dyer, “Pastiche et mélanges,” in Bouillaguet and Rogers, Dictionnaire Marcel Proust, 747.} He had envisioned publishing such a volume as early as 1907 and proposed the idea without success to four different publishers before the First World War.\footnote{See the “Notice” in Proust, CSB, 681-686.}

Their indifference is perhaps unsurprising given the faint self-praise Proust mustered on behalf of his journalism when attempting to persuade Eugène Fasquelle to publish a book of his articles from Le Figaro in late 1912. “Je ne veux pas,” he wrote to the publisher, who had previously rejected a similar proposal as well as Du côté de chez Swann, “avoir l’air de donner à ce que j’écris plus d’importance que cela n’en mérite.”\footnote{Proust to Eugène Fasquelle, late Dec. 1912, in Proust, Corr., 11: 339.} Indeed, the only “importance” Proust
could bring himself to mention was that some unnamed authors had supposedly told him they would like to be able reread the pastiches he had published in *Le Figaro* several years previously. Proust also later expressed reservations about *Pastiche et mélange* itself, worrying that “un lecteur peu attentif” might confuse these journalistic writings with the *Recherche*.

Those anxieties were not without foundation. For Proust’s journalism frequently foreshadows his novel. As Jean-Yves Tadié notes, even in his very first article for a daily newspaper, a report published in *Le Gaulois* in 1894 of a *soirée* given by his friend Robert de Montesquiou in Versailles: “[Proust] place un décor, décrit une action, des toilettes, une atmosphère historique, et s’égare parmi la foule de ses modèles futurs. Le matériau nécessaire à la composition du *Côté de Guermantes* commence à se déposer dans sa mémoire et dans son imagination.”

The *Recherche* itself includes passages adapted from several articles that Proust had published in *Le Figaro* during the 1900s. And a pastiche of the Goncourts’ *Journal* in *Le Temps retrouvé* recalls a pastiche of the same authors that Proust had published in *Le Figaro* in 1908. Moreover, as we saw in Chapter Four, *Le Figaro* published four modified extracts from

---


1491 Along with the “petit morceau,” a portrait of Princess Mathilde Bonaparte in *À l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* (Proust, *RTP*, 1: 532-534) is adapted from “Un Salon historique: le salon de S.A.I. La Princesse Mathilde” (*Le Figaro*, Feb. 25, 1903, 3); and the narrator’s reflections on the “miracle” of the telephone in *Le Côté de Guermantes* (Proust, *RTP*, 2: 431-432) are adapted from several paragraphs in “Journées de lecture” (*Le Figaro*, March 20, 1907, 1), which themselves reprise a theme Proust had developed in the manuscript of *Jean Santeuil* (see Proust, *RTP*, 2: 1590). The latter article also alludes to the excitement stirred by reading “l’Indicateur des chemins de fer” – a recurring motif in the *Recherche*. Jean-Yves Tadié notes additional textual parallels between Proust’s “Salons” and the *Recherche* in his *Proust* (Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1993), 130-133.

1492 See Proust, *RTP*, 4: 287-295 and Proust, *CSB*, 24-27. As Hannah Freed-Thall has argued, Proust’s pastiches, which purport to recount the 1908 Lemoine Affair – a topical diamond-fabrication scam – from the perspective of major French authors, explore “the instability intrinsic to the prestige of aesthetic production and reception alike.” (Freed-Thall, *Spoiled Distinctions: Aesthetics and the Ordinary in French Modernism* [Oxford University Press, 2015], 30). Those explorations of unstable aesthetic prestige, she further argues, anticipate the tenor of cultural discussion in the *Recherche* itself where “performances of distinction tend to get out of hand” (30) as the characters awkwardly compete to show off their connoisseurship in a world where aesthetic standards have been thrown into flux, much as Lemoine’s scam had cast doubt on the value of diamonds.
the manuscript of *Du côté de chez Swann*, without identifying them as such, in 1912-1913. In a footnote to *Pastiches et mélanges* itself, Proust indicates he had quoted from “Journées en automobile” (originally published, as we saw in Chapter One, in *Le Figaro* as “Impressions de route en automobile”\(^{1493}\)) in *Du côté de chez Swann* – where it becomes “le petit morceau” describing the steeples of Martinville – as “un exemple de ce que j’écrivis dans mon enfance” and that, in a later as yet unpublished volume of the *Recherche*, “cette page remaniée est le sujet de presque tout un chapitre.”\(^{1494}\) Those disclosures blur the line both between the hero of the *Recherche* and its author and between his novel and journalism. In the same footnote, Proust also states that he had refrained from republishing “les nombreuses pages que j’ai écrites sur des églises dans *Le Figaro*, par exemple: ‘L’église de village’ (bien que très supérieure à mon avis à bien d’autres qu’on lira plus loin). Mais elles avaient passé dans *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* [sic] et je ne pouvais me répéter.” As in his letter to Fasquelle, Proust deprecates a portion of his own journalism, which again makes us wonder why he was eager to republish such material. He also gives the impression that “L’Église de village” had originated as an article for *Le Figaro*, whereas it was in fact a modified extract from the manuscript of *Du côté de chez Swann*. Even a highly attentive reader might here have difficulty determining where Proust’s journalism ends, and his novel begins.

Such hesitations are consistent with Proust’s ambivalence towards the press in general, which is most succinctly expressed in “Sentiments filiaux d’un parricide,” a 1907 article for *Le Figaro*, republished in *Pastiches et mélanges*, about Henri van Blarenberghe, a friend of Proust, who had recently murdered his mother and then committed suicide.\(^{1495}\) Proust learnt of this crime

\(^{1494}\) Proust, *CSB*, 64.
one morning as he embarked upon “cet acte abominable et voluptueux qui s’appelle lire le journal” – a remark that recalls Baudelaire’s descriptions of the newspaper as “un tissu d’horreurs” and “ce dégoûtant apéritif” in Mon cœur mis à nu.1496 Whereas Baudelaire wrote more favourably of the press in “Le Peintre de la vie moderne”’s celebration of Constantin Guys’s newspaper sketches, what distinguishes “Sentiments filiaux d’un parricide” is that Proust here condenses the competing urges of repulsion and attraction stirred by the newspaper into a single syntagm. For Proust, reading the newspaper is not alternately abominable and voluptuous but both at the same time – abominable because “tous les malheurs et les cataclysmes de l’univers” come surging into his matutinal bedroom and voluptuous because “on se sent soudain allègrement rattaché à l’existence […].”1497 Why should reading about disasters around the world prompt such gaiety? Proust does not say so explicitly, but it appears that his satisfaction derives from the contrast between far-off misery and his own physical comfort, heightened by “quelques gorgées de café au lait.” The morning newspaper, in other words, offers him a hefty dose of Schadenfreude. For Proust, reading the newspaper is voluptuous not in spite of its abominations but because of them. What at first appears to be a contradiction duly acquires a dark aura of immoral consistency, which Proust, who seems to double himself by shifting into the third person and first-person plural, neither condemns nor justifies. The ambivalence here applies less to journalism itself than to how he feels about his own reactions to reading the newspaper.

Not only does Proust – partially shielded behind indefinite pronouns – rejoice at distant calamities, the suffering of those close to him leaves the writer cold. For while reading the newspaper prompts occasional spasms of mawkish sentiment – such as when a report of soldiers cheering on the French president causes Proust to shed a tear – he adds that it is “un pleur que nous
refuserions à un malheur proche de nous.” The article then shifts to a censorious, moralistic tone: “Vils comédiens que seule fait pleurer la douleur d’Hécube, ou moins que cela, le voyage du Président de la République!” In contrast to the nonchalance with which Proust describes himself luxuriating in the misfortune of others, he now seems to reproach his own inability to sympathize with real people as opposed to fictional characters and mediatized displays of patriotic fervour – a theme that, as we shall see, reappears in the Du côté de chez Swann’s portrait of Françoise. And yet he simultaneously depicts himself as an actor, which suggests the whole account of his voluptuously abominable morning routine is a kind of performance, further complicating his portrayal of that journalistically fuelled spectacle.

In the latter part of “Sentiments filiaux d’un parricide,” Proust then shows himself to be far from indifferent to “un malheur proche” as he describes his intense reaction to reading the news of Blarenberghe’s matricide and suicide. Unlike the report of a presidential tour, that fait divers prompts no maudlin tears. Rather, Proust marvels at the “pure [et] religieuse atmosphere de beauté morale” in which “un noble exemplaire d’humanité” carried out his crime, supposedly stemming from “la plus inéluctable fatalité […]”. Instead of jejune sentiment, Blarenberghe’s deeds stir a deep current of morally dubious sympathy and empathy in Proust, who compares the murderer to Ajax and Oedipus before suggesting in the final lines that Blarenberghe represents an irresistibly tragic vision of death: “Mais quelle joie, quelle raison de vivre, quelle vie peuvent résister à cette vision? D’elle ou de la joie, quelle est vraie, quelle est ‘le Vrai’?” Proust’s ambivalence towards

---

1498 Proust, CSB, 154-155.
1499 Proust, CSB, 157.
1500 Proust, CSB, 160. The article was supposed to conclude with a still more heroic evocation of parricide, but Le Figaro’s editorial secretary Jules Cardane cut the final sentence, which he deemed, according to Calmette, “un blâme insuffisant pour l’acte du malheureux parricide” (Calmette to Proust, Feb. 1, 1907, in Proust, Corr., 7: 55-56): “Rappelons-nous que chez les Anciens il n’était pas d’autel plus sacré, entouré d’une vénération, d’une superstition plus profondes, gage de plus de grandeur et de gloire pour la terre qui les possédait et les avait chèrement disputé, que le tombeau d’Œdipe à Colone et que le tombeau d’Oreste à Sparte, cet Oreste que les Furies avaient poursuivi jusqu’aux pieds d’Apollon même et d’Athéné en disant: ‘Nous chassons loin des autels le
the press is thus paralleled by his remarkably indulgent view of a murder that he hesitates to regret, let alone condemn. That view is nonetheless expressed in a question that seems less rhetorical than equivocal. As Proust implicitly wrestles with his own Oedipal fixations, he too may feel the lure of heroic parricide and self-destruction, but part of him also recoils from that fatalistic vision.

What we encounter in “Sentiments filiaux d’un parricide” is a restless conscience oscillating between sinister psychological undercurrents, moral self-criticism, and aesthetic rapture. The fulcrum of those tergiversations is the newspaper, which initially triggers Proust’s Schadenfreude and then becomes an instrument of catharsis as the news of his friend’s crime leads the author to write his own article for Le Figaro, where he confronts both the twisted emotions habitually stirred by his morning newspaper and his troubling feelings of sympathy for Blarenberghe. Journalism, in other words, can be voluptuously abominable; but it can also be sublime.

VII. Hostility towards the press in Proust’s early fiction

Proust’s view of journalism had become more complex and nuanced as he matured as a writer. His early fictional writings largely reprise traditional portrayals of the press as a frivolous and mendacious distraction that is the enemy of good literary style and political virtue.

In his collection of prose poems and short stories Les Plaisirs et les Jours (1896), journalism is associated with the snobbish artifice of high society, where duchesses pay to have...
flattering articles about themselves inserted in newspapers that are in turn devoured by provincial shopkeepers entranced by tales of metropolitan elegance.\textsuperscript{1501}

\textit{Jean Santeuil}, Proust’s unfinished autobiographical novel, seemingly written between 1895 and 1900, similarly mocks his contemporaries’ fixation on how they are portrayed in society gossip columns.\textsuperscript{1502} For example, Mme Cresmeyer, a social-climbing hostess, here sends a note to \textit{Le Figaro} about a dinner party she had held for Bergotte (despite the celebrated novelist, who reappears in the \textit{Recherche}, having requested her discretion) and then opens the newspaper to find that her name has been completely misspelled.\textsuperscript{1503} When she dies a few months later, the newspapers publish no report of her funeral since, the narrator mordantly remarks, the hostess “n’était plus là pour envoyer la note.”\textsuperscript{1504} The eponymous hero himself, notwithstanding his frequently expressed disdain for journalism, is far from indifferent to his own mediatized profile. As Jean prepares to fight a duel, he looks forward to reading about the event in the newspapers afterwards – assuming he lives to tell the tale – and basking in the reflected social prestige of his two seconds – a duke and a general.\textsuperscript{1505} In both cases, the novel seems to caution against valuing life itself less than its superficial representations in the press. And for Bergotte, a paragon of artistic integrity, Cresmeyer’s efforts to piggyback on his reputation in the pages of \textit{Le Figaro} are said to represent “le vilain côté de sa vie.”\textsuperscript{1506}

Journalism also comes in for stylistic criticism early in the narrative, when Jean’s philosophy teacher M. Beulier reproaches him for submitting a piece of homework filled with “des

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{1502} For the dates of the novel’s composition, see the “Notice” in Proust, \textit{JS}, 980.
\textsuperscript{1503} See Proust, \textit{JS}, 792-797.
\textsuperscript{1504} Proust, \textit{JS}, 797.
\textsuperscript{1505} See Proust, \textit{JS}, 731.
\textsuperscript{1506} Proust, \textit{JS}, 797.
\end{flushright}
banalités courantes, toutes les mauvaises manières d’écrire que vous avez apprises dans les journaux ou les revues.” Jean’s bad writing here is typified by a pretentious description of the sunset – “les rouges incendies du couchant” – which Beulier dismisses as “de la couleur pour un petit journal d’où, voyons, de province, non plus même, des côlônies [sic].” That journalistic analogy seems surprising given that Jean’s ornate periphrasis evokes the kind of Symbolist poetry that Proust criticized in “Contre l’obscurité,” an 1896 article for Le Revue blanche. As we saw in Chapter One, the Symbolists themselves regularly inveighed against the press. Indeed, Mallarmé’s “Le Mystère dans les lettres,” published in La Revue blanche a few months after “Contre l’obscurité” and traditionally, though, as we shall see, probably erroneously, viewed as a specific riposte to Proust’s article, dismissed his detractors in such terms: “Je préfère, devant l’agression, rétorquer que des contemporains ne savent pas lire. — Autrepart que dans le journal […].” As we also saw in Chapter One, Symbolist poetry did occasionally appear in the mass press, and Mallarmé embraced a vision of literary-journalistic hybridity in his late writings. But the implication of Beulier’s admonishments is that second-rate journalists habitually resorted to pretentiously obscure poetic imagery in their newspaper articles, which seems hyperbolic. Late nineteenth-century French newspapers were undoubtedly full of “banalités,” but their version of banality was usually rather different to the precious Symbolist banality of “les rouges incendies du couchant.”

1507 Proust, JS, 262.
1508 Proust, JS, 263.
What then could Beulier be up to here? His aim is to encourage Jean to write simply and abandon bad habits picked up from reading Symbolist literature.\footnote{As Antoine Compagnon has commented on this passage, Beulier offers a “[l]eçon de simplicité, de grandeur, leçon qui engage au dépouillement et à la suppression de tous les ornements et fioritures où Les Plaisirs et les Jours se complaisaient […]” (Compagnon, Proust entre deux siècles [Paris: Seuil, 1989], 184).} To discredit Symbolism, he thus implies that such purple prose is not really literature at all but mere journalism. That might not be an accurate characterization of either contemporary journalism or Symbolism, but his appeal to the doxa of journalism’s aesthetic inferiority is a rhetorically effective way of diminishing his real target, which echoes Mallarmé’s retort in “Le Mystère dans les lettres.”

Jean does not immediately appreciate Beulier’s advice, finding his teacher’s speaking style to be dull and unimaginative. But the style of Jean Santeuil itself, which is more plainly written than Les Plaisirs et les Jours, suggests that the lesson has ultimately been learned.\footnote{See Compagnon, Proust entre deux siècles, 184-185.} And even if Beulier’s analogy between Symbolism and journalism is misleading, that shift away from ornamental language is paralleled in the novel by Jean’s increasing antipathy towards the press. Whereas the schoolboy finds inspiration in “la lecture des moindres contes du Gil Blas ou de L’Écho de Paris,” the grown man disdains erstwhile devotees of poetry who “croient trouver la même chose en lisant des faits divers” and who compare contemporary journalism to the works of Balzac (a judgement that overlooks the journalistic origins of much of Balzac’s own writing).\footnote{Proust, JS, 263 and 481.}

That hostility also takes on a political hue when Jean’s father becomes the target of baseless calumnies in the left-wing press due to his association with the fictional disgraced politician Charles Marie. That campaign prompts Jean to visit the socialist leader Couzon (a thinly veiled version of Jean Jaurès) and protest against these attacks. Jean admires Couzon’s sense of justice, and the legendary orator’s defence of the Ottoman Empire’s persecuted Armenians in the Chamber
prior to their meeting leaves him “profondément ému.” But when Couzon then refuses, for tactical political reasons, to intervene to stop the campaign against Jean’s father, the hero takes him to task for allowing his allies in the left-wing press to foment a forthcoming “Règne de l’Injustice […] en faisant régner, par la calomnie, le goût du scandale et de la cruauté dans tous les cœurs.” In Jean’s eyes, Couzon’s own grandeur and virtue will thus be swallowed up by the perfidy of his journalistic comrades.

The anti-Dreyfusard press is portrayed in equally dark tones in the next section of the novel, featuring an eye-witness account of the first Zola trial (arising from the novelist’s “J’accuse”) in February 1898, which Proust had attended. Dreyfus’s defender Colonel Picquart here acquires the heroic aura of a dignified philosopher-warrior assailed by mendacious journalists and jurists: “C’était aussi un cavalier qui revenait d’Afrique, qui ignorait autrement que par la malveillance qui perçait dans les journaux, tout ce monde de journalistes, d’adversaires, de juges qui emplissait la salle […]” Whereas the Dreyfus Affair is often seen as a struggle waged by a handful of courageous writer-journalists – principally Bernard Lazare and Zola (who never appears in Jean Santeuil’s account of his trial) – against the full might of the French Army, this passage emphasizes the role played by an isolated cavalry officer battling the scurrilous hive mind of the press. Indeed, the Dreyfusard press here only merits a single passing reference to “la liste de protestation de L’Aurore” – a brief statement, which Proust had signed, calling for the revision of Dreyfus’s original 1894 trial, published the day after Zola’s “J’accuse” on January 14, 1898.

1515 Proust, JS, 613.
1516 See Carter, Marcel Proust, 251.
1517 Proust, JS, 632.
1518 “Une protestation,” L’Aurore, Jan. 14, 1898, 1; Proust, JS, 651.
There follows a lengthy passage, forming a separate fragment of the novel, about the publication between March and May 1899 in *Le Figaro* – whose editorial line on Dreyfus repeatedly fluctuated over the course of the Affair – of the transcript of a recent inquest carried out by the Court of Cassation, which led to the 1894 judgement being overturned and to Dreyfus being retried before a military tribunal in Rennes later that year.\(^{1519}\) As in “Sentiments filiaux d’un parricide,” albeit without any trace of *Schadenfreude*, reading these reports whilst drinking his morning coffee brings intense pleasure to an unidentified narrator speaking in the first-person plural (though a deleted sentence indicates the passage was conceived as a description of Jean’s mental state), who describes himself as one of the people “qui désiraient l’élargissement de Dreyfus s’il était innocent.”\(^ {1520}\) And yet what stirs that pleasure is not the realization that the anti-Dreyfusard conspiracy was now unravelling but insights into how anti-Dreyfusard officers such as General de Boisdeffre and Colonel Paty du Clam think and interact with each other, which offer him “la réalisation partielle de ce qui était tout entier vierge dans le domaine de l’imagination.”\(^ {1521}\) Here again what paradoxically excites the young Dreyfusard is the aura of military prestige surrounding these discredited figures rather than the gathering momentum of the Dreyfusard campaign in the press.

Despite *Jean Santeuil*’s anti-journalistic animus, the novel’s account of the Dreyfus Affair itself has a journalistic flavour. As Yuji Murakami notes, Proust adopts “le style journalistique” when recording what he had observed at the Zola trial.\(^{1522}\) Indeed, according to Murakami, his


\(^{1521}\) Proust, *JS*, 654.

description of a crucial moment in the proceedings involving Boisdeffre is more detailed than those found in contemporary newspaper reports. Rather than what Beulier would call “de la couleur pour un petit journal,” Proust thus offers a keenly observed first draft of history that has often been referenced in histories of the Affair for its documentary value. As literature, this episode is less compelling. While Proust undoubtedly captures the sense of excitement in and around the courtroom during the trial, much of what he records will now seem obscure to all but specialists of the Affair. And in contrast to the treatment of the Affair in the Recherche, where personal and political drama become densely intertwined, particularly in Sodome et Gomorrhe when the dying Swann delivers a final Dreyfusard cri de cœur, Proust’s account of the trial has little bearing on the rest of Jean Santeuil, which contains few other allusions to the Affair. Jean Santeuil attests to Proust’s developing talents as both a novelist and a journalist, but those talents seem to be running on parallel tracks. He has yet, in other words, to integrate his gift for socio-political observation within a coherent fictional structure. And by attacking the press on aesthetic and political grounds whilst imitating the style of reportage, Proust, like so many of his contemporaries, emulates Flaubert’s received idea.

The novel itself briefly alludes to a form of that paradox when the narrator remarks that if reading the transcript of the Court of Cassation’s inquest in Le Figaro each morning can seem “effrayant” and like “un vrai travail,” it is nonetheless “un travail dont nous ne nous déchargerions pas volontiers sur un autre.” He adds that this newspaper-reading labour is so satisfying that complaints that the saga has been going on for too long have been replaced by anxiety about how

---

1525 Proust, JS, 653. The expressions “effrayant” and “un vrai travail” appear within a quotation, which, reflecting the novel’s unfinished state, is not attributed to anyone in particular. The rhythm of the passage suggests the unidentified narrator (not present throughout the novel) is probably referring to his own state of mind as well as the general tone of commentary about the Affair within his social circle.
to fill the time when it’s all over. Proust thus already seems aware of the competing urges stirred by the press, but, in Jean Santeuil, he stops short of exploring the implications of journalism’s ambivalent attraction for his own writing.

VIII. Sainte-Beuve and the “débutant”

Proust’s abandonment of Jean Santeuil coincided with his becoming a semi-regular contributor to Le Figaro during the 1900s, which marks the peak of his journalistic output. That experience did not turn Proust into an enthusiastic herald of journalism’s literary potential à la Mallarmé, but it both yielded material for the Recherche and led him to reflect more deeply about his own relationship to the press in “Sentiments filiaux.” As Brian Rogers has argued, the articles he wrote in this period, particularly several portraits of salon life, also display a mastery of detail and a fluid narrative style that mark a transition between the “rigid conventionality” of the stories in Les Plaisirs et les Jours and the rich social tapestry of the Recherche. As we have seen, those qualities were not apparent to André Gide, who told Proust that he had initially viewed him as a dilettante who wrote for Le Figaro. For the founder of La NRF, Proust became a great writer in spite of his writings for a frivolous society newspaper. But Proust’s gossip columns and “Salons” in fact laid the foundation for his novelistic achievement. Such material would never have been published in the austere pages of La Revue blanche or the Mercure de France. Le Gaulois and Le Figaro thus provided him with an ideal platform to develop his talent for social

---

1526 As Cerqueira dos Anjos notes, such self-conscious depictions of the press are a recurrent feature of Proust’s journalism: “Dans leurs contradictions mêmes, dans leurs interrogations sur ce que la presse représente, on se rend compte qu’inévitablement ou consciemment ces écrits nous parlent non seulement d’un roman à venir ou d’un romancier en formation mais d’un monde médiatique qui les entoure et d’un écrivain constamment soucieux de sa présence dans la presse.” (Cerqueira dos Anjos, Proust et la presse, 305). See also Proust et la presse, 275-288.

observation. And, as his narrator remarks in *À l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*: “les ‘quoique’ sont toujours des ‘parce que’ méconnus.”

In early 1908, Proust began working on a novel, which, though the drafts have been lost, seems to have already anticipated the *Recherche*. In the autumn, he seems to have shifted his attention towards an essay about the mid-nineteenth-century newspaper critic Sainte-Beuve – whom he had pastiched in *Le Figaro* in March that year – which developed into a preliminary version of the novel of remembrance, reprising central themes from *Jean Santeuil*, that would evolve into the *Recherche* itself. In August 1909, Proust approached Alfred Vallette, editor of the *Mercure de France*, about publishing the work, which he titled *Contre Sainte-Beuve, Souvenir d’une Matinée*, with the proposal that its novelistic portion would first appear in instalments in the magazine and would then be published alongside the critical reflections on Sainte-Beuve as a book. Vallette rejected the proposal without even receiving the manuscript. Later that year, Proust sought to publish an early version of “Combray,” which would later become the opening section of *Du côté de chez Swann*, in instalments in *Le Figaro*, but a faux-pas he committed towards Calmette scuppered the project, whereafter Proust resolved to publish his ever-expanding novel in book form.

Proust’s initial efforts to publish these writings in the press are surprising given his comments in the fragmentary drafts of his projected essay-cum-novel – posthumously published

---

as *Contre Sainte-Beuve* – about the deficiencies of journalistic publication. In contrast to habitual literary criticisms of the press – such as those found in *Jean Santeuil* – which emphasize the mendacity, triviality, cretinism, and venality of journalistic writing, what troubles Proust in *Contre Sainte-Beuve* is how journalistic publication shapes an author’s perceptions of his own work and its anticipated effect on his readers.

That critique, which, as we shall see, is reprised in the *Recherche*, begins with two contrasting images of writers encountering their work in the press. Whereas Sainte-Beuve would savour the experience of reading his weekly column in *Le Constitutionnel* and imagining “la nouvelle des pensées brillantes qu’il avait trouvées” spreading across Paris, an unnamed young author frustratedly scours the newspaper each morning in search of an article he has submitted for publication.\(^\text{1532}\) When the article finally appears, Proust’s “débutant” is so overjoyed that he has further copies of the newspaper bought for him so that he too can simulate the experience of readers across Paris encountering his article. That parallel serves to highlight what Proust sees as Sainte-Beuve’s literary immaturity. For while the veteran critic may no longer have shared the “débutant”’s rapturous joy at the sight of his own articles, by Proust’s account, he never grew out of the habit of fantasizing about his readers’ reactions. In Proust’s eyes, that solicitousness, which means a newspaper article only becomes fully realized in the minds of its readers, constitutes journalism’s fundamental flaw:

Ainsi la beauté journalistique n’est pas tout entière dans l’article; détachée des esprits où elle s’achève, ce n’est qu’une Vénus brisée. Et comme c’est de la foule (cette foule fût-elle une élite) qu’elle reçoit son expression dernière, cette expression est toujours un peu vulgaire. C’est aux silences de l’approbation imaginée de tel ou tel lecteur que le journaliste pèse ses mots et trouve leur équilibre avec sa pensée. Aussi son œuvre, écrite avec l’inconsciente collaboration des autres, est-elle moins personnelle.\(^\text{1533}\)

\(^{1532}\) Proust, “La Méthode de Sainte-Beuve,” in *CSB*, 226.

\(^{1533}\) Proust, “La Méthode de Sainte-Beuve,” in *CSB*, 228.
Sainte-Beuve’s biographical critical method here emerges as the corollary to his role as a journalist. If Sainte-Beuve sought the meaning of a work in the facts of its author’s life, then this approach reflects his fixation on his own readers when writing his articles. Since he writes with particular readers in mind – such as the diarist the Comtesse de Boigne – it follows that he would discuss other works in terms of how their authors related to their readers. His error, in Proust’s eyes, thus consists of treating literature like a journalistic “Vénus brisée” that requires such contextual putty to be made whole.

This analysis has little in common with the predominantly reflexive form of hostility towards journalism found throughout nineteenth and early twentieth-century French novels. For Proust concedes that there is such a thing as journalistic beauty. And a “Vénus” is, after all, a beautiful woman or a beautiful object. A “Vénus” can also mean a prostitute, as in the expression, possibly coined by Balzac, “la Vénus des carrefours.” Contre Sainte-Beuve thus echoes the Balzacian trope of journalism as the whorehouse of thought. But it does so ambiguously in a single phrase that assigns to journalism a kind of vulgar splendour, supplying an aesthetic parallel to “Sentiments filiaux”’s account of the newspaper’s abominably voluptuous sensual-cum-psychological appeal. By these lights, journalism might be inferior to literature, but it is far from worthless. Indeed, Contre Sainte-Beuve depicts the publication of the “débutant”’s article, whose subject here remains unidentified, as a genuinely joyous and inspiring moment that prompts him to discuss writing another article about Sainte-Beuve with his mother, reprising the sense of journalistic self-awareness found in “Sentiments filiaux.” The crucial word is of course

---

1534 Honoré de Balzac, Le Cousin Pons, in Œuvres complètes, vol. 17 (Paris: Furne, 1848), 390. The first attestation of this expression in the Trésor de la langue française is from Balzac’s novel.

1535 See Proust, “Projets de préface,” in CSB, 217. The earlier edition of Contre Sainte-Beuve edited by Bernard de Fallois provides a more extensive version of the conversation (see Proust, Contre Sainte-Beuve, ed. Bernard de Fallois [Paris: Gallimard, 1954], 119-120). (On the differences between these two editions, see Kazuyoshi
“débutant” – a figure clearly synonymous with Proust himself. Journalism, he suggests, may be a good place to start a literary career, but those such as Sainte-Beuve who continue to dwell within the press end up trapped within its sterile conventions. Here again, the old saw – “Le journalisme mène à tout, à condition d’en sortir” – rings true.

Proust ended up exemplifying that adage in both life and art. Le Figaro’s dilettantish sometime chroniqueur became the author of the Recherche, which itself tells the story of a would-be author who ultimately leaves journalism behind. And yet Proust and his hero simultaneously bring their journalism with them, as the story of the hero’s emerging literary vocation revolves around a fictionalized version of one of Proust’s Figaro articles. Given the Recherche’s self-conscious fixation on its own genesis, the hero’s repudiation of journalism necessarily keeps journalism to the forefront of the novel. As in Flaubert’s received idea, Proust can’t quite live without the press. The Recherche also thunders against the press at times, particularly, as we saw in Chapter Three, in Charlus’s tirade against war-time “bourrage de crâne.” But that thunder alternates with more subtle tones to create a uniquely complex fictional portrait both of the novel’s own connections to the press and of journalism’s broad cultural significance in Proust’s time.

IX. Varieties of journalistic experience in the Recherche

The press is omnipresent in the Recherche. Newspapers play a central role both in the development of the hero’s artistic vocation and in how he and the other characters perceive the world. Culture, politics, society gossip, and war are all mediated through newspapers, which frequently trigger intense bursts of fevered cogitation. Along with the passages taken from


See, for example, the paranoid jealousy triggered by newspaper theatrical advertisements in “Un amour de Swann” (Proust, RTP, 1: 345-355) and La Prisonnière (Proust, RTP, 3: 654-662). On the significance of the latter episode for Proust’s phenomenology of reading, whereby texts are transformed in the minds of their readers,
Proust’s own *Figaro* articles, the novel also frequently borrows from articles he had read in the press. Through this dense pattern of allusion and critique, Proust creates a portrait of an artist and a society struggling to come to terms with the discombobulating surge of modernity created by the rapid expansion of the French press, whose total circulation, as we saw in Chapter One, increased seven-fold during his lifetime.

Charles Swann sets the tone early in *Du côté de chez Swann* when he complains, as we saw in the Introduction, about “les assomnants journaux que nous nous croyons obligés de lire matin et soir,” whereas great works of literature are left to pile up on the shelf. He duly offers a novel proposal:

“Ce que je reproche aux journaux c’est de nous faire faire attention tous les jours à des choses insignifiantes tandis que nous lisons trois ou quatre fois dans notre vie les livres où il y a des choses essentielles. Du moment que nous déchirons fiévreusement chaque matin la bande du journal, alors on devrait changer les choses et mettre dans le journal, moi je ne sais pas, les… *Pensées* de Pascal! (il détacha ce mot d’un ton d’emphase ironique pour ne pas avoir l’air pédant). Et c’est dans le volume doré sur tranches que nous n’ouvrons qu’une fois tous les dix ans”, ajouta-t-il en témoignant pour les choses mondaines ce dédain qu’affectent certains hommes du monde, “que nous lirions que la reine de Grèce est allée à Cannes ou

---

see Teresa Whittington, *The Syllables of Time: Proust and the History of Reading* (London: Legenda, 2009), 46-50. As Freed-Thall has noted, newspapers also trigger two bouts of involuntary memory in “Un amour de Swann” and *Albertine disparue* (see Freed-Thall, *Spoiled Distinctions*, 38).

que la princesse de Léon a donné un bal costumé. Comme cela la juste proportion serait rétablie."\textsuperscript{1538}

This vision of literary-journalistic transmigration is less fanciful than Swann supposes. For the form and content of his imaginary gilded, leather-bound volume, and indeed its guiltily forgotten position on the shelves of many readers, uncannily prefigure the destiny of the \textit{Recherche} itself, which is full of tales of minor royalty and aristocratic life, some of them adapted from Proust’s own journalism, along with one pivotal ball scene. And Proust’s triumph consists precisely in having shown that “mondanités” and the most banal phenomena of everyday life could form the basis for a great work of art. His novel thus opens with a dismissal of journalism’s cultural worth that is ultimately contradicted by the \textit{Recherche} itself.

That paradox acquires denser philosophical texture in \textit{À l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs}, where the narrator’s mind turns to the press as he wonders whether we ever truly manage to form a complete impression of other people’s words and actions:

[I]l est bien possible que, même en ce qui concerne la vie millénaire de l’humanité, la philosophie du feuilletoniste selon laquelle tout est promis à l’oubli soit moins vraie qu’une philosophie contraire qui prédirait la conservation de toutes choses. Dans le même journal où le moraliste du “Premier Paris”, nous dit d’un événement, d’un chef-d’œuvre, à plus forte raison d’une chanteuse qui eut “son heure de célébrité”: “Qui se souviendra de tout cela dans dix ans?”, à la troisième page, le compte rendu de l’Académie des inscriptions ne parle-t-il pas souvent d’un fait par lui-même moins important, d’un poème de peu de valeur, qui date de l’époque des Pharaons et qu’on connaît encore intégralement?\textsuperscript{1539}

The newspaper, whose form and content seem to embody all that is ephemeral, actually supplies, by attesting to the survival of even mediocre ancient literary culture within its own pages, a refutation of its own “philosophie du feuilletoniste.” The narrator duly reads the newspaper against the grain to extract “un fait par lui-même moins important” that has nonetheless attained posterity.

\textsuperscript{1538} Proust, \textit{RTP} 1: 25-26.
\textsuperscript{1539} Proust, \textit{RTP}, 1: 469.
And Proust does likewise by embroidering his novel with pieces of old journalism, in themselves relatively unimportant – just like all those aesthetic triggers at the heart of the *Recherche* such as the madeleine, the uneven paving stones outside the Hôtel de Guermantes, and “le petit pan du mur jaune” in Vermeer’s *View of Delft* – which become highly significant through the narrator’s redécoupage.\(^{1540}\) As Guillaume Pinson has observed, this method even takes on a physical dimension in the final pages of *Le Temps retrouvé*, where the narrator describes the fragility of his own manuscripts, which he hopes his housekeeper Françoise will help him preserve “de la même façon qu’elle mettait des pièces aux parties usées de ses robes, ou qu’à la fenêtre de la cuisine, en attendant le vitrier comme moi l’imprimeur, elle collait un morceau de journal à la place d’un carreau[.\(^{1541}\) The image of the newspaper papering over a broken window here becomes what the classical grammarian Pierre Fontanier called a syllepsis of metaphor, which evokes the many fragments of old journalism that hold together Proust’s novel.\(^{1542}\)

Despite the generally hostile tenor of commentary about journalism in the *Recherche*, the novel also includes several episodes where the press emerges in an inspiring and even heroic light. In *À l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, the young hero is initially underwhelmed by a performance of *Phèdre* featuring his idol La Berma until he reads a newspaper review describing her performance as “la plus pure et la plus haute manifestation d’art,” a seemingly banal phrase that nonetheless vanquishes his earlier ambivalence and makes him realize that he has just witnessed a great work.\(^{1543}\) Whilst adding that “on peut trouver que je n’étais pas absolument sincère,” the narrator goes on to compare this experience to drawing inspiration from other authors and

\(^{1540}\) Proust, *RTP*, 3: 692.
\(^{1543}\) Proust, *RTP*, 1: 472.
musicians, concluding that all our most satisfying ideas ultimately feed off ideas we encounter outside of ourselves. Here again, what seems to count is not the intrinsic quality of those external influences but the effect they have on us. And a newspaper article can thus inspire profound aesthetic insight in spite of its own mediocrity.

The press also emerges as a force for political virtue in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, when Swann recounts to the narrator how the Prince de Guermantes and his wife had both come to perceive the truth about the Dreyfus Affair, independently of each other, by reading the Dreyfusard newspapers *L’Aurore* and *Le Siècle* in secret.\(^{1544}\) Whereas the overtly Dreyfusard Jean Santeuil barely mentions the role played by the Dreyfusard press, the *Recherche*, whose implicit Dreyfusard sympathies, as we saw in Chapter Three, have been analysed by Yuji Murakami, thus hints at the transformative effect on elite public opinion of the campaign waged by a handful of journalists and intellectuals.\(^{1545}\)

As the Dreyfus Affair gives way to the First World War, the novel’s portrayal of the press darkens considerably. Newspapers remain a collective obsession, but Swann’s world-weary irony is washed away by the rivers of blood flowing through their pages. As we saw in Chapter Three, *Le Temps retrouvé* includes a lengthy tirade by the Baron de Charlus – who had previously quipped that he reads newspapers like he washes his hands, without taking any interest in them – against the chauvinism of the wartime press while *Sodome et Gomorrhe II* proleptically alludes to the destructive influence of journalistic militarism at the time of the Second Moroccan Crisis.\(^{1546}\)


\(^{1546}\) Charlus’s comments about washing his hands are in Proust, *RTP*, 2: 584. That haughty dismissal comes to seem rather hubristic once he becomes the victim of a press campaign revealing his homosexuality instigated by his former lover Morel (see Proust, *RTP*, 4: 346-347).
narrator himself largely seconds Charlus’s critique. But, shortly before that tirade, he also offers an insight of his own that suggests the “bourrage de crâne” perpetrated by the press merely catalyzes man’s intrinsic capacity for self-deception. Faced with the insouciance of his maître d’hôtel, who puts his faith in edulcorated newspaper reports of French military success even as the Germans advance to within artillery range of Paris in spring 1918, the narrator remarks: “[O]n lit les journaux comme on aime, un bandeau sur les yeux. On ne cherche pas à comprendre les faits. On écoute les douces paroles du rédacteur en chef comme on écoute les paroles de sa maîtresse.”

Given the distress previously endured by the narrator when he obsessively sought to discover exactly what his own mistress Albertine was up to, there is a suggestion here that it would be preferable to keep the blindfold on rather than confront the dismal reality of both love and war. The idea that such wilful ignorance might be beneficial becomes still more explicit in the narrator’s subsequent gloss of Charlus’s Germanophilia, which the narrator attributes less to his family’s Germanic origins than to a sense of detachment and lack of patriotic feeling that leads the Baron to revolt against the reflexive chauvinism of his fellow Frenchmen.

Those blinkered atavistic passions, the narrator insists, stem not from journalistic propaganda but from an instinct for national self-preservation: “Le bourrage de crâne est un mot vide de sens. […] Le véritable bourrage de crâne, on se le fait à soi-même par l’espérance, qui est une forme de l’instinct de conservation d’une nation, si l’on est vraiment membre vivant de cette nation.”

The French people, in other words, have entered a collective spasm of delusion about the achievements of their own military and the perfidy of their enemy that is essential to maintaining hope of victory. In wartime, too much lucidity threatens catastrophe, and a nation of Charluses would succumb to

---

1547 Proust, RTP, 4: 330.
1548 Proust, RTP, 4: 353-354.
1549 Proust, RTP, 4: 353.
immediate defeat. The lies and distortions of the French press thus seem like an epiphenomenon within a national epidemic of humbug, whose grim necessity the narrator reluctantly concedes.

The press plays a similarly tangential role in a memorable vignette shortly before Charlus’s tirade, where we glimpse the social-climbing hostess Mme Verdurin reading a newspaper the morning after the sinking of the Lusitania in May 1915 whilst eating a croissant (a scarce delicacy in wartime Paris, obtained only thanks to the intervention of her doctor):

[L]a mort de tous ces noyés ne devait lui apparaître que réduite au milliardième, car tout en faisant, la bouche pleine, ces réflexions désolées, l’air qui surnageait sur sa figure, amené là probablement par la saveur du croissant, si précieux contre la migraine, était plutôt celui d’une douce satisfaction.  

As in “Sentiments filiaux,” reading about distant suffering in an atmosphere of security and material comfort here triggers an intense sensation of Schadenfreude. And here again the real problem is less the newspaper itself than underlying human perversity. In his Figaro article, Proust had seemed reluctant to disavow the voluptuously abominable pleasure of luxuriating in the misfortune of others, and that sense of moral ambiguity is heightened by his exalted view of Blarenberghe’s murder. By contrast, his portrait of the ageing salonnière, her mouth stuffed full of pastry, is singularly unedifying. What had been a morally dubious thrill now appears chillingly grotesque on every level. And, for all its failings, the blame for Mme Verdurin’s matitudinal Schadenfreude can scarcely be laid at the door of the French press, which merely catalyzes an eternal strain of egoism foreshadowed by a line from Lucretius’s De Rerum Natura – suave mari magno – that is previously quoted several times in the Recherche, notably in Sodome et Gomorrhe when Swann, visibly ravaged by cancer, enters the Princesse de Guermantes’s ball.  

---

1550 Proust, RTP, 4: 352.
1551 “Et c’est avec une stupéfaction presque désobligeante, où il entrait de la curiosité indiscrète, de la cruauté, un retour à la fois quiet et soucieux sur soi-même (mélange à la fois de suave mari magno et de memento quia pulvis, eût dit Robert), que tous les regards s’attachèrent à ce visage duquel la maladie avait si bien rongé les joues [...].” (Proust, RTP, 3: 89). The relevant verses from Lucretius are “Suave mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis/ e terra...”
Roman poet found it pleasing to watch ships being tossed about a stormy sea from the safety of the shore, so Mme Verdurin savours the news of a maritime disaster in a Parisian mansion where she faces little threat save for the occasional Zeppelin raid.

And yet, as Antoine Compagnon has argued, both Lucretius’s poem itself, which goes on to disavow celebrating the misfortune of others as distinct from feeling relief at one’s own safety, and the allusion in Sodome et Gomorrhe evoke an ambiguous blend of pity and self-interest that only hardens into full-blown narcissism at Mme Verdurin’s breakfast table. Whereas the shipwreck, notes Compagnon, is the traditional image of the suave mari magno:

[I]l est une autre version du même topos, sa variante moderne pour ainsi dire, et, significativement, celle-ci est aussi présente, et inséparable, dans le passage du Temps retrouvé: c’est le journal, le journal qui apporte les catastrophes, où l’on découvre, dans le havre de son club ou de son salon, enfoncé dans son fauteuil, à la chaleur du foyer, l’horreur quotidienne: crimes et faits divers, inondations et tremblements de terre.1552

By these lights, the newspaper increases our superficial knowledge of quotidian horror whilst diminishing our understanding of what it means to suffer. Lucretius described witnessing nearby ships at risk of devastation. When many distant disasters are condensed into a few blocks of texts, readers may both find their reserves of pity being rapidly depleted and lose a visceral appreciation of what the victims of those catastrophes have experienced. The suave mari magno duly sheds its mitigating ambiguity. From there, it is but a short mental hop towards Schadenfreude, as in Baudelaire’s depiction of the newspaper as a “dégoûtant apéritif” that corrupts its readers each morning, transforming the breakfast of the civilized man into, as Compagnon puts it, “un rituel

sadique.” Proust’s vignette of Mme Verdurin, where the newspaper itself is described in entirely neutral terms, does not, however, convey the same emphatically anti-journalistic animus as Baudelaire’s remarks. That scene also follows a vignette of the Verdurins’ “salon politique,” where discussion of the war prompts, if not exactly Schadenfreude, then a perhaps still more sinister egoistic calculation:

[Les Verdurin] pensaient en effet à ces hécatombes des régiments anéantis, de passagers engloutis; mais une opération inverse multiplie à tel point ce qui concerne notre bien-être et divise par un chiffre tellement formidable ce qui ne le concerne pas, que la mort de millions d’inconnus nous chatouille à peine et presque moins désagréablement qu’un courant d’air.1554

Worldly chatter here appears just as capable of bringing out the worst in people as a newspaper report. What counts is less the medium or even the message it delivers than the existing psychological springs they actuate.

That variability is glimpsed in Du côté de chez Swann, where the hero’s housekeeper Françoise, in direct contrast to Mme Verdurin, habitually weeps whilst reading newspaper reports of far-off misery. Those tears abruptly cease as soon as “elle pouvait se représenter la personne qui en était l’objet d’une façon un peu précise.”1555 When her misfortunate kitchen maid suffers severe post-natal cramps, she duly fails to muster the slightest sympathy yet starts crying when she is sent to consult the description of the ailment in a book of medicine. As in the later vignette of Mme Verdurin, there is no real criticism of the press itself here. Indeed, the juxtaposition of book and newspaper suggests that Françoise’s topsy-turvy emotional reactions can stem from any written medium. Limiting her sympathy to people she reads about seems like a kind of defence mechanism that allows her to shirk her moral responsibilities towards her beleaguered, nameless

---

1554 Proust, RTP, 4: 351.
1555 Proust, RTP, 1: 121.
kitchen maid, whom she treats with a blend of sadism and indifference, almost as if she were an unloved dog. Unlike the worldly Mme Verdurin, Françoise lacks any capacity for dissimulation. Rather than confine spasms of Schadenfreude to the privacy of the breakfast table, she displays her cruelty in full view of the hero and his mother as the kitchen maid lies in agony.

The newspaper-disdaining Swann previously jokes that the gravid, unmarried young woman’s swollen appearance makes her resemble Giotto’s allegorical fresco of Charity, thereby reducing her to an archetype and turning her predicament into a punchline much appreciated by the hero’s family. Connoisseurship thus offers no surer moral guidance or sense of sympathy than Françoise’s lachrymose newspaper reading. Rather than a singularly and inevitably vitiating force, the press emerges as just another potential source of moral corruption in the Recherche.

As Teresa Whitington notes, Françoise’s tears and her inability to sympathize with those close at hand echo Proust’s own tears in “Sentiments filiaux,” prompted by a newspaper report of a presidential visit, which, as we have seen, he would not have shed for “un malheur proche de nous.” And, as we have also seen, the same article anticipates Mme Verdurin’s Schadenfreude in Le Temps retrouvé. Proust himself thus pivots between twin extremes of journalistically inspired emotional perversity in his article. He then offers a remarkably sympathetic account of the murder committed by his erstwhile acquaintance Blarenberghe.

In the Recherche, these tendencies are disaggregated as Françoise and Mme Verdurin separately assume the conflicting emotional reactions to the press Proust had previously identified with himself, whereas his narrator retains the empathetic outlook of “Sentiments filiaux.” That perspective becomes far less indulgent, however, and acquires a harder moral edge. For empathy in the Recherche does not necessarily entail sympathy. The vignette of Mme Verdurin implies a

---

1556 See Whitington, The Syllables of Time, 44.
deep understanding of her state of mind, which only makes her seem more grotesque. Proust’s narrator, himself no paragon of virtue, struggles throughout the novel to see people as they really are. And his attempts to understand those around him bring only misery and disillusionment as one idolized personage after another reveal their inner cruelty and duplicity, leaving little trace of the heroic grandeur or “beauté morale” Proust ascribed to Blarenberghe. In the world of the *Recherche*, too much understanding is the ultimate destroyer of human happiness. It is also essential to penetrating what *Contre Sainte-Beuve* calls the “moi profond.” Excavating those psychological depths is the central preoccupation of Proust’s novel. There thus emerges a bleak dichotomy between art and life, where achievement in the former stems from failure in the latter.

Journalism is pivotal to that triumphant failure. Just as the *Recherche* itself grew out of the aborted journalistic endeavour of *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, so the hero’s artistic vocation begins to crystallize thanks to the disappointment he experiences after publishing an article in *Le Figaro* in *Albertine disparue*.

What Mireille Naturel calls “le fabuleux destin” of that article begins in 1907, when *Le Figaro*, to coincide with Paris’s Salon d’automobile, published Proust’s “Impressions de route en automobile,” which recounts a trip he had made across Normandy with his lover “l’ingénieux [Alfred] Agostinelli” at the wheel.\(^\text{1557}\) The beginning of that article, which describes Proust’s shifting perspective of the steeples of Caen as they approach the town, then becomes “le petit morceau” that the hero jots down in the local doctor’s carriage at the end of “Combray,” where, among other minor changes, Caen is replaced by the fictional village of Martinville.\(^\text{1558}\)

---


initially hopes that Norpois, a diplomat and contributor to the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, will help him publish his “petit poème en prose” in that *grande revue*, but he hands back the putative article without comment.\footnote{1559 Proust, *RTP*, 1: 447.} At some unidentified point the hero submits the work to *Le Figaro* and thrice notes his frustration as he scours the newspaper for an article that seems destined never to see the light of day, just like the “débutant” in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*.\footnote{1560 Proust, *RTP*, 2: 643; 3: 523 and 626.} Then, in *Albertine disparue*, his mother leaves him his post one morning, including a copy of *Le Figaro*, which has finally published his article.\footnote{1561 Proust, *RTP*, 4: 147.}

Further echoing *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, his initial reaction is one of joy as he imagines “le pain spirituel qu’est un journal” being distributed across Paris and miraculously multiplying itself into thousands of identical copies.\footnote{1562 Proust, *RTP*, 4: 148.} As in his portrait of Sainte-Beuve, the hero goes on to fantasize about his friends reading the article (though it turns out almost all of them have not even noticed it); and, like the “débutant,” he vows to send out for more copies of *Le Figaro* so that he can simulate the reactions of strangers who encounter his writing. Proust also reprises *Contre Sainte-Beuve*’s critique of journalism’s dependency on the approbation of its readers:

> [U]ne partie de sa beauté – et c’est la tare originelle de ce genre de littérature, dont ne sont pas exceptés les célèbres *Lundis* [i.e. Sainte-Beuve’s weekly articles] – réside dans l’impression qu’elle produit sur les lecteurs. C’est une Vénus collective, dont on n’a qu’un membre mutilé si l’on s’en tient à la pensée de l’auteur, car elle ne se réalise complète que dans l’esprit de ses lecteurs. En eux elle s’achève. Et comme une foule, fût-elle une élite, n’est pas artiste, ce cachet dernier qu’elle lui donne garde toujours quelque chose d’un peu commun.\footnote{1563 Proust, *RTP*, 4: 150.}

Proust here adds further ambiguity to the already equivocal image of the journalistic “Vénus” found in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. “Ce cachet dernier” refers to the grubby mark or fingerprint left by
the newspaper-reading mob, but “cachet” can also mean distinction, originality, or indeed a seal of authenticity or legitimacy. “Tare” – a flaw or blemish – seems more categorical, but, in keeping with the religiously charged description of the miraculously multiplying “pain spirituel” of the newspaper, the accompanying epithet evokes original sin, from which, by definition, no-one can escape. And that is exactly how journalism appears in the *Recherche*. For Proust never expunges the “tare” of journalism from a novel that here purports to repudiate journalism as an inferior form of writing (whilst also, unlike *Contre Saint-Beuve*, conceding that journalism is a “genre de littérature”). Rather, his rejection of journalism occurs in a work that continuously draws attention to how the press structures the hero’s emerging artistic vocation and his perception of the world, culminating in the publication of the “petit morceau,” which epitomizes the role of the press in the genesis of the *Recherche*.1564 Furthermore, if Proust’s narrator here recoils from that “quelque chose d’un peu commun” left by the newspaper-reading mob, he previously extolled “un fait par lui-même moins important” he had unearthed in the newspaper. Far from distancing itself from such banalities, the *Recherche* repeatedly celebrates and assimilates life’s most humble experiences. Indeed, the “petit morceau” both describes and itself constitutes “un fait par lui-même moins important” that has been elevated to the status of art through its position in Proust’s novel, where it at once represents all he wishes to leave behind and the starting point of his creative journey. Without journalism’s “tare originelle,” there would, in other words, be no prospect of literary redemption.

1564 Naturel notes how the “petit morceau” offers an internal argument for situating the *Recherche* within its material and genetic context (what Jacques Bersani called “le fait littéraire”): “L’article dans *Le Figaro* est la mise an abyme parfaite du fait littéraire dont Proust devient ainsi le précurseur. Il met en évidence la réalité éditoriale complexe qui caractérise la *Recherche*, en a conditionné la publication et en fait une œuvre ouverte à des interprétations divergentes.” (Naturel, *Proust et le fait littéraire*, 60). See also her commentary on “le fait littéraire” in her introduction (7-10).
Hannah Freed-Thall offers an alternative reading of this scene, which emphasizes the bathos of the hero’s immediate reaction to the publication of his article as he manically tries, without much success, to work his way into the mind of a “lecteur quelconque”: “The Proustian narrator models a flagrantly unsophisticated mode of reading, in which boredom and fascination short-circuit into one another, an elite readership can be imagined as a ‘crowd,’ and a narrator who elsewhere carefully withholds his voice suddenly breaks into a triumphant ‘bah!’”\(^\text{1565}\) That lack of sophistication – typified by the epithet *quelconque*, which Freed-Thall here interprets as a “marker of superlative ordinariness” – indeed seems applicable to the hero’s initial spasm of *amour propre*. It is offset, however, by the parallel commentary on the journalistic “Vénus,” which is a remarkably ambiguous and thence sophisticated account of how readers consume newspapers. That nuanced disavowal of journalism seems to be not the hero’s immediate reaction but the narrator’s mature reflection as he looks back on the episode (which offers a clear example of how hero and narrator are distinct-yet-coincident presences in the *Recherche*). With hindsight, the narrator can see that writing for the sake of temporary journalistic acclaim offers only a shallow, unsophisticated sense of satisfaction. And that deception seems to prepare the way for the *Recherche’s* concluding epiphany about the necessity of writing not to please others but to understand the self.\(^\text{1566}\)

Proust’s critique of journalism in *Albertine disparue* is far from the hypocritical anti-journalistic thunder satirized in Flaubert’s *Dictionnaire*. And yet the pivotal role of the “petit morceau” in the *Recherche* and the novel’s myriad other journalistic borrowings show that Proust cannot live without the press even as he diminishes journalism’s aesthetic value. What

\(^{1565}\) Proust, *RTP*, 4: 151; Freed-Thall, *Spoiled Distinctions*, 60.

\(^{1566}\) On how journalism, like letter-writing, represents a form of “transitive writing,” to wit “writing with an external object in mind,” (102) for Proust, see Michael R. Finn, “Transitive Writing,” in *Proust, the Body and Literary Form* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 102-141.
distinguishes the *Recherche* from so many other novels exemplifying that paradox is not just the nuanced tone of his critique but also the self-awareness accompanying it. Gide comes close to such a reckoning in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*. But he ultimately relegates a brief acknowledgement of the novel’s journalistic origins to the *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs*, whereas Proust situates the story of his own debt to journalism right at the heart of the *Recherche*. He also seems to emphasize the paradox of his position by inserting his critique of journalism’s “tare originelle” in the middle of the *Recherche*’s account of his hero’s ongoing excitement before the sight of his article, which only dissipates when he later realizes that it has passed largely unnoticed among his friends.

Journalism helped make Proust into an artist. Exploring how that superficial albeit far from worthless medium shaped his life is thus essential to capturing the reality of his “moi profond.” And his tangential relationship to the press also allows him to have it both ways and remain apart from the mob without cutting himself off entirely. Whereas Baudelaire’s “Peintre de la vie moderne” sets out to “épouser la foule,” Proust’s narrator-hero briefly plunges into its hive mind, then recoils but never washes his hands of the experience.¹⁵⁶⁷ That residue left by his imaginary brush with the newspaper-reading mob is a mark of the *Recherche*’s broader ambivalence towards modernity itself. Proust too was what Compagnon calls a “moderne déchiré,” for whom the mass press represented an unavoidable fault line between his inward and backward-looking consciousness and the protean tumult of the external world.

**X. Proust’s “Livre”?**

Because of their apparent clash in *La Revue blanche* in 1896, Mallarmé and Proust have typically been seen as antagonists. Proust, a disciple of Anatole France’s clear classical prose, attacked the linguistic obscurity of Symbolist poetry, which he portrays as lifeless – and

¹⁵⁶⁷ Baudelaire, “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” in *Oc*, 2: 691; italicized in the original.
paradoxically marred by “l’idée enfantine et grossière qu’on peut précisément reprocher au vulgaire” – since its impenetrability betrays a desire to alienate its readers that is just as aesthetically mediocre as the converse desire to please them.\footnote{1568} Proust thus assails Symbolism on similar grounds to those on which he criticizes journalism in \textit{Contre Sainte-Beuve} and \textit{Albertine disparue}. In light of that parallel, Beulier’s dismissal of the hero’s literary preciosity in \textit{Jean Santeuil} as “de la couleur pour un petit journal” comes to seem perhaps more than purely rhetorical. For Proust, Symbolists and journalists alike have sacrificed the principle of art for art’s sake.

As Anne Henry and Bertrand Marchal have argued, it is in fact unlikely that “\textit{Contre l’obscurité},” which never mentions Mallarmé, targeted the poet himself so much as his militant young acolytes.\footnote{1569} Proust also occasionally expresses admiration for some though not all of Mallarmé’s poetry in his letters and mocks the poet’s detractors in \textit{Les Plaisirs et les Jours} and the \textit{Recherche}.\footnote{1570} Mallarmé’s “Le Mystère dans les lettres” in turn seems to have been composed as a general response to his detractors rather than Proust in particular.\footnote{1571}

Moreover, in a letter to Albertine (adapted from a real letter to Agostinelli) in \textit{Albertine disparue}, Proust’s hero quotes the first stanza of Mallarmé’s sonnet “Le Vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd’hui,” which depicts a swan trapped inside a glacier.\footnote{1572} Whereas the hero proposes to have these verses inscribed on a yacht he wishes to give Albertine, Proust had vowed to do the same on an aeroplane for Agostinelli, who died in a plane crash on the very day Proust wrote his letter.
Marchal sees that travestissement of Proust’s proposed gift to Agostinelli as characteristic of a broader metaphorical relationship between aeroplanes, boats, the sky, and the sea, which comes to the fore in a lengthy passage filled with maritime imagery in *La Prisonnière*, where the hero recounts visiting an aerodrome with Albertine.\(^{1573}\) The same figures also appear in a juxtaposition of two mythological paintings by the fictional impressionist artist Elstir and an aeroplane seen by the hero off the coast of Balbec in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*.\(^{1574}\) In *La Prisonnière*, the narrator later contrasts the swan that transports Wagner’s Lohengrin with the same aeroplane, which he sees as the truest embodiment of Wagner’s soaring leitmotifs and the vehicle best equipped “pour explorer l’infini.”\(^{1575}\) That analogy is then turned on its head in *Le Temps retrouvé*, where the aristocratic officer Saint-Loup compares the sound of air-raid sirens in Paris to Wagner’s music and the German bombers to Walkyries.\(^{1576}\) The aeroplane and Wagner, which had seemed like twin apotheoses of spiritual rapture and artistic flourishing, have come to represent violence and destruction. “There is no document of civilization,” as Walter Benjamin remarked, “which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.”\(^{1577}\)

Like the press, Elstir’s paintings, aeroplanes, and Wagner’s music stir an ephemeral flurry of spiritual rapture in the *Recherche*. Ultimately, in Marchal’s reading, Proust then returns to the one true faith of literature itself in a work of art that both assimilates and transcends these facets of modernity. Echoing the aptly named Swann’s earlier failure to achieve fulfilment through connoisseurship, the chimeric Mallarmé inscription in *Albertine disparue* signals the failure of Proust’s hope of touching infinity aboard an aeroplane. But, just as the trapped swan of Mallarmé’s

---


sonnet unleashes what Marchal calls “triomphe du Cygne des mots” represented by the poem itself, where the life of the *signe* compensates for the death of the *cygne*, so Proust’s dreams of literally soaring into the clouds give way to the realization that “le vrai vol, c’est celui d’un autre animal à plume, l’écrivain.” Here again, in other words, artistic achievement flows from worldly disappointment.

Marchal concludes his article on Proust and Mallarmé with the assertion that the latter’s sonnet constitutes “un nœud symbolique” in *Recherche*, which ties together several strands of aesthetic influence, as well “une des matrices programmatiques de cette œuvre totale rendue, contre Wagner, au seul génie de la littérature.” The notion of “cette œuvre totale” evokes Mallarmé’s own cosmic vision of “le Livre.” And Marchal elsewhere draws that parallel explicitly:

> Par sa forme comme par son écriture, la Bible proustienne est bien l’héritière littéraire du *Gesamtkunstwerk* wagnérien, et du Livre mallarméen.

> Comme le Livre mallarméen, cette Bible nouvelle est celle d’un univers qui n’est plus théocratique, mais entré dans l’ère de la relativité: Bible d’un univers désenchanté […], Bible d’une religion moderne, démystifiée et sans au-delà, celle de la littérature.

The affinities between Mallarmé’s “Livre” and the *Recherche* stem not only from their shared religious echoes and Proust’s allusions to Mallarmé. Both Mallarmé and Proust also strove to find a way of incorporating journalism within their totalizing literary visions. Indeed, their struggles to come to terms with the mass press are saturated with religious imagery in both *Divagations* and the *Recherche*. As we saw in Chapter One, Mallarmé ultimately espoused a rapturous vision of literary-journalistic hybridity that he saw as the basis for a new civic faith. *Pace* Marchal, the Mallarmé of “Quant au livre” and *Un coup de dés* seems positively *enchanted* by the possibilities of that endeavour, which evokes the pervasive though far from universal optimism of the pre-1914

---

1578 Marchal, “Proust et Mallarmé,” 74.
1579 Marchal, “Proust et Mallarmé,” 75.
world. By contrast, the *Recherche* tells the story of its hero’s *disenchantment* with journalism, which coheres with the dismal mood of the First World War and its aftermath. Where Mallarmé had sought to transcend the opposition between journalism and literature, Proust thus reverts, albeit with much greater nuance than his precursors, to the traditional literary view of journalism’s aesthetic inferiority. But he does so in a work that simultaneously draws attention to its own journalistic hinterland as well as the competing urges stirred by the press. The lacuna at the heart of novels of journalism such as *Illusions perdues, Bel-Ami,* and *Les Déracinés,* which never confront their own debts to the press, is thereby filled. Proust also avoids the doubtless excessive and unrealizable faith Mallarmé placed in the mass press as a vehicle for literary and civilizational renewal. If the *Recherche* is indeed the heir to Mallarmé’s “Livre,” then Proust has a clear-eyed view of what that inheritance can yield. The *Recherche* is not the Book. It is rather a book – one capable of inspiring quasi-religious devotion that nonetheless offers no transcendent solution to the death of God.

Nor does Proust resolve the crisis of the novel so much as circumvent it. Earlier “romans du roman” such as Huysmans’s *Là-Bas* or Gourmont’s *Sixtine* seem roiled by creative paralysis and discord about what a novel should be. *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* similarly portrays a novelist struggling and ultimately failing to write a “roman pur.” These works are the sum of their defeats, which convey little confidence in the future of the genre. The *Recherche* too is a catalogue of frustrations and disappointments. But that suffering is redeemed by its concluding epiphany, where the hero grasps the necessity of using what time is left him to record the experience of time itself. And rather than fixate on the form of the novel or wallow in the rhetoric of literary crisis, Proust offers the loosely defined vow to write “un livre aussi long que *Les Mille et une Nuits* peut-être,
That book might well be “une espèce de roman,” as Proust called it in a letter to the journalist René Blum. But it also expands the boundaries of the genre beyond all recognition to assimilate an extraordinary array of ancient, classical, and modern literary influences as well as painting, music, architecture, photography, philosophy, politics, religion, and indeed journalism, whose genetic role is explored with a level of candour unparalleled in French prose fiction. By explicitly confronting journalism’s paradoxical position within his work, Proust seems, without exactly resolving the problem, to unwind a particularly knotty strand of the crisis of the novel and create space for a sustained meditation on the essence of literature itself.

Like One Thousand and One Nights, the Recherche is a portrait of an entire culture. But it is indeed “tout autre” because that portrait is refracted through the hyperactive consciousness of its creator, who delves into what his narrator calls the “livre intérieur de signes inconnus”:

Chaque événement, que ce fût l’affaire Dreyfus, que ce fût la guerre, avait fourni d’autres excuses pour ne pas déchiffrer ce livre-là, ils voulaient assurer le triomphe du droit, refaire l’unité morale de la nation, n’avaient pas le temps de penser à la littérature.

The Dreyfus Affair and the First World War are of course central to the Recherche. But what accounts for their presence in the novel is not so much their world-historical importance as the traces they have left upon the hero’s “livre intérieur.” To decode that book he plunges into the deepest reaches of his being. By extension, that process of self-exploration involves reconstructing the world as he saw it and as it was revealed to him through different media. His seemingly solipsistic method duly yields a sweeping socio-historical panorama. And though the Recherche

---

1581 Proust, RTP, 4: 621. As we saw in Chapter One, Mallarmé anticipated that the growth of the mass press would yield “de Mille et Une Nuits innombrables” (Mallarmé, Oc, 2: 222). That common point of reference further emphasizes Mallarmé and Proust’s shared preoccupation with balancing journalistic modernity and literary tradition. On One Thousand and One Nights as a model for the Recherche, see Dominique Jullien, Proust et ses modèles (Paris: José Corti, 1989).
1583 Proust, RTP, 4: 458.
self-consciously tells the story of its own creation, Proust’s vision of literature differs from that of Huysmans, Gourmont, and Gide. Whereas the primary subject of their “romans du roman” is the novel itself, the Recherche’s self-consciousness has a more humanist focus. For Proust, the purpose of literature is not to cast a chilly ironic gaze on its own artifice but to capture the reality of lived experience in all its bewildering complexity and inconsistency.

Symbolizing that unity of opposites in the Recherche are the two paths in Combray – the rugged, hawthorn-strewn Méséglise Way (also known as Swann’s way because it passes by his house) – associated with the wild raptures of nature, sexual excitement, and the intimacy of bourgeois family life – and the longer, more cultivated Guermantes Way, which connotes aristocratic refinement, intellectualism, snobbery, and literary and social ambition – the world, in other words, of Le Gaulois and Le Figaro.1584 The steeples of Martinville described in the “petit morceau” the hero publishes in the latter newspaper lie along the Guermantes Way, whereas the humble-yet-inspiring spectacle of the wind tugging at the wild grasses and a hen’s downy feathers in front of a gardener’s hut occurs earlier in “Combray” on the Méséglise Way. The Guermantes Way represents a form of polished albeit superficial literary talent, the Méséglise Way a deep current of emotion that the young hero is unable to put into words. His writing, in other words, lacks emotional depth, while his emotions lack literary expression. The hero’s struggle to bring together content and form duly becomes the essence of his search for creative fulfilment. And just as it transpires in Albertine disparue that the Méséglise and Guermantes Ways are in fact contiguous – an association that acquires human form through the marriage of Swann’s daughter Gilberte to the Duchesse de Guermantes’s nephew Saint-Loup – the novel itself represents the

1584 See Jérôme Picon, “Guermantes (côté de)” and “Swann (côté de),” in Bouillaguet and Rogers, Dictionnaire Marcel Proust, 439-443 and 980-983.
union of the stylistic gifts Proust honed in the press and his yearning to give artistic voice to his
“moi profond.”

What ensues is not the dazzling, world-changing synthesis envisioned by Mallarmé but an
uneasy symbiosis between conflicting forces. When people ask the hero what he thinks of Saint-
Loup and Gilberte’s marriage, as if conducting a journalistic “enquête sur la hauteur des chapeaux
des femmes au théâtre ou sur le roman psychologique,” he feels only:

une immense tristesse, comme quand deux parties de votre existence passée,
amarrées auprès de vous, et sur lesquelles on fonde peut-être paresseusement au
jour le jour, quelque espoir inavoué, s’éloignent définitivement, avec un
claquement joyeux de flammes, pour des destinations étrangères, comme deux
vaisselleaux.1585

What proves to be their loveless and faithless union strikes him, in other words, as less than the
sum of its parts. And though he is later impressed by the beauty of their teenage daughter, who
encapsulates the physical traits of her forebears, which arouses the hero’s yearning to retrieve lost
time, he also seems disappointed that she goes on to marry “un homme de lettres obscur,” making
it difficult for future generations to believe that “les parents de cet obscur ménage avaient eu une
grande situation.”1586 So it is with the marriage of journalism and literature in the Recherche
epitomized by the “petit morceau” – itself the work of a then-obscure man of letters – whose
publication the hero initially greets as a cosmic unifying event that will create a deep mental
affinity between him and thousands of readers. Instead, the article is widely ignored and assumes
an aesthetically ambiguous status, becoming a fragment of devalued juvenilia that nonetheless
plays a pivotal role within the work of art stemming from the hero’s disillusionment with the press.
The Recherche, as Compagnon puts it, is “le roman de l’entre-deux, pas de la contradiction résolue
et de la synthèse dialectique, mais de la symétrie boiteuse ou défectueuse, du déséquilibre et de la

1585 Proust, RTP, 4: 241.
1586 Proust, RTP, 4: 605-606.
disproportion [...].”

Oscillating between journalism and literature, tradition and modernity, fiction and reality, Proust’s novel becomes in one of its final metaphors “une sorte de ces verres grossissants,” which magnifies all its irresolvable internal tensions.

In the world of *Recherche*, it is as if, to alter Gramsci’s diagnosis, the old never truly dies and the new quickly becomes old, which makes the kind of political and cultural *risorgimento* advocated by the Marxist philosopher-politician seem chimerical. The newspaper, which supplies an ephemeral burst of excitement each morning that soon recedes – without ever fading entirely – into the ferment of the “moi profond,” encapsulates that weary dynamic. What had represented, for Balzac, Huysmans, and Barrès among others, an existential threat to literature itself, and, for Mallarmé and Apollinaire, an inspiring albeit anxious new cultural horizon, instead becomes just another unavoidable fact of modern life, thence the banality of the metaphor in *Albertine disparue*, reprised from “Sentiments filiaux,” where the narrator describes the newspaper as daily bread for the mind. “Nous sommes tous les enfants de la presse,” wrote Zola.

Proust struggles against that filiation yet simultaneously emphasizes the bonds linking the *Recherche* to the press. Rather than sever those ties, he ultimately accepts them as part of the fabric of his work and self. After a century of evasion and resentment, he finally places an acknowledgement of the French novel’s debt to journalism at heart of his own work. Proust renews the genre, in other words, by confronting a salient feature that had been there all along.

---

1588 Proust, *RTP*, 4: 610.
CONCLUSION

The final episode of Kenneth Clark’s 1969 BBC television series Civilisation: A Personal View opens with an extended sequence of aerial shots of the Manhattan skyline backed by the anxious strains of William Walton’s First Symphony. As the camera flies in front of a Wall Street skyscraper, the episode’s title flashes onto the screen: “Heroic Materialism.”

Clark never exactly defines this concept. But the implication is clear enough. Manhattan, for Clark, at once represents the apotheosis of man’s ability to mould his environment and the triumph of material self-interest. “New York,” says Clark, “was built to the glory of mammon – money, gain, the new god of the nineteenth century.” That spectacle leaves him ambivalent. From a distance, the results of so much concentrated human ingenuity resemble “a celestial city.” Up close: “Lots of squalor, and, in the luxury, something parasitical. One sees why heroic materialism is still linked with an uneasy conscience.”

The achievement of the authors, editors, and publishers discussed in this dissertation also reflect a kind of heroic materialism. Most remarkable (and most underappreciated) were the efforts of figures such as Léon Deschamps, Alfred Vallette, and Rachilde, who created thriving literary magazines and publishing houses from scratch with barely a centime to their names. They did not do so for the sake of mammon. But they certainly grasped the necessity of using mammon to make literature happen. Their wheeling-dealing may not have been squalid, but it did have distasteful aspects – puffery, bribery, and reliance on young authors desperate to be published at their own expense – that belie the lofty image projected in their petites revues. Gaston Gallimard used similar

---

1592 Clark, Civilisation, 321. In the series, the first of these sentences is different: “Behind this grim uniformity lurks an even grimmer poverty and problems that seem almost insoluble.”
methods (though not the *compte d’auteur*) – whilst nursing a distinctly uneasy conscience – as he built up what continues to be the dominant literary publishing house in France. It is hard to muster even equivocal admiration for such a swaggering braggart as Bernard Grasset. But it was his commercial acumen that helped put Marcel Proust on the literary map.

With the exceptions of a handful of radical outliers such as Ernest Vaughan, founder of *L’Aurore*, and Jean Jaurès, slain as he prepared to write an article denouncing the incipient First World War, few mid-to-late nineteenth and early twentieth-century French newspaper editors or publishers cut an ostensibly heroic figure. By and large, they connived in the crimes of imperialism, applauded the framing of Alfred Dreyfus, and sold their approval to the highest bidder. The literature of the period duly tends to portray them as grasping, unscrupulous philistines.

And yet Jules Vallès, a revolutionary socialist, expressed grudging respect for Émile de Girardin and Hippolyte de Villemessant in his *Jacques Vingtras* trilogy. Proust dedicated *Du côté de chez Swann* to Gaston Calmette, who had published many of his articles and encouraged him to write his novel, even though *Le Figaro*’s editor never followed through on his commitment to serialize the work and came to treat the author with haughty indifference, as indicated by an incident where he gracelessly received a present of a monogrammed cigarette case that Proust had purchased from Tiffany’s. And Marcel Schwob credited Fernand Xau, the founder of *Le Journal*, with giving him his start in literature by publishing one of his short stories in *L’Écho de Paris*, whilst simultaneously telling Octave Mirbeau that “[o]n est plus heureux, je crois, quand on débute avec des camarades, dans une petite revue.” Those ambivalent interactions emphasize the exploitative dynamism of the mass press. The editors of *La Presse, Le Figaro*, and *Le Journal* may have had little more than mammon and power on their minds. They nonetheless presided over

---

1593 For an account of the cigarette case incident, see Carter, *Marcel Proust*, 532.
1594 Schwob to Mirbeau, n.d. [1893 or 1894]; quoted in Lesage, “Le Mercure de France de 1890 à 1914,” 1: 100.
newspapers where modernist authors were able to carve out a space, however tenuous and uncertain, for their works, as Vallès, Proust, and Schwob all acknowledged. Arsène Houssaye, now remembered only as the subject of Baudelaire’s ironically obsequious dedication at the beginning of the *Petits poèmes en prose*, similarly deserves credit for publishing those unconventional works in a daily newspaper, where their scrappy sallies against the poet’s editors seem oddly at home.

Alain sums up the productive tension of writing for the mass press in one of his “Propos,” for *La Dépêche de Rouen et de Normandie*, where he reflects on the role of his own newspaper column:

> Il s’agit de se tenir dans l’entre-deux; de ménager un peu; de heurter un peu; et en somme de se faire une liberté dans les entraves mêmes, une liberté conquise, une liberté prise sur les choses et sur les gens; non une liberté en l’air.\(^{1595}\)

As we saw in Chapter Six, Barbey d’Aurevilly and Louis Aragon both use similar imagery to describe their involvement with the press. The former deplores the ball and chain of journalism, whereas the latter seems to celebrate the strictures of working for Communist newspapers as a delivery from the chaos of Surrealism. Alain offers a more nuanced assessment of journalism’s constraints. Its shackles, which he identifies earlier in the article with his own inherent sense of moderation rather than the dictates of his editor or proprietor, need not be the antithesis of an idealized, unobtainable conception of freedom but the potential source of genuine, concrete freedom to get to grips with the world and shape human events. As we saw in Chapter Seven, Roger Martin du Gard’s Jalicourt similarly exhorts Jacques Thibault to embrace journalism as the only way of life that will allow him to develop worthwhile opinions about the world.

Both exaggerate perhaps. And Alain doubtless underplays the strength of editorial and proprietorial control over the press at the time. But there is more truth to Alain and Jalicourt’s vision of journalism than Pierre Bourdieu’s remark in his 1996 pamphlet on the mass media that those working in television (and he draws similar conclusions about print journalists) are “des marionnettes d’une nécessité qu’il faut décrire, d’une structure qu’il faut dégager et porter au jour.”1596 Like the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century French press, today’s mass media may well be subject to intense commercial and political pressures that dictate much of their output. But it does not follow that such dominating forces are structurally irresistible, just as the bleak portrait of journalism as a cultural whorehouse found in nineteenth-century novels does not capture the ambiguous reality of what was happening in the literary laboratory of the press.

There were many authors in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century France who managed to forge “une liberté dans les entraves mêmes” of the newspaper, even as that medium intermittently struck them as being just as alienating as television did Bourdieu in the late twentieth century. The eclectic, improvised character of much modernist literature bears the traces of those struggles. Authors such as Mallarmé, Schwob, Mirbeau, Apollinaire, Alain, and Proust displayed heroism in the face of heroic materialism. That heroism did not consist of cutting themselves off from journalistic mammon. Rather, they at once resisted its domination – as well as the forces of heroic materialism more generally – and exploited its dynamism for their own ends. Such dialectical shrewdness is the essence of their confrontation with modernity.

Clark, an Edwardian connoisseur of decidedly traditional tastes and self-described “stick-in-the-mud,” similarly used television, a then much-feared and derided medium in artistic and intellectual circles, to create what remains one of the most stirring examples of *haute vulgarisation*
ever made, which, whatever its flaws and omissions, fulfilled the BBC’s original Reithian mission to inform, educate, and entertain with verve and aplomb.\textsuperscript{1597} It is precisely such incongruous compounds – the *Petits poèmes en prose* in *La Presse*, *Un coup de dés* in *Cosmopolis*, Fénéon at *Le Matin*, Proust at *Le Figaro* (and then its antipode *La NRF*) – that often yield startlingly original contributions to civilization.

Late nineteenth and early twentieth-century French punditry, which confidently maintained that the newspaper would soon kill off the book, shows that predictions about the future of media are a hazardous exercise. Today, the newspaper, that erstwhile symbol of modernity, nonetheless truly appears to be approaching death’s door. The printed book, despite ongoing periodic predictions of its demise, seems less threatened though by no means secure. Even the world of broadcast television is roiled with talk of crisis.

The source of those ructions is the internet and its associated gadgets, which stir reactions that are remarkably like those directed at the press throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In some quarters, futurist technophilia; more commonly, apprehension at the cultural, social, and political impact of these innovations combined with neurotic dependence upon them. If Flaubert were writing his *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* today, “Ne pouvoir s’en passer – mais tonner contre” would probably be the entry for “iPhone.” The challenge for artists and journalists alike thus remains that of trying to come to terms with the latest manifestations of heroic materialism without being wrecked by them.

Faced with the indignities of the digital era, des Esseintes-style isolation might very well seem tempting. More inspiring is Mallarmé’s exhortation to his contemporaries, who, as we saw

\textsuperscript{1597} Clark, *Civilisation*, 346. The Reithian principles, named for the BBC’s first director general John Reith, are the foundational principles of public sector broadcasting in the UK (see Tony Harcup, *A Dictionary of Journalism* [Oxford University Press, 2014], 263).
in Chapter One, shunned the theatre as a frivolous distraction: “Héroïques, soit! artistes de ce jour, plutôt que peindre une solitude de cloître à la torche de votre immortalité ou sacrifier devant l’idole de vous-mêmes, mettez la main à ce monument [...].” The medium may have changed, but the message remains ever timely.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

I.1. ARCHIVAL SOURCES


Collection Mercure de France. Institut Mémoires de l’édition contemporaine (IMEC), Caen.

Fonds Charles Péguy. Centre Charles Péguy, Orléans.

Fonds Grasset. IMEC.

Fonds Jean Paulhan. IMEC.

Fonds Larousse. IMEC.


Fonds Roger Martin du Gard. BnF-Richelieu.


Lettres reçues par Guillaume Apollinaire. BnF-Richelieu.


I.2. DIGITIZED ARCHIVAL SOURCES


Fonds Marcel Proust. BnF-Gallica.

François Mauriac en ligne. Université Bordeaux Montaigne.

Presse et revues. BnF-Gallica.

Standesamt Eltville am Rhein Sterbenebenregister. Hessisches Staatsarchiv Marburg.
II.1. NEWSPAPERS:
[Place of publication is Paris unless otherwise stated.]

Consulted systematically in their totality:
Le Chasseur des chevelures (1892)
L'Écho de Paris: supplément littéraire (1892-1893)
Le Matin français (1884)
Le Salut public (1848)
Le Tranchman'Echo (1915)

Consulted systematically in part:
() = Years consulted; [] = Years of publication
Le Cri du peuple (1885) [1871; 1883-1899; 1901-1914; 1918-1922]
L'Écho de Paris (1884; 1891) [1884-1938]
Le Figaro (1884; 1893) [1826-]
Le Journal (1892-1893) [1892-1944]
Le Matin (1884; 1893) [1884-1944]
Le Temps (1884) [1861-1942]

Consulted intermittently:
L’Action française [1908-1944]
L’Aurore [1897-1914]
Le Canard enchaîné [1915-1940; 1944-]
Comédia [1907-1944]
Le Constitutionnel [1819-1914]
Le Cri de Paris [1897-1940; 1949-50]
Le XIXe siècle [1871-1921]
La Fronde [1897-1905]
Le Gaulois [1868-1929]
Gil Blas [1879-1914; 1921-40]
L’Humanité [1904-1939; 1944-]
L’Intransigeant [1880-1940; 1947-8]
Le Journal des débats politiques et littéraires [1814-1944]
La Justice [1880-1931; 1939-40; 1971-76]
La Lanterne [1877-1938]
L’Opinion [1907-38]
Paris-Journal [1908-33]
Paris-Midi [1911-1944]
Le Petit Journal [1863-44]
Le Petit Parisien [1876-44]
Le Petit Temps (supplement to Le Temps) [1893-1903; 1906-11]
La Presse [1836-1939; 1945-52]
Le Rappel [1869-1933]
La Rue [1867-1868]
Le Siècle [1836-1932]
Le Soir [1869-1932]
II.2. MAGAZINES:

Consulted systematically in their totality:
Le Centaure (1896)
La Conque (1891-1892)
Cahiers de la quinzaine (1900-1914)
L’Ermitage (1890-1906)
Le Fou (1883)
Nord-Sud (1917-1918) *
Le Pal (1885) *
La Revue blanche – Brussels (1889-1891)
La Revue blanche (1891-1903)
Revue des lettres et des arts (1867-1868)
Les Soirées de Paris (1912-1914) *
La Vogue (1886)
[*These publications have been reprinted as books that are listed in Section III. 5]

Consulted systematically in part:
Mercure de France (1891-1900) [1891-1940; 1946-1965]
La Nouvelle Revue française (1908-1923) [1908-1914; 1919-1943; 1953-]
La Plume (1889-1901) [1889-1904; 1905; 1911-1914]
La Revue indépendante (1884-89) [1884-1895]

Consulted intermittently:
Le Banquet [1892-1893]
Commerce [1924-1932]
Le Décadent littéraire et artistique [1886-9]
La Décadence artistique et littéraire [1886]
Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires [1890-93]
L’Événement [1872-1966]
Femina [1901-1939; 1945-1953]
La Grande Revue [1898-1940]
Littérature [1919-1924]
Lutèce [1883-1886; 1897]
The National Observer – Edinburgh [1888-1897]
La Nouvelle Revue [1879-1940]
La Nouvelle Rive gauche [1882-1883]
La Pléiade [1886-1889]
La Révolution surréaliste [1924-1929]
La Revue politique et littéraire (aka La Revue bleue) [1871-1933]
Revue des Deux Mondes [1829-]
La Revue de Paris [1829-1845; 1851-1858; 1864-1865; 1894-1940; 1945-70]
La Revue hebdomadaire [1892-1939]
La Revue wagnérienne [1885-1888]
Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution [1930-1933]
III. PRIMARY TEXTS

III.1. COLLECTED WORKS


III.2. INDIVIDUAL WORKS


—. “Le Pyrée.” *Gil Blas*, May 4, 1908, 2.


—. “Ubu roi.” *Mercure de France* 15, no. 69, Sept. 1895, 281-304.


Lavergne, Antonin. “Jean Coste ou l’instituteur du village.” *Cahiers de la quinzaine* 2, no. 12, 13 June 1901.


—. “Pages oubliées.” *La Vogue,* no. 1, April 4, 1886, 1-5.

—. “Crémaillère.” *La Revue indépendante,* no. 7, April 1888, 202-3.

—. *Pages,* Bruxelles: Edmond Deman, 1891.


—. “La Cour.” *La Revue blanche* 8, no. 42, March 1, 1895, 223-227.


—. “Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard.” *Cosmopolis* 6, no. 17, May 1897, 417-427.


—. “Le Journal d’une femme de chambre: nouveaux fragments.” *La Revue blanche* 21, no. 159-168, Jan. 15-June 1, 1900.


— “Le ‘Triomphe de la République.’” Cahiers de la quinzaine 1, no. 1, 24-49.
— “Entre deux trains.” Cahiers de la quinzaine 1, no. 9, May 5, 1900, 1-46.
— “Personnalités.” Cahiers de la quinzaine 3, no. 12, April 12, 1902.
— “Textes formant dossier.” Cahiers de la quinzaine 6, no. 9, Jan. 24, 1905.
— “Notre jeunesse.” Cahiers de la quinzaine 11, no. 12, July 12, 1910.
— “L’Argent.” Cahiers de la quinzaine 14, no. 6, Feb. 11, 1913.
— “L’Argent suite.” Cahiers de la quinzaine 14, no. 9, April 22, 1913.
— “Sainte Geneviève patronne de Paris.” Le Figaro, Aug. 16, 1913, 1.
— “Note conjointe sur M. Descartes et la philosophie cartésienne (Fragments).” La NRF, no. 70 and 71, July and August 1919.

— “Journées de lecture.” Le Figaro, March 20, 1907, 1.
— “Impressions de route en automobile.” Le Figaro, Nov. 19, 1907, 1.


Tharaud, Jérôme and Jean. “La Fête arabe.” *La NRF*, no. 39 and 40, March and April 1912.


—. *Le Roi au masque d’or*. Paris: Ollendorff, 1892.


III.3. CORRESPONDENCE, INTERVIEWS, AND PUBLISHED PAPERS


— “Le Fonds littéraire II.” Le Figaro, Sept. 28, 1894, 2.


III.4. MEMOIRS, JOURNALS, CONTEMPORARY LECTURES, PAMPHLETS, PREFACES, AND CRITICAL STUDIES


—. La Vie de Maurice Barrès. Paris: La NRF, 1921.


III.5. CONTEMPORARY JOURNALISM


—. “La Séparation des églises et de l’état.” *Cahiers de la quinzaine* 6, no. 14, April 4, 1905.


—. [Montade, pseud.]. “La Vie anecdotique.” *Mercure de France* 90, no. 332, April 16, 1911, 884.


—. “Kipling et Pierre Mille.” *La NRF*, no. 47, Nov. 1912, 925-929.


—. “Émile Zola comme littérateur.” *L’Écho de Paris*, March 10, 1908, 1.


Berger, Marcel. *L’Opinion*, June 14, 1926.


—. “Rossignol de Catacombes.” *La Plume*, no. 24, April 15, 1890, 61-63.

—. “Le Reportage littéraire.” *La Plume*, no. 26, May 15, 1890, 81-82.

—. “La Besace lumineuse.” *La Plume*, no. 38, Nov. 15, 1890, 209-211.


—. “L’Incarnation de l’adverbe.” *La Plume*, no. 51, June 1, 1891, 177-181.


Bourgeois, André. “Quatre jours à Montceau.” *Cahiers de la quinzaine* 2, no. 9, March 19, 1901, 44-72.


—. “La Statue de Baudelaire.” *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Sept. 1, 1892. Reprinted in Guyaux et al., *La Querelle de la statue de Baudelaire (août-décembre 1892)*.


—. “Second Courrier d’Indo-Chine.” *Cahiers de la quinzaine* 4, no. 9, Jan. 13, 1903, 69-72.


—. “La France vue de Laval.” *Cahiers de la quinzaine* 5, no. 12, March 15, 1904, 13-85.


—. “Petites Revues.” *L’Évenement*, Nov. 5, 1886, 1.


*Le Chasseur de chevelures.* “Le Chasseur de chevelures.” No. 1, Jan. 15, 1892, 1.


Daveillans, Fr. and Paul Louis. “Notes politiques et sociales.” *La Revue blanche* 28, no. 216, June 1, 1902, 210-212.


La Direction. “Notre programme.” *La Plume*, no. 1, April 15, 1889, 1.


Dubois-Desaulle, Gaston. “Le Bagne militaire d’Oléron.” *La Revue blanche* 29, no. 188, April 1, 1901, 481-504.

—. “Réponse au général André.” *La Revue blanche* 29, no. 189, April 15, 1901, 607-610.


—. “A nos lecteurs.” May 18, 1895, 1.


—. “À travers Paris.” March 18, 1902, 1.


—. “Réponse au jury.” Aug. 1, 1914, 2.


—. “À travers les livres.” Dec. 24, 1904, 1.


—. “Salon de 1845.” *La Presse*, March 18, 1845, 1.

—. “Feuilleton de la Presse: salon de 1852 (10e article).” *La Presse*, May 27, 1852, 2.


—. “Nationalisme et littérature (second article).” *La NRF*, no. 9, Oct. 1909, 190-194.

—. “Nationalisme et littérature (troisième article).” *La NRF*, no. 10, Nov. 1909, 237-244.


—. “Lettre ouverte à Jacques Rivière.” *La NRF*, no. 69, 121-125.


—. “Alexandre Dumas fils et les écrivains nouveaux.” *Mercure de France* 17, no. 73, Jan. 1896, 37-65.

—. “Epilogues.” *Mercure de France* 17, no. 74, Feb. 1896, 259-262.


—. “Spéculations.” *La Revue blanche* 24, no. 186, March 1, 1901, 381-383.


—. “Paris colonie nègre.” *La Revue blanche* 24, no. 188, April 1, 1901, 537.

—. “Faits divers.” *Le Canard sauvage*, no. 28, Sept. 27, 1903, [5].


Lorrain, Jean [Raitif de la Bretonne, pseud.]. “Pall-Mall Semaine.” *Le Journal*, April 19, 1897, 2.


*La Plume*. “Souscription ouverte par LA PLUME pour publier DÉDICACES par Paul Verlaine.” No. 21, March 1, 1890, 31.


—. “Échos d’art et de littérature.” No. 49, May 1, 1891, 16.
—. “Échos d’art et de littérature.” No. 60, Oct. 15, 1891, 38.
—. “Nos soirées littéraires.” No. 72, April 15, 1892, 41.
—. “Échos d’art et de littérature.” No. 83, Oct. 1, 1892, 110.
—. “Échos d’art et de littérature.” No. 86, Nov. 15, 1892.
—. “Sixième banquet de la Plume.” No. 88, Dec. 15, 1892, 532-533.
—. “La Quinzaine littéraire et artistique.” No. 109, Nov. 1, 1893, 466-468.
—. “Quelques opinions sur les affiches illustrées.” No. 110, Nov. 15, 1893, 495-499.


—. “Enquête sur la Commune.” Vol. 12, no. 91, March 15, 1897, 249-305.
—. “Enquête sur la Commune: seconde série.” Vol. 12, no. 92, April 1, 1897, 356-388.
—. “Chronique financière.” Vol. 15, no. 116, April 1, 1898, 560.


—. “La Nouvelle Revue française.” *La NRF*, no. 69, June 1, 1919, 1-12.


—. “La Décadence de la liberté.” *La NRF*, no. 72, Sept. 1, 1919, 498-522.


Salomé, René. “Courrier de Belgique.” *Cahiers de la quinzaine* 3, no. 18, June 10, 1902, 55-68.

Sarcey, Francisque [pseud.]. “Rodolphe Salis.” *La Plume*, no. 5, June 15, 1889, 41.


—. “Marcel Proust et la tradition française.” *La NRF*, no. 112, Jan. 1923, 130-139.

—. “Lettres et journaux.” *La NRF*, no. 117, June 1, 1923. 930-938.


Vallès, Jules. “Notre premier numéro.” *La Rue*, June 8, 1867.


—. “Questions de librairie.” *Mercure de France* 12, no. 57, Sept. 1894, 80-85.

—. “Une enquête franco-allemande.” *Mercure de France* 14, no. 64, April 1895, 1-65.


—. “M. Stéphane Mallarmé.” *Le Figaro*, Dec. 8, 1892, 1.


IV. SECONDARY WORKS

IV.1. JOURNAL AND ENCYCLOPEDIA ARTICLES, BOOK REVIEWS, BOOK CHAPTERS, CONFERENCE PAPERS, INTRODUCTIONS, AND PREFACES


Andrieux, Charlotte. “Le Collage de documents dans *Jean Barois*: une approche littéraire et picturale moderne.” In *Jean Barois, centenaire d’un roman monstre: lectures à vif, lectures


Bildan, Gérard. “Écrire dans les journaux.” In Touret, *Cendrars au pays de Jean Galmot*.


Champeau, Stéphanie. “Jean Lorrain et les Goncourt.” In Palacio and Walbecq, Jean Lorrain, 149-188.

Chaudier, Stéphane. “Un écrivain apolitique à l’âge d’or des engagements: Proust à la NRF.” In La Nouvelle Revue française de Jean Paulhan, 145-164.


—. “Ferdinand Brunetièr.” Encyclopédie universalis.

—. “Stuart Merrill.” Encyclopédie universalis.


—. “La Nouvelle Revue française de Jean Paulhan et le modernisme.” In Guérin, La Nouvelle Revue française de Jean Paulhan, 19-43.


Dubois, Jacques. “Émile Zola.” In Kalifa et al., La Civilisation du journal, 1231-1239.


Freitas, Maria Teresa de. “Le Brésil en revue: ‘reportages’ brésiliens de Blaise Cendrars.” In Touret, *Cendrars au pays de Jean Galmot*.


Henry, Anne. “Mallarmé (Stéphane).” In Bouillaguet and Rogers, *Dictionnaire Marcel Proust*, 586-587.


—. “*Pastiches et mélanges*.” In Bouillaguet and Rogers, *Dictionnaire Marcel Proust*, 747.


Miguet-Ollagnier, Marie. “CAMBREMER (jeune marquise).” In Bouillaguet and Rogers, Dictionnaire Marcel Proust, 182.


Picon, Jérôme. “Guermantes (côté de)” and “Swann (côté de).” In Bouillaguet and Rogers, *Dictionnaire Marcel Proust*, 439-443 and 980-983.


Reynolds, Winston A. “To Burn One’s Boats or to Burn One’s Bridges?” *American Speech* 34, no. 2 (May 1959): 95-100.


Seillan, Jean-Marie. “L’Interview.” In Kalifa et al., La Civilisation du journal, 1025-1040.


Suter, Patrick. “‘Anti-journal’ et ‘autre journal’: la presse dans les premiers livres de Breton.” In Boucharenc, “L’Universel Reportage,” 35-44.


—. “Séverine.” In Kalifa et al., La Civilisation du journal, 1287-1290.


Vérilhac, Yoan. “*La Petite Revue*.” In Kalifa et al., *La Civilisation du journal*, 359-373.


IV.2. BOOKS, CATALOGUES, AND SPECIAL ISSUES OF JOURNALS


592


**IV.3. THESES AND DISSERTATIONS**


IV.4. BIBLIOGRAPHIES


IV.5. MISCELLANEOUS


