Career Stories
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All of the authors for whom we have dates (Colette, Harry, Reval, Roger, Tinayre, and Yver) were born in the eight-year period between 1869 and 1877, making them part of the same generation of women writers. All nine writers began their literary careers in approximately the same time period (1890s and or early 1900s). Many were born outside Paris or outside France (Harry was born in Jerusalem, Roger was born in Switzerland) and moved to the capital as children or young adults. Whether or not they lived in Paris, most published their works in Parisian-based journals and used Parisian publishers for their novels.

**Babin, Marcelle.** Little can be found on this author, who apparently published only the novel *Pharamacienne*, followed by the story *Vie Brisée* in the same volume, in 1907. From the preface of *Pharmacienne*, we know that the author was a pharmacist herself in the provinces and a pharmacy student at the University of Paris. She co-wrote the libretto for a comic opera titled *Idylle en Bretagne*, published and performed in Paris in 1912. The publisher for *Pharmacienne*, J. Siraudeau in Angers, is one of the few non-Parisian publishers in this study.

**Colette (1873–1954); née Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette.** She married three times, moving to Paris and beginning her writing career with her first husband, Willy. She had a daughter in 1913 with her second husband, Henry de Jouvenel. Beginning with *Claudine à l’école* in 1900, Colette wrote many novels, short stories, and “autobiographical fiction.” She was also a prolific journalist and a mime. She was awarded the Légion d’honneur (*chevalier*) in 1920 and promoted to *grand officier* in 1953. She was also the president and first woman member of the Académie Goncourt, among other honors. Colette’s life and career has been well documented over the years, both in biographies and critical analyses of her texts. I include her name here for the sake of consistency.
Compain, Louise-Marie. No dates available. Compain was a member of the founding committee of the society that organized the mass movement for women’s suffrage in France, the Union française pour le suffrage des femmes (French Union for Women’s Suffrage, or UFSF). As an officer of the UFSF, Compain participated in the 1911 convention of the International Women’s Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) in Stockholm and numerous meetings in France. Compain also devoted herself to women’s work and labor law, lecturing and writing on the conditions of working-class women. Her novels include L’Un vers l’autre (1903) and L’Oppobre (1905).

Harry, Myriam (1869–1958); née Maria Rosette Shapira, married Emile Perrault in 1904. Myriam Harry was born in Jerusalem to a Protestant family (her mother was German, her father a converted Jew from the Ukraine). After the father’s suicide, the family returned to Germany, and at seventeen, Harry moved to Paris to become a teacher and also began her literary career. First as columnist for La Fronde (with a short story published in 1898), Harry wrote for several journals and published her first novel, Petites Épouses, in 1902. Many of her works are “orientalist” in nature, and she is famous as the first recipient of the Femina Prize for La Conquête de Jérusalem. The Femina book prize was created after she was denied the Prix Goncourt because she was a woman.

Reval, Gabrielle (1870–1938); née Gabrielle Logerot, married to the poet Fernand Fleuret. Logerot was one of the first graduates (class of 1890) of the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Sèvres founded in 1882, and she taught at the high school for girls at Niort until 1899. In addition to her novels, she also wrote for several newspapers, including L’Œuvre and Le Journal. She was awarded the Légion d’honneur, the Prix du Président de la République (1934), and the Portuguese Order of Santiago de l’Epée (1935). She also shaped women’s writing as a member of the jury for the Femina Prize.

Roger, Noelle (1874–1953); pseudonym for Hélène Dufour Pittard. Roger was a Swiss novelist, best known for her nine science fiction novels that appeared mainly between the wars, including Le Déluge (1922), Le Nouvel Adam (1924), Celui qui voit (1926), Le Soleil enseveli (1928), and La Vallée perdue (1939). In these later works, she is a Jean-Jacques Rousseau disciple and holds society responsible for perverting man, distorting him from nature, and bringing him to live in deceit; the impure are punished and the heroes are tragic figures.
Esther de Suze. No dates available; née Esther Bénisti. There is little information on this writer. Before Institutrice, she published the novels Coeur brisé (1898) and Journal d’une juive au couvent (1899), although these do not contain portraits of working women.

Tinayre, Marcelle (1877–1948); née Marguerite-Suzanne-Marcelle Chasteau. She married the painter and engraver Julien Tinayre after receiving the baccalauréat. She began her writing career at an early age, publishing Vive les vacances in 1895 and L’Enfant gaulois in 1897 under the pseudonym of Charles Marcel. Tinayre contributed regularly to a wide variety of newspapers and periodicals, such as La Mode Pratique, La Vie Heureuse, and Le Temps. She wrote the first serial story published in Marguerite Durand’s La Fronde and through that connection made her first contacts in the world of French feminism. In 1908 Tinayre was named to receive the Légion d’honneur (chevalier), but she wrote a satirical piece on the award before she received it and her name was removed from the honors list. In 1939 she received the Barthou Prize from the French Academy.

Yver, Colette (1874–1953); née Antoinette de Bergevin. She married Auguste Huzard in 1904. Although she published children’s stories when she was only seventeen, Yver’s first major novel, Les Cervelines (The Brainy Women), did not appear until 1903. Auguste Huzard, an editor for the publishing house of Juven, read the manuscript, and he later claimed to have married her because of it. In 1907, Colette Yver was awarded the “Vie Heureuse” (Femina) Prize for her novel Princesses de science (Princesses of Science), and she subsequently became a member of the Femina jury. In later years she worked for the Catholic Church and for the sick, devoting her writing to saints lives and other religious subjects. Her early novels, however, were quite subversive.
Appendix 2—Plot Summaries

La Bachelière (The Female Graduate) 1910, by Gabrielle Reval
The novel has two distinct sections; the first depicts the heroine, Gaude Malvos, working alongside her father the famous archeologist Pierre Malvos. Knowing that his funding is running out, she decides in a public ceremony to choose one of her father’s wealthy students as a husband so that they may continue their work without interruptions. This decision fails in two ways: the young man requires that Gaude give up her work with her father in order to be a devoted wife and mother, and her father is upset because he believes that his daughter (and most valuable assistant) is giving up the life of the mind for a “banal” existence as wife and mother. The father dies from a heart attack, and Gaude breaks the engagement with the young student so that she can move to Paris to seek her fortune there.

The second part of the novel focuses on Gaude’s growing independence and her budding career as a writer. At first, she is rebuffed by her father’s publishers, but after taking a series of jobs (research assistant, private school teacher) and moving away from the “protective” cover of her father’s reputation and colleagues, she begins to blossom as an independent writer and researcher. She does not see the fruit of her labor, however, as a slightly deranged colleague at the school burns her manuscript (convinced it is heretical writing), and the ending of the novel is ambiguous, as Gaude has decided to leave for Poland (her father’s country of origin). Although she anticipates a new start, she leaves with an uncertain future.

Les Cervelines (The Brainy Women) 1903, by Colette Yver
The main protagonist in this text is Marceline Rhonans, a high school history teacher and “orientalist” researcher in Brie. There are two other important women professionals as well, Jeanne Boerk, a pathology student at the Briois hospital, and Eugénie Lebrun, a successful novelist and playwright in Paris. All three women are “cervelines” (brainy women) according to Dr. Jean Cécile, the male character who invented this term.
Both Jeanne and Marceline are curiosities in the small city where they work and study, and two young doctors fall in love with them. Jeanne is so devoted to her career (and future advancement in Paris) that she rejects the offer of love and marriage by her supervisor Paul Tisserel. Marceline is tempted by a possible romance with Jean Cécile, but decides that she is not made for a domestic life in the provinces and ends up rejecting his marriage proposal as well. There is also a fairly long flashback by Jean Cécile to his earlier infatuation with another cerveline, Eugénie Lebrun, while he was a medical student in Paris.

The novel ends with Marceline’s decision to request support from her former professors so that she can make a trip to Beirut to study the Phoenician culture that is the core of her research and writing.

Claudine à l’école (Claudine at School) 1900, by Colette
Colette’s first novel, published under her first husband’s name, chronicles the final year in public school of fifteen-year-old Claudine in the fictional village of Montigny. Based in part on Colette’s memories of her school years, the narrative gives a day-by-day account of girls in a state-run school under the changing laws of the Third Republic. The narrative opens with the students moving in to newly constructed buildings in September and ends with the closing awards ceremony in July.

Influenced by her husband Willy, Colette also included several risqué segments, including references to a lesbian relationship between two of the girls’ schoolteachers and a philandering regional inspector who comes to “inspect” the older girls in the school as well as the youngest woman schoolteacher. Claudine describes her coursework, friends and teachers, and end-of-the-year exams, but she also explains her emotional state and her difficulties imagining a future for herself, in the school system or in Montigny “society.”

Dames du Palais (Ladies of the Court) 1909, by Colette Yver
This text focuses on the budding career of Henriette, a young lawyer in Paris. When the novel begins, she is just starting her legal practice, following in her father’s footsteps. But after she marries a fellow lawyer and has a baby girl, her life becomes more complicated. Although she seems to juggle the multiple tasks easily, things become difficult when she begins to compete with her husband for clients. As her talents begin to outshine his, the husband becomes bitter and withdrawn. In the end Henriette decides to give up her practice in order to make her husband happy.
The novel is unusual because it includes many different women lawyers; some are experienced lawyers with a well-known clientele, some are struggling to provide a living for themselves and their children, and others are still students whose futures remains undefined. Yver demonstrates that these women form a community, but there are many different legal styles and professional goals among them.

**Institutrice (Woman Schoolteacher) 1902, by Esther de Suze**

After having been raised as a well-to-do bourgeoise in Marseille, the main character in this novel, Marie-Thérèse Romane, loses both her father and her mother within the space of several weeks and learns after their deaths that her father was ruined, leaving her nothing but debt. At eighteen, suddenly an orphan and a pauper, Marie-Thérèse decides that solitude and hard work are the two things she needs most in life. She therefore pursues the necessary education to receive the brevet supérieur and obtains a teaching post in a village primary school. At the beginning of her stay, Marie-Thérèse spends all her time working out new teaching methods, trying new ways to arrange her house, and taking walks in the mountainous and wintry landscape around her. Although the parents and townspeople think that she is doing a good job overall, she begins to feel lonely. Rumors spread that she is having an affair with the mayor and she must leave the town immediately. The conclusion of the novel explains that she has moved to Marseille and is starting her life over, marrying a young man whom she has met there.

**Pharmacienne (Woman Pharmacist) 1907, by Marcelle Babin**

The main character in this novel, Danielle Dormeul, age eighteen, suddenly finds herself an orphan with little financial support and a younger brother to care for. Her father’s friend Michel Bakitcheff and his son Wilfrid suggest to Danielle that she might pursue a career in medicine, as her father had, in order to support her brother and herself. She immediately begins her studies for the baccalauréat exams and continues with medical school. She becomes the unwitting object of study of the handsome yet Machiavellian Dr. Adrien Clavelan, one of her professors at medical school, because he wishes to know the link between physical and psychological distress. When Danielle becomes seriously ill from an infected scalpel during one of her first autopsies, Clavelan constantly tends to her and reinforces his attentions. At the moment when she is finally beginning to recover, the doctor suddenly reveals to Danielle that he is married. The psychological shock of this news to Danielle triggers a physical relapse, exactly according to Clavelan’s predictions.
Her renewed physical suffering, however, does not diminish the “moral suffering” (la souffrance d’amour) that she felt, and therefore Clavelan decides he must end the experiment and never see her again, requiring her to transfer to pharmacy school.

Babin’s novel devotes almost one-third of its plot to a description of the heroine’s education, from her initial decision to become a doctor, through the different courses taken, exams passed, and diplomas received. But it is more closely related to the scientific novel than the education novel because a major portion of the narrative examines Danielle’s negotiations with the town where she has decided to establish her pharmacy. She experiences some of the typical issues involved with clients suspicious of a female professional and must deal with emotional as well as professional disappointments.

In the end, she does meet and marry a local man who is willing to allow her to continue her research and even her public work as a pharmacist. Babin’s heroine thus continues her research, although the day-to-day operation of the pharmacy is handed over to her younger brother, who has followed in her career footsteps.

**Princesses de science (The Doctor Wife or Princesses of Science) 1907, by Colette Yver**

The main protagonist in this novel, Thérèse Herlinge, is a bright young medical student when the novel begins. She marries a fellow student, Fernand Guéméné, and continues with her thesis research until she becomes pregnant. As soon as she has given birth, she returns to her research, but the nine-month interruption leads her to choose a more limited thesis topic. Her work is again interrupted when her husband becomes seriously ill and she stays home to take care of him. When she finally returns to her work, she decides she must give up the thesis and instead establishes a general practice alongside her husband’s. Their child, who was being cared for by a wet nurse, dies at an early age, and the couple becomes more and more unhappy. Fernand wishes that Thérèse would give up her career to be a devoted wife and mother; Thérèse cannot imagine a life without science. In the end, after she learns that Fernand has become attracted to the widow of one of his clients, Thérèse renounces her medical practice and her research in order to save her crumbling marriage.

Yver includes a number of other women working in the medical field who serves as antimodels for the main character. These include her peer Dina, who gives up her medical career to marry a fellow doctor, and two older women. One is Dr. Lancelevée, who pursues her high-profile medical
career in Paris but maintains a secretive affair with a colleague on the side. The other is Dr. Adeline, who has tried to do everything: have a family and maintain a medical practice. As a result she is exhausted, has not achieved any great professional success, her husband is alienated, and her children are not taken care of properly. These three characters are all examples to Thérèse of the difficulties that women face when trying to juggle professional and personal lives.

**La Rebelle (The Woman Rebel) 1905, by Marcelle Tinayre**

In this novel, the main character is a journalist for the women’s magazine *Le Monde féminin*. At the beginning of the text, Josanne Valentin is married to a sick husband and carrying on a fading affair with a wealthy bachelor. These relationships both end (the husband dies and the bachelor marries another woman), and she meets the feminist writer Noël Delysle, whose work *La Travailleuse (The Woman Worker)* she reviewed for *Le Monde féminin*. The novel discusses Josanne’s career at the magazine, including her rise from a fashion columnist and book reviewer to a full-fledged journalist, doing investigative reporting on topics of her choosing. The narrator also chronicles the ups and downs of her relationship with the jealous and surprisingly conservative Noël. Josanne tries to remain a “rebel” in her public life, that is, in the types of articles that she writes, but in her private life she eventually decides not to insist on feminist principles and renounces her previous life as an adulterer, even though she believes that she had the right to seek pleasure as much as any man. After this renunciation, Noël announces to Josanne’s editor that he won’t have her for much longer because they are going to be married, and the novel ends with this declaration about Josanne’s future.

**Sévriennes (Women of Sèvres) 1900, by Gabrielle Reval**

The first of Reval’s trilogy on women students and schoolteachers, this novel focuses on the three years that Marguerite Triel spends at the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Sèvres, the most prestigious state-run teacher training school for women at the time. She is surrounded by an intriguing cast of characters: students with varying personalities and professional aspirations, professors with diverse goals for their students, and a director who provides a model of strength and intelligence for her students, despite her chilly demeanor.

As the novel progresses, Marguerite recounts the day-to-day activities of her classmates, along with major events, such as the departure of certain students for teaching positions or preparations for the final exams. These diary sections are interspersed with sections where the omniscient narrator
describes the school’s philosophy and other perspectives on its activities. Given her top ranking at the school, the heroine appears poised for a promising career as a high school professor or even as headmistress of a school. In the closing pages of the novel the reader discovers that Marguerite has decided not to take a teaching position but rather to live with and take care of a sculptor named Henri Dolfière.

L’Un vers l’autre (One Toward the Other) 1903, by Louise-Marie Compain
Compain outlines the decision by a young wife, Laure Déborda, to leave her conservative husband and become a teacher. The novel briefly describes the year of courses Laure takes to gain her credentials, but it focuses mainly on the trials and tribulations she undergoes as a first-year teacher in a regional école normale for women (teacher training school) in a city with distrusting citizens.

The narrator offers remarkable insights into the developing feminist perspective of the main character, Laure, and the positive influence of her school’s director, a single woman who has decided to spend her life directing public schools for girls, opting not to marry or have a family. Although she and the other teachers at the school are all encouraging role models for Laure, the suspicious townspeople and the regional inspectors create tensions in her life that she is unable to tolerate.

In an unusual move in this type of novel, Compain devotes one chapter toward the end of the text to the parallel developments of Laure’s husband during the year. Thus the reader receives some justification for the renunciation plot at the end of this narrative: the husband has reformed and forsaken his authoritarian ways that originally drove Laure away. When he comes to the school to tell her he has changed and to ask her to come home, their mountaintop reunion is somewhat rose-colored. Compain, however, depicts them as a happy couple in the follow-up novel that she wrote in 1905.

La Vagabonde (The Vagabond) 1910, by Colette
This novel is still well known and currently in print, and I include a brief plot summary here only for the sake of consistency. Recently divorced, Renée Néré has given up a writing career to become a mime performer at a Parisian music hall with her partner Brague. Although her life has
become more difficult financially since her divorce from the painter Adolphe Taillandy, she is glad to be on her own after suffering for years from his infidelities.

As the narrative opens, she cautiously begins a new relationship with Maxime Dufferein-Chautel, a wealthy man her age (thirty-four), who originally saw her on the music hall stage. They spend many pleasant moments together, but she leaves him behind when she departs to perform with her partner Brague in a tour of the French provinces. While she is away, Renée and Max begin a correspondence in which she explains that she is worried about future infidelities by Max, in part because of the similarity in their ages but also because she has already been through a failed marriage, while he has never been married. When he writes and asks her to marry him and begins to indicate a more authoritarian (proprietary) style as a future husband, Renée realizes that she cannot continue with him, preferring solitude to domination. The novel ends with her decision to break off the relationship, even though she admits that she cares for him deeply.