‘Il faut vivre’: Writers, Journalists and Income, 1890–1914

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‘Il faut vivre’: Writers, Journalists and Income, 1890–1914

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ABSTRACT

This article looks at the complex relationship between literary authors, money and the press from 1890 to 1914, a period generally considered to be the heyday of the printed press in France. This paper focuses therefore on the sociological context of journalism, publishing, and writing. Using examples from the journalistic careers of several distinctive writer-journalists (Apollinaire, Colette, Alfred Jarry, Jean Lorrain) and several newspapers and periodicals, this article shows how closely the press and literary production were intertwined. While scholarship exists on individual journalistic careers, this article aims to provide an overview of the period and considers how certain literary authors made a living from journalism. It discusses their employment as opinion makers, columnists, critics, and serial novelists, the publications they worked for, as well as their own periodicals. While often considered a simple moneymaking exercise, this article demonstrates how journalism and the press played a crucial and productive part in shaping literary careers, œuvres, and reputations during the Belle Époque.

KEYWORDS

journalism; literature; money; publishing; print culture; Apollinaire; Colette; Jean Lorrain; Alfred Jarry; L’Écho de Paris.

On 26 January 1912 Apollinaire wrote to André Gide: ‘Je suis extrêmement las de tout en particulièrement de devoir rester à Paris, de devoir aller dans les journaux, d’avoir tant de mal à vivre misérablement’ (Caizergues, 1981: 39). It was not the only letter in which Apollinaire complained about his chronic lack of money or how he hated having to beg editors to employ him. When reading the correspondence of writers, money – or the lack of it – is a recurring theme. On 20 August 1914 Colette wrote to her friend Christiane Mendelys about her role as a journalist for Le Matin explaining, slightly apologetically: ‘Il faut vivre […]’ (Pichois-Forbin, 1961: 107). Another contemporary, Jean Lorrain, grumbled to his colleague Willy on 19 May 1901 about having to accompany Henri Letellier, editor in chief of Le Journal, to the Chantilly racecourse. He apologised by saying that it was a ‘[…] devoir professionnel hélas, série possible de nouvelles chroniques’ (Lorrain, 2005: 24). Writers who did not have an independent income, a best-seller to their name or some form of patronage, had to look for other ways to make money with their writing, a boulot alimentaire. Networking in order to get published and paid was, it seemed, an unfortunate by-product of being a writer.

Literary writing had of course always been a tricky career choice and between 1890 and 1910 a crisis in literary publishing meant even more insecurity (Datta, 1999: 20). Reading
habits had changed and even though more people than ever were reading, they were predominantly consuming more newspapers and non-fiction. Newspapers were increasingly targeting this new, large, popular audience. Throughout the nineteenth century novels had been serialized in cheaper and accessible newspapers removing the immediate need to buy the book. The growing commercialisation of the literary market and competition within it meant that many publishing houses had started to produce more mass-produced cheap editions (Mollier, 1997: 22-23).

Compared to decreasing revenues from prose and poetry, journalism seemed the place where money could be made, in particular between 1880 and 1914, the years generally considered as the golden age of the French press (Albert, 1990: 3; Bellanger, 1972: 239). The liberalisation of the press after the 29 July 1881 law, technological advances in printing and communication, cheaper transportation, as well as increased literacy had all contributed to this golden age. By 1914 the 80 daily newspapers (weekly or monthly periodicals not included) in Paris alone had a circulation of 5 500 000 copies whereas in 1870 the 36 Parisian newspapers had a print run of 1 070 000 (Albert, 1990: 32). By the late nineteenth century journalism had also become more professionalised, more specialised and diversified, both in terms of types of journalists – from high-profile literary columnists to anonymous reporters of fait divers (Delporte, 1999; Ferenzi, 1993) – and types of content – a high increase in specialised newspapers and periodicals (Charle, 2004: 143-67).

Le Petit Journal, Le Petit Parisien, Le Matin and Le Journal dominated in these years. Together these four newspapers had a daily circulation of 4.5 million copies, two thirds of all newspapers in Paris, and they targeted a large working- to middle-class audience (Albert, 1990: 160-61). Le Petit Journal was well known for its Supplément illustré, first issued in 1884 and costing five centimes while Le Petit Parisien would become the best-selling newspaper in the world, at one point selling 1.45 million daily copies by 1914. Le Matin, in which Colette had a regular column before and during the First World War, was modelled after American newspapers and reportage, but also excelled in blackmail campaigns against politicians and played an influential role in political life (Bellanger, 1972: 309-14). Le Matin’s direct rival was Le Journal, whose first issue in 1892 was accompanied by a huge publicity campaign. Director Fernand Xau presented Le Journal as a ‘journal littéraire’ with contributors such as Catulle Mendès, Gyp, Séverine, Maurice Barrès, Octave Mirbeau, Jean Lorrain and Alphonse Allais. Then there were the broadsheets generally aimed at a more cultivated and elitist audience: Le Temps, Le Journal des débats, Le Gaulois and Le Figaro, the latter also a ‘journal littéraire’. These papers generally stayed clear from radical political opinions unlike the so-called feuilles politiques which favoured a particular politician or political movement. Often these politicians had been writers or journalists turned political figures or vice versa. Left wing, socialist periodicals, such as La Lanterne and L’Humanité, had contributors such as Léon Blum, Octave Mirbeau, Anatole France and Jean Jaurès. On the right-wing end of the spectrum Maurice Barrès led the conservative, Catholic L’Action Française and Édouard Drumont edited the nationalist and antisemitic La Libre Parole. Apart from the daily newspapers there were many more specialized periodicals, dailies, weeklies and monthly magazines and literary reviews to which many literary authors also contributed, some of which will be discussed below.
Journalism and pay

So how much could writers earn from journalism around 1900? It is important to note that even though the number of newspapers and periodicals had more than doubled during this time, working conditions for journalists remained precarious. The newspaper union, the *Syndicat national des journalistes*, was not founded until 1918, and it was not until 1935 that decent contracts and working rights for journalists finally became law (Bellanger, 1972: 239). Apart from the editors and a select number of regular columnists, most journalists and contributors did not receive a fixed salary, but were paid by the article or per line. Those who were lucky to be employed full-time at a daily might earn between 4 000 and 6 000 francs a year (Bellanger, 1972: 285). Then again, even freelance work, whether for a daily newspaper, a magazine or a literary review, was better than nothing at all.

From authors’ correspondence we can get some idea of earnings. Jean Lorrain received 50 francs for each column during his first regular employment as a columnist at *L’Événement* in the late 1880s (Anthonay, 2005: 320). He wrote about five or six columns a month, adding up to a total of about 300 francs a month. This was still beginner’s money however. Prominent literary stars and *chroniqueurs* such as Francois Coppée earned as much as 300 francs for every article. Yet even a starter income from journalism was better than the royalties received from book publications. Lorrain only earned 350 francs in total from the sale of his first two novels combined (Anthonay, 2005: 323) while he wrote 230 *chroniques* for *L’Événement* in three and a half years. He quit the paper in July 1890 after numerous quarrels about money. Newly hired by *L’Écho de Paris*, he wrote an angry letter to *L’Événement*’s editor Edmond Magnier. Lorrain rants about going to the offices eight times in eight days for 75 francs he never received, calling attention to Magnier’s shady finances and the insecure financial situation of his columnists, who often wrote for very little or even for free: ‘Je débutais et ignorais encore le journalisme; grâce à vous je connais aujourd’hui les êtres et les choses. Je vous en garderai toujours la reconnaissance, mais j’ai passé l’âge des humiliations salariées et gratuites’ (Anthonay, 2005: 408-09). In terms of money and fame Lorrain’s journalistic career would prove successful. By 1900 he had managed to become one of the best-paid journalists in Paris, mostly thanks to his popular columns for *L’Écho de Paris* and later *Le Journal*.

Pay however differed considerably depending on the publication and the person writing. Front-page columns and commentary in the dailies, known as the *chroniques*, paid the most, but general reporting, freelance work or reviews were less well remunerated. Apollinaire for example never really managed to earn enough from his journalism, partly because the publications in which his writing appeared were reasonably well known, but not among the best sellers. In 1910 Apollinaire received 50 francs a month for his column in *La Démocratie Sociale* and 48 francs a month for his column ‘la vie anecdotique’ in literary review *Le Mercure de France* (Caizergues, 1981: 35). For his freelance work at *L’Intransigeant, Paris-Journal* and *Paris-Midi* Apollinaire had to keep track of the number of articles and lines he had written. *Paris-Midi* paid Apollinaire about 0.15 franc per line (Caizergues, 1981: 36) which did not add up to a huge amount. Some months were more lucrative than others, but generally Apollinaire’s income from journalism averaged little more than 100 francs per month. To place these sums in the context of the period: the cost of an annual subscription to the *Journal des*
débats in 1900 was 40 francs whereas an annual subscription to *Le Petit Parisien* in the same year cost 18 francs. The price for one issue in 1900 ranged from five for *Le Petit Parisien* to ten centimes for the *Journal de débats*. Apollinaire complained not just about his lack of money. He also lamented the fact that writing for money kept him from devoting himself full-time to poetry. While he hoped for more regular employment as a journalist at a daily, he also expressed his frustration at having to write ‘de stupides circulaires financières et d’encore plus stupides articles de Bourse pour gagner ma vie’ (Caizergues, 1981: 39).

In similar fashion, in a letter from 1910, Colette also wrote that journalism – a three-louis article for *Madame et Monsieur*, her regular column for *Paris-Journal* – prevented her from working more on her novels:

*Madame et Monsieur* demande un article sur le Printemps (la saison, pas le magasin) pour le numéro de Pâques, on me donnera 3 louis, alors je ne peux pas refuser, le journal est toujours très aimable pour moi. Le numéro de Pâques devant être illustré somptueusement, il faut que je fasse l’article tout de suite, et puis la chronique sur Bruxelles pour *Paris-Journal*, qu’est-ce que tu veux, le roman attendra un peu, ce n’est pas de ma faute. (Colette, 2009: 112)

Three louis was 80 francs. While journalism took up a considerable amount of her time, Colette simply needed the money and could not afford to refuse the work.

The relationship between writers and money was often an uncomfortable one, as was the relationship between literature and writing for money or journalism (see Figure 1). The press was associated with the worlds of finance, commerce and politics. The French dailies in particular relied heavily on revenue from advertising and commercial investors. This made them prone to influence and corruption from business and political lobbying. For example *Le Petit Journal*, *Le Petit Parisien*, *Le Matin*, *Le Temps* and *Le Figaro* all earned income from advertising by the Panama Canal company; some editors and

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*Figure 1*: *L’Assiette au Beurre*, 16 May 1903, ‘Les journalistes’. Source: Bibliothèque Nationale de France/Gallica. Web link: [http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1047770h](http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1047770h).
journalists were even paid directly; figures were revealed by *La Libre parole* in September 1892 (Feyel, 2012: 168-69). Journalism was thus considered suspicious, lacking in independence when compared to literary writing. Colette’s contrite three words, ‘il faut vivre’, convey her ambivalent sentiments towards journalism. Colette’s mother Sido was also less than positive about her new job at *Le Matin*: ‘C’est la fin de tes œuvres littéraires, tes romans. Rien n’use les écrivains comme le journalisme’ (Bonal and Maget, 2010: 18). Sido’s opinion was clear; lending your time and talents to journalistic writing compromised a writer’s career. In similar fashion Edmond de Goncourt wrote in his *Journal* that he thought Jean Lorrain was squandering his writing talents in journalism, but Lorrain made it clear that he did not have enough independent income – as the Goncourts did – to support himself and his mother. He had to write for money: ‘À mes reproches de lui [Jean Lorrain] voir mettre toute sa cervelle dans le journalisme, il me disait qu’il avait abandonné tout entière sa petite fortune à sa mère, fortune grâce à laquelle elle pouvait vivre auprès de lui et qu’il fallait qu’il gagnât sa vie avec sa plume’ (Goncourt, 1956: 73-74).

However, journalism in France was a vast and diverse field ranging from daily reporting to literary contributions by prominent writers, and its output varying from daily popular newspapers to magazines and literary periodicals. The press was for better or worse at the frontline of debates in politics, society, culture and literature. Literary authors benefited from the press in ways that were not narrowly financial.

**The chroniqueurs: socio-political commentary**

Many writers found regular employment as *chroniqueurs* and their opinion articles featured prominently on the front pages. Celebrity authors helped sell copy in a highly competitive market and newspapers made sure to advertise their literary stars widely. Though all newspapers employed literary figures, *L’Écho de Paris* (see Figure 2) was probably, alongside *Le Figaro, Le Journal* and *Gil Blas* (which had serialized many of Zola’s novels) one of the most literary as well as very *mondain*, aimed at a class of moneyed, leisureed readers, contrary for example to the more popular *Le Petit Journal* or *Le Petit Parisien*. *L’Écho* deliberately positioned itself as literary. In the first issue director Valentin Simond made clear how *L’Écho* would distinguish itself from all the other newspapers that had flooded Paris in the 1880s by its mix of politics and literature. Similar to others like *Gil Blas* or *Le Figaro*, its subtitle was ‘journal littéraire et politique du matin’ but in a front page editorial from the year it was launched *L’Écho de Paris* was also advertised as ‘le journal qui fait la plus grande part à la littérature et qui coûte le meilleur marché’ (*L’Écho de Paris*, 20 August 1884): literary and cheap.

The paper mixed Republican, conservative politics with literature and gossip. In the same vain as for example *Gil Blas*, which Bellanger (1976: 380) labels a ‘feuille de chantage’ and with which it shared several writers, *L’Écho de Paris* also engaged in gossip and smear campaigns against politicians, society figures and the *demi-monde*, meaning those individuals who did not quite live up to society’s moral standards even though they were part of society life, for example courtesans or popular entertainers. *L’Écho*’s popularity in the 1890s it seems was mainly due to this mix and to its employment of literary celebrities. As historians of journalism have remarked (Albert, 1990; Ferenczi, 1993; Martin, 1997 and 1998; Delporte, 1999) the distinctions between fact and fiction, news and opinion in the French press at the time were often blurred. Even the Baedeker guide to Paris...
warned visitors against the biased and opinionated French newspapers (Baedeker, 1900: 32). In *L’Écho de Paris*, and in many other newspapers, opinion articles, columns and serial novels often appear prominently on page one, whereas most of the factual news written by anonymous reporters appears on pages two, three and four (most newspapers had four pages at the time). Despite its active role in politics,4 *L’Écho de Paris* contributors in the 1890s were as diverse politically as they were aesthetically (from *Académiciens* to the avant-garde, from left to right-wing), including at different stages Émile Zola, Anatole France, Maurice Barrès, Jules Lemaître, Georges Courteline, Alphonse Daudet, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Octave Mirbeau, Edmond de Goncourt, Catulle Mendès, Jean Lorrain, Séverine, Marcel Schwob and Laurent Tailhade (Picq, 2001: 377-79). When a twenty-something Colette first visited the offices of *L’Écho de Paris* in the 1890s – her then husband Willy was the paper’s music critic – the literary, bohemian atmosphere made a lasting impression on her. Much later, in 1933, Colette would lovingly recall the sights, sounds and smells of the newspaper that sparked her interest in journalism: ‘D’où me vient cette tentation? De très loin, de ma vingtième année. D’un temps silencieux où silencieuse, je contemplai. De l’ancien *Écho de Paris*, de la *Cocarde*, du vieil *Intransigeant* … De la rue du Croissant, des salles de rédaction souillées, irrespirable, du

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*Figure 2:* Poster by Jules Cheret for *L’Écho de Paris* (1889) advertising the new editors and columnists. Source: Bibliothèque Nationale de France/Gallica/Médiathèque Chaumont. Web link: http://silos.ville-chaumont.fr/flora/oai.jsp/index_view_direct_anonymous.jsp?record=default:UNIMARC:82166.
gaz vert. De l’odeur d’encre, d’hommes, de gros tabac, de boue mouillée et de bière […]’ (Bonal and Maget, 2010: 35). The relationship between a writer and newspaper was also a mutually beneficial one as a high-profile position as a columnist might help boost one’s literary status.

Most chroniqueurs commented in some form or another on contemporary society, politics and culture. Apollinaire wrote about socio-political issues and cultural life in his columns for La Démocratie sociale and the Mercure de France. For Paris-Midi he wrote political reports. Some literary heavyweights were explicitly known for their socio-political commentary – figures such as Émile Zola, Anatole France or Maurice Barrès. Anatole France for example wrote reflections on contemporary life for L’Écho, later published as the Histoire Contemporaine series. When L’Écho de Paris turned increasingly anti-Dreyfusard and antisemitic, France left for Le Figaro, and so did several other Dreyfusard and Jewish authors, including Marcel Schwob, Laurent Tailhade and Henry Bauër. These writers were not simply writing for money. Quite often, their journalism, literary work and political views were closely aligned.

Others like Alfred Jarry adopted a more detached, absurdist approach to political and social commentary. Even though Jarry’s articles for La Revue blanche and the Almanach du Père Ubu deal with the Dreyfus Affair and other political events, Jarry preferred to satirize rather than engage in polemics or partisan politics. This outsider position – supposedly free from financial and political interests – became a measure for a particular avant-garde, subversive form of political writing and expression (Dubbelboer, 2012). Some stayed clear of politics altogether. Jean Lorrain’s role as a columnist for L’Écho de Paris was that of social commentator. He considered himself a moralist and said of himself in 1902: ‘Chroniqueur, je suis obligé de peindre les mœurs, je suis Lorrain de la Bretonne’ (Le Journal, 29 May 1902, ‘Doit on le lire’). Lorrain in fact used the pseudonym of Raitif de la Bretonne for his chroniques. He changed Restif to Raitif in 1890 for a new series of articles apparently after the grandson of Restif de la Bretonne complained.5 Lorrain started using the pseudonym for a series of 112 articles entitled ‘Une femme par jour’ which appeared in L’Écho de Paris from 2 July 1890 until 29 April 1891. The title ‘une femme par jour’ sounded both derogatory and titillating. The font of the column’s title also stood out on the frontpage: flowery, stereotypically feminine (see Figure 3). Lorrain’s task was to provide an encyclopaedia of female transgression and deviance through portraits of actual women. The titles are full of innuendo and explicit sexuality and the articles are written in the fashionable decadent style of Lorrain and L’Écho de Paris.

Women writers like Colette were rarely paid to be political opinion makers in the press. Notable exceptions were Séverine (Caroline Rémy de Guebhard), arguably the most famous, who wrote for Le Journal, Gyp (Comtesse de Martel), who also wrote for Le Journal and Augustine Bulteau, who wrote columns for Le Gaulois and Le Figaro under the pseudonyms Jacques Vontade and ‘Femina’. For men – but even more so for women – adopting a pseudonym allowed for more freedom of expression and writers could, if necessary, separate their public, political voice from their personal one. Tellingly, Séverine wrote several of her more outspoken articles for La Fronde under the male pseudonym of Arthur Vingtras. La Fronde was a unique example of female journalists creating their own political space. The newspaper, launched in 1897 by Marguerite Durand, was entirely run and written by women. It was also successful and actively participated in social and political debates; during the Affair it campaigned in favour of Dreyfus.
The earnestness of La Fronde was mocked as ‘Le Temps en jupons’, but Marguerite Durand adopted the phrase as a badge of honour when the paper celebrated its fifth anniversary.6

Unsurprisingly, some female authors such as Colette were hesitant to be associated too much or too directly with political writing.7 Many women journalists found themselves writing for the fashion, entertainment or society columns instead. Women’s magazines, such as Femina, La Vie Heureuse or Le Petit Écho de la Mode, clearly distinct from the feminist press like La Fronde, became increasingly popular in these years. Rachel Mesch (2013) has convincingly shown how women’s magazines such as Femina and La Vie Heureuse helped shape the careers of – largely forgotten, but successful – women writers such as Lucie Delarue-Mardrus, Marcelle Tinayre, and Myriam Harry. Mesch is right in pointing to the importance of these magazines for women’s writing and literary history. It is therefore no coincidence that much of Colette’s writing was published in these periodicals. In 1909 for example Colette had also been asked to write about contemporary fashion for a newspaper, even though in a letter she admitted not knowing much about the subject. But even when Colette started writing her regular column for Le Matin in 1910, her role was to add a feminine voice to the paper. The title ‘Contes des mille et une nuits’ evokes the

**Figure 3:** Front page L’Écho de Paris, 2 July 1890. Start of the chronique ‘Une femme par jour’ by Raitif de la Bretonne/Jean Lorrain. Source: Bibliothèque Nationale de France/Gallica. Web link: http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7988958.
fictional, the female story-teller, whereas the subtitle ‘Le Journal de Colette’ accentuates the idea of the ‘feminine’ private sphere. Another contemporary, Lucie Delarue-Mardrus – who had contributed to La Revue blanche and La Fronde in the past – equally complained that the editors of Le Journal pressed her not to write about politics, but to stick to fashion and other topics deemed more suitable for women. And when the newspaper Le Matin commissioned Delarue-Mardrus to write social commentary, it was to write several anti-feminist pieces (Plat, 1994: 128-29).

In general, the relationship between writers and political journalism sparked fears of a loss of autonomy and independence that could prove detrimental to one’s career. Despite being anti-Dreyfusard and having signed a petition in defence of Colonel Henry, Lorrain preferred to keep his writing clear of overt politics. He felt that L’Écho in general was losing its head, focusing solely on ‘du bruit et du scandale’ (Lorrain, 2006: 135-36). Lorrain left for Le Journal, which also offered him more money. Le Journal and its editor Fernand Xau, former editor at L’Écho de Paris, tended to avoid political campaigns while L’Écho de Paris never fully recovered from its fanatical anti-Dreyfusard campaign. Xau took over many of L’Écho de Paris’ contributors and its mix of news, politics, literature and gossip.

**Literature in the press: pre-publication, serialisation**

Literary authors benefited from the press through their roles as columnists, but also by writing serial novels or through publication of excerpts of their work in the press. Those with little to no original work to their name often had to start at the bottom as anonymous feuilletonistes. Well-known serial novelists, having to keep up with a high demand of output, often used young, unknown and aspiring authors to write their work for them. Henri Gauthier-Villars, better known as Willy, was infamous for employing a whole string of ghost-writers. At the start of his career in 1900 Apollinaire took up the thankless job of ghost-writer together with fellow journalist Eugène Gaillard for a writer-lawyer called Henry Esnard who had ‘un roman à faire pour Le Matin: Il me prie de l’aider […] J’abais des chapitres, Le Matin publie Que faire? titre du feuilleton’ (Caizergues, 1981: 50). The first instalment of Que faire? was published on 19 February 1900 on page two under the easily recognisable pseudonym of Henry Esnard – Desnar – and announced on the front page (see Figure 4). Exactly what the extent of Apollinaire’s contribution was remains unclear.8

Jean Lorrain’s novels were also serialized. In the same year as his debut as a columnist, L’Écho de Paris published Jean Lorrain’s La Dame aux feuilles rouges introducing him as ‘un des jeunes écrivains qui, par son talent, a su se créer une place dans la littérature contemporaine’ (L’Écho de Paris, 3 October 1890). The serial novel was published under his own name, perhaps in an effort to distinguish his literary authorship from the gossipy, journalistic persona of Restif de la Bretonne. Lorrain’s novels appeared mainly in newspapers, but also in popular magazines. One of his later novels, Ellen, was serialized in 1905 and 1906 in the women’s magazine Femina, which had a circulation of 130 000 copies (Leroy-Sabiani, 1998: 110). Lorrain’s colleague at L’Écho de Paris, Catulle Mendès, wrote similar decadent serial novels for the newspaper, widely advertised to the paper’s readers (see Figure 5). Novels by Lorrain and Mendès were often accompanied by subtitles such as ‘roman contemporain’, ‘roman moderne’ or ‘mœurs parisiennes’, a fin de siècle euphemism for scandal, sex and decadence. The reactionary, moralising tone Mendès and Lorrain often adopted in these serials allowed the paper’s readership to keep the
moral high ground while reading titillating stories about ‘deviant’ behaviour. Lorrain’s career in journalism blossomed because he had quickly learned that these kind of salacious stories attracted readers and sold papers.

However, playing into the press’s appetite for scandal and sensational stories affected Lorrain’s literary career in terms of how he was perceived by his peers. Even though Edmond de Goncourt’s novels were also serialized, he felt that the serialization of Lorrain’s work in the press ‘orientera ses choix littéraires et déterminera son mode de création. C’est le cas de Monsieur de Bougrelon et de Monsieur de Phocas où le rythme du feuilleton impose ses dictats à la création romanesque’ (Lorrain, 2007: 11). Whether Lorrain’s status as a literary author suffered because of his journalism and serialization or because he was just not a very good novelist is perhaps debatable, but as his career progressed the lack of literary respect from his peers increasingly bothered Lorrain. He wanted to be known first and foremost as a novelist, and for people to judge his novels by literary standards and not as an extension of his gossip columns. In a letter intended to congratulate Colette and Willy on their success with the Claudine novels, Lorrain makes it clear that his novels are complex and serious works of art in their own right, not romans à scandales like those by Willy or Huysmans:

Accusé d’avoir détraqué Mr D’Adelswärd ou conseurs et consort par ma littérature et englobé dans la même équipe en compagnie d’Huysmans et Willy, j’ai fait une restriction et ai fait observer que Mr de Phocas et Le Vice errant, livres plutôt durs à lire et d’une très grande tristesse, ne pouvaient être assimilés aux joyeusetés de grande vente et de grand succès de librairie, écrits surtout en vue des gros tirages … [ce] dont je vous félicite tous deux. (Lorrain et al., 2005: 38-39)
Despite his objections Lorrain was considered *un auteur à scandale*. His novels were central in an infamous court case in which Lorrain’s writing was accused of having inspired the baron Jacques d’Adelswärd-Fersen to participate in an orgy with underage boys. The above letter shows a Lorrain fed up with this court case, the literary world, a lack of literary respect, and demonstrates his resentment towards best-selling authors like Willy and Colette.

Colette’s literary career generally benefited from serial publication, especially in the early years. Her reputation or status hardly seemed affected by it as her fame grew. Nearly all of her early novels and short stories – such as *La Vagabonde*, *L’Entrave*, *Vrilles de la Vigne* – were first published in women’s and entertainment magazines. Like many magazines *La Vie parisienne* had its own publishing house. Colette would also have received additional remuneration from reproduction in provincial papers, which often bought and copied content from the national, Parisian press. This income supplemented any royalties she might have earned from the eventual book publication and from the articles and columns she wrote regularly as well. Contrary to Lorrain, the press enabled Colette to establish her literary reputation. By 1910 Colette was a well-known novelist – she was nominated for the Prix Goncourt that year, as was Apollinaire⁹ – and became a columnist for one of France’s biggest newspapers, *Le Matin*.

**Figure 5**: Advertisement for *La Femme-enfant* by Catulle Mendès, serialised in *L’Écho de Paris*. Source: BnF/Gallica. Web link: [http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9016353m](http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9016353m).
For Jarry the press provided similar publishing opportunities. Many newspapers had their own literary supplements that published reviews, essays, interviews and excerpts. Before its toxic role in the Dreyfus Affair, \(L\acute{E}cho de Paris\) was one of the newspapers that helped shape 1890s literary culture through prizes and through the publication of serial novels, poetry and stories. Writers Catulle Mendès and Marcel Schwob were, at that time, editors of the paper’s literary supplement and every month the paper held an open, anonymous literary competition with a 100 franc prize for the winner. There were three prizes for prose and one for poetry. In 1893 Jarry won both the poetry and prose award (Brotchie, 2011: 49) and his literary career was off to a promising start.

**Literary periodicals and experiment**

Not every writer had access to or wanted to work for mainstream newspapers or magazines. Many also found a home in one of the numerous artistic and literary periodicals, some of which had a prestigious standing among the cultural elite of Paris. Genova (2002), Datta (1999), Leroy-Bertrand-Sabiani (1998: 117-57) and Bellanger (1972: 380-94) have shown the important role journals such as \La Revue blanche\ (1889) and \La Plume\ (1889) played in literary life and in the avant-garde in these years. \Le Mercure de France\ (1890) and \La Nouvelle Revue Française\ (1908) would become twentieth-century literary institutions. Many of these periodicals also had their own publishing house. \Le Mercure de France\ and \La Revue blanche\ published Jarry’s literary works, such as \Ubu Roi\ (1896) and \Le Surmâle\ (1902) respectively. Fragments of Jarry’s novel \Gestes et Opinions du Docteur Faustroll\, for example, appeared in the \Mercure de France\ (1898) and in \La Plume\ (1900) even though the complete novel was not published until 1911 by Fasquelle (which took over the \Éditions Revue blanche\). Jarry’s involvement with these literary periodicals allowed him to publish much of his work.

The mistrust among literary figures towards the dailies and the professional journalistic establishment – too influenced by political and financial powers – partially explains the status and appeal of these smaller, often short-lived periodicals. Many authors, including Apollinaire, Colette and Lorrain, worked for both the mainstream press and cultural periodicals and there was much more overlap between the two than was perhaps apparent at first. Apollinaire contributed to \La Revue blanche, La Plume\ and \Le Mercure de France\. Some, like Jarry, depended on literary periodicals, because they could not find a home anywhere else. At one point Jarry was appointed by newspaper \Le Figaro\ to write columns entitled ‘Fantaisies parisiennes’. Though this might seem surprising – this was the paper where Marcel Proust wrote his society columns – \Le Figaro\ had many writers on its payroll and was relatively open-minded when it came to literary styles. Despite \Le Figaro’s\ literary credentials, Jarry’s writing was not a good fit: it contained too much \fantaisie\, too little \parisienne\.

Jarry contributed three articles before he and the newspaper parted ways; his writing was much more suited to literary periodicals.

From the beginning of his career Jarry wrote a number of impressive and little recognized science, art and literary reviews, recently discussed by Gosztola (2013). Despite not being widely known as a critic, Jarry turned out to have an eye for the new and was one of the first to write about Picasso and Henri Rousseau. His artistic tastes were similar to those of Apollinaire who was fast becoming a much more renowned critic for, among other publications, \L’Intransigeant\ and \Paris-Journal\. Jarry, Lorrain and Apollinaire all
worked as critics, but again for women the situation was slightly different. A prominent position as a critic was rare for a woman – a notable exception being Rachilde at the Mercure de France. When editor Eugène de Montfort quit the Nouvelle Revue Française in 1908 to launch his review Les Marges, he wanted to devote a regular column to the growing importance of female authors in the literary field. He also wanted the reviewer to be a woman, but according to de Montfort, all the famous authors he approached, including Anna de Noailles, Marie de Heredia (Gérard d’Houville) and Colette (who said she considered all criticism arbitrary), declined his request (Campa, 2013: 269). De Montfort then commissioned Apollinaire as a columnist en travesti. Thus Apollinaire’s alter-ego Louise Lalanne was born and from January 1909 onwards Louise wrote, often very positively, about contemporary female authors such as Colette.

La Revue blanche also employed Jarry to write humorous reflections on current events. The review’s editor, Félix Fénéon, was a fan of his work and Jarry seemed well suited to La Revue blanche’s eclectic staff (Bourrelier, 2007). Léon Blum, André Gide and Marcel Proust were the in-house art critics. Apollinaire wrote regularly for the review between 1900 and 1903. Willy and Debussy were the review’s music critics. After Félix Fénéon became editor in 1895, La Revue blanche also became more political and socially engaged. In the Fénéon years La Revue blanche started new sections and columns on politics, history, society, even sports, which led to the magazine being read outside of the avant-garde as well (Datta, 1999: 33). Fénéon would also help publish writers such as Gide and Jarry through the magazine’s publishing house. In Jarry’s case, Fénéon’s patronage was truly a lifeline, financially, professionally as well as socially. After La Revue blanche folded in 1903 Jarry’s writing came to a halt while his personal life spiralled out of control. We do not know exactly what Jarry was paid by La Revue blanche, but it is reasonable to assume that the monthly amount would be similar to that what Apollinaire earned at the Mercure de France; around 50 francs had been enough to give him some stability.

After a number of creative and financial quarrels with Le Journal, Jean Lorrain also approached La Revue Blanche to publish his work. Lorrain’s career in general shows how the worlds of popular, commercial journalism and avant-garde periodicals often collided. The journalistic and literary world was a close-knit one despite aesthetic or political divisions. Some of Lorrain’s first articles appeared in the weekly literary, satirical and illustrated Le Courrier français. Launched by entrepreneur Jules Roques in 1886 to sell Géraudel pastilles, Roques cleverly linked his commercial goals to some of the rising literary and artistic stars of the day while playing into the Belle Époque’s appetite for humour. While the periodical marketed itself as counter-cultural and avant-garde, it was in fact tied to big business and advertising. Its editorial office was located in an old Montmartre cabaret, with well-known caricaturists and new, young literary talent, among whom were Alphonse Allais and Jean Lorrain. It is here, when he was still unknown, that Lorrain first learned the art of publicity (Lorrain, 2007: 15). He also began writing art reviews that stood in great contrast to his more gossipy columns for the bigger papers.

Some writers, in particular those belonging to the avant-garde such as Apollinaire and Jarry, experimented, to various degrees of success, with the launch of their own periodicals. Apollinaire started his poetry review Le Festin d’Ésope, ‘revue des Belles-Lettres’, in November 1903. In October 1903 Jarry contributed to the second issue. The magazine lasted less than a year and folded in August 1904. It was a marginal, limited edition, 16 to 20 pages, which at a price of a franc for the first issue and a reduced 0.50 for the second was always
going to be a hard sell at a time when even more established periodicals such as *La Plume* and *La Revue Blanche* ended up in financial difficulties. Yet it was a creative endeavour that brought together Apollinaire’s love for journalism and poetry, and a drive to establish an avant-garde community and platform. In the 1890s Alfred Jarry had collaborated with Remy de Gourmont to create *L’Ymagier*, an artistic review devoted to the graphic arts interspersed with symbolist texts. Though short-lived – Jarry briefly continued with the even more short-lived *Perhinderion* – this exclusive, elitist publication was an example of literary authors creating their own journalistic spaces outside of the commercial press and mainstream publishing. Jarry did not stop there. Hoping to cash in on the notoriety of *Ubu Roi*, he came up with the idea to publish an affordable quarterly almanac in which Père Ubu would shed his light on current events. In the end only two were published. The first was a small, pocket-size almanac which appeared in 1899. The second almanac was bigger and more luxurious, with illustrations by Pierre Bonnard and published by art dealer Ambroise Vollard in 1901 (see Figure 6). This was priced at one franc. Vollard and Jarry probably thought that the marketing trick of suggesting popularity might sell more copies. The cover of the second Almanac said ‘en vente partout’ and ‘2ème édition’, both of which were a lie. In the Almanac Ubu himself ironically tries to sell his publication as a ‘bon placement de père de famille’. The opposite was true of course. About a thousand were printed and most booksellers did not want them.

Art dealer and publisher of the Almanac Ambroise Vollard was a savvy promoter. He writes in his memoir that he decided to launch the almanac at one franc, hoping this would turn it into a financial success. But when buyers stayed away Vollard suspected it was because of the Almanac’s low price and he raised the price to two francs. Now desperately wanting to boost sales, he tried an opposite marketing strategy of appealing to scarcity, raising the price and advertising the work as a rare luxury product, something Vollard had been successful in with his publication of expensive *livres d’artistes*. In the end, none of these tricks worked and Jarry, again, did not manage to reach the larger audience he claimed to want – although whether he really wanted that is up for debate. Jarry’s semi-journalistic self-publishing project was probably intentionally ambivalent from the start. When a Collège de France professor enquired about a copy, Jarry jokingly wrote he had more than 700 left which, unfortunately, was not a joke. Apollinaire owned a copy of the second Almanac. Most of the copies did not sell, but ended up in the hands of Jarry’s inner circle. Part commercial, part avant-garde project, *Ubu*’s Almanac was just like Jarry’s other writing – much too experimental and too absurdist to appeal to a large audience.

*Il faut vivre?*

The ambivalent feelings about art versus commerce, and the inescapability of connections between press, publicity and money remained a key concern among literary authors; many in some respect upheld the ideal that the only true artist was the one not corrupted by money. Echoes of this idea are noticeable in Apollinaire’s statements, in Colette’s apologetic words, in Lorrain’s unease with his journalistic notoriety, and in Jarry’s general reluctance to make any sort of concession to the public. As Curatolo and Schaffner (2010) have remarked, the supposedly detrimental effects of journalism on literature had become a real trope in the works of nineteenth-century authors such as Balzac, Maupassant and Baudelaire. Edmond de Goncourt wrote in his journal on 21 January 1895: ‘J’ai bien peur que les rares fabricateurs
de livres de ce jeune monde soient mangés par le journalisme, où se touchent de grosses payes avec le tintamarre de la gloire’ (Goncourt, 1956: 721).

Such rhetoric has tended to obscure the historical reality of writers’ involvement with the press. And by 1900 these sentiments had also become somewhat of a cliché. The Paris-Parisiens guide to Paris in 1899 for example has a chapter entitled ‘Parisianismes’, a list of useful phrases to use in polite society. One of the first listed is: ‘le journalisme écrase la littérature et la littérature s’en ressent’ (Paris-Parisiens, 1899: 4). While many writers’ biographies acknowledge the journalism of Colette, Lorrain, Apollinaire or Jarry, the role of the press in their career or in their literary output as a whole has not been extensively examined although in recent years scholarly interest in these issues has increased considerably. Despite these authors’ complaints about journalism, all of them published their journalistic columns and articles as a collection or had plans to do so. This was a way of turning journalistic ‘writing for money’ into a more literary exercise – book publication guaranteed the longevity of the articles beyond the ephemeral nature of the newspaper – but it also shows that these writers did in fact value their journalistic writing. Lorrain’s ‘échos’ and ‘chroniques’ were published for example, in Les Poussières de Paris by Fayard in 1896 and by Ollendorff in 1902 (reissued in 2006). Apollinaire’s Les Peintres cubistes as well as Le Flâneur des deux

**Figure 6:** Cover for the second Almanach illustré du Père Ubu. 1900. Paris: A. Vollard. Source: BnF/Gallica. Web link: [http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8595074n](http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8595074n).
rives were the result of previously published articles, criticism and essays. Jarry’s humourist reflections on contemporary society for La Revue Blanche were collected in a volume entitled La Chandelle verte ou la lumière sur les choses du temps. Though not published during his lifetime, Jarry had made clear plans to publish them before his death in 1907. Colette’s wartime columns for Le Matin were published in 1918 under the title of Les Longues heures. Colette, with a healthy dose of false modesty, called this collection ‘pauvres choses journalistiques’ (Gilet, 1997: 205), but her articles met with considerable critical acclaim.

Edmond de Goncourt lamented in his Journal that ‘la jeunesse des lettres’ was ‘bien avide de l’argent, bien incapable de travailler de longs mois dans la retraite’ (Goncourt, 1956: 721), hungry for money and quick success. He conveniently forgets to mention, however, that many of his generation were also journalists. He also conveniently forgets that writers could not live on air. For most, journalism was a necessity and a welcome source of income. Alphonse Allais expressed a more pragmatic if not still slightly uncomfortable attitude towards journalism and writing for money, writing dryly: ‘mon traité avec Le Journal me garantissant une somme fixe pour mes chroniques, qu’on rie ou qu’on ne rie pas.’ (Le Journal, 26 April 1895). Goncourt’s aristocratic disdain for money and his elitist concerns about autonomy were a luxury authors like Allais, Apollinaire, Colette, Jarry or Lorrain simply could not afford.

Yet in a sense Goncourt might have been right about the new generation. Around 1900 writers seemed much more ready than before, or perhaps more resigned, to embrace the commercialism, publicity and best-seller culture of the Belle Époque. Lorrain and Colette embraced the financial opportunities the press offered, or at least tried to make the best of it. Writers like Apollinaire and Jarry also appropriated elements of journalism as part of their creative projects. Scholars have shown that the lines between journalistic and literary writing had been blurred throughout the nineteenth century (Thérenty, 2007; Thérenty and Vaillant, 2004; Pinson, 2008; Pinson and Prévost, 2010). Journalism was not just a source of money; it was also a birthplace of literary invention, creativity and modernity (Thérenty and Vaillant, 2012: 1499-1551). What has previously been neglected is that journalism is a form of writing and should therefore also, as Thérenty (2003) proposes, be studied within the context of literary history and not only in the domains of history, sociology and journalism studies. This is particularly true for the Belle Époque when success in journalism played a seminal role in publishing and in literary careers. The press provided writers such as Apollinaire, Colette, Jarry and Lorrain with a source of income – ‘il faut vivre’ – but it also helped shape their careers, provide a publishing platform, a cultural network and a place to experiment with their writing. Without these opportunities offered by journalism many of their works might never have been published at all.

Notes

1. For subscription prices see Journal des débats politiques et littéraires 1 May 1900 [online] [accessed 2 October 2016] Available at: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4698519.item>. Le Petit Parisien 1 May 1900 [online] [accessed 2 October 2016]. Available at: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k559959m.item>.
2. See also Dubbelboer (2015). This publication focused mainly on Colette’s career and her journalism in the context of the Belle Époque literary field while the present article offers an overview and further discussion of journalism and the literary field in the same period.
3. A substantial number of newspapers and periodicals from the period 1890-1914 were consulted in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France on microfilm or online via BnF/Gallica, including: Le Figaro, Le Journal, Le Temps, L’Écho de Paris, La Fronde, Le Matin, Le Gaulois, Gil Blas, La Vie Parisienne, Paris-Journal, Mercure de France, La Revue Blanche, La Plume, Festin d’Ésope, L’Ymagier. Since a detailed discussion of all these publications exceeds the scope of this article, L’Écho de Paris – which presented itself as ‘literary’ – has been chosen a case study to illustrate aspects of the bonds between literature and journalism found in newspapers. L’Écho de Paris was consulted from 1884 to 1900 [online] [accessed September to December 2015]. Available at: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb34429768r/date>.

4. Like most French newspapers L’Écho de Paris was partisan and actively involved in political life. The paper supported its own political municipal and parliamentary candidates, many of whom were on their payroll as journalists. On 20 December 1885 for example the paper’s front page announced the formation of a ‘Union de la presse républicaine’, together with Le Soir, Le Siècle and Le Temps among others. The ‘Union’ supported a list of political candidates, including Paul Deroulède, in opposition to both the radical socialist press and the royalist, reactionary press. L’Écho de Paris, 20 December 1885. [online] [accessed 28 December 2015]. Available at: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k797248j/f1.item>.

5. ‘[...] à la suite d’une protestation du petit-fils de Restif de la Bretonne, notre collaborateur signera ses Portraits, paraissant sous le titre “Une Femme par jour” du pseudonyme Raitif de la Bretonne.’ L’Écho de Paris, 2 July 1890 [online] [accessed 28 December 2015]. Available at: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7988958/f1.item>.

6. ‘La Fronde était un journal comme les autres journaux [...] pas plus amusant!! On y trouvait matière à discussion, non à plaisanterie. Vite, elle fut baptisée: “Le Temps en jupons”’. Cette critique était le seul compliment qu’elle pouvait ambitionner.’ Marguerite Durand, La Fronde, 15 December 1902.

7. Generally speaking, political culture during the Third Republic was unfavourable to women who were deemed to belong to the private instead of the public sphere and the potential for backlash was a reality (McMillan, 2000: 45-93).


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Notes on Contributor

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