Career Stories

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women writers who discussed Yver’s *Princesses de science* did not give it unanimous praise. The novelist and journalist Camille Marbo wrote a fairly severe critique of the work in her article “La Femme intellectuelle au foyer” (“The Intellectual Woman at Home”), published in the August 1907 issue of the *Vie Heureuse* magazine, only one month after Yver’s novel had appeared in print. Marbo not only gives a list of Parisian women who both work and have a successful marriage and family life, but she critiques Colette Yver’s heroine Thérèse Guéméné and her friend Dina for abandoning their intellectual pursuits to take care of their husbands.

In her rebuttal to Marbo’s piece, which appeared in *La Vie Heureuse* two months later (October 1907), Yver defends her decision and explains that she was not proposing the more “humble” woman as the ideal. Her appeal to the reader is direct: “Certain unprepared readers saw in the novel the disapproval of the intellectual woman. That is an error that could dishonor the work and that the author asks to rectify. If in this book, in opposition to a princess of science, a very simple woman rises up, one who is more apt than the first to make a man happy, one should not believe that this humble and touching creature was imagined as the symbol, the ideal proposed in conclusion.” Thus in her response to Marbo, Yver denies the idea that she believes all intellectual women *should* choose husband and family over career.

So the question remains: why did these authors—Yver, Reval, Compain, or Tinayre—include such conformity in the conclusions to their narratives? Were they perhaps being “practical,” “descriptive” or “prescriptive?”

1. “Certaines lectrices légèrement prévenues ont vu dans ce roman la réprobation de la femme intellectuelle. C’est là une erreur qui pourrait le déshonorer et que l’auteur demande à rectifier. Si dans ce livre, en opposition avec une princesse de science, surgit une très simple femme, plus apte que la première à faire le bonheur d’un homme, il ne faudrait pas croire que cette humble et touchante créature ait été imaginée comme le type, l’idéal proposé en conclusion” (Yver, *La Vie Heureuse* 6, no. 10 [octobre 1907]).
While all three of these hypotheses have tempted critics, both in the past and more recently, all three crumble upon closer analysis. First, we may ask if these authors were being “practical,” that is, were they hoping to satisfy the demands of a conservative editor or reading public by including a renunciation of career and public life for women at the end of their novels? Certain recent critics, such as Jennifer Waelti-Walters, have suggested this possibility (Waelti-Walters 177), but I believe that this proposal falls short, in part because written proof between editors, readers, and authors has never been firmly established. Even if such a correspondence were to be discovered, it would leave the larger question unanswered: why would a conservative reading public or a traditional editor who does not approve of professionally active women allow for a positive portrayal of working heroines throughout the majority of the text? How could the renunciation of career in the last few pages be enough to satisfy such a group? A second hypothesis is that these women writers were being merely “descriptive,” that is, they were outlining the actual difficulties that women professionals faced in the current social context. But this hypothesis also falls flat, at least for women in the sciences, since Marie Curie and other prominent women scientists demonstrated clearly to their contemporaries that women did not have to renounce their careers in order to maintain a happy marriage and a family. Critics have also pondered the possibility that these writers were being “prescriptive,” that is, they were suggesting that women ought to behave in this way. The majority of critics who have accused these writers of antifeminist tendencies probably believed this attitude to be the case, from Simone de Beauvoir to recent critics and historians. This idea, however, is also not convincing. Colette Yver herself explains clearly in the Vie Heureuse article cited above that she is not recommending this decision for all professional women. Most of the authors considered in this book had husbands and/or children, and yet they continued to write and publish novels and other materials (plays, articles, essays, and so on). If these writers truly believed that women ought to give up their careers when they got married, why did they not do so themselves? Literary critic Diana Holmes has noted that such a stance is at odds for women writers who obviously had not made the choice, and who had continued as both married women and

as professional writers (Holmes 1996, 53–54). How then do we explain the gap between historic living conditions and fictional portrayals of women professionals?

Given the unsatisfactory nature of these different hypotheses, I will return to my original thesis: these women writers chose these types of endings because they lent a new type of dramatic tension and complexity to the narrative structure of their novels and helped to forge a new form of literary text during the Belle Epoque. Such a premise is confirmed when we examine portraits of professional women writers in texts from this era. If a renunciation of the career were to be applied to novels containing a woman writer, such a plot device might appear to undermine the author’s own professional career. But most women writers of the Belle Epoque did not embrace the abandonment of the writing career in their fictive works that portrayed women journalists, novelists, or playwrights. Without that renunciation plot device, however, how is one to make such a text interesting or appealing to the reader? What new narrative structures did they create in order to allow for romance and quest plots to coexist throughout the novel? And how did they demand more complex solutions and create a series of negotiations for their writing heroines, involving both the private and public status of the protagonist? Below, I will examine three different depictions of women writers: Eugénie Lebrun in Yver’s *Les Cervelines* (1903), Josanne Valentin in Marcelle Tinayre’s *La Rebelle* (1905), and Renée Néré in Colette’s *La Vagabonde* (1910). Each protagonist takes a different path to resolve the typical problems presented to women professionals, combining a self-sufficient attitude about their personal lives with a unique awareness of their public roles as culture producers in French society.

When compared to the female protagonists in the other novels studied so far, these characters are unusual in many ways. They are not pioneers in their field because women writers had existed for some time in France and were even occasionally represented in French literature: Balzac’s Camille Maupin (the nom de plume for Félicité Des Touches) in *Béatrix* (1839) and Maupassant’s journalist Madeleine Forrestier in *Bel Ami* (1885), for example.

3. For a brief plot summary of each novel, see Appendix 2. There were other creative works during the time about women writers, including some by male authors: the brothers Margueritte in 1899 published the novel *Femmes nouvelles* about an all-women-staffed newspaper (probably based on *La Fronde*); Roberts discusses the theatrical successes *La Fronde* (1900) by Lucien Besnard and *La Femme seule* (1912) by Eugène Brieux (Roberts 2002, 44–45). Also, in the more general category of Künstlerroman, or novel of artistic development, there is the 1906 novel by Gabrielle Reval, *Le Ruban de Vénus* about a woman artist at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.
But women writers were still relatively rare in France during this time period, and certainly they were not included in the Académie or other exclusive circles for *hommes de lettres*. Furthermore, in contrast to the scientists and teachers studied in preceding chapters, the women writers portrayed in these novels are fairly experienced producers of culture in their society. Therefore, the plotlines focus less on the professional *development* of the protagonists than in other novels studied thus far. In fact, since there is no formal training to become a writer, we find no descriptions of classroom scenes, professors, or peers in these texts. Mentor relationships are important in *La Vagabonde* (Renée and Brague) and *La Rebelle* (Josanne and Mlle Bon), yet they remain secondary for most of the narrative. Certain major professional events do arise, such as an important publication or a critical review of a new work, but the apprenticeship phase of the career process is largely completed. Instead, the reader sees day-to-day work patterns, and the technical side of the female *berufsroman* comes out most clearly in these sections of each text. The reader also witnesses significant midcareer shifts that take place for these women in the arts, such as Josanne’s promotion to full-time investigative reporter.

A second major difference between these protagonists and those of the education and scientific novels is that these women have already been married when the novels begin; two (Eugénie and Renée) are divorced at the beginning of the narratives, and Josanne is soon widowed. All three have had the chance to be naively in love, and all three have grown wary of the “charms” of married life. All three soon confront new men who will demand their attention, their love, and their lives. Thus, the romance plot is still present in all three narratives, but it is seen from the viewpoint of a more experienced widow or divorcée.

Finally, these novels about women writers and artists include a significant role for the writer’s audience. The readers’ and spectators’ social and economic class holds a primary function in the ways that the protagonist understands her professional role and the needs and desires of her private life. Many education and scientific novels focus on the heroine’s status in French society and in relation to her future peers and colleagues, but without regard for the status of her students or her patients. The three protagonists we will study in this chapter work for audiences from different social and economic classes, and each audience has an important impact on her personal and professional development. Renée Néré, in *La Vagabonde*, has switched careers from novelist to mime, and as the text begins, she is preparing for a performance in a Parisian music hall for a popular, mainly
working-class audience. Josanne Valentin, in *La Rebelle*, is a journalist for a women’s magazine titled *Le Monde féminin* and writes her fashion pieces and interviews for a primarily petit bourgeois audience of women who live in the provinces. Eugénie Lebrun, in *Les Cervelines*, writes her successful novels and plays for a privileged and wealthy bourgeois audience in Paris. Each one is portrayed as a marginal woman in French society, but whether she is a rebel, a vagabond, or a brainy woman, each heroine carves a different niche for herself in Belle Epoque culture, due in part to her relationship with her audience. The public and professional roles of these women shape the choices they make in their private lives. Studying the protagonists’ roles both as producers and as consumers of culture allows for a better understanding of the negotiations that each novel makes between conflicting romance and quest plots. Accordingly, I have divided this chapter into two sections: the first part focuses on the characters’ professional roles and their relationships to their audiences; the second part will examine their private lives and the ways in which their personal decisions are shaped by their work in the public sphere.

The Writer’s Career: An Art or a Living?

In Yver’s *Les Cervelines*, we find a direct confirmation of the notion that members of the dominant class desire an affirmation of their values and lifestyle in the art they consume. The reactions to Eugénie Lebrun’s recent literary work specifically include a reference to the upper-class audience: “That year she had a sensational success with her novel, *The Ankles*. In it, love abounded, streamed, overflowed. The spirit of the times was understood by

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4. Pierre Bourdieu, in his 1984 study *Distinction*, claims that cultural production aimed at the dominant fractions of society (the wealthier bourgeois class) usually coincides with and confirms those groups’ expectations. The dominant class in a society seeks not only “distinction,” as Bourdieu labels it, but also reinforcement of its own values and practices (Bourdieu 1984, 293). In contrast, the dominated classes in a society take on two opposing attitudes, depending on their relation to the dominant class. The working class follows what Bourdieu calls “the choice of the necessary.” Its behavior implies a cultural taste restricted by economic boundaries. For Bourdieu, that behavior extends beyond simple financial concerns and develops into a system of taste in itself, often in opposition to those cultural tastes deemed “legitimate” by the dominant class (374–75). Two defining qualities of this dominated working class, according to Bourdieu, are thus solidarity with the group and the “bon vivant” personality (394). The other dominated class, the petit bourgeois, follows the practice of “cultural goodwill.” Bourdieu explains the difficult position of members of this class: “Uncertain of their classifications, divided between the tastes they incline to and the tastes
deciphering the enigma of the title: *The Ankles.* We knew what it was about. The wealthy bourgeois audience for whom Eugénie Lebrun writes, embodied in the impersonal pronoun *on* (we), knows what she is talking about; they have a clear understanding of the “enigma” of the title, the subject matter of the novel, and the reflection that the work gave of the “spirit of the times” (*l’état d’esprit de l’époque*). The novel thus reinforces their cultural practices. It is interesting to note that Yver indicates indirectly that the type of reader she expects might be reading *Les Cervelines* belongs to the petit bourgeois or working classes, rather than the bourgeois sectors of French society. Her narrator states that “we” knew what the title meant, but then goes on to explain what the double meaning of *les chevilles* is (ankles/linchpins) to her readers: what they are “in the theater, for the author of a play, and what they must be in the passions of a man’s life.” With this clarification by her narrator, Yver reveals her assumption that the readers of *Les Chevilles* might lack the necessary cultural capital to be able to understand the dual meaning of the novel’s title.

This text by Eugénie Lebrun becomes a great success among the ruling classes, which would generally include the category of professional doctors and scientific researchers. The well-known Dr. Ponard, for example, demonstrates that he has read and enjoyed a number of her works, citing titles of Eugénie’s past successes at the beginning of the narrative when he is explaining who she is to his younger colleague Jean Cécile. Ponard mentions her recent plays, rightfully assuming that Dr. Cécile will know of them. They aspire to, the petit bourgeois are condemned to disparate choices” (326). The petit bourgeois is usually more adamant and allows for less variation in appreciation and consumption of culture.

Bourdieu also outlines two distinct positions among the producers of culture, which are usually in battle with one another to define legitimate art and culture (Bourdieu 1993, 40). Authors are divided into success and failure based not only on economic profit, but also on the type of audience to whom they appeal: “Authors who manage to secure ‘high-society’ successes and bourgeois consecration are opposed to those who are condemned to so-called ‘popular’ success—the authors of rural novels, music-hall artists, chansonniers, etc.” (46). Those who produce “art for art’s sake” are therefore usually considered more important than those who produce a “bourgeois” or “popular” art. Two of the three portraits of Belle Epoque women writers included in this chapter provide striking examples of a heroine’s move back and forth, from a producer of “art for art’s sake” to that of a “bourgeois” or “popular” artist. These fictional portraits are not only of the women as producers of culture; their positions as consumers of culture, in fact, often lead to a contradictory movement between the two poles or, at the least, the temptation to do so.


6. “au théâtre pour l’auteur d’une pièce, et ce qu’elles doivent être dans la vie passionnelle d’un homme” (Yver 1903, 38).
Her identity is thus directly linked to her famous works: “Who is she? . . . Why it’s Pierre Fifre, the author of ‘Peasants,’ of ‘Madeleine-Capucine,’ you know, last year’s success at the Odeon.” Jean Cécile’s surprise (“Pierre Fifre, a woman?”) does not come from a lack of recognition, but rather from the revelation of two new facts. First, the woman whose broken ankle he has just treated is not a courtesan, as he had assumed from the demimondaine appearance of her apartment, she is instead a successful writer. Second, the true sex of the author of these theater hits is revealed abruptly, possibly changing Dr. Cécile’s interpretation of the works. Eugénie’s practice of taking on a masculine nom de plume, common for the time period, allowed her the role of cultural producer that might have been denied or misinterpreted because of her sex.

Yver portrays Eugénie as both a producer and a consumer of culture, although she does not place her in the same class for both roles. Eugénie has given up much of her economic privilege as a consumer of culture by divorcing a wealthy banker. She is quite content, however, with her new status and cultural capital as a writer for the bourgeoisie. She describes her feeling of liberation after her divorce, claiming that she felt intoxicated by freedom and happiness, and happier to be free at twenty-eight than she was when in love at age twenty (Yver 1903, 37). Eugénie’s description of her daily routine further demonstrates her contentment with her new life: “My solitude is agreeable to me. I can pursue my internal dreams. Often I return home, walking in a golden vision, in the unreal, moved by the great Parisian scenery that has never ceased to enchant me. . . . After that I devote myself to work. Nothing disturbs me, nothing comes to offend or demolish these exquisite sensations and this illusory world that I see.”

These declarations announce that Eugénie’s divorce has provided her, as a consumer of culture, with greater cultural capital in exchange for less economic privilege. The quest element has won the battle in Eugénie’s story. While the romance plot remains an important ingredient in the sophisticated plays and novels that she writes, it is of secondary importance in her personal life.


8. “Ma solitude m’est agréable. J’y poursuis mon rêve intérieur. Souvent je rentre chez moi, marchant dans une vision d’or, dans l’irréel, émue du grand décor parisien qui n’a jamais cessé de m’enchanter. . . . Après je me donne au travail. Rien ne me trouble, rien ne vient heurter ni démolir l’architecture de ces sensations exquises, de ce monde illusoire que je vois” (Yver 1903, 43).
In contrast to her status as a consumer of culture, Eugénie Lebrun’s status as a producer of culture retains links with the dominant economic and political class. Her literary successes indicate that she has not entirely relinquished her access to the power and prestige of this group. Dr. Ponard tells Jean Cécile that Eugénie earns money “like a man” with just a few strokes of the pen (Yver 1903, 21). In the field of cultural production, therefore, Eugénie creates literature and drama that not only appeals to but is also well compensated by the dominant class. The narrator includes details of her writer’s block and various other struggles as an artist who creates art for art’s sake.9 These passages indicate the work of a writer who is not concerned with deadlines or profits, but with inspiration, creative production, and artistic talent. Yet the overwhelming emphasis is placed on the stock types that she creates, the details that she uses to reproduce a realistic image of the haute bourgeoisie, and the personalities of her friends whom she examines and imitates when constructing characters for her new works. Her habit of writing personal dramas and romances into fiction has blurred the boundaries between the fictional and the real world, leaving her too dispassionate and analytical for men, such as Jean Cécile, who fall in love with her. This is one of the main reasons why the romance narrative never advances in this section of Yver’s text.

Renée Néré, in *La Vagabonde*, begins as Eugénie had begun: with a divorce, reduced economic power, and a certain critical and bourgeois success in writing literature. For several reasons, however, she moves deliberately away from her bourgeois audience, taking the opposite path, straight to the working-class music halls. In contrast to Eugénie, Renée appears to prefer her “condemned” status as a “popular” star in the music hall, as sociologist Pierre Bourdieu labeled such a position (Bourdieu 1991, 46). One of the main reasons for Renée’s decision to give up writing is that she had become a writer while she was married and therefore considers the practice of writing a luxury, an activity for women of the leisure class who have hours to spend hypnotized on the couch, forgetting time and concentrating only on creating new “treasures” for the blank page (Colette 1984b, 1074).10 Colette confirms the

9. “Elle le tenait au courant de ses mécomptes, de ses délicates souffrances d’artiste, de ses lasitudes, de ses cruelles intermittences de talent” (She kept him apprised of her disappointments, her delicate artist’s suffering, her lasitude, her cruel intermittent talent.) (Yver 1903, 30).

10. “Ecrire. . . . C’est le regard accroché, hypnotisé par le reflet de la fenêtre dans l’encrier d’argent, la fièvre divine qui monte aux joues, au front, tandis qu’une bienheureuse mort glacée sur le papier la main qui écrit. Cela veut dire aussi l’oubli de l’heure, la paresse au creux du divan, la débauche d’invention d’où l’on sort courbatu, abêté, mais déjà récompensé, et porteur de trésors qu’on décharge lentement sur la feuille vierge, dans le petit cirque de lumière qui s’abrite sous la
statement made by her contemporary Camille Pert, who believed that women did not pursue journalism or writing as a full-time career because there was not enough financial security in that line of work (Pert 298). Rather, it was a leisure-time activity that occasionally produced a bestseller.

The act of writing for Renée had also been a means of isolating herself from her surroundings, a way to avoid dealing with her crumbling marriage. She confesses to her diary that suffering and writing seemed to go hand in hand: “I settled down to suffering with an unyielding pride and obstinacy, and to producing literature” (Colette 2001b, 27). Renée’s literary endeavors were therefore not a planned career move but an escape technique that was temporarily soothing. Thus Renée conceives her writing more as art for art’s sake, rather than as a product for bourgeois consumption.

In some ways, Renée even denies the quest element in her early writing career, dismissing her literary success as something fleeting, based on the dubious judgment of critics whose opinions were always opposed to hers. Her own opinion of her first novel indicates some condescension, related to the work’s incredible success among the “tout Paris,” and she calls it “a chaste little novel of love and marriage, slightly insipid and very agreeable, which had an unexpected and extravagant success” (Colette 2001b, 27). The adjectives “little” (petit), “insipid” (serin) and “agreeable” (gentil) are mildly mocking and demonstrate Renée’s lack of enthusiasm for her bourgeois hit. But she does mention that her first work’s great success encouraged her to write a second and even a third novel, although they both sold less well than the first. Her second work, lacking positive public reception, had a readership mainly of other authors. Here, her audience was reduced to other gens de lettres, but it still carried some renown. Her third novel was neither a bourgeois hit nor an artistic success, but it remains her own favorite, and she calls it her “private unrecognized masterpiece” (mon chef d’oeuvre inconnu à moi) (Colette 2001b, 28; Colette 1984b, 1085). Renée thus indicates that writing for the sake of a reading public (whether bourgeois,
intellectual, or artistic), and as a potential vocation, never presented itself as a viable option. She describes herself as “a woman of letters who has turned out badly” (une femme de lettres qui a mal tourné) (Colette 2001b, 14; Colette 1984b 1075). As is typical of the traditional bildungsroman plotline, circumstances in Renée’s life have required her to make a detour from her initial goals, and the “false start” caused by her divorce has led her to choose mime performance as an alternative career path.

As a divorcée, Renée has switched over to the supposedly more dependable working atmosphere in the music hall, yet the idea that mime and dance performances might provide a more stable income than writing appears to be only part of the reason why Renée has changed careers, especially when we consider the many uncertainties and difficulties involved in the life of a music hall performer. This profession is also based on approval by an unknown audience but includes harsher physical circumstances: strenuous physical training and rehearsals, cold dressing rooms, uncomfortable traveling arrangements, short contracts without guarantees of renewal. Renée herself notes the pitiable example of noble suffering and rejection of one of her colleagues, Antoniew and his three dogs, who may not be invited to return for a second season: “Nothing could be sadder, more dignified, or more disdainful than this man and his three creatures, proudly resigned to their wandering lot. . . . Tenderness, like rest and security, is for us an inaccessible luxury” (Colette 2001b, 38–39).

The working conditions in the music halls of Paris seem to be filled with as much uncertainty and disappointment as those in the life of a writer.

Despite this precarious existence, Renée claims that she loves her new career. Her description of the audiences, popular and sometimes boisterous, yet appreciative and goodwilled, provides some explanation for her satisfaction with her role as culture producer in the industrial arts. Throwing cheap bouquets of violets and applauding thunderously, the working-class crowd with its enthusiastic bon vivant attitude gives her confidence, and it remains sympathetic and admiring throughout the novel. In contrast, the occasional solo performances that she gives at private parties of the Parisian bourgeoisie make Renée uncomfortable and edgy, especially because they throw her back into her old milieu from which she feels she has been exiled by her divorce.

13. “Il n’y a rien de plus triste, de plus digne, de plus dédaigneux, que cet homme et ses trois bêtes, orgueilleusement résignés à leur sort de vagabonds. . . . Comme le repos et la sécurité, la tendresse est pour nous un luxe inaccessible” (Colette 1984b, 1093).
Renée describes the black mood and feeling of dread that hangs over her all day before a private performance that her agent has contracted for her and her mime partner, Brague. In that particular audience, Renée finds sitting in the very first row a woman who slept with her husband, then another in the second row, and a third farther back in the crowd. The women are all embarrassed and surprised to see Renée performing on the stage in front of them. The men in the audience may have been aloof and uncaring when she was a married woman of the dominant class, yet they now watch with curiosity and appetite as she performs half-nude for them in their living room (Colette 1984b, 1099). Renée, in contrast, is disgusted and angry, and she renders these faces from her past nameless, even in her thoughts. Although Renée is obviously the traitor along class lines, in her mind she accuses the women in the audience of sexual treason and the men of conspiracy (Colette 1984b, 1095). Her personal reasons for separating herself from this crowd are thus closely linked to her professional decision to give up bourgeois literature for the career of a mime. Renée prefers the drunken catcalls and the fist fights of working-class music halls to the sinister silence of the private bourgeois salon or the fickle approval of bourgeois literary critics. The impact that her marriage has had on her career path is reinforced here, along with the ways in which the earlier romance plot has affected her ability to carry out her quest for an independent life.

_La Vagabonde_, however, is an unconfessed elegy in praise of writing, since Renée is composing a “journal intime” (private diary) of her thoughts and experiences that eventually constitute the entire text of the novel. This renewed interest in her earlier career resurfaces as hints of her returning desire to write arise throughout the work: “From time to time I feel a need, sharp as thirst in summer, to note and to describe” (Colette 2001b, 14). Although Renée dismisses these desires as irrelevant or distracting to the tasks of living, paying the bills, and simply surviving, this writing activity continues to attach her to the artistic fractions of French society. In this manner, Colette re-embraces the writing profession even as her protagonist appears to spurn it.

In contrast, Marcelle Tinayre’s protagonist, Josanne Valentin, embraces her career in writing enthusiastically, following in the footsteps of her father, José Daniel. Josanne directs her work toward the lower classes, but with differing results than those of Renée. The audience of her women’s magazine,
Le Monde féminin, consists mainly of women from the petite bourgeoisie living in the provinces. Josanne mockingly describes the carefully crafted depictions of the “elite” that the editor, Mme Isidore Foucart, requires for the articles of Le Monde féminin: “In The Feminine World, all the women were pretty, almost all were virtuous; all the men were ‘talented;’ the worst ones had ‘children’s souls.’ Men and women, all were rich; they exhibited, in their suave ‘interiors,’ designer or couturier clothing. And their effigies, their biographies, so much fame and glory, stirred up the hearts of the little provincial women who subscribed to the magazine” (Tinayre 44–45).15 The strict limitations of a petit bourgeois set of tastes are obvious in Tinayre’s description: there can be no departures from conventional cultural stereotypes about the dominant class: all the women are pretty, all the men are talented, and all of them are rich. To maintain such a middle-brow version of culture, censure must often be imposed on writers and photographers at the magazine. In one scene at the offices of Le Monde féminin, for example, the editors must cancel an interview with a “Miss Brémond, great actress,” because she insisted that the magazine include with its biographical article two risqué photographs of herself that she happened to find amusing. Trying to explain why the pictures are impossible, the photographer points to the pudeur (modesty) of the subscribers of Le Monde féminin (43).

Although the writers rarely enter into direct contact with their readers, a moment arises in the offices of Le Monde féminin that illustrates the “disparate choices,” as Bourdieu labels them, of the petit bourgeois subscriber (Bourdieu 1984, 326). A woman verbally assaults Josanne and a number of other employees because she did not receive her bonus prize, a cheap handheld fan, with her annual subscription. She threatens to switch over to the newly founded Vie Heureuse or Fémina magazines in order to get her fan. As the staff passes her on from one to the other, they make disdainful remarks about her petty attitude and behavior: aspiring to a certain bourgeois ideal, yet inclining toward a working-class practice of “getting one’s money’s worth” (Tinayre 43).

Josanne’s class status at the magazine is not entirely clear-cut. Although her father’s reputation as a journalist places her in the intellectual or artistic population of the bourgeoisie, his early death has forced Josanne and her

mother into petit bourgeois or even working-class living conditions. As the novel begins, Josanne is the sole breadwinner for her own family, and her husband’s lengthy illness requires expensive medicine. She is thus required to lead an extremely frugal existence: she does her own marketing every morning; cleans the apartment herself; and the impulse purchase of *The Woman Worker (La Travailleuse)*, a book on women’s rights that she found intriguing, causes her anxiety about their monthly budget and a certain amount of regret. The feelings of the two directors of the magazine toward Josanne illustrate the dual class position that she maintains. On one hand, Mme Foucart does not like Josanne’s lower economic status, describing her as “poor, dressed indifferently, and very arrogant.” But her husband and co-director, M. Foucart, appreciates Josanne’s intellectual capital: “intelligent, courageous, exact, and proud:—a model employee and a ‘brave’ woman (une ‘brave’ femme)” (Tinayre 45–46). At the beginning of the novel, Josanne’s status as a general staff member reflects her ambiguous class status. Her assignments range from clerk to secretary to copy editor, but she does not complain about arriving at the bureau earlier than all the other reporters, nor does she find the variety of tasks that she must juggle for *Le Monde féminin* to be a burden (38). Tinayre’s label for Josanne, “l’employée à tout faire,” of course brings to mind the more menial employment of the *bonne à tout faire*, an underpaid domestic servant position held by overworked young women in many petit bourgeois households during the turn of the century. Josanne’s career and her attitudes do not fit the mold of the “exceptional” professional, such as the brainy women Jeanne Boerk or Marceline Rhonans. Nor is she well known publicly for her articles on women’s rights, like her colleague at the magazine, Mademoiselle Bon. At this early stage, her work is above all a source of income, to allow her to maintain her independent lifestyle and support her husband and child on her own. Thus she produces culture in a similar fashion to Renée in *La Vagabonde*.

Josanne’s first writing assignments are mainly limited to banal summaries of recent books for the book review section and to predictable forecasts about seasonal trends in women’s fashion, rather than investigative reporting or interviews with celebrities. She admits openly that her editor, M. Foucart, often pressures her into writing on topics that are not of great interest to her. In a letter to Noël Delysle, whose book *La Travailleuse* she reviewed, Josanne states that the opportunities for self-expression were rare (Tinayre 81). In one ironic scene, Josanne is writing a piece on the latest clothing styles when her worn blouse rips at the seams. At first she becomes upset, weary of being less fashionable than her well-dressed colleagues.
Yet she also notes the irony of the situation: mending her frayed old shirt while sitting in the beautiful offices of the magazine writing about haute couture and next season’s fashion which she herself could never afford. She even laughs as she thinks about what her petit bourgeois readers would think of her if they could see her in her tattered clothing (40).

Even when Josanne is promoted to “journaliste” and invited by M. Foucart to conduct interviews and do investigative reports for the magazine, she must still bring her writing style in to line with petit bourgeois cultural constraints. For example, when she visits the Villa Bleue, a home for unwed pregnant teenagers, M. Foucart gives her a cautionary piece of advice that contradicts the most basic tenets of investigative reporting, namely clarity, factualness, and truth: “Foucart had recommended that we ‘attenuate the stomachs’: ‘Remember that your article will be read by young women. They must not be able to understand anything.’ ”

Instead of informing the reading public, Josanne’s editor requires that she obscure the facts and keep her younger readers uninformed about the perils of unwed teenage motherhood. Mademoiselle Bon, who has encouraged Josanne to write this article and even accompanied her to the Villa Bleue, explains to the home’s director that women reporters cannot always write openly and expose the misery and horrors of other women in the world around them, mainly because of editors’ constraints: Foucart, for example, demands that charity be “discreet” and misery be “veiled” in his magazine (Tinayre 98–99). The subject matter of this particular article is problematic in many ways for the conservative tastes of the petit bourgeois audience. One of the only reasons Josanne has been allowed to pursue the topic is the fact that the Villa Bleue has been founded by a group of wealthy Parisian socialites, whom the readers of Le Monde féminin admire. The photographer for the article makes these society women the centerpiece of his portrait, along with several women doctors and administrators; the pregnant girls are included almost as an afterthought and mostly well hidden from view. He boasts about his clever placement of the teenagers’ stomachs, so that only the young pretty ones are truly visible, and none really look pregnant.

His work thus transforms into reality Foucart’s principles about discretion and obscuring the facts.

Josanne’s promotion to the position of journalist at *Le Monde féminin* thus does not give her artistic freedom. Her prose writing remains produced for and consumed by a specific class of reader. Josanne, however, does not renounce her career because of the censure or limits imposed on her writing. In fact, she professes no interest in creating art for art’s sake and no urges to write a novel or play on the side. In contrast to both Eugénie and Renée, who claim at least some artistic ability and originality, Josanne’s self-critique firmly denies any creative genius. At the same time, she affirms her journalistic talents, including her verve, spirit, and the ability to write clearly.

The portrayals of female culture producers in these three novels highlight the conventional features of their writing or performing careers. Although each woman is creative to a certain extent, she is also portrayed as aware of and accepting the constraints imposed by her particular audience, whether they are working-class, petit bourgeois, or bourgeois consumers. Thus, in their public or professional roles, unlike their scientific counterparts, these women are not recognizably “exceptional” individuals. In their personal lives, however, their values and attitudes about romance, love, and marriage remain outside the socially accepted norms of behavior. Each heroine devises her own system of principles to live by, and for each, her “rebellious” decisions in private are determined in part by her public position as a producer of culture.

**Self-Sufficient Women in Love**

Each of the writing protagonists studied here is tempted by a wealthy or professional man to abandon her artistic production for the economic privilege and security of a traditional female position in the dominant class. All three reject this offer, but for different reasons.

Josanne Valentin, as we have just seen, is hardly a rebelle when it comes to her professional life: she appears resigned to the production of a conservative journalism for her petit bourgeois readership. But in decisions concerning

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18. “If I had some talent, I would write books: I would tell truths, serious and sad, that only a woman can tell well. . . . Alas! I don’t have talent. . . . I write an article skillfully; I have a little verve and spirit, and experience. . . . But I lack the gift of achieving my imagination, I lack a creative faculty. . . . I would be a good advisor, perhaps a good collaborator.” (Si j’avais du talent, j’écritrais des livres; je dirais des choses vraies, graves et tristes, qu’une femme seulement peu bien dire. . . . Hélas! je n’ai pas de talent. . . . J’écris adroitement un article; j’ai un peu de verve et d’esprit, du métier. . . . Mais il me manque le don de réaliser mes imaginations, la faculté créatrice. . . . Je serais une bonne conseillère, peut-être une bonne collaboratrice [Tinayre 142].)
her personal life, she chooses actions that often fall outside the category of bourgeois convention, creating a truly subversive character. As the novel opens, Josanne’s illegitimate child Claude is two years old, her affair with the wealthy bachelor Maurice Nattier has gone on for five years, and her husband Pierre’s illness has been dragging on for eight long years. She is clearly at the end of her rope with both of these men, and as the narrator makes obvious, neither one is worthy of Josanne’s attentions. Josanne faithfully tends to her bedridden husband until the day he dies. Her life of sacrifice extends beyond “decent” bourgeois convention to include her own body, which she abandons to her husband’s desires, even as his diseased body disgusts and repulses her. Even in sex, Josanne feels a compulsive obligation to agree to his every demand (Tinayre 32). Tinayre’s portrait of Josanne’s husband resembles that of many of Yver’s male protagonists, a whining, egotistical brat whose self-pity and fits of rage, combined with his debilitating disease and reliance on ether and other addictive drugs, turn him into a decaying and wretched human being. The narrator inevitably leads the reader to feel pity for Josanne in her role of sacrificial wife.

Meanwhile, Josanne has maintained a romantic and picturesque love affair with Maurice Nattier, even though the possibility of marriage or a future life together seems very remote. Their love is described initially as “a discreet and delicate love, which perfumed Josanne’s dark life like violets perfume the woods in spring. It was a chaste and innocent love, very proud of resembling love that one finds in books” (Tinayre 6). As the narrator indicates, their love affair is typical, even novelistic, comparable to those found “in books.” Josanne’s attitude about extramarital sex is unconventional for a bourgeois housewife, much closer to the remarks emitted by professional courtesans, as she claims openly that she is not ashamed of

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19. “un amour discret, délicat, qui embauma la vie obscure de Josanne comme les violettes invisibles embaument les bois, au printemps. Ce fut un amour chaste et puéril, tout fier de ressembler aux amours qu’on voit dans les livres” (Tinayre 6).

20. Several passages make reference to the “literary” quality of Josanne’s life. For example, during one of her daily shopping trips through the local markets, Josanne comments that her neighborhood, in the Latin Quarter, seems to appear out of different French novels: “Josanne is sure that these people are Balzac characters who have come back. The phantom of Father Goriot descends parfois la montagne Sainte-Geneviève pour rentrer à la pension Vauquer. . . . Elle s’amuse à retrouver, après le Paris de Balzac, le Paris d’Eugène Sue. . . . La rue Mouffetard. . . . Elle achète son beurre chez la crémière au teint de lait . . . telle ‘Gervaise’ dans l’Assommoir.” (Josanne is sure that these people are Balzac characters who have come back. The phantom of Father Goriot sometimes comes down the Saint-Genevieve mountain to return home to the Vauquer Pension. . . . She enjoyed finding, after Balzac’s Paris, the Paris of Eugène Sue. . . . On Mouffetard Street. . . .
having an affair and is even pleased to say so. Her lover, Maurice, however, being rather conservative and hypocritical according to the narrator, is shocked by Josanne’s lack of guilt (6–7). Maurice’s selfish and unheroic character mutates into a contemptible portrait of immaturity and irresponsibility when he abandons Josanne as soon as she announces that she is pregnant with his child (9). When he reappears after the child’s birth, Josanne and he continue to meet occasionally for a quick hour or two of physical pleasure together, in hotel rooms or hasty carriage rides (23).

Josanne’s justifications for protecting her relationship, although complicated, indicate a personal philosophy to be true to herself and to her own desires and needs: “I cannot live without happiness. And the pleasure of sacrifice is not enough for me. . . . I am not a saint; I am not a heroine: I am a woman, very much a woman.”21 In surprising contrast to her humble acceptance of menial tasks and dull assignments at *Le Monde féminin*, Josanne boldly states that she has the right to satisfy her own wishes and goals in private, in addition to her obligations to care for her husband and child. She does not worry about what her petit bourgeois readers would think or what her bourgeois colleagues at the magazine would say if they knew about her affair with Maurice. Josanne clings to both men for a variety of reasons—love, responsibility, or pleasure—until Pierre’s death from cancer and the news of Maurice’s marriage to an engineer’s daughter, which follows quickly thereafter.

From the outset, Tinayre has modeled a female protagonist who is remarkable in her personal values and relationships. The man with whom Josanne eventually falls in love is equally an outsider to bourgeois conventions: Noël Delysle, whose study of working women, *La Travailleuse* (The Working Woman), appears to match her sentiments about women’s rights to work, love, and live as they choose. Her first contact with this man is intellectual, as she skims his text in a bookshop while waiting for a tardy Maurice to meet her. Delysle’s words inspire her as they confirm her own belief system, stating that a poor woman has the right to more than the three

21. “Je ne peux pas vivre sans bonheur. Et la volupté du sacrifice ne me suffit pas. . . . Je ne suis pas une sainte; je ne suis pas une héroïne: je suis une femme, très femme” (Tinayre 8).
basic necessities: she also has “the right to think, to speak, to act, to love as she wishes” (Tinayre 13). Her impromptu decision to buy *La Travailleuse* results in the propitious opportunity for Josanne to write a review of a text that she actually finds intellectually stimulating, and it provides an occasion for Delysle to write to her, thus initiating a long-distance correspondence.

When Josanne finally meets and falls in love with Noël, she does not immediately begin a romantic relationship with him, and she continues to write and to live independently. Her decision to refuse Noël’s first offer of marriage is linked in part to her belief that women should be able to live freely, on their own. She also refuses his offer because of his brutish jealousy of her son Claude, who acts as a reminder to Noël that Josanne had a previous lover. His jealousy clearly unveils Noël’s hypocritical feelings about women, since it demonstrates that his theories about women’s rights to live on their own and love as they please contrast directly with his emotional possessiveness and his obsession with Josanne’s past.

Surprisingly, Josanne is not offended by Noël’s hypocrisy but rather is moved by it and encouraged to help him overcome his old-fashioned emotions. It is Noël’s long battle with jealousy that eventually stamps out any “rebellion” or independence in Josanne’s goals for her personal life. At first, she refuses to feel guilty about her love affair with Maurice, and she does not regret her past life before Noël: “She could not persuade herself that she had committed an unspeakable act, and that she would only be able to escape scorn through remorse, penitence, and humility. She felt nothing that resembled Christian contrition and she did not want to be loved out of pity or weakness.”

During moments of lucidity, Noël agrees with her rational arguments. But he returns to his bursts of outrage and despair whenever Josanne makes the slightest mention of a past action or emotion.

Tinayre builds tension throughout the narrative with a series of scenes between the couple, alternating between angry drama and calming reconciliation, until Josanne reaches a state of emotional exhaustion and renounces her past in order to obtain Noël’s complete affection (Tinayre 333). At the same time that she repudiates her past, she announces that she is no longer a *rebelle*: “Do not use that name “rebel” for me anymore. . . . I rebelled against the moral and material injustices that I had suffered, like so many women,

22. “Elle ne se persuadait pas qu’elle avait commis une acte infâme, et qu’elle ne pourrait échapper au mépris que par le remords, la pénitence, et l’humilité. Elle ne ressentait rien qui ressemblât à de la contrition chrétienne et elle ne voulait pas être aimée par pitié, par faiblesses” (Tinayre 260).
but not against love.”

Once Josanne has given up her right to a past life and to her independence, Noël feels liberated from his jealousy, thus revealing his underlying conservatism. It is only after Josanne sacrifices herself that they can live happily together.

Could this be considered a “happy” ending? The couple may appear blissfully united at the conclusion of the novel, yet Marcelle Tinayre leaves enough ambiguity in her text so that the reader must decide for herself whether or not Josanne and Noël will continue to be happy together. For example, it appears that they will marry in the near future, but the marriage is never openly discussed. Instead, it is mentioned only indirectly when Noël takes it upon himself to announce to Josanne’s editor that she will soon be abandoning her career in journalism in order to take care of him and their future family when they wed (Tinayre 348). The text does not contain any statement by Josanne about forgoing her career in journalism for a marriage to Noël, even though his announcement, ending with the plural nous (“nous nous marions”), implies that she was in agreement. It is left to the reader to decide whether or not Josanne will actually give up her writing career and her independence, if and when she marries Noël Delysle. As we have seen for Josanne, the personal and private are two separate spheres.

Much of the romance between Josanne and Noël may appear to belong outside the traditional realm of bourgeois courtship: they have sex many months before there is a mention of marriage, they both admit to previous lovers and sexual experiences, and much of their relationship is based on their compatibility as intellectuals and writers. It is only in the physical aspects of their relationship that Josanne reverts to conservative notions of the “laws of nature” about the power of men over women in love. After an afternoon of lovemaking at Noël’s apartment, her thoughts silently address him as he smokes peacefully: “It is both our desire that I be your respected equal in the eyes of the world, in your mind and in your friendship. But the rebel rebelled against an unjust society, and not against nature; she did not rebel against the eternal law of love. . . . She does not reject the tender, joyous and noble voluntary servitude, which does not humiliate, because it is offered. Truly, it pleases me to call you ‘my master.’ ”

Josanne does not believe that these physical desires for submission affect her equal status.

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23. “Ne me donne plus ce nom de ‘rebelle.’ . . . Je me suis révoltée, contre les injustices morales et matérielles, dont j’ai souffert, comme tant de femmes, et non pas contre l’amour” (Tinayre 334).
24. Que je sois votre égale respectée, devant le monde, devant votre raison et votre amitié, c’est notre désir à tous deux. Mais la rebelle s’est rebélée contre la société injuste, et non pas contre
with Noël as an intellectual or a friend. Nor do they reduce her feminist principles in the social and political realms. As with her affair with Maurice, Josanne believes that she can continue to pursue her intellectual and feminist goals while enjoying a submissive physical relationship with Noël. Thus she may indeed feel free to continue her career as a journalist even after she marries Noël.

Renée Néré in *La Vagabonde* draws a similar distinction between submitting to a powerful physical relationship with a man and maintaining her independent way of life. This division is made simpler for Renée because her attraction to Maxime Dufferein-Chautel is not at all intellectual, but solely physical. Max originally noticed Renée in one of her music hall performances, and their first encounter, in her dressing room after the show, is filled with his intense animal desire for her (Colette 1984b, 1079–80). After Max learns that Renée does not respond to the “wild desire” (désir sauvage) of her music hall admirers, he controls his passion but still focuses all of his attention on her body rather than on her conversation or her thoughts (1122). Max does not appear curious about Renée’s ideas or activities, and he does not reveal any of his own. Renée knows nothing about Max’s interest or abilities, except that he belongs to the leisure class and has no occupation, no profession. She asks herself if he thinks, reads, or works but decides that given his economic class, he does none of those things (1123). Renée insists on adjectives that emphasize the quotidian and unexceptional in Max—commonplace, adequate, so many men (“banale,” “suffisant,” “tant d’hommes”). He is just a typical male, replaceable and rather uninteresting. As they spend more time together, Renée’s ignorance of his principles, politics, and interests remains a large gap in their relationship. She merely laughs at the fact that he spends all his time on love, thus taking the traditionally female role of the courtesan in their relationship, while she works for a living and is preoccupied with her career as much as or even more than she is concerned with their affair (1170–71).

Their physical relationship, in contrast, takes off dramatically and develops quickly throughout the narrative. Renée enjoys being swept off her feet and turning herself into a submissive object of affection. During an interlude in their lovemaking, she remarks on her obedient behavior in front of him: “Maxime has remained on the divan and his mute appeal...
receives the most flattering of responses: my look of a submissive bitch, rather shame-faced, rather cowed, very must petted, and ready to accept the leash, the collar, the place at her master’s feet, and everything” (Colette 2001b, 127). Renée’s use of the dog-master metaphor recalls the same type of master-slave vocabulary that Josanne employed to describe her sexual rapport with Noël (“it pleases me to call you ‘my master’” [La Rebelle 305]). Renée does not balk at this instinct to obedience and submission, and her old friend Hamond explains that it is because she is in love (1177). Although Hamond refers to the humiliating or degrading tasks Renée performed for her ex-husband Adolphe Taillandy when she still loved him, the lesson is the same for her acts of submission with Max, since she is beginning to love him when Hamond makes this statement. Just as Josanne dismissed her feminist principles when in the bedroom, Renée agrees with Hamond that love does anesthetize one’s sense of independence and pride (1184). There are even moments when she is with Max where she contemplates giving up everything—her mime partner, her music hall performances, her road trips—in order to live peacefully in the “great shadow” of her lover (1180). But for a number of reasons, Renée must reject this dream, and in great contrast to Josanne, Renée finally decides that her humble physical servitude to this man will adversely affect her independent status vis-à-vis her career and her new way of life, which she has struggled to establish and maintain since her difficult divorce three years earlier.

Renée’s new life as an independent working woman is probably the most important cause for her uncertainty about her future with Max. Although she does not have complete control over her work schedule, Renée has gained the authority to make demands of her agent, Salomon, for tour bookings, salary levels, and the type of commission she considers appropriate for his services. In an important scene in Salomon’s office, Renée demonstrates her unshakeable will that allows her to get what she wants at work (Colette 1984b, 1135–37). This hard-won independence is not easily relinquished, even for the life of luxury and leisure that Max promises her. When she tells her old friend Hamond of her visions of a future life with Max, she is stunned by Hamond’s obvious question about renouncing her career (1179). This first reaction indicates the extent of Renée’s attachment to her work and to the independence it affords her: she will not abandon her career easily.

25. “Maxime est demeuré sur le divan, et son muet appel reçoit la plus flatteuse réponse: mon regard de chienne sournoise, un peu penaude, un peu battue, très choyée, et qui accepte tout, la laisse, le collier, la place aux pieds de son maître” (Colette 1984b, 1160).
Later, when she and Max playfully discuss the prospect of having children together, Renée again bolts when the idea of giving up her work is suggested. In this instance, Max expresses the pleasure he would feel when Renée’s pregnancy would force her to refrain from traveling all over France without him and end her career on the stage. She is not surprised that Max wants to possess her completely. In fact, she has been telling him for days that he is a natural “père de famille” (paterfamilias), a conservative stay-at-home type. But his words, “tu serais prise” (you would be caught), reactivate old questions and concerns in Renée’s mind. Renée’s decision to forgo marriage to Max indicates that she associates her personal emotions with her actions in the public sphere of work, and she cannot find a way to separate the two. If she renounces her independent travels and her public life on the stage, she will also be losing her individual character and her sense of self in her private life. When Hamond suggests that she begin writing novels again to replace her theater activities, Renée is tempted by the idea. But she realizes that she would have to be completely devoted to Max’s life of leisurely pastimes, travel, and sports. Her desire to write would be smothered, just as her desire to perform and to travel on her own would have to be crushed. Thus, because Renée cannot envision herself as an active partner in a future marriage with Max, she cannot feasibly envision the revival of her writing career either.

One of the major differences between Renée and Josanne is the fact that Renée finally chooses not to abandon her own sense of identity. Although she does not invite the recurring comparisons that appear to her between Max and Adolphe, she does not deny them or claim to regret her past and her previous love for Adolphe. Renée’s only regret is that she and Max do not have similar backgrounds with similar degrees of suffering, betrayal, and experience in married life. If they did marry, she would recognize all the inconveniences and problems that newlywed couples encounter, since she has already been married, whereas Max has not (Colette 1984b, 1212). But Renée does nothing to change their differences and does not pretend that she can ignore or erase her past actions and thoughts as Josanne did to appease Noël’s jealous nature.

Eugénie Lebrun, the heroine in Les Cervelines, also keeps Jean Cécile at a healthy distance from her emotional life, but Eugénie informs her would-be lover immediately that she is not interested in a romantic relationship, as soon as he expresses his designs in a confessional letter to her. She calmly explains that it is just a passing fancy and that Jean will soon forget his passion for her. Her first marriage, like Renée’s in La Vagabonde, has cured her
of the desire for another husband. Rather, Eugénie is much happier living on her own and surrounding herself with friends and admirers rather than a demanding and authoritarian husband or lover.

Yver highlights Eugénie’s distance from Jean’s romantic mindset through a series of detailed scenes that are highly attentive to Eugénie’s movements, in order to reveal with subtlety her mindset. Even in their first encounter after Jean has sent her his important love letter, Eugénie’s tone, although kind and generous, is completely businesslike, as if she were critiquing a fictional work that had been sent to her for review rather than a love letter. Her first comments to him as he enters her apartment emphasize the style and effect of his writing instead of the content of his letter: “Truly, nothing has ever touched me like that letter. You who claimed not to know how to write! I read and reread it; it is admirable.”26 She comments that his prose is concise, direct, and devoid of flowery phrasing. Using her skills as a professional author and an expert on writing, Eugénie has immediately set the tone of their conversation and established the distance that she wishes to keep from their potentially emotional discussion. Therefore, when she moves on to the heart of the matter, Jean is already silenced and submissive to her authority. Although he manages to object to her reason, to plead that his love is “heroic” and unlike the affections that she has experienced from less ardent suitors, her calm and reserved nature remains untouched. When they return to his letter, Eugénie again avoids any mention of its content and focuses instead on her examination of Jean’s handwriting. Eugénie’s trendy fascination with graphology leads to a painful scrutiny of Jean’s personality, based on her analysis of his capital and lowercase letters (Yver 1903, 36).

Her analytical dissections of both his writing style and his personality anger Jean, as they serve to indicate Eugénie’s total lack of passion for him. They do not, however, succeed in alienating his feelings for her and his desire to make her his wife. When he finally sends his old professor, Dr. Ponard, to ask for her hand in marriage for him, she refuses, again giving clear and obvious reasons for her decision: “She did not accept; she could not accept, possessing all life’s pleasures, happy, celebrated, absorbed by her art, and free. Marriage could add nothing to her happiness; it was only a way to destroy it.”27 Her successful career and her faithful friends and admirers afford Eugénie a

26. “Vraiment, rien ne m’a jamais touchée comme cette lettre. Vous qui prétendiez ne savoir pas écrire! Je l’ai lue et relue ; elle est admirable” (Yver 1903, 33).
27. “Elle n’accepta pas; elle ne pouvait pas accepter, possédant de la vie tous les agréments, heureuse, fêtée, absorbée par son art, et libre. Le mariage ne pouvait rien ajouter à son bonheur, mais il était seulement un moyen de le détruire” (Yver 1903, 38).
serenity as a single woman that remains in direct contrast to both Renée and Josanne, who admit to strong bouts of solitude and isolation in their single lives.

When Jean Cécile makes his final visit to Eugénie’s apartment and delivers his ultimatum, love me or I will never see you again, Eugénie again finds an ingenious way to distance herself from his excessive emotional outpourings. As she responds to his demand, she remains completely absorbed in her repairs to a tiny marble statue, fragile like Jean’s feelings: “She was amusing herself now by gluing together a miniscule marble statue that the valet had broken. She put together, one after the other, with much delicacy, the tiny little parts that were no thicker than her finger. ‘Come now,’ she said to Cécile slowly, interrupted at each comma by the difficulty of her manual task, ‘don’t be unjust, or crazy.’”28 Eugénie’s steady hand and level tone only serve to enrage Jean, who leaves her forever and returns to his family’s home in Briois. Eugénie offers patience and understanding for Jean’s difficulties, and Jean cannot tolerate his loved one’s “help.” In contrast to the women writers in Colette’s and Tinayre’s novels, Eugénie never cedes her position. In the end, her forecast that Jean would recover and forget about his passion for her comes true. Alone in his apartment six months later, he must admit that Eugénie was right after all (Yver 1903, 47).

The portraits of these three self-sufficient women are directly related to their modes of cultural production in the public sphere. The two women who are most dependent on their public for legitimacy, Renée and Eugénie, are the least likely to need reinforcement in their private lives. Eugénie Lebrun is entirely reliant on her bourgeois audience and admirers, not only for her economic survival but also for friendship and social interaction. While she also maintains connections to the artistic and intellectual spheres of French society, she openly embraces her bourgeois audience’s system of values at the same time that she perpetuates it in her literary works. Renée also relies heavily on her working-class audience at the music hall, but mainly for economic survival. She enjoys their bon vivant attitude toward culture and life, but her social network excludes them. She limits her social interaction to a few family friends from the bourgeoisie and several colleagues from the

28. “Elle s’amusait maintenant à recoller un marbre minuscule qu’avait brisé le valet de chambre. Elle remettait l’un après l’autre, avec milles délicatesse, de petits membres fins qui n’égaleraient pas en grosseur son doigt. ‘Voyons, dit-elle à Cécile lentement, interrompue à chaque virgule par la difficulté de sa besogne manuelle, ne soyez ni injuste, ni fou’” (Yver 1903, 41).
music hall who place themselves in the category of the artist. Renée is not as engaged as Eugénie is with her public role of culture producer, and she therefore has serious thoughts about abandoning that role for a private life with Max.

The position of both of these women in the field of cultural production contrasts strongly with Josanne’s. She is only indirectly dependent on her petit bourgeois readership for economic survival, since her salary comes from the Foucarts’ budget, which in turn relies on subscriptions. She is paid not according to the success or failure of a particular piece, but by the rapidity with which she can finish an article, the skillfulness of her writing, and by the number of articles she writes within a certain time frame. The main influence on her cultural production comes specifically from the demands of her editors, Monsieur and Madame Foucart. In social terms, Josanne does not embrace the values of her petit bourgeois readers at all. Because of her financial constraints, Josanne’s material mode of living would often be considered at a level below the rigid standards set by the petit bourgeois. In contrast, her interests in political writings and objets d’art remain above the typical desires of her readers. Her friends are mainly chosen from the intellectual or artistic classes of French society: writers, journalists, and activists in feminist groups. She is therefore not strongly attached to her work at *Le Monde féminin* nor to her readers, who remain anonymous to her, and she is more inclined to consider a renunciation of her cultural production to ensure a stronger bond in her private life with Noël.

By looking at each of these female protagonists from both viewpoints, as producers of culture as well as consumers of culture, we can better understand the ways in which their relationship with their audience and their public roles as producers of culture influenced their decisions about marriage and career. These portraits also permit us to understand that the women who developed these characters (Yver, Tinayre, and Colette) did not have prescriptive or descriptive aims when constructing their novels about professional women writers, nor were they offering “safe” or “practical” endings for their editors or their readers. Instead they were creating narrative conflicts that would allow for a critique of women’s oppression and a praise of the working women who sought to find ways to combine romance and quest in their lives.