Career Stories
Rogers, Juliette M.

Published by Penn State University Press

Rogers, Juliette M.
Career Stories: Belle Époque Novels of Professional Development.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/293.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/293

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=305721
the events of the Third Republic that would have the most significant impact on women’s lives, both immediately and on a long-term basis, were the creation of girls’ public secondary schools and women’s teacher training schools (les écoles normales), along with the decision to require primary education for all girls. Before 1870, there had been no official governmental structures that would guarantee a nationalized, public education for girls in France. Although the Falloux law of 1850 had recommended that municipalities of 800 or more inhabitants provide primary education for girls as well as for boys, very few cities and towns were able to provide the necessary funds to support an extra school and extra (female) teachers. Girls’ instruction often took place in makeshift buildings with professors “borrowed” from boys’ school, or with nuns hired by the town at lower wages. The government supported only a small handful of teacher training schools for women before 1880, making it difficult for women to obtain the degrees necessary to teach in the public schools (the brevet primaire and supérieur were the minimal diplomas required for teaching). Nuns, on the contrary, needed only a “letter of obedience” from the superiors in their convent to teach in municipal primary schools. After 1867, because the number of inhabitants necessary for the recommendation of a girls’ primary school was reduced from 800 to 500, and because the supervision of funding for building construction had become stricter, the number of girls’ schools opening increased, reaching an enrollment of 2,316,000 girls in 1880 (Rousselot 370–72). In 1882, a government decree made primary education for all children obligatory.1

Secondary education for girls also took several decades to become available to all girls nationwide. The 1867 proposal for secondary education, initiated by Victor Duruy, lasted only three years, until the Commune, and it existed

1. For information on primary education in France, see Linda Clark, *Schooling the Daughters of Marianne* (1984), Laura Strumingher, *What Were Little Girls and Boys Made Of? Primary
only in Paris. It was not until 1880 that the National Assembly passed the Camille Sée Decree, which called for the funding of a national secondary school system for girls (Rousselot 372). In the following year, the National Assembly passed a bill to establish a national women’s teaching school, l’École Normale Supérieure de Sèvres, to train women professors for the new secondary schools. Soon after Sèvres, many regional teacher training schools were created to provide qualified, state-educated women schoolteachers for the new girls’ primary and secondary schools. This series of national legislative acts meant that girls from all social and economic classes could attend classes, and after 1882, they were required to pass through the primary school level.

According to the new educational system, the schoolteacher became the new source of authority, the new role model during the formative years through adolescence. The new schoolteachers were expected to be models of cleanliness, morality, proper public behavior, and republican civic duty. Mona Ozouf’s groundbreaking work on the battles waged between the Catholic Church and the Republic, L’Ecole, L’Eglise, et la République, 1871–1914 (School, Church, and Republic), demonstrates the emphasis on nationalism that education reformers of the Third Republic promoted for both men and women (Ozouf 1982, 103–23). Ozouf observes that one of the major goals for Jules Ferry and other pedagogues of the time had been symbolic as well as practical: they wanted freedom from the church, not only through schools operated independently of the church. Laïcité (secularism) became a keyword for the campaign for “modern” schooling, and the reformers’ primary tool toward achieving that goal was to insist on the notion of national identity rather than on religious or regional affiliations. In its zeal, the republican school supplants God, as Ozouf shows by comparing a geography lesson from a religious school to one from a public school: whereas the text from the religious school includes a celebration of God in its description of the splendors of nature, the text from the republican school includes passages extolling the French citizen in the geographic diversity that makes up France (114)!

To build patriotic pride in the nation, France and Paris were overtly lauded in schools. Education historian Pierre Albertini states categorically, “The education of the schools of the Republic undeniably reinforced the feeling of belonging to the French nation.”2 For Albertini, one of the chief

---

1. Education in Rural France, 1830–1880 (1983), Jo Burr Margadant’s Madame le Professeur (1990), esp. the introduction, and the period work by Frederic Ernest Farrington, The Public Primary School System of France with Special Reference to the Training of Teachers (1906).

2. “L’enseignement de l’Ecole républicaine a incontestablement renforcé le sentiment d’appartenance à la nation française” (Albertini 75). Albertini labels the entire period from 1870 to
ways for the schools to encourage this growth in nationalist feeling was to add history texts that focused primarily on the nation and on the great figures who had founded France, particularly since the 1789 Revolution. He also cites the development of geography courses on France and the addition of French literature in the primary programs as further examples of the new patriotism that public schools in France were bringing forth under the Jules Ferry reforms.

This new patriotism played a crucial role in transforming Third Republic French society, as Eugen Weber has argued in his classic work *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (1976). In particular, schools became a major factor for change in France because they helped students to understand a society that extended beyond their local community. Normally we separate society and school (society educates, school instructs), yet Weber notes that the public schools from the Third Republic provided both instruction and education, describing this particular schooling as: “a major agent of acculturation: shaping individuals to fit into societies and cultures broader than their own, and persuading them that these broader realms are their own” (Weber 1976, 330). This nationalizing force in education influenced both male and female novels of educational development in France at the turn of the century.

In addition to outlining broader social goals, the major reforms for girls’ education in the 1880s and 1890s also brought about a very concrete result: by 1900, literacy rates among French women of all classes had increased dramatically. Rather than the bourgeois Madame Bovaries who read sentimental romances to escape from their humdrum lives, women readers now came from all ranks of society, and they demanded a literature that would reflect their own class situations. Between 1900 and 1905, for example, more than a dozen novels were published in France featuring young women studying at the high school and university levels, or teaching girls and women in public schools.  

Both historians today and analysts from the turn of the century agree that the

---

3. Those novels include: *Claudine à l’école* (1900; *Claudine at School*) by Colette-Willy; *Sévriennes* (1900; *Women of Sévres*), *Un Lycée de jeunes filles* (1901; *A High School of Young Girls*), and *Lycéennes* (1902; *High School Girls*) by Gabrielle Reval; *L’Institutrice* (1900; *The Woman Schoolteacher*) by R. O’Monroy and R. Valler; *Institutrice* (1902; *Woman Schoolteacher*) by Esther de Suze; *Le Journal d’une institutrice* (1902; *The Diary of a Woman Schoolteacher*) by Léon Deries; *L’Un vers l’autre* (1903; *One Towards the Other*) by Louise-Marie Compain; *La Maternelle* (1904; *The Nursery School*) and *L’Institutrice de province* (1906; *The Woman Schoolteacher from the Provinces*) by Léon Frapié; and *L’Evasée* (1905; *The Female Fugitive*) by “une
enthusiasm of these new readers was one of the major factors for the sudden popularity of turn-of-the-century women authors whose heroines were independent, educated, and modern—les femmes nouvelles (New Women).

One of today’s historians of French publishing trends, Anne Sauvy, notes that the increase in literacy was directly linked to one of the highest periods of reading activity among French women: “women achieved literacy in the second half of the XIXth century. From then on, they constitute the most avid readers in the public masses, especially novel readers. The period from 1890 to 1950 is certainly the time when, historically, Frenchwomen read the most.” It is significant that these new readers chose novels, and particularly popular novels, as their favorite written materials. These texts were often first published in serial form, in magazines or daily newspapers. Newspapers advertised the serial novel as offering inexpensive installments of fiction that could be read in short time periods, mainly for the benefit of working women who were too busy to pass many consecutive hours at leisure, slowly consuming an entire novel. Historical analyses of the serial novel in France emphasize the practical aspects of its format. Anne-Marie Thiesse, for example, notes that the serial novel worked well with the rhythms of the working-class household because the short installments could be read easily between two domestic tasks and the suspenseful ending of each episode sparked reader interest until the next issue arrived (Thiesse 1984, 21).

This type of roman-feuilleton, or serial novel, was most frequently located in the rez-de-chaussée (ground floor) section of major daily newspapers. As a part of the daily newspaper, the serial novel turned out to be inexpensive and accessible to women of the working classes for whom the prestige (and cost) of the bound book still held some power of intimidation. Thiesse comments that the school reforms of the Third Republic slowly began to erode that intimidation, “through the early and prolonged contact of all children with textbooks, thanks to the expansion of school libraries and to

4. “les femmes ont achevé leur alphabétisation dans la seconde moitié du XIX siècle. Elles constituent dès lors la masse de public la plus avide de lectures et surtout de romans. La période qui s’étend de 1890 à 1950 est certainement celle qui a vu historiquement les Françaises lire le plus” (Sauvy 243).

5. This title referred to the physical location of the story on the printed page, since it was usually found on the bottom quarter of the front page (Thiesse 1984, 20).
the wide distribution of book prizes.” The latter, books awarded publicly at the end-of-the-year school prize ceremony, were considered special “aesthetic objects,” conserved carefully and proudly displayed in the homes of many generations of French men and women. The serial novel, however, retained its popularity and appeared more and more often in the literary sections of the increasingly popular “women’s” magazines that began to flourish during this period.

The rise in the number of periodicals written specifically for women readers may also have links to the creation of a secondary school system for girls, as S. M. Bonvoisin and M. Maignien, historians of the French press, have argued. The demand for periodicals for women rose so dramatically that between 1892 and 1908 at least twelve different daily, weekly, and monthly newspapers and magazines for a specifically female readership opened their doors in France. Among the most famous are La Fronde (The Revolt) founded in 1892 by Marguerite Durand, the only newspaper staffed entirely by women in France, Femina (founded 1900), and La Vie Heureuse (The Happy Life; founded 1902), whose staff members contributed to the creation of the Prix Femina (first called the Prix Vie Heureuse) in 1905, in response to the Prix Goncourt’s exclusion of women writers from their prestigious book prize competition. Although most revues combined articles on current events with advice columns, society news, and literary reviews, some

6. “par la mise en contact précoce et prolongée de tous les enfants avec des manuels . . . , grâce aussi à l’expansion des bibliothèques scolaires et aux larges distributions de prix” (Thiesse 1984, 23).
7. “Le succès de cette diversification (de journaux pour femmes) s’inscrit dans l’évolution du statut des femmes au sein de la société française, conséquence de l’obtention d’un certain nombre de droits civils: accès des jeunes filles à l’enseignement secondaire (décret Camille Sée, 1880)” (Bonvoisin and Maignien 17).
8. This phenomenal increase in women’s periodicals may have been part of a greater trend during the period 1870–1930, which Anne Marie Thiesse calls “l’âge d’or de la presse française” (the golden age of the French press) (Thiesse 1984, 17–20). Not only did the number of periodicals aimed specifically at a female audience increase, but also the four major daily newspapers augmented their number of women’s columns and serial novels that were written mostly by women novelists and intended for female readers.
9. See La Vie Heureuse in December 1904, where portraits of the twenty women writers who sat on the first jury appear; the February 1905 issue, where the prize of 5,000 francs is advertised; and the March 1905 issue, where the jury awards Myriam Harry the first Vie Heureuse book prize for her novel La Conquête de Jerusalem (The Conquest of Jerusalem). Anne Sauvy, in “La Littérature et les femmes” (“Literature and Women”), gives details of the protest raised by women writers against the exclusion of women from the Goncourt Prize and their decision to form a contest of their own (Sauvy 249). Jean Rabaut gives a brief history of the creation of the two different prizes (Femina and Vie Heureuse) and the decision to combine them into one competition shortly after their creation (Rabaut 151).
of the journals were specifically political (L’Abeille [The Bee] and L’Action Féministe [Feminist Action] for example, were newsletters for women’s unions), some were specifically literary (Lectures de la femme [Woman’s Readings]), and some were aimed at specific groups of women (La Femme Nouvelle [The New Woman] was written for high school students and teachers, including job listings). Several of the novelists whom I will study in later chapters contributed articles regularly to women’s magazines and newspapers from the turn of the century, in addition to serial fiction. Colette, Marcelle Tinayre, and Colette Yver contributed articles, speeches, and interviews to La Femme, La Fronde, and La Vie Heureuse during the period 1900–1910, for example.

Camille Pert, a social activist for women, noted in 1910, in her work Le Travail de la femme (Woman’s Work), that very few women had pursued the careers of journalist, dramaturge, or translator, mainly because these jobs did not pay well or provide a source of steady income. She also listed the fact that they were still considered very masculine fields (Pert 298). Not all journalists were of the same opinion. In the November 1905 issue of La Vie Heureuse, we find an article written by a male journalist who fears that women were taking over the field of journalism. He claims that 27 percent of all journalists were women, but then adds that his figures were especially true in America and Germany, where women writers were a stronger force than in France.10 And in Uzanne’s 1910 study, Etudes de sociologie féminine: Parisiennes de ce temps (Studies in Feminine Sociology: Parisian Women of Today), the author claims a large number of women writers: 3,500 women “with blue dyed stocking,” including 2,800 who write novels or books for children, 200 who write pedagogical works, and 350 poets (Uzanne 272–73). Although 3,500 feminists (or “blue-stockings”) may appear an insignificant number by today’s standards, for contemporaries such as Uzanne they appeared to be an overwhelming group that stood ready to invade the literary world.

Pert herself did comment that, with the increase in the number of periodicals and their growing circulations, women might develop more interest in journalism as it became a more feasible means of earning one’s living: “The multitude of cheap periodicals [and] newspapers consumes an enormous mass of ‘copy’; and if this literature does not bring glory to those who devote themselves to it, it does procure them a modest wage.”11

10. This article was reprinted from the Figaro and is located in the column “Evènements et Menus Faits” of La Vie Heureuse 27, no. 11, (novembre 1905): 4.

11. “La multitude des publications périodiques à bon marché, des journaux, consomme jour- nellement une énorme masse de ‘copie’; et si cette littérature n’apporte point la gloire à ceux qui s’y livrent, elle leur procure un gain modeste” (Pert 298).
Thus Pert considered journalism, whether for a daily newspaper or a women’s magazine, primarily as a source of income, rather than as a glorious career for women. It was a practical means for women to earn money, and it was considered only secondarily as a literary endeavor.

Confirming her theory, a well-known journalist from the turn of the century, Séverine, slipped from public memory almost as soon as she died. Her biographer, Evelyne LeGarrec, blames the ephemeral quality of newspaper reporting for her disappearance from the public eye at her death and for her continued invisibility throughout the twentieth century (LeGarrec 306).

One of the novels that I will be studying, Marcelle Tinayre’s La Rebelle (The Woman Rebel, 1905), also supports Pert’s notion that writing was becoming a practical way for women to live on their own, even though it did not bring fame and glory with it. The story focuses on a heroine who provides for her invalid husband, her son, and herself by writing articles for a women’s magazine located in Paris. After her husband’s death, she continues to earn a modest living through journalism and thereby remains independent so that she may pursue her own goals and follow her own beliefs.

Other novels about women writers from the Belle Époque indicate a similar independence of mind and body. In both La Vagabonde (The Vagabond) by Colette and Les Cervelines (The Brainy Women) by Colette Yver, the women writers are portrayed as creative individuals who do not need societal approval, the support of a man or husband, or even a network of female friends in order to achieve their goals. Although surrounded by friends, admirers, critics, and suitors, the women writers are portrayed as indifferent to or distant from the conventional restrictions placed on women of their era. Their marginal status within bourgeois society thus confirms some of Pert’s concerns that writing was still considered a male field and thus women could not easily pursue such a career at the turn of the century. Yet the number of women writers continued to grow, and their choice of female protagonists who taught and wrote indicates that these types of fictional characters could be considered heroines for women readers of the time.

The secondary school system and the rise in the literacy rate of French women thus caused significant increases in journals, newspapers, and novels written for and by women at the beginning of the twentieth century.

12. Other more recent biographies have discussed Séverine’s anonymity and have done much to remember this forgotten journalist and newspaper editor. I am thinking, for example, of Christiane Douyère-Demeulenaere’s text Séverine et Vallès: Le cri du peuple (Paris: Payot, 2003), Paul Couturiau’s Séverine l’insoumise: Biographie (Paris: Éditions du Rocher, 2001), and Jean-Michel Gaillard’s Séverine (Paris: Plon, 1999), in addition to Roberts’s chapters in Disruptive Acts (2002).
Jules Bertaut, a literary critic from the turn of the century, goes even further in his claims for the consequences of the new secondary education system for girls. According to Bertaut, not only did the school system produce more young women readers and writers, it also produced more young women protagonists. He explains that obligatory education at the primary level was the main cause for the increase in dynamic young heroines in literary trends: “The great and unique cause to explain this sudden evolution of the young girl (in French literature), can only be education. The young girl owes to required schooling, imposed by the law and accepted by social custom, the personality that she has acquired in the past twenty years.”

Public education had allowed young girls to become more independent by requiring them to leave their homes on a daily basis to go to school and by encouraging their curiosity and the development of their ideas and opinions. It also promoted a variety of types of young girls, not a single model of submission and devotion to paternal authority. Bertaut believed that these two trends in young women’s lives affected the portrayals of them in literature. Finally, they were being described and developed as protagonists with personalities, after centuries of being portrayed as nonentities with no social rank. Bertaut also lists ten different literary types of *jeunes filles* (young girls) found in the novels of his day, including the *revolteée* (the revolted girl), the *intellectuelle* (the intellectual girl), the *fille du peuple* (the daughter of the people), and the *féministe* (the feminist) (Bertaut 165ff.). Another literary critic and popular novelist of the period, Charles-Henri Hirsch, also commented on the “new” *jeune fille moderne* (modern young girl) who had transformed the dull literary model of previous generations: “The differences are very weak between the thousands of young girls of French literature, from Cécile de Volanges to Mademoiselle Renaude Chamot in *Coco de Génie* by Monsieur Louis Dumur. They all seem like fugitives from the same convent. A uniform discipline has bent them to similar ways of acting and thinking.”

To offer an example of the “new” literary type, Hirsch points to Colette’s Claudine character and her refreshing openness and vitality.

---

13. “La grande, l’unique cause pour expliquer cette évolution soudaine de la jeune fille (dans la littérature française), c’est et ce ne peut être que l’instruction. C’est à l’instruction obligatoire, imposée par la loi et acceptée par les moeurs, que la jeune fille doit la personnalité qu’elle s’est acquise depuis une vingtaine d’années seulement” (Bertaut 166).

It must be remembered that not all contemporaries thought as positively about the educational system as did Bertaut or Hirsch. Many felt that the public school system for girls had a negative influence on the female population in France. Some even denounced it as a threat to the Roman Catholic religion in France or to the survival of the French race. Jacques Valdour, under the pseudonym Nic, wrote *Le Lycée corrupteur* (*The Corrupting High School*) in 1909, a general indictment against nonreligious (non–Roman Catholic) public high schools for both boys and girls in France. His pessimistic view of the goals of girls’ public high schools becomes evident in his writings, where he claims that the high school is the state’s main agent of “intellectual and moral corruption.” He also believes that the role of the new girls’ high schools is to prevent Christian households from being established (Nic 113). Valdour did not even want to consider the possibility that educated female high school graduates might pursue careers outside the home. From his critique, we can see that he assumed that the women who graduated from public high schools would still be involved with traditionally feminine activities: homemaker, mother, teacher of moral and religious beliefs. They would *fonder un foyer* (start a family). His main fear resided in the fact that these state-educated homemakers might not teach Roman Catholic values to their children because of other (i.e., Protestant or republican) values taught in their high schools. But he did not doubt for a moment that women would remain in the home, at the center of the nuclear family.

Furthermore, Valdour believed that the new high school teachers were not only nonreligious, but also antireligious. To prove his point he recounts the story of a girls’ schoolteacher who allowed only those high school students who had *not* attended Mass that morning to buy some candy from a passing street vendor. This story had been told and retold several times, and it is difficult to determine what kinds of embellishments or omissions may have been made to the anecdote (Nic 114). Valdour, however, used the tale as a basis for his statements about the “anti-religious Protestantism” at the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Sèvres and the anti-Catholic sentiments that the professors encouraged in the new schoolteachers that Sèvres produced each year for the provincial girls’ high schools. Gabrielle Reval, in her novel about the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Sèvres, *Sévriennes* (1900), while giving a generally positive image of the school’s mission, also critiques

---

15. According to Valdour, he had read it when it was reproduced in *La Libre parole* following a report given in *Le Messager-matin de l’Allier* based on a story heard in the suburban streets of the city of Moulins.
the austerity and rationality of the Protestant director, Mme Jules Ferron, but for very different reasons than those of Valdour. Literary critics picked up on this criticism and although they gave positive reviews of Reval’s texts overall, they continually pointed to the same flaw, the fact that religion never played an important role for any of the heroines of her works. Mme A. Philip de Barjau’s reviews of Reval, for example, in the magazine La Femme, give high praise to her literary style and character development, but insist that the lack of religion is the most serious problem in the book, and in “real” high schools, too, because it leaves the students without une base solide (a solid base). Paule Branzac, writing for the journal La Femme Nouvelle (The New Woman, 1 février 1905), mentions similar problems with Reval’s texts.

“Nic” was of course not alone in his critique of women’s education. Another conservative literary critic and popular novelist from the turn of the century, Léo Clarétie, took a more extreme view of the consequences of women’s education and feminism in general for France. In his 1907 study of women’s education, L’Ecole des dames (The School for Ladies), Clarétie wrote that women should have the same rights as men theoretically, but that if they actually claimed their rights to equal education and to equal pay, they would have to give up maternity (Clarétie 11). Maternity and feminism were incompatible in Clarétie’s eyes, and feminism, if practiced widely, would therefore lead to the extinction of the human race (11). The idea that women had to make a choice between education and maternity, brain and body, was a popular one, backed by medical doctors, priests, and others who maintained older theories on women’s anatomy. Many of the novelists analyzed in later chapters in this book also deal with this apparent conflict between motherhood and career, some conceding that it existed, others fighting to prove that both were possible.

16. For example: “Quant à la valeur littéraire du livre qui nous occupe, elle est réelle” (As for the literary value of the book that we are concerned with, it is great.), in Mme A. Philip de Barjau’s “Revues littéraires,” La Femme 23, no. 3, (1 février 1901): 23.

17. For her opinions, see, for example, her later article in 1901: Mme A. Philip de Barjau, “Revues Littéraires” in La Femme 23, no. 15 (1 septembre 1901): 135.

18. Branzac’s comparative review of three different novels about women schoolteachers allows her to make such distinctions about Reval’s work. See Paule Branzac’s article “Livres Nouveaux,” which contains a review of L’Evadée, by “une institutrice de province” and Séviennes by Gabrielle Reval in La Femme Nouvelle, février 1905.

19. Clarétie’s concern may seem hysterical today, but in the context of the “depopulation crisis” that occupied the minds of many intellectuals and scientists during the 1890s, the threat of human extinction seemed omnipresent. See Karen Offen’s article “Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle Paris.”
A second debate, spawned by the new public schools for girls, centered on whether or not the government should create one unified, coeducational system, cutting the costs of supporting two separate school systems and giving girls and boys the same education. Isabelle Gatti de Gamand, an eloquent girls’ school director who had founded the girls’ school system in Belgium at the end of the nineteenth century, supported a coeducational system for practical reasons. If the boys’ and girls’ school systems were melded into one, then girls’ education would actually receive more funding, since most French towns had only enough money to support one school and generally gave priority to the boys’ school, neglecting girls’ instruction. She also believed that a bilateral system channeled girls into a restricted field of possible careers, whereas boys generally had a larger choice of professions, especially those who graduated with the prestigious *baccalauréat* diploma, which was not offered as part of girls’ secondary education during the Belle Epoque. In Gatti de Gamand’s mind, a single educational system would theoretically give all students equal access to all careers, based on their qualifications and the diplomas held (Gatti de Gamand 21–24).

In the 1930s and later, parallel educations for both sexes would in fact become the norm. But at the beginning of the century, Gatti de Gamand’s views did not reflect those of the majority, and most French citizens continued to desire separate schools and curricula for the two sexes. In Colette’s text, *Claudine à l’école* (1900), the fictional village of Montigny is in the midst of constructing a brand new school that consists of two separate wings for the boys’ and girls’ classrooms and dormitories, and two separate teachers’ quarters, in spite of the additional cost of providing duplicate facilities. Claudine’s curriculum includes obligatory needlepoint, singing lessons, and drawing classes, and her formal schooling terminates with a brevet exam. Her school thus mirrors the decision of the majority of educational leaders, who continued to support different curricula until the 1930s and separate classrooms until the 1960s. Jo Burr Margadant, in her history of women teachers in France, analyzes the advantages of the separate secondary school system for women that existed from 1880 to the 1930s, and specifically the fact that the government trained an entire corps of women teachers to

20. Although unusual for the time period, Gatti de Gamand was not alone in her feelings that coeducation would be beneficial for girls: in Nelly Roussel’s popular lecture from 1905 titled “L’Eternelle Sacrifiée” (“The Eternal Sacrificed Woman”), she also speaks eloquently for a single education system and notes that the United States, England, and Holland have all converted successfully (Roussel 89).
educate girls. Both cultural and political demands required the government to educate and give authority to the women who would run the new schools, thus producing a new professional class of women in French society (Margadant 249–52).  

These political and historical hypotheses for the proliferation of the female erziehungsroman, or novel of educational development, are further supported by the fact that some of the authors of these novels had been public school students or teachers at the end of the nineteenth century. Gabrielle Reval, for example, entered the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Sèvres in 1893, passed the agrégation exam, and worked as a schoolteacher before she wrote her trilogy on women’s public schools in 1900. Colette attended a provincial public school in her native Burgundian village of Saint-Sauveur-en-Puisaye from 1880 to 1890 before marrying, moving to Paris in 1893, and writing the four novels of the Claudine series from 1899 to 1903. Others wrote historical or political documents and gave public lectures on women’s access to higher education and the professions. Louise-Marie Compain, a well-known activist for women’s labor law, published La Femme dans les organisations ouvrières (Woman in Workers Organizations) in 1910, which discusses the role of women in the different unions that existed at the turn of the century. Gabrielle Reval’s L’Avenir de nos filles (The Future of Our Daughters, 1904) lists the pros and cons of different professions that had recently opened up to women. Daniel Lesueur (pseud. for Jeanne Lapauze) also wrote on women and work at the turn of the century: L’Évolution féminine; ses résultats économiques (Feminine Evolution: Economic Results, 1905).

The new education system for girls thus produced a new mass of readers and writers, but probably most important, it also produced new careerists. Before public schooling, young girls with no family resources who had to find work often went into domestic employment as personal maid, cook, nursemaid, or la bonne à tout faire (general housemaid). Generally, they worked long hours for low wages and lived far from their own families, sometimes in deplorable conditions. The bonne à tout faire whose responsibilities included cleaning, shopping, cooking, and serving most often worked in petit

21. Margadant also explains that the switch to a single curriculum in the 1930s, while benefiting female students who wanted to receive the male baccalauréat degree, would also have some negative results. In particular, the first generations of women schoolteachers and administrators were affected since their training was considered antiquated before they had reached retirement age.

22. The women novelists that I have chosen to study were all of the same generation (six were born between 1869 and 1878), with similar educational backgrounds and middle-class origins. For more biographical information on the nine writers, see Appendix 1.
bourgeois households. Their tasks were grueling, amounting to thirteen or fifteen hours per day, and the young woman’s life often remained at the mercy of her employers (Martin-Fugier 19–21). By the turn of the century, a great shortage of domestic help existed in Paris and all over France. Historian Martin-Fugier claims that this lack of employable maids was mainly the result of an increase in demand by petit bourgeois families, who desired a domestic servant for the prestige of being served. She notes that there were numerous petit bourgeois households at the end of the nineteenth century whose incomes were scarcely higher than that of the proletariat, and who thus found it urgent to distinguish themselves from the working classes by hiring a general household maid (36). Martin-Fugier finds that some petit bourgeois would even sacrifice eating nutritionally balanced meals in order to be able to hire a live-in maid and feel as though they belonged to the bourgeoisie (100–101).

With the new century, a new style of domestic help is portrayed in novels, for example, in Octave Mirbeau’s Journal d’une femme de chambre (Diary of a Chambermaid; 1900). The protagonist, Célèstine, recounts her daily life in a bourgeois manor in the provinces, revealing and analyzing the numerous sexual and moral depravities of her employers, neighbors, and village acquaintances. The tone and content of Célèstine’s diary rendered Mirbeau’s work scandalous in the eyes of his contemporaries. Yet the novel may also be considered subversive because it portrayed a literate maid, one who knew how to read and write well. Although no one may have believed it, the preface stated that Célèstine wrote the entire volume of diary entries, while Mirbeau acted only as the “editor” for the work (Mirbeau 31). Mirbeau presented Célèstine as a heroine who enjoys reading fiction, one who includes comments in her diary about novels she has just finished reading. She also confides to her diary that she finds her “peers”—other maids, servants, and valets from the town—rather dull. To distinguish herself from them, she refers to her urban background and specifically to her education and ability to read: “Upbringing, rubbing shoulders with chic people, the habit of beautiful things, reading Paul Bourget’s novels, have saved me from these turpitudes.” Even though his tone may be somewhat condescending, Mirbeau created a plausible fictional example of a modern and literate maid for his contemporaries. His protagonist reflects the historical fact that the literacy rate continued in an upward trend among women of the working classes and increased considerably every year during this time period.

23. “L’éducation, le frottement avec les gens chics, l’habitude des belles choses, la lecture des romans de Paul Bourget, m’ont sauvée de ces turpitudes” (Mirbeau 94).
Given Mirbeau’s example of the literate maid who feels “above” her peers, we can present an alternative hypothesis for the domestic-help shortage of the Belle Epoque: with a brevet in hand, working-class women were finding more desirable careers opening up for them. Even though they still represented a restricted choice, the new jobs appeared more prestigious, less grueling, and better paying than the standard domestic servant job. Uzanne’s “sociological” study of Parisian women from his time is divided into chapters according to profession, with such title chapters as “Ouvrières de Paris” (Women Workers of Paris), “Marchandes et boutiquières” (Women Merchants and Boutique Owners), “Demoiselles et employées de magasin” (Women Shop Employees), and “Dames d’administration” (Ladies of the Administration), which included telephone operators, hospital staff, railroad personnel, typists, and office workers.

Teaching became by far the most popular new profession for women at the turn of the century, probably in part because of the very visible role model that women schoolteachers provided to young girls. This was no surprise, given the government’s goals in forming women schoolteachers. More and more histories of the Third Republic’s educational goals reveal the wide-ranging socialization strategies that the key governmental reformers and their opponents were struggling to make during this period. The government’s efforts included reforms of the guidelines for morals and behavior. School children, of course, were the target for many of the new lessons in ethics and rules of conduct to follow, but equally fascinating is the amount of time devoted in certain pedagogical manuals to setting down rigid guidelines for the behavior and living patterns of the schoolteachers, who appear to be in as much need of reform as the children in some cases.24

Because all girls from ages six to thirteen now attended school six days each week, their biological mothers would rather obviously exercise less influence over them. The governmental reformers did not mean to deprive girls of a maternal influence by separating them from their mothers; in fact, it was assumed that all women had innate motherly qualities, and that female schoolteachers could therefore present maternal role models naturally in the classroom to their students (Clark 18). One of these reformers, Jules Rambosson, writing in 1873, even suggests two years of teaching as the best training method for would-be mothers after they had finished

24. For more detail on the attention paid to the moral and behavioral guidelines for school teachers, see Linda Clark’s Schooling the Daughters of Marianne (1984) and Jo Burr Margadant’s Madame le Professeur.
their own formal schooling, since such a training period would provide hands-on work with children (Rambosson 99). The Third Republic’s institutionalizing of the definition of mothering would have serious long-term effects on girls and women in the Belle Epoque. An obvious example of this maternal modeling can be found in Gabrielle Reval’s heroine Marguerite Triel, in Sévriennes. In response to indirect messages from her professors, as Marguerite progresses in her studies to become a teacher, she shifts her emphasis from seeking out maternal professors and role models at her school to developing mothering qualities in herself.

In addition to role models, women schoolteachers were also expected to monitor the conduct of their pupils, as well as their own personal behavior. Historian Linda Clark notes, “Once on the job, woman school teachers should be exemplary in conduct, avoiding local disputes and gossip and keeping a distance from men” (Clark 1984, 16). In Chapter 3, I discuss the difficulties involved for most fictional schoolteachers in attempting to maintain a clean record of behavior, often because of public rumor but also because of personal needs. The private life of the unmarried woman school-teacher was usually sacrificed to her public duties as teacher and moral guide of her students.

Women’s teacher training schools generally recruited from the middle classes, since teaching still offered one of the few respectable employment opportunities for middle-class women during the Third Republic. Primary targets were female students who had finished primary and secondary school requirements with high grades but who were required to earn a living. The teaching profession also appealed to young girls of the working and peasant classes, especially because it appeared to be a step up in the world for them. Colette’s fictional character Claudine marvels at the fact that so many of her classmates are willing to sacrifice their health and youth by studying long hours indoors in order to become schoolteachers: “In order to not work

25. Rambosson also suggests hiring women teachers for other, more practical, considerations: he points out the fact that they would save the state some money, since, according to economic trends of the day, they would have to be paid only one-third the salary of men (Rambosson 98).

26. The post office and department stores also opened their low-level clerical and sales positions to young women during the last part of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. These positions, however, perceived as “dens of iniquity,” were not desirable jobs for women of the bourgeoisie, even though many women who worked there came from the lower ranks of the middle class. See, for example, Michael B. Miller’s discussion of “les demoiselles de magasin” in The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869–1920 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 192–97.
in the fields or at the loom, they had preferred to make their skins yellow and their chests hollow and deform their right shoulders” (Colette 2001a, 124). This statement from *Claudine à l’école* reflects the reality in France: the number of young women applying for teaching positions at the turn of the century outnumbered the positions available by astounding percentages. Lesueur mentions that a call for applicants in 1899 to fill 193 posts for female primary schoolteachers in the Seine department received 7,000 applications. As a result, some critics began to recommend that schoolteachers discourage young high school students from trying to enter the teaching field, since such a high demand existed for the few positions available (Lesueur 234–38). Yet due to the reigning pedagogical practices, where learning from role models prevailed, professors continued to encourage tacitly their students to become teachers.

In spite of the prestige and promise of an easier life, the teaching profession in reality was a difficult one, filled with long hours, low pay, poor living conditions, spiteful town citizens, and unsympathetic school administrators. Feminists, socialists, and even the president of the Republic spoke out on the inequity of the woman schoolteacher’s career. The newspaper *L’Action féministe* (*Feminist Action*) reports that on October 30, 1909, President Fallières spoke at the inauguration of the Hôtel de la Ligue de l’Enseignement (Hotel for the League of Education) on the necessity of women’s equality in French society: “I am among those who believe that women should be equal to men in social life. If the laws have not yet consecrated this equality, I wish that the difference in salaries that exists between women and men in society disappeared.” Not only were women schoolteachers paid less than their male counterparts, their teaching assignments and actual working hours were often longer. And the educator’s career was an isolating one for single women, sometimes leading to a life of solitude and depression. Emilie Carles, in her autobiographical account of her teaching career in the French Alps, *Une Soupe aux herbes sauvages* (translated as *A Life of Her Own*), discusses her loneliness during her initial years as a teacher in several tiny alpine villages, before her marriage and permanent assignment to a school in her home town (Carles 89–91, 125–26). These facts were translated in the

27. “pour ne pas travailler dans la terre ou dans la toile, elles ont préféré jaunir leur peau, creuser leur poitrine et déformer leur épaule droite” (Colette 133). For English translations of Colette’s *Claudine* series, I have used the White translation.

28. “Je suis de ceux qui pensent que les femmes doivent être à l’égalité avec les hommes dans la vie sociale. Si les lois n’ont pas encore consacré cette égalité, je fais des vœux pour que la différence des traitements qui existe entre les femmes et les hommes dans la société disparaîse” (Fallières 24–25).
fictional accounts of women schoolteachers as well: in every single women’s education novel that I examine in Chapter 3, the teachers all note problems with adjusting to their assigned school and town. In Louise-Marie Compain’s 1903 novel, L’Un vers l’autre (One Toward the Other), both the experienced school director and the heroine Laure Deborda, a novice in her first year as a schoolteacher, are the subject of menacing gossip by townspeople who are suspicious of the new “godless” professors. Marie-Thérèse Romane, the main protagonist of Esther de Suze’s 1902 novel, Institutrice (Schoolteacher), enjoys her new teaching job but must leave the school and the town after vicious rumors were spread that she has been involved in an affair with the mayor. This pattern in the novels, based on personal accounts of the teaching profession and cultural and social biases against unmarried women teachers, contributes to the production of a renunciation plot structure, essential for a deeper understanding of the novels as a genre.

In addition to the incentives to read, write, and teach, the opening of secondary schools for women sent out the message that women should be well educated and should have access to higher learning. With the new interest in university-level educations for women, other more prestigious professions, such as law and medicine, previously controlled by men, also became legally open to women during the turn-of-the-century period. Although some of these professional schools were now accessible officially, it must be noted that some remained closed to women, even to those who had earned the baccalaureat diploma, until after the Belle Epoque. Those schools that had “officially” opened their doors to women still held up many barriers to female applicants: it was common practice for the men in charge to discourage women from pursuing advanced degrees and from practicing the profession. To understand some of the reasons for the difficulties that women encountered when trying to enter these careers, it is helpful to first examine the numerous changes that these professions themselves underwent during the nineteenth century in France.

In many sociological and historical theories of professionalization, women’s entrance into the “free” professions is noticeably absent. By “free” professions, I mean the category known in French as les professions libres: law, engineering, and medicine, for examples. Women’s absence from sociological accounts of professionalization theory probably stems from the fact that women have been allowed into these professions only in the past century, and in significant numbers only in the past forty years. All professionalization theories, however, include some of the same general structures, processes,
and ideals involved in the creation and perpetuation of the professions. These basic structures will provide us with a clearer picture of the restrictive and regulated environment under which the supposedly “autonomous” professionals worked, an environment that is applicable to both men and women.

During the nineteenth century, certain high-status social groups felt they were losing their traditional stability and prestige. Beginning with Napoléon’s decree for the baccalauréat, new exams were created to control entrance to professional schools and thus to the liberal professions. They often reflected the classical and elite training found in some expensive preparatory schools, but particularly in Napoléon’s national system of lycées. Created in 1808 under the guise of a republican rhetoric of public education open to all (male) citizens, the baccalauréat almost immediately became “one of the most powerful stratifying devices in French society” (Weiss 20). The content of the baccalauréat focused on a classical curriculum and required, for example, that the philosophy questions be delivered in Latin (22), thus excluding candidates who had not engaged in traditional studies promoted by the lycées. It also reinforced the notion that a literary and classical education was essential for the formation of a “well-rounded” professional, even those involved in the sciences and law. There were obvious political reasons for requiring the classical education found in the state-run high schools, such as Napoléon’s wish to create order and hierarchy in his empire. But it also included an underlying prejudice for members of the upper classes, who had traditionally held positions in these professions. John H. Weiss notes that the baccalauréat not only provided barriers for the working classes, but created unity among different strata of the bourgeoisie as well (23). The baccalauréat thus required elitism and an implied disregard for practical or technical education. These qualities would affect the social status of students admitted to schools of law and medicine throughout the nineteenth and even into the twentieth centuries. For those students who did not have an upper-class background, there would often be socialization in school to identify with the bourgeoisie whose members considered themselves superior to the members of the commercial, agricultural, and industrial professions (23). Philip Elliott in his text *Sociology of the Professions* discusses the equal importance of status socialization when compared to role socialization in professional schools: “Role socialisation consists of training in the skills

29. See also Christophe Charle’s 1987 text *Les Elites de la République, 1880–1900.*
of a future role; status socialisation involves acquiring a more general social identity and patterns of behaviour acceptable to people in the future status position” (Elliott 77). Gaston Valran, a Belle Epoque author, confirms this emphasis on status socialization, and in particular the focus on professional work as a form of service rather than as a means for economic gain. In 1908 he wrote about the importance of a professional’s contributions to society: “We generally consider that one chooses to exercise a liberal profession, not for professional profit, but out of concern for social welfare.”

The combined importance of one’s status and behavior, in addition to one’s technical role, emerges from the historical view that professions and professional associations were formed and grew out of two opposing forces. First, there are the socially elite groups that had always claimed membership to professional classes, due to ideals of service to the crown, rather than to technical ability. Second, with the rise of industrial and commercial societies in the nineteenth century and their technical advances, a strong notion of professional knowledge and competence developed, especially in the latter half of the nineteenth century, according to Elliott. The results of these two forces were a combination of the two philosophies, which remain firmly in place today, so that the defining characteristics of professions, even now, contain, for example, the idea that doctors or professors or others involved in “the liberal professions” should dislike competition, advertising, and profit, and that they should believe in the principle of payment in order to work rather than working for pay (Elliott 52–53). Thus, although members of the liberal professions required some technical training, which placed them in the same category as members of commercial or industrial professions, they were socialized to identify with members of an elite class who focused on service.

Magali Larson’s work *The Rise of Professionalism*, in which she focuses on the developing relationship of new professions to the market, adds to this historical view of professionalization. She analyzes the act of creating a demand for new professional services and examines the control of this demand by professional organizations, with the help of the state. She explains that, unlike the early capitalist industries, the new professions “were not exploiting already existing markets but were instead working to create them” (Larson 10). In order to develop a credible reputation and eliminate nonprofessional competitors, the professions were required to standardize

---

30. “On estime généralement que l’on choisit d’exercer une profession libérale non pour en retirer un profit professionnel mais par souci de l’intérêt social” (cited in Vagogne 7).
their practices and to regulate the education of their members. In order to achieve these goals, they relied on state protection and state-enforced penalties against unlicensed practitioners, as well as on state-mandated “monopolies of competence” for universities and professional schools, which would be the only institutions allowed to confer diplomas on new members of the professions (15).

Although the previous comments apply specifically to men in professions, some of the same underlying characteristics are true for the women professionals portrayed in Belle Epoque novels. In literary works, the conflicts and the successes of women trying to enter traditionally male domains—law, medicine, engineering—quickly became the subjects of novels about women’s professional development. One of the first parallels with the general observations we have just made about the liberal professions is the fact that most of the female protagonists are either members of the bourgeoisie or aspire to that class. They usually hold such traditional bourgeois values as duty, responsibility, and service to one’s family and country. Although some protagonists must work in order to earn a living (especially those who are widowed or orphaned), most of the professional women claim a love for knowledge and service above all other goals. This second parallel, the general denial of any desire for wealth, fame, and competition is indeed part of the practice of status and role socialization that takes place during the years of professional training for both men and women. But such desires certainly do exist, and they are apparent to the husbands, parents, and colleagues who are close to the women professionals. Their situation is thus open to a different kind of attack than the one directed against schoolteachers, because they do not work for selfless reasons. Whereas schoolteachers are rarely portrayed as ladder-climbing competitors (the highest rank they could strive for was usually the directorship of a school), women lawyers, scientists, and researchers who have tasted even a small amount of success are often described as ravenous for renown in their field. Ambition may have been acceptable for men in the professions, as it implied an eagerness to serve both state and self, but in women, any desire for advancement was usually translated as aggressive and egotistical and as such was severely critiqued by supervisors and outsiders.

A third parallel to general practices in professionalism lies in the need for technical training. All of the protagonists studied in this book are deeply involved in clinical studies, lab experiments, and other practical applications of their professions. In Chapter 4, where the focus is on the “feminization” of the scientific and medical professions in France, each of the professional
development novels discussed is liberally sprinkled with technical jargon or scientific terms. All four novels narrate, in various degrees of detail, the educational process for the scientific professions. Finally, many of the women who are portrayed as successful professionals have found a particular niche for themselves, as women, in the field of scientific study. The ability to find a new “market” for their skills and to maintain that they are particularly well trained for that market enables them to gain a certain authority in their field, as Magali Larson claims. For example, a prominent woman doctor in Yver’s *Princesses de sciences* (*Princesses of Science*) specializes in gynecology and women patients, or a young woman lawyer in Yver’s *Dames du Palais* (*Ladies of the Court*) earns a considerable reputation by gaining expertise in divorce law and child-custody cases. Thus, many of the general principles of the history and theory of professional development in Western Europe apply directly to the women protagonists in these novels.

In spite of some traits shared with general professional development theory in France, there remain several distinct differences in women’s professional experiences. In the battle to allow women to practice law in France, for example, it was not just role and status socialization that were essential for access into the legal profession, as a brief look at the historical case of Jeanne Chauvin demonstrates. Jeanne Chauvin, the first woman to defend a dissertation thesis in law in 1892, was refused admission to the bar and the right to try cases in 1897. Eugen Weber explains that after these refusals, Chauvin “went to court, and lost on the ground that the legal profession should be reserved for men, who alone exercised civic rights” (Weber 1986, 96). Such a court decision confirms Magali Larson’s theory that the professions must call on the state to aid in controlling the entrance of new members. The court in this case, however, was not eliminating a “nonprofessional” or “unlicensed” competitor; Mme Chauvin held the required degrees to practice and had undergone the necessary role and status socialization mandated by the legal world. Instead of pointing to unprofessional behavior or inadequate technical training, her lack of civic rights, based on her sex alone, was the reason for dismissing this potential lawyer. Later, in November 1900, following a shift in arguments, the National Assembly passed a bill allowing women to practice law, as Edmond Milland of *Le Figaro* noted. Milland’s report of the Senate debate that preceded the bill’s passage indicates that the shift made by the opponents eventually led to a weaker argument for them. While in 1897 one of the key components of the opposition’s line of reasoning had been Mme Chauvin’s lack of civic rights, based on her sex, the debate in 1900 centered on the character and
nature of women, which may be considered a socialized skill. M. Gourju, senator from the Rhône and opponent to women lawyers, stated, “women govern humanity with their beauty, their heart, their grace, and they must not envy the legal power of man.”

Their new position was easily attacked: M. Tillayre, the author of the bill, claimed that if women had stronger hearts than men, they would make better lawyers. He further noted that his appeal was not only for feminist reasons but also for “legitimate claims—the freedom of the professions.” Although the latter statement may appear to indicate his rather dubious belief that feminist reasons were not legitimate claims, the importance of upholding the “liberty” of the free professions stands out clearly. The vote following Tillayre’s speech passed the bill overwhelmingly: 172 to 34.

To demonstrate the enthusiasm for the new law, the front page of Le Petit Journal (no. 527, 23 décembre 1900) contained a full-page illustration of the first woman lawyer in France, Mme Petit, standing in the Appellate Court of Paris. It was reported that she went through the prestation de serment (oath taking) only twenty-four hours after the official decree was passed, so that she could join the bar and begin to practice law immediately (Le Figaro, 6 décembre 1900). Within the first several years, the number of women attorneys in France increased, but not considerably. An article titled “The Beginnings of Women Lawyers” (“Débuts des femmes avocats”) in the September 1905 issue of La Vie Heureuse reports that only four women had chosen to exercise their right to practice law in France. And in 1910, Camille Pert’s study found that after the first years of the century, the numbers had leveled off, probably due to the continuing resistance from male lawyers and law students, and to social and cultural definitions of women’s nature that would prohibit them from pursuing a career in law. Yet the right to practice law was considered a remarkable victory for the women’s rights movement of the early twentieth century (Weber 1986, 96).

That feeling is evident in the voice of the book reviewer for La Vie Heureuse who criticized Gustave Hue’s novel, L’Avocate (The Woman Lawyer, 1903). The reviewer is angered because the protagonist, Jeanne Hardy, was never shown trying cases in the courthouse. The heroine’s decision to abandon her law career also disappointed the reviewer, who felt that the opportunity

31. “les femmes gouvernent l’humanité avec leur beaute, leur coeur, leur grace, et elles ne doi-
32. “revendications légitimes—la liberté des professions.” Ibid.
for women to practice law was an important right that needed to be promoted rather than critiqued in literature. She chastised Hue for neglecting to underline this message in his book “because the career of the woman lawyer is one that is accessible to women and because today women have more and more need to earn a living . . . he [Hue] proves nothing against the practice of the austere legal profession by the women of tomorrow.”

This excerpt indicates the book reviewer’s wish to inform her reading public that the field of law was indeed open to women, and to encourage those readers who might be interested in pursuing a career in law. One further critique of Hue’s novel was that Jeanne Hardy was not realistically portrayed as a lawyer, since Hue had described his heroine as young and beautiful. Most lawyers, in the reviewer’s opinion, were neither (ix). A few years later the novelist Colette Yver published Les Dames du Palais (Ladies of the Court, 1909), in which she counteracts those stereotypical images: Yver develops portraits of a variety of women lawyers who are old and young, pretty and ugly, married and single. Thus in contrast to Pert’s statistics that showed a static number of women lawyers in France, Yver’s fictional account implies a blossoming of new women attorneys that allowed for many different types of women to practice law.

The medical profession also underwent turmoil and debate over the decision to allow women to practice. One might expect less resistance from traditionalists, since mainstream social and cultural mores promoted the values of care and nurturance in women. These skills were required for the practice of medicine and part of both the role and the status socialization in medical school. In theory, the medical profession should have been considered an appropriate field for women, and the precedents set by the Empress Eugénie in the 1860s, when she authorized women’s admittance to the Ecole de Médecine de Paris by an imperial decree, would lead one to believe that by 1900 many women would be practicing medicine. Yet a relatively small number of women actually attended medical school or received a medical degree in the nineteenth century.

Weber notes that between 1882 and 1903 the number of women doctors in France showed only a small increase, from seven to ninety-five (Weber 1986, 95).

33. “parce que la carrière d’avocate est une de celles accessibles aux femmes et parce que, aujourd’hui, les femmes ont de plus en plus besoin de gagner leur vie . . . il [Hue] ne prouve rien contre l’exercice de l’austère profession d’avocate par les femmes de demain” (ix) (La Vie Heureuse, Supplément avec guide du lecteur 2, no. 1 [janvier 1903]: viii–ix). See also La Femme 25, no. 6, (15 mars 1903): 48.

34. Benefiting from the Empress Eugénie’s support, Madeleine Gibelin Brès was the first woman in France to receive a medical degree in 1870. One reason for the relatively small number of women
The new prestige and power of the medical doctor in French society, as demonstrated by Foucault and others, also brought out resistance and hostility from both male students and male doctors to the idea of women studying and practicing medicine. The sexual harassment of those women who did enter the medical profession was therefore well known and well documented at the turn of the century. Weber recounts an incident of a woman who had tried to enter medical school being burned in effigy by her classmates. Several authors from the Belle Epoque period wrote about women in the medical field: Colette Yver and Gabrielle Reval wrote on women studying or practicing as doctors, and Marcelle Babin wrote about a woman who studied to become a doctor, but ended up in the field of pharmacy. These authors address specifically the issues of harassment from male colleagues in school and on the job and about mistrust and hostility from clients. The main protagonist of *Pharmacienne* (1907), Danielle Dormeuil, openly discusses the disruptive behavior of the medical students at her school, which was intended to discourage her from attending classes and continuing her studies. She also unknowingly became the object of an unusual experiment devised by one of her own professors, an event that led to a long illness and her forced decision to switch to the field of pharmacy. The career of the pharmacist, because of its sedentary, storekeeper aspects, was considered a profession more suitable for women. In Colette Yver’s novel *Les Cervelines* (*The Brainy Women*, 1903), one of the heroine’s male classmates pays a waiter at a formal dinner to “accidentally” pour gravy all over her silk blouse. When she goes to the kitchen to clean up, the ringleader of the prank follows her there and steals a velvet collar from her in order to spread harmful lies about her, insinuating promiscuous behavior. The narrator comments that these pranks are signs of a deeper jealousy and hatred: “They [the male

in medical school is probably the fact that a baccalauréat was required to enter the universities. Public schools for girls did not award this diploma until 1924 (Moses 175).

35. I am referring, of course to Michel Foucault’s 1962 *La Naissance de la clinique*. Mainstream views of the country doctor, who emphasized reduced suffering and pain, were not prestigious, barely a cut above a tradesman: Charles Bovary, in *Madame Bovary*, is a good example of the lack of prestige and status for the country doctor. It was only with the rise of the clinics and professional schools that the power relations between patient and doctor changed dramatically in the nineteenth century. For further discussion, see Chapter 4 on women scientists and doctors.

36. For an historical account of discouragement of women in the medical profession, see Weber’s *France: Fin-de-siècle*, pp. 95–96.
students] were envious of her, of her intelligence, her science, her work. . . . They were—these lazy little ladies’ men, keen on their careers—so many enemies from whom she always had to protect herself.”

In January 1901, in an effort to combat the negative and injurious behavior against women in medical schools, a women’s school director named Mme Alphen opened a private hospital staffed entirely by female medical interns from her school. The journal *La Femme* reported that an all-female staff of medical interns would greatly reduce the tensions for women doctors in the abusive work environment of a mixed-sex hospital. Furthermore, the article noted that it would encourage women to develop their “special aptitudes” in medicine, perhaps implying the female traits of caring, healing, and nurturance, but could also have pointed to specialized “women’s” fields (gynecology, obstetrics, or pediatrics) (*La Femme* janvier 1901, 10).

One topic that has rarely been addressed in sociological theories of professional development until recently is the tension between domestic and professional work. This lack is perhaps due to the fact that male professionals, about whom most theories of professional development have been written, assumed that others (wife, parents, domestic help) would attend to the domestic affairs of their private lives and thus did not address this issue directly. For example, in an analysis of the centrality of work to the private lives of professionals, Elliott does indicate the correspondence between work and leisure time activities in the professions. In his study, however, he makes no mention of domestic or familial responsibilities or everyday activities in the private domain.

Turning to women’s professional development novels from the Belle Epoque, it becomes apparent that these traditional definitions of the professional were already out-of-date one hundred years ago. The preponderance

---

37. “ils (les étudiants) étaient envious d’elle, de son intelligence, de sa science, de son travail. . . . C’étaient—ces petits hommes paresseux, galants, âpres à leur métier—autant d’ennemis dont elle avait à se garder toujours” (Yver 1903, 146). A 1990 French novel, *Catherine Courage* by Jacques Duquesne, narrates the trials and triumphs of a turn-of-the-century woman doctor, demonstrating the continued fascination in France with women in the medical field of the Belle Epoque. Jacques Duquesne also wrote the screenplay for the four-and-a-half-hour televised version of the novel in 1993.

38. Based on a study of university professors, advertising executives, and dentists, Elliott claims that if the intellectual content of the profession and the amount of contact with professional colleagues are both high, the similarity between work and leisure activities will also be high. Thus, university professors will pursue hobbies during their leisure time that overlap with or are related to activities of their profession, as opposed to advertising executives and dentists, who usually choose hobbies that are very different from their professional activities (Elliott 138).
of concern with the home and of direct involvement in domestic decisions indicates that a dramatically different experience has existed for women professionals for more than a century. The fictional characters created during the Belle Époque often longed to find ways to combine the traditional duties of housewife and mother with the new responsibilities of their chosen professional career. When seeking a solution that would permit such a delicate balance of domestic and public work, the protagonists often modified their home environments. These novels include women researchers whose most important room of the house is their study and women doctors who built examination rooms and even laboratories in their homes. These professional women spend at least part of each day in the public domain, whether the lecture hall, the pharmacy, the hospital, or the clinic. Yet their rearrangement of their own homes permits them to stay in closer contact with domestic concerns and to oversee the daily management of private affairs. This arrangement not only reflected historical practices of the time but also indicates the novelists’ attempts to develop professional female protagonists who could be understood as nurturing or maternal characters. The goals and the challenges found in nonteaching professions, namely, the need to balance public and private duties, thus yield new types of professional heroines and conflicts in Belle Époque literature.

From this brief survey of the professional development of women in France, we can understand how the activities of heroines in certain Belle Époque novels reflected the changes that were occurring in French society. Not only did the heroines engage in new fields of study and work, they also discussed the challenges their careers presented to them and the discrimination they confronted. The novels’ popularity and proliferation may have been a result of how closely they paralleled the changes in the political and social realms of French culture: they thus act as a bridge in Belle Époque studies between fictional women characters in the domain of literature and active women students and professionals in the domain of social history.

Before considering the relation of these novels to the culture that produced them, it is crucial to first look at their status as literary objects. For clues to what made these topics and these women writers so popular during the Belle Époque—and then so forgettable in literary histories of the era—it is necessary to study the key narrative and generic elements of this particular subgenre of the bildungsroman, or coming-of-age novel.
Although the women writers have been forgotten, several major male authors from the end of the nineteenth century who wrote novels in the form of the berufsroman are still studied and read today. The women novelists who followed them created new plots and different character types, thus a brief survey of the typical literary devices and protagonist profiles found in the bildungsroman will help to illuminate the reasons why women's novels appealed to the Belle Epoque readers of France and offer an explanation for their absence from most twentieth-century literary histories of the Belle Epoque.