



## *The Literary Avant-Garde at the Fin de Siècle*

The year 1889–1890 was a pivotal one for French history. The French observed the centennial of the French Revolution, commemorated in part by the Exposition Universelle and the construction of the Eiffel Tower, which heralded a new age of technology, industry, and progress. The anniversary afforded French men and women the opportunity to reflect both on their recent past and their future, especially in light of the Boulanger Affair, which exploded onto the national scene in 1889. The year was significant for literary history as well; it marked the founding of five avant-garde journals, publications that would become the mouthpieces of their generation. *La Revue blanche* and *La Plume* were launched in 1889, followed shortly by *Le Mercure de France*, *Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires*, and *L'Ermitage* in 1890. The year 1889 also witnessed the publication of the second novel of Maurice Barrès's *culte du moi* trilogy; for its author, *Un Homme libre* became the hallmark of his youth, and for his peers, the symbol of an entire generation. Finally, in 1891, the journalist Jules Huret's (1863) publication of "L'Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire" in the newspaper *L'Echo de Paris* introduced this new intellectual generation to its elders as well as to the public at large.

The individuals who belonged to the generation of 1890 were an elite, not only limited to men who had at least acquired the baccalaureate, if not a university degree, but also those whose ambitions—intellectual or otherwise—had brought them to Paris, the center of French political, social, economic, and intellectual life. They shared the same pedagogic education as well as a common

culture and congregated together, organizing themselves around such individuals as Stéphane Mallarmé and Maurice Barrès and such literary journals as *La Revue blanche* and *Le Mercure de France*. These literary journals thus became important witnesses of a generation as well as important centers of sociability.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, I examine the generation of 1890 within a sociocultural context, concentrating on the literary avant-garde of the fin de siècle. I will study the conditions that led to the emergence of the avant-garde of the late nineteenth century and chart the development of the avant-garde network of little magazines. In the following chapter, I will continue to study the generation of 1890, examining the ideas shared by its members. From these two chapters, which combine sociological analysis and intellectual history, should emerge a collective portrait of the generation of 1890.

The cultural avant-garde, a product of liberal democracy, dates from the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Only after the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune did the term acquire its secondary, cultural meaning. Up to that time, the expression, originally a military term, was used to designate political groups. The transferral of a political term to culture, however, is of significance and is related in part to the unity of the political and the cultural avant-gardes of the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

The avant-garde of the fin de siècle was thus not the first avant-garde group. As surprising as it may seem, Zola and his fellow Naturalists were members of the avant-garde during their youth. Just as Zola went on to become the target of the avant-garde of the fin de siècle, so, too, did fin-de-siècle avant-gardistes become the next generation's old fogies; witness the trial of Maurice Barrès (1862) by Dadaists after the war. When Symbolist poet Henri de Régnier (1864) was elected to the Académie française in 1911, he and his fellow Symbolists had long ceased to be members of the avant-garde. The literary avant-garde at the fin de siècle thus corresponded closely, although not exclusively, to the generation of 1890. Not only is the avant-garde a product of youth, so, too, does there exist a cult of youth among its members.<sup>3</sup>

If the avant-garde at the turn of the century overlapped with the generation of 1890, it did not do so with one literary movement, although the Symbolists certainly dominated. Among the avant-garde included members of Jean Moréas's (1856) *Ecole romane*, a group born of opposition to Symbolism; Moréas, whose real name was Papadiamantopoulos, was a former Symbolist. The *Ecole romane* included such classicizers as Charles Maurras (1868), who rejected the foreign, "Germanic" influences of the Romantics and

their Symbolist heirs, and called for a return to France's "true" roots in classical Greco-Roman culture. In 1895, there arrived on the scene yet another group that opposed Symbolism: the Naturists, who rejected the excessive artificiality of Symbolist poetry and its evasion of the real world. Led by Maurice Le Blond (1877) and Saint-Georges de Bouh  lier (1876), the Naturists proclaimed a return to natural values and a celebration of daily life and looked upon Zola as a hero. In their admiration, they were alone among their peers—at least until the Dreyfus Affair. Yet all these groups, despite their different esthetics, shared a sense of solidarity, both spatial and temporal. They all wrote for the same little magazines. Symbolists, Naturists, and proponents of the *Ecole romane* often published articles in the same issues of these journals. As the future Socialist leader L  on Blum (1872), who began his career as literary critic for *La Revue blanche*, noted, avant-garde journals played an important role in giving young writers a sense of cohesion, of sharing common goals, if not always ideas:

And after all, is it not in the various sincere reviews that the youth of this time has best revealed itself? . . . But their [reviews'] useful contribution has been to give some cohesion to the rather vague views of dispersed intellects. They have united a literary generation. Perhaps this union is linked more to mutual sympathies than to ideas in common.<sup>4</sup>

Although there existed rivalries among members of the avant-garde, they were united in their opposition to the establishment, both political and literary, along with their refusal of the forces of the marketplace. As members of the avant-garde, they shared similar views, in particular, the rejection of the bourgeois values incarnated by the Third Republic. From their different perspectives, Symbolists, Naturists, and members of the *Ecole romane* agreed in defining contemporary French society and parliamentary democracy as corrupt and decadent. So, too, could they agree on their desire to play an active role in contributing to the nation's regeneration.

An examination of the intellectual milieu at this time is necessary in order to understand the importance of these journals. Fin-de-si  cle France—from about 1890 until 1910—witnessed a crisis in the publishing industry at the same time that it experienced a sharp increase in the numbers of writers. In the wake of the tremendous successes (1875–1885) of such writers as Emile Zola (1840) and Georges Ohnet (1848), an increasing number of individuals

chose literature as their profession; from 1865 to 1899, the number of writers in France doubled.<sup>5</sup>

Editors had more power than ever before to control what was published. Given their need to make money, quality was often sacrificed to popularity and expedience. Some editors were so desperate that they published anything as long as the author could pay for publication. Paradoxically, editors hoping to find readers, flooded the market with books—the number of books published in 1889 reached an all time high of 14,849 titles. Given the sheer volume of production, bookstores were unable to display new works for more than a week. Window space had to be made for the newest crop.<sup>6</sup>

Added to the glut of the literary market was a change in consumer habits. While the 1870s and early 1880s had represented the golden age of the novel, readers during the latter half of the 1880s and during the 1890s preferred “practical,” “how to” works on medicine, gardening, and etiquette. Furthermore, the general public read newspapers rather than books. The former were more easily accessible, both intellectually and in terms of immediacy and cost. Moreover, many of these newspapers published literary works in serial form; why buy a book when one could read it more cheaply in the penny press?<sup>7</sup>

In such an atmosphere, a new author had great difficulty finding a public and launching a career. Furthermore, the type of work written by the young members of the avant-garde, in particular, by the Symbolist poets, was not easily understood by the larger public. Unable then to get their works published by commercial presses and alienated from the cultural establishment, whose esthetics they rejected, young writers and artists banded together to form a tightly knit network of journals which could serve as a forum for their ideas, eventually even founding their own presses.<sup>8</sup> Poet Francis Vielé-Griffin (1864), editor of *Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires*, complained bitterly in an article published on 1 November 1890 that a hostile campaign had been waged in the press against the little magazines, referring to “this battle of calumny and insult against faith and patience. . . .” His feelings were confirmed by Henri Mazel (1864), director of *L'Ermitage*, who wrote in his memoirs of the necessity of founding an avant-garde network:

A new generation was on the rise, which would not be satisfied by a nauseating ideal and who . . . finding moreover all the doors of the Republic of Letters closed, would be obliged, in order to sustain its intellectual life, to con-

struct its own provisional shelters, which were represented by the young reviews of the time.<sup>9</sup>

This exclusion was to a certain extent self-imposed. By their own rejection of commercial and official culture, these young artists sought to create a legitimacy, even an autonomy, while remaining faithful to pure artistic values.<sup>10</sup> Yet the avant-garde also depended on the popular press for publicity, as Maurice Barrès noted. Young writers, who wanted to become known but who found the doors of the literary marketplace closed to them, not only created a parallel universe in the little magazines, they also used such widely distributed newspapers as *Le Figaro* and *L'Echo de Paris* to launch themselves by publishing their manifestoes therein.<sup>11</sup>

Avant-garde writers often published *enquêtes* both in their own journals and in the popular press to forge a sense of identity. Indeed, *enquêtes* represented one of the products of the expansion of the press; along with reportages and interviews, *enquêtes* represented a new genre in French magazines and journals of the fin de siècle. Imported from the United States, they were seen as a sign of the increased professionalization of the French press, a move toward a press of information. At the same time, they represented a continued link with the traditional French press, which placed great emphasis on literature and politics, since those interviewed and polled were generally writers and politicians.<sup>12</sup>

Interviews and *enquêtes* contributed to the professionalization of intellectuals, as did the formation and expansion of the "new" republican university. Interviews with individual writers allowed them to reach a larger audience, but it also meant that the public acknowledged that the writer might have something of interest to say on issues of national importance. Through the *enquête*, writers and artists were grouped together, giving them a sense of cohesion. This idea of belonging to a collectivity would contribute to the emergence of the intellectual as a social category.

For young writers of the avant-garde, the *enquêtes* published in the popular press were particularly useful, for they allowed them to publicize their ideas and reach a wider audience than that of the avant-garde journals. The 1891 "L'Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire," organized by journalist Jules Huret for the newspaper *L'Echo de Paris*, was one of the first notable *enquêtes* of the period and served as a model for subsequent inquiries. Marking the emergence of a new intellectual generation, it gave young writers the opportunity to establish a dialogue with their elders, who were also polled. Indeed, a number of participants in the inquiry noted that it was

a vehicle for publicizing the Symbolist poets, most of whom were unknown to the general public.<sup>13</sup>

Thereafter, *enquêtes* proliferated both in the popular press and in the little magazines. Huret went on to conduct *enquêtes* on a variety of topics ranging from the social question in Europe to the role of the French university in society. Such little magazines as *La Revue blanche*, *L'Ermitage*, and *Le Mercure de France* published numerous *enquêtes* during the next decade on topics including the influence of the historian-philosopher Hippolyte Taine, the impact of Scandinavian letters on French literature, the Commune, on the social question, and on cultural and political relations with Germany.<sup>14</sup>

The number of little magazines increased dramatically from 1885 to 1900. In a work entitled *Les Petites revues*, published in 1899, Symbolist critic Remy de Gourmont (1858) estimated that at least one hundred new little magazines were published during the years 1890 to 1898.<sup>15</sup> Although originally a response to the exclusion of young writers from the world of the cultural establishment as well as of the commercial press, these types of literary journals continued to flourish in the period that followed. A great number were founded during the few years preceding World War I and later, during the interwar period.<sup>16</sup> At least two of these little magazines, *Le Mercure de France* and *La Nouvelle Revue française* (*NRF*), became institutions. The independent literary journal itself became a fixture in French intellectual life, while such establishment literary journals as *La Revue des deux mondes*, which had dispensed general culture and conferred official consecration in the literary milieu during the *fin de siècle*, continued to decline, having reached their apogee from 1870 to 1914.<sup>17</sup> The success of the little magazines had long-term effects on intellectual life. From 1910 on, it was the avant-garde that represented real legitimacy within the intellectual milieu.<sup>18</sup>

Although they often shared common goals and indeed the same collaborators, the various avant-garde magazines of the late nineteenth century had distinctive personalities. *L'Ermitage*, as its name might suggest, attempted to steer clear of the various literary and political disputes reflected in the pages of its peers. If it did not engage in polemics, it did, however, reflect an interest in political and social questions. In its orientation, *L'Ermitage* was politically more conservative than *Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires* and *La Revue blanche*, both of which were closely linked to the anarchist movement. The founder of *L'Ermitage*, Henri Mazel, born in Nîmes, came from a pious Catholic family of doctors. After obtain-



ing a *licence* in law in Montpellier, Mazel went to Paris to continue his studies at the Ecole libre des sciences politiques. He entered government service in 1889 when he began working for the Naval Ministry, a position from which he retired in 1929. Like a number of his avant-garde colleagues, critics Félix Fénéon (1861) and Remy de Gourmont among them, Mazel pursued his literary activities alongside a full-time government job.

Critic, essayist, playwright, and novelist, Mazel was a disciple of sociologist Gabriel Tarde (1843) and an admirer of Frédéric Le Play (1806), the chief representative of social Catholicism in nineteenth-century France. Mazel contributed articles to *La Réforme sociale*, the review named after Le Play's major work, including a piece comparing Tarde and Le Play. Influenced by the ideas of these two men, Mazel pursued a lifelong interest in sociological and religious questions, contributing a column on social questions to *Le Mercure de France* from 1897 to 1940.<sup>19</sup> Mazel, who was fairly conservative, although not conservative enough to suit Charles Maurras, protested vigorously when Maurras described *L'Ermitage* as an anarchist publication in an article on young reviews for *La Revue bleue*.<sup>20</sup> In his last editorial as director, Mazel proclaimed proudly that *L'Ermitage* had not indulged in the anarchist folly of its sister publications.<sup>21</sup>

Although Mazel was the major force behind *L'Ermitage*, he did not run the magazine by himself. At end of 1891, he asked his friends René Boylesve, whose real name was Tardiveau (1867), and Adolphe Retté (1863) to serve as members of an editorial committee. Retté, who was at the time an ardent Symbolist, accepted on the condition that the review be open to Symbolist writers.<sup>22</sup> When Mazel resigned as director of the review in favor of Edouard Ducoté (1870) in 1895, he could boast that during his tenure, *L'Ermitage* had published not only the works of such Symbolist poets as Stuart Merrill (1863), who also served as editorial secretary for a brief time, Francis Vielé-Griffin, and Henri de Régnier, but also the Ecole romane poetry of Jean Moréas, along with Charles Maurras's defense of this school. Nor was the work of older poets neglected; Paul Verlaine (1844) and Stéphane Mallarmé (1842) were published, along with Parnassian poet José-Maria de Heredia (1842) and Frédéric Mistral (1830), one of the founding fathers of the Félibrige movement, which celebrated Provençal culture.<sup>23</sup>

The colorful itinerary of Retté is not atypical of members of the avant-garde at the fin de siècle and merits a brief examination. Retté began his career as a Symbolist poet, contributing first to *La Vogue* and then to *L'Ermitage* and publishing a book of verses entitled

*Le Thulé des brumes* in 1891. Politicized in 1893 by a variety of events, among them the July student riots against the repression by conservative Senator Bérenger of Les Quat'z'Arts Ball, and by the strike of the Pas-de-Calais miners, Retté turned to anarchism as an outlet for his frustrations. He was even arrested in January 1894 during the government's crackdown on anarchist militants and propagandists. Later that year, he left Paris for the forest of Guermandes. The poetry he produced during the next few years was marked both by his interest in anarchism and a rejection of the Symbolist esthetic he had once espoused. A Naturist, he now called for a return to nature and castigated the Symbolists for their artificiality. He also advocated art in service of the revolution, a position he had previously criticized. Perhaps his most shocking act was to publish a diatribe against his former mentor Mallarmé in *La Plume* in 1896. His work during this period was resolutely anticlerical, although it did contain much religious imagery. His last and final transformation came in 1906 when he converted to Catholicism.<sup>24</sup>

Such a checkered itinerary is perfectly in keeping with the tumult and confusion of the years immediately preceding the Dreyfus Affair, before the notions of Left and Right as we understand them were crystallized. The amorphous nature of anarchism during these years allowed such confusion. Common to all of Retté's stances was his association of art and politics and an opposition to the parliamentary democracy of the bourgeois Republic.<sup>25</sup>

No less a colorful character was Hugues Rebelle, who took over Retté's editorial duties after the latter's departure from Paris. Born Georges Grassal in 1867, Rebelle was a native of Nantes. Like Mazel, he came from a pious Catholic family. Unlike Mazel, however, he execrated Christianity, while praising Catholicism and the Catholic Church. A self-styled paganist and admirer of Nietzsche, Rebelle was a member of the Ecole romane group and later went on to join the Action française. Not only was he closely involved with *L'Ermitage*, he also wrote for *La Plume*, *La Revue blanche*, and *Le Mercure de France*, in which he wrote a resounding defense of Oscar Wilde in 1895.<sup>26</sup>

Any review is more than a mere collection of its collaborators; it also represents a milieu. The collaborators of *L'Ermitage* met regularly at the Café Vachette, popular among students and writers during the late nineteenth century. Mazel himself hosted Wednesday evening gatherings at 26, rue de Varenne, the headquarters of *L'Ermitage* as well as his personal residence.

The relations of *L'Ermitage* with *La Plume* and *Le Mercure* were good; as for *Les Entretien*s, its collaborators Paul Adam (1862),



Henri de Régnier, and Francis Vielé-Griffin all published in *L'Ermitage*—despite the protestations of Rebell, who opposed the presence of writers associated with the anarchist movement. Links with the *La Revue blanche* appear to have been limited. Mazel ironized in his farewell editorial that *La Revue blanche* had ignored *L'Ermitage* until the present, when it had “kindly” offered to take over its subscriptions.<sup>27</sup> After Mazel’s departure, the review, which appeared until 1906, oriented itself toward a modern classicism. Unlike the classicism of Maurras, it sought to integrate the contributions of Symbolism. Henri Ghéon (1875) and André Gide (1869) were regular collaborators before going on to found the *NRF*.

Like *L'Ermitage*, *Le Mercure de France* maintained a certain distance from the political quarrels of the day. It was founded by a group of eleven friends, among them Jules Renard (1864), Ernest Raynaud (1864), Remy de Gourmont, and Alfred Vallette (1858), who served as its director for a great many years. These friends included Symbolists (Gourmont) as well as members of the *Ecole romane* (Raynaud). Like the other reviews, *Le Mercure* was born of school friendships and collaborations on other little reviews. Raynaud, who had met Renard at the Lycée Charlemagne, introduced the latter to Vallette. The others had contributed to *La Pléiade*, the precursor of *Le Mercure*. Among the collaborators of *La Pléiade* were Stuart Merrill, Francis Vielé-Griffin, Pierre Quillard (1864), Henri de Régnier, Laurent Tailhade (1854), Rachilde (1860), and Alfred Vallette, all of whom were associated with *Le Mercure* at one time or another. Vallette himself had served as editor of another little magazine called *Le Scapin* to which a number of the eleven founders of *Le Mercure* had contributed. Finally, a great many of them had frequented the same cafés and salons. Indeed, several of the future founders of *Le Mercure* had met at Rachilde’s Tuesday evening gatherings.<sup>28</sup>

The opening declaration of *Le Mercure*, written by Vallette, closely resembles those of the other avant-garde journals: “Of the three goals that a literary journal may choose—to make money, to unite a literary group around a common esthetic . . . or to publish purely artistic works . . . not accepted by journals which must cater to a clientele, it is the latter that we have chosen.”<sup>29</sup> Like its sister publications, *Le Mercure*, in opposition to commercial values, presented itself as a defender of art. If the editorial committee initially rejected adherence to one literary movement, it did subsequently become—around 1895—the semiofficial organ of Symbolism. Although the review was weak in its publication of prose, it excelled

in its publication of poetry, not surprising given its predilection for Symbolism. The review also became the *grande dame* of the avant-garde journals, not only because of its longevity, but also as a result of its near-encyclopedic coverage of the literary and artistic movements of the period. At one time or another, almost all the members of the literary avant-garde of the fin de siècle published in its pages. *Le Mercure* is also known, along with *La Revue blanche*, for its promotion of foreign literatures. A number of its collaborators were the translators of foreign writers, especially of Nietzsche and Ibsen.

According to Vallette, *Le Mercure's* transformation from a modest little journal to a serious review came in 1896–1897, with the inauguration of a rubric called “Revue du mois,” which carefully catalogued contemporary literary and artistic movements. By this time, *Le Mercure* was associated with its own press, founded in 1894. It was also during this period that *Le Mercure*, which had hitherto remained distant from the literary quarrels of the day, became embroiled in them. Adolphe Retté's attack on Mallarmé in *La Plume* elicited a number of responses in *Le Mercure*, as did the discussion that pitted Naturists against Symbolists.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike *Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires* and *La Revue blanche*, which were financed by wealthy young men and their families, *Le Mercure* was launched by the monetary contributions of its eleven founders, most of whom came from modest families. The review's success and longevity are entirely to the credit of its director Alfred Vallette. Vallette, like Léon Deschamps (1863), the founder of *La Plume*, was an excellent administrator rather than a talented litterateur. Born in Paris, Vallette, the son of a typographer, ran his own printing shop. Unlike the majority of the founders of avant-garde magazines, Vallette had a firm knowledge of the printing metier.<sup>31</sup>

Vallette's wife Marguerite Eymery was the novelist Rachilde. In 1890, Rachilde was already a successful writer whose novel *Monsieur Vénus* had earned her the title “queen of the decadents” and the praise of Maurice Barrès, who wrote the preface to this novel. Rachilde played an important role at *Le Mercure*, serving as the review's literary critic for novels from 1892 to 1926. She claimed that she had been relegated this task by *Le Mercure's* other founders, who felt that reviewing novels—as opposed to poetry—was unworthy of their literary talents. Rachilde also published short stories in *Le Mercure* and submitted her novels to the review's press. Her influence was also felt in other, less easily quantifiable ways. She dispensed creative advice to her husband and attracted the literary

lights of the period to her salon on the rue des Ecoles, before her marriage, and after, rue de l'Echaudé and finally, rue de Condé.<sup>32</sup>

As a woman in a predominantly male milieu, Rachilde represents a notable exception. The avant-garde, born of friendships forged at the *lycée* and/or the university, was a male-dominated world that consciously rejected the presence of women or tolerated them when they were the wives of review directors. Women often played the role of *salonnière* or muse as did Misia (1872), the wife of *Revue blanche* director Thadée Natanson. In their views toward women, members of the avant-garde were no more revolutionary than the bourgeois gentlemen they criticized. If their memoirs are any indication, Rachilde appears to have won the grudging respect of her male colleagues at *Le Mercure*.<sup>33</sup>

Another personality closely associated with *Le Mercure* was Remy de Gourmont, the finest and best-known of the critics associated with the Symbolist movement. Born of a noble Norman family, he came to Paris to study in 1884. He worked at the Bibliothèque Nationale until he was fired in 1891 for his publication in *Le Mercure* of an "anti-patriotic" article entitled "Le Joujou patriotisme." Although Gourmont was also a novelist and playwright, he is best-known for his criticism, especially his brief sketches of Symbolist writers in *Le Livre des masques* and *Promenades littéraires*. Gourmont's temperament, both aristocratic and individualist, led him to anarchism.<sup>34</sup> During the 1890s, he was among the most ardent of the literary anarchists, even writing an article in which he likened Symbolism to anarchism. His anarchism, however, was more individualist and esthetic than political and social. He subsequently adopted a more conservative, indeed, reactionary political stance.

*La Plume* was directed by Léon Deschamps until his death in 1899. The review continued to appear until 1914, with a long interruption between 1905 and 1911. Deschamps, whose astute business sense contributed to the success of *La Plume*, maintained excellent relations with all the other avant-garde magazines not only with the more politically active *Les Entretiens* and *La Revue blanche*, but also with the more circumspect *Le Mercure* and *L'Ermitage*.

The most eclectic of the avant-garde journals, *La Plume* published the works of members of the Ecole romane—Moréas, Maurras, and Rebell—for whom Deschamps had a personal preference, but also those of Symbolists Stuart Merrill and Francis Vielé-Griffin, and the Naturists, including the newly converted Adolphe Retté (who published his diatribe against Mallarmé here), not to mention

of older writers, among them Zola, Mallarmé, and the Parnassian poet François Coppée (1842). This mixture of generations, literary movements, and political foes was the hallmark of *La Plume*.<sup>35</sup> Where else, remarked former collaborator Ernest Raynaud, could Charles Maurras rub elbows with anarchist militants.<sup>36</sup>

Although Deschamps admired certain of his elders, he did seek especially to promote the work of members of the avant-garde. It is for this reason that he founded a press, entitled Bibliothèque artistique et littéraire, which published Verlaine's *Dédicaces* as its first title, along with the works of young writers, including those of Hugues Rebell and Adolphe Retté. The collaborators of *La Plume* were quick to come to the aid of fellow artists. They launched subscription campaigns for a Baudelaire monument and for the destitute Verlaine. In 1895, Deschamps, along with *La Plume* collaborator Stuart Merrill, initiated a petition in favor of Oscar Wilde, convicted of "crimes of gross indecency" and condemned to two years of "hard labour." They did so out of artistic solidarity for Wilde, whom they viewed as a fellow member of the avant-garde.

*La Plume* is best known for its special issues devoted to various literary movements: Naturism, Symbolism, and the Félibres, specific authors, among them Moréas and Barrès, as well as social and political questions: anarchism, socialist literature, and even an issue on "aristocracy," guest edited by Henri Mazel. It is also remembered for the soirées and banquets it organized, presided by the likes of Zola, Mallarmé, and Paul Adam. In addition, Deschamps expanded *La Plume's* contacts to the world of art, when he published a special issue on 15 November 1893 devoted to the history of the French illustrated poster. Included were the works of such artists as Jules Chéret (1836), Adolphe Willette (1857), Henri-Gabriel Ibels (1867), and Toulouse-Lautrec (1864). Subsequently, Deschamps offered a special deluxe edition of issues of *La Plume*, which were accompanied by an original print, photogravure or watercolor. Deschamps also organized art exhibitions in the review's offices at 31, rue Bonaparte. The exhibitions, known as "Le Salon des cent," presented the work of both established artists as well as of their unknown peers.<sup>37</sup> The publicity which these banquets, exhibitions, and campaign drives attracted not only for *La Plume* but for the avant-garde in general is perfectly in keeping with the avant-garde desire for attention.

*Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires* was founded by Francis Vielé-Griffin, Henri de Régnier, and Paul Adam. In 1891, they were joined by Bernard Lazare (1865), newly arrived to Paris from his hometown in Nîmes. Vielé-Griffin came from a wealthy family. Born

in Norfolk, Virginia, he came to Paris with his mother after his parents' divorce in 1872. He attended the Collège Stanislas in Paris, where he met fellow *Entretiens* collaborator and poet Henri de Régnier.<sup>38</sup> Born in Honfleur, Régnier descended from an aristocratic family. If Vielé-Griffin is among the most independent and original of the Symbolists, Régnier is among the best known. Like Vielé-Griffin, Régnier studied law but never practiced it. Although Régnier was an ardent Symbolist, he did have connections with Parnassian José-Maria de Heredia, having married one of his daughters, the poet Gérard d'Houville (1875).

The tone of *Les Entretiens*, both in literary and political matters, was more polemical than that of the other reviews. Vielé-Griffin, who served as the review's editor-in-chief, regularly published diatribes against members of the preceding generation, particularly against Zola, execrated by the Symbolist members of the avant-garde. During its brief life, the review published the work of a great many young writers, including André Gide, Paul Valéry (1871), and Paul Claudel (1868).

As its name indicates, *Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires* followed contemporary politics closely. In 1891, it published excerpts of the *Communist Manifesto*; it later published texts by Engels as well by anarchist theoreticians, among them Mikhail Bakunin, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and Jean Grave. In addition, it gave free rein in its pages to literary anarchists. The most notorious of these writings was an article by Paul Adam in which he eulogized the recently executed terrorist Ravachol. Members of the *Entretiens* staff, especially Adam and Lazare, had ties with anarchist publications. Both men, along with Lucien Descaves (1861), Jean Ajalbert (1863), Camille Mauclair (1872), Victor Barrucand (1866), Félix Fénéon, and Octave Mirbeau (1848), wrote for Zo d'Axa's (born Gallaud in 1864) *L'Endehors*, the most literary of the anarchist journals. In addition, Lazare was an ardent admirer of anarchist militant Jean Grave (1854). When Grave was tried in 1894, Lazare came to his defense, publishing articles in the mainstream press and even testifying on his behalf, as did Adam.

*Les Entretiens* ceased publication in December 1893, in part, because the review, financed by Vielé-Griffin, was costly, but also because Lazare and Vielé-Griffin disagreed on its future orientation. Lazare, whose interest in anarchism had become increasingly political and social, rather than merely literary, wished to move in this direction. In fact, after *Les Entretiens* folded, Lazare founded his own briefly lived journal, first called *L'Action* and then *L'Action sociale*.<sup>39</sup>

Although Lazare is best known as the first defender of Alfred Dreyfus, he began his career in avant-garde circles, publishing not only in *Les Entretiens* but also in *La Revue blanche* and *L'Ermitage*. During the course of the 1890s, Lazare expanded his reach beyond the avant-garde, writing for such mainstream newspapers as *Le Figaro*, *L'Echo de Paris*, and *Le Journal*. His vigorous defense of the Symbolists and his anarchist sympathies made him a controversial figure in this bourgeois milieu. By the time members of the Dreyfus family asked him to come to their aid in 1896, he was already a journalist of note.

The other name closely associated with *Les Entretiens* is Paul Adam. Adam's itinerary is no less colorful than that of Adolphe Retté. Indeed, it can easily be argued that Adam was involved in nearly every literary and political trend of the late nineteenth century. The grandson of an officer in the Napoleonic army, Adam came from a well-to-do family that had fallen on hard times. Henceforth, Adam was obliged to earn a living, which explains the frenetic rate of his production. Adam began his career as a Naturalist, publishing a novel called *Chair molle* in 1885. He also wrote two Symbolist novels during the next few years with Moréas, and contributed to a number of avant-garde journals, *La Revue indépendante*, *La Vogue*, and *Le Symboliste*, which he helped to found.<sup>40</sup>

It was also at this time that Adam joined Barrès in presenting himself as a Boulangist candidate from Nancy; although he lost, Barrès won. From Boulangism, Adam moved on to anarchism, becoming one of the writers most closely associated with the anarchist movement. He inaugurated a column called "Critique des mœurs" in *Les Entretiens* that he continued upon joining the staff of *La Revue blanche*. The novels he wrote during these years can best be described as social commentary, including one entitled *Le Mystère des foules* (1895) on Boulangism. His fascination for the man on horseback, which continued through his involvement in the anarchist movement and the Dreyfus Affair, and even beyond, illustrates the link between political extremes during the 1890s. Indeed, during the Affair, Adam, an ardent supporter of the army, found himself in an awkward situation as a Dreyfusard. In the years leading up to World War I, Adam, who was a fervent believer in *revanche* against Germany, was once again able to take up the cause of the French army. During the war (in 1916), he founded the Ligue de la Fraternité intellectuelle latine, which proclaimed the superiority and the defense of the "Latin races."

If *La Plume* was the most publicity conscious, *La Revue blanche*, directed by the Natanson brothers, was easily the most unique and



the best strategically placed of the avant-garde magazines of the fin de siècle. It served as mediator between the avant-garde and the establishment as well as between the literary and political avant-gardes. *La Revue blanche* further distinguished itself from its rivals in that it was a major center for Jewish intellectuals, although it never saw itself as such. Its directors, along with an important number of its collaborators, were Jewish, among them Léon Blum, Tristan Bernard (1866), Bernard Lazare, Gustave Kahn (1859), Lucien Muhlfeld (1870), Romain Coolus (born René-Max Weil in 1868), Pierre Veber (1869), Julien Benda (1867), Daniel Halévy (1872), and Marcel Proust (1871). During the Dreyfus Affair, it played a key role as a meeting place for Dreyfusard politicians and intellectuals. Given its historical importance, it is surprisingly little-known by most American scholars and thus merits close attention.<sup>41</sup>

Founded in 1889 in Belgium, *La Revue blanche* emigrated to Paris in 1891. The review's directors were the Natanson brothers, who came from a wealthy Jewish family in Warsaw that had emigrated to France during the early years of the Third Republic. The elder brothers Alexandre (1866) and Thadée (1868) were naturalized Frenchmen, while the youngest, Alfred (1873), was born in France. Their father Adam, a wealthy businessman, financed the review during the years of its operation. Since avant-garde journals in general tend to lose money rather than make it, this financial support was an important factor in the longevity of *La Revue blanche*, which lasted until 1903.

*La Revue blanche's* opening manifesto, like that of *La Plume*, *L'Ermitage*, and *Le Mercure*, proclaimed an openness of spirit and a dedication to pure artistic values. A later statement, which reflected the influence of Barrès and the *culte du moi*, proclaimed the right of *La Revue blanche's* authors to freely express their opinions and "develop themselves."<sup>42</sup> Again, like *La Plume* and *L'Ermitage*, *La Revue blanche* followed a policy of eclecticism, publishing the works of Symbolists and Naturists alike, according special attention to the works of young authors. In addition, its collaborators expressed a desire to found a review that would rival such establishment publications as *La Revue des deux mondes*, but from a youthful, less conformist perspective.<sup>43</sup>

*La Revue blanche* paid special attention to poetry, publishing the works of Mallarmé and Verlaine, as well as those of Stuart Merrill, Henri de Régnier, Francis Vielé-Griffin, Camille Mauclair, Saint-Pol Roux (1861), and Emile Verhaeren (1855). In 1897, the review's poet-in-residence, Gustave Kahn, inaugurated a column

exclusively devoted to the review of poetic works. *La Revue blanche's* literary criticism was also comprehensive; its first literary critic, Lucien Muhlfeld, was succeeded by Léon Blum in 1896, when the former left to write drama criticism for the mainstream newspaper *L'Echo de Paris*. Blum's successor was André Gide.

*La Revue blanche* maintained close contact with the theater world. Pierre Veber, Romain Coolus, Alfred Athys (Natanson), and Alfred Jarry (1873), who all served as *La Revue blanche's* drama critics over the years, were themselves playwrights. Coolus, Veber, and their *Revue blanche* colleagues Tristan Bernard and Victor Barrucand had their works staged not only in avant-garde theaters, notably the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, founded by Aurélien Lugné-Poë (1869), but also in the boulevard theaters. Lugné-Poë is best known for popularizing Ibsen and his fellow Scandinavians in France, along with his presentation of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu roi*, which created a scandal when it was performed in 1896. Not only did *Revue blanche* collaborators subscribe to Lugné-Poë's theater, the review artists, notably, Edouard Vuillard (1868), Pierre Bonnard (1867), Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864), and Maurice Denis (1870), all designed theater programs and sets for his productions.

Through Fénéon and Thadée Natanson, both of whom were art critics, *La Revue blanche* maintained contacts with young artists. Not only did it publicize their work, but its editors also invited artists to submit their drawings for publication in the review. Vuillard, Denis, Bonnard, Toulouse-Lautrec, Ker-Xavier Roussel (1867), Paul Ranson (1864), and Felix Vallotton (1865) were all asked to submit lithographs as frontispieces for the review, which were eventually published by the *Revue blanche* press in album form. Illustrations regularly appeared in *La Revue blanche*, especially those of Vallotton, the most assiduous of the review's artist collaborators. Naturally, art criticism was a regular feature. Among those who published articles on this topic included such artist-critics as Maurice Denis, Paul Signac (1863), and Jacques-Emile Blanche (1861).

Although *La Revue blanche* never covered music as fully as it did literature and art, it did publish articles by Wagnerian specialist Henri Gauthiers-Villars (1859), better known as Willy, of Colette fame, as well as by Claude Debussy (1862). *La Revue blanche*, unlike the more sober *Mercur*e and *Ermitage*, also gave free rein to the comedic talents of the best humorists of the day. Tristan Bernard, Jules Renard, Romain Coolus, and Pierre Veber wrote articles and contributed to the journal's humoristic supplements.

After Muhlfeld's departure, his editorial duties were taken over for a short period by Marcel Barrière (1868), former secretary to

the Duc d'Orléans, before the arrival in 1895 of Félix Fénéon. A key figure connecting the Parisian cultural and political milieus of the fin de siècle, Fénéon was simultaneously involved in three different movements: Symbolism, Post-Impressionism, and anarchism. The first and foremost champion of the artist Georges Seurat (1859), he also helped launch the careers of such writers as Jules Laforgue (1860), Arthur Rimbaud (1854), André Gide, and Alfred Jarry. For many years, Fénéon was by day an employee of the War Ministry; at the same time, he was closely involved with the anarchist movement. When Fénéon, along with a number of anarchist propagandists and militants, was brought to trial in 1894, he attracted the attention of Thadée Natanson, who was serving as assistant to Fénéon's lawyer Maître Demange (who later became Alfred Dreyfus's lawyer). Thadée immediately invited Fénéon to join the *Revue blanche* staff. When the review folded in 1903, Fénéon began writing for *Le Figaro* and *Le Matin* and later joined the staff of the Bernheim art gallery. Fénéon maintained left-wing sympathies throughout his life, even becoming a Communist in his later years.<sup>44</sup>

Fénéon's arrival coincided with a turning point for *La Revue blanche*, which established a number of new rubrics at this time: columns on politics and contemporary manners, history, foreign literatures, and even sports. It was at this time that *La Revue blanche* made the transition from a relatively unknown little magazine to a publication that was read even outside the avant-garde milieu. Its circulation reached perhaps ten thousand.<sup>45</sup> The publicity provided by the now celebrated Bonnard and Lautrec posters of *La Revue blanche*, the advertisements published in the boulevard publication, *Le Cri de Paris*, also owned by the Natansons, and the phenomenal success of *Quo Vadis*, published by the *Revue blanche* press, made the journal highly visible.

Fénéon, who was seriously interested in contemporary political and social movements, unlike his predecessor Muhlfeld, elicited the approval of anarchist leader Jean Grave when *La Revue blanche* began devoting in-depth articles to the anarchist and socialist movements, along with the writings of such thinkers as Peter Kropotkin and Leo Tolstoy. Other articles included a study on anti-Semitism during the Middle Ages by Bernard Lazare and a series on German socialism by Charles Andler (1866). A noted Germanist, Andler was a friend of Lucien Herr (1864), the librarian of the Ecole Normale, who is best-known for having converted several generations of *normaliens* to socialism, including Socialist leaders Jean Jaurès (1859) and Léon Blum.

At the time of the Dreyfus Affair, Herr sent other *normaliens* to write for the review, among them François Simiand (1873), the future disciple of Emile Durkheim (1858), and Charles Péguy (1873), who wrote a special column on contemporary politics. During the Affair, the review published a series of antimilitarist articles by Urbain Gohier (1862), which were later reprinted in book form as *L'Armée contre la nation*. For publishing these articles, the *Revue blanche* press and Gohier were accused of defaming the army and the navy and brought to trial. Among the witnesses for the defense was the distinguished historian Charles Seignobos (1854) of the Sorbonne. His testimony not only contributed to the acquittal of the defendants, but it also suggested that *La Revue blanche* was highly regarded in certain academic circles—at the Sorbonne as well as at the Ecole Normale.<sup>46</sup>

During the Affair, *La Revue blanche* threw itself into the fray with "Protestation," a companion piece to Zola's "J'Accuse." Although the Affair represented a major triumph for *La Revue blanche*, it also signaled its demise. Thadée Natanson, a founding member of the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, lost a considerable portion of the family fortune in an ill-fated scheme to raise money for the new cause he had adopted. In addition to such financial difficulties, review collaborators increasingly disagreed on its purpose and mission. While the more politically active collaborators—Léon Blum, Tristan Bernard, and Jules Renard—went on to join the staff of Jean Jaurès's socialist newspaper *L'Humanité*, others, like André Gide, retreated to the realm of pure literature, founding *La NRF*.

Because of the variety of its contacts, *La Revue blanche* stood at the crossroads of important political, social, and cultural currents, mediating not only between the avant-garde and the establishment, but also between the literary and political milieus. Although an exhaustive study of *La Revue blanche*'s role in contemporary political and cultural life is not possible here, a brief examination of its networks of sociability offers us an important glimpse into the workings of the avant-garde, in particular, the social solidarity it represented.

If we are to chart the meeting places for members of the avant-garde, the best place to begin is the Parisian *lycée*. Condorcet, Henri IV, and Louis-le-Grand were among the best *lycées* in France. During the late nineteenth century, the *lycée* was still the bastion of the elite, a place where bourgeois families sent their sons to become cultured. Here, a select group of young men formed lifelong friendships—women did not yet attend *lycées* with men—that would prove decisive for their future.<sup>47</sup> Condorcet, unlike its more austere

counterparts, was located in the bustling streets of the Ninth *arrondissement* and accepted day pupils. It is perhaps for this reason that the school produced such an impressive number of writers and artists, including a great many Symbolist writers like Pierre Quillard and Stuart Merrill. The Symbolist connection extends even to Mallarmé, who taught English there for many years.

The Natanson brothers all attended Condorcet; the two older brothers were especially friendly with Lugué-Poë, Maurice Denis, Bonnard, Vuillard, and Ker-Xavier Roussel, along with Pierre Veber, Tristan Bernard, and Romain Coolus. The second group of Condorcet graduates at *La Revue blanche* consisted of a group of men slightly younger: Daniel Halévy, Jacques Bizet (1872), Marcel Proust, Fernand Gregh (1874), and Alfred Natanson. These men founded the review *Le Banquet*, which survived only a few months. When it folded, the *Revue blanche* editorial board invited the staff of *Le Banquet* to join them.

Other Parisian *lycées* also contributed to the staff of *La Revue blanche*; Gide and Blum both attended Henri IV. Through Gide, Blum met Pierre Louÿs (1870), founder of another little magazine *La Conque*. Blum published several poems here before submitting texts to *Le Banquet* and then moving on to *La Revue blanche*.

A number of members of the literary avant-garde had ties with the republican university. Indeed, the literary milieu at this time was in part fed by disenchanted members of the university population who could not find other jobs.<sup>48</sup> Alexandre and Thadée were lawyers. Blum possessed a *licence* in law as did Tristan Bernard, Henri de Régnier, and Lucien Muhlfeld. For much of the nineteenth century and a good part of the twentieth, obtaining a law degree was a common option for sons of the bourgeoisie. Even if the holder never practiced law, he acquired the cachet of an educated man.

A number of *Revue blanche* collaborators were *normaliens*: Léon Blum, Romain Coolus, Charles Péguy, Charles Andler, and Lucien Herr. In fact, Herr was chosen by the *Revue blanche* group to excommunicate Barrès on behalf of an entire generation in the pages of the review after the latter declared his anti-Dreyfusard stance. The Sorbonne was another meeting place for review collaborators. Proust, Gregh, Halévy, Blum, and Muhlfeld all took classes here. Muhlfeld even served as the Sorbonne's assistant librarian.

As must be increasingly obvious, there existed a multiplicity of links between reviews. Writers wrote concurrently for several magazines. Jules Renard, Rachilde, Remy de Gourmont, Henri de Régnier, Pierre Quillard, Stuart Merrill, Hugues Rebell, and Saint

Pol-Roux, all of whom were associated with *Le Mercure de France*, and some with *L'Ermitage*, *La Plume*, and *Les Entretiens*, also wrote articles for *La Revue blanche*. Jarry was first a member of the *Mercure* staff, but left in 1896 to write drama criticism for *La Revue blanche*. Among the older members of the *Revue blanche* group, Fénéon, Kahn, and Adam had already participated in other avant-garde ventures together. Fénéon and Kahn had collaborated on *La Vogue*, founded by the latter, and on *Le Symboliste*, which the two had founded with Jules Laforgue and Jean Moréas, as well as on *La Revue indépendante*. Paul Adam, Bernard Lazare, Viel-Griffin, and Henri de Régnier had worked on *Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires* together before contributing to *La Revue blanche*.

Family relations also tied various members of the avant-garde together. Muhlfeld and Adam were married to two sisters. Ker-Xavier Roussel and Pierre Veber were wedded to the sisters of Vuillard and Tristan Bernard respectively. Régnier and Pierre Louÿs were brothers-in-law. The Blums were friendly with the Bernards, who knew the Natansons. Like the other avant-garde journals, *La Revue blanche* also constituted a milieu. Thadée's wife, Misia, received visitors to her home on Thursday afternoons; when the Natansons summered in Valvins, they invited their *Revue blanche* friends, among them Mallarmé, Mirbeau, Toulouse-Lautrec, Vuillard, Bonnard, and Coolus.<sup>49</sup>

As for the location of *La Revue blanche*, while most of the avant-garde journals were tucked away on quiet streets of the Left Bank, *La Revue blanche's* offices were located in the busiest parts of the Right Bank. Its first home was located on the rue des Martyrs, where it was close both to the cabarets of Montmartre as well as to the offices of various anarchist publications. In 1895, *La Revue blanche* moved to the rue Laffitte, known as the street of artists because some twenty art galleries were located here. In its last headquarters on the boulevard des Italiens, *La Revue blanche* was in the company of the major newspapers, which were located on the *grands boulevards*. In fact, it shared offices with its sister publication *Le Cri de Paris*.<sup>50</sup>

This brief examination of the avant-garde journals, their collaborators, and their relations reveals a small world of dense and multiple contacts. Yet by no means was the avant-garde, despite its rhetoric, cut off from other groups, both political and literary. A number of members of the avant-garde belonged both to it and to the larger world of the popular press. Maurras and Barrès are the most obvious examples, but certain members of the *Revue blanche*