Gender Difference and Cultural Labour in French Fiction from Zola to Colette

Sometimes, the alphabet connotes as much as it denotes. The first entry in Raymond Williams's book of *Keywords* is 'aesthetic'; the last entry is 'work'. Tellingly, that last entry makes no reference to the work of art, nor any cross-reference to the entry for 'art' which in fact notes:

> While art still meant skill and industry diligent skill, they were often closely associated, but when each was abstracted and specialized they were often, from [the early nineteenth century] contrasted as the separate areas of imagination and utility. […] There was a consequent defensive specialization of certain skills and purposes to the arts or the humanities where forms of general use and intention which were not determined by immediate exchange could be at least conceptually abstracted. (42)

That entry for 'work' does, though, make avowedly passing reference to questions of gender:

> What is now most interesting is [the word's] predominant specialization to regular paid employment. […] [T]o take one significant example, an active woman, running a house and bringing up children, is distinguished from a woman who **works**: that is to say, takes paid employment. […] Work then partly shifted from the productive effort itself to the predominant social relationship. It is only in this sense that a woman running a house and bringing up children can be said to be **not working**. (335)

This chapter will conjoin these contexts to address the treatment of women's role in cultural activities such as literature, painting and journalism in French fiction at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Primary amongst the Germanic terms by which we classify the subgenres of the novel is the notion of the *Bildungsroman* in which we have, in recent decades, come to identify the dominance of masculinity as the default subjectivity of nineteenth-century culture, and in particular the tale of the Romantic male subject's insertion into the urban plot more readily associated with Realism and Naturalism. As Juliette Rogers reminds us, offshoots of this archetype include the novel of educational development, or *Erziehungsroman*, and the novel of artistic development, or *Künstlerroman* (2007, 1).[1] Although this latter term tracks the *Bildungsroman* through the long nineteenth century in the wake of that foundational text for both subgenres, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795), the novel of the artist (not to be understood here in exclusively visual terms) is often seen to acquire a particular force in those decades just before and after the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which coincide with the Modernist explosion, not least in western Europe: hence Émile Zola's *L'Œuvre* [*The Masterpiece*] (1886), Henry James's *The Tragic Muse* (1890), Thomas Mann's *Tonio Kröger* (1903), Romain Rolland's *Jean-Christophe* (1904–1905), Rainer Maria Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910), Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* [*In Search of Lost Time*] (1913-27), James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). The negotiations between mimesis and modernism (measured in a French context in the distance between Zola and Proust) necessarily involved a particular kind of linguistic self-consciousness in arguments over the very stakes of verbal representation. Such self-consciousness undermined notions of the referential and the plausible at the very moment that the figurative was also coming under considerable intellectual pressure in the visual arts. In this context, the novel of the artist provided a referential context for such reflexive musings, or

in other words, plots and characters which would facilitate the thematization of such metacritical matters.

If this aesthetic context has persuasively framed critical reflections on this focus on the work in art as well as the work of art, then this reflexive thematization of the creative processes in literature, painting and other arts might also benefit from two further historical contexts which are by no means exclusive to fin-de-siècle and belle époque France, but which speak eloquently to the stakes of modernity in the first decades of the Third Republic, from the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. First, in France, as in Britain and elsewhere, technological and educational developments led to the mediatization of textual culture, not least in the exponential growth of journalism and the press. For writers, this provided new outlets (for all sorts of writing including serialized fiction), and indeed in the role of the journalist a new type of career and a new type of cultural labour. The relationship between journalism and literature in the nineteenth century is not a new discovery, but certainly in a French context, more recent technological developments (in particular the French national library's remarkable web digitalization project *Gallica*) have transformed the ways in which literary scholars work in the field, and allowed us to pursue literary criticism in the context of a cultural studies and media studies approach to the nineteenth century. In this vein in the present volume, Edmund Birch finds in *New Grub Street* (1891) the English novel of journalism most adroit in its understanding of cross-Channel cultural relationships, in particular in its evocation of Balzac's *Illusions perdues* [*Lost Illusions*] (1837-43) and Maupassant's *Bel-Ami* (1885). Amongst the various explanations in the introduction to the present volume of our late, rather than long, nineteenth century (1830-1930) is the way in which 'the July Monarchy, installed in 1830, […] oversaw the acceleration of French industrial expansion', including the birth of the modern French press in precisely that same decade (as witnessed by the bold assertion of two of the leading lights in this new press/literature field,

Marie-Ève Thérenty and Alain Vaillant, that Year I of the 'media era' was 1836 in which Émile de Girardin launched his daily newspaper, *La Presse*). To reposition Year I in a French context, as Thérenty and Vaillant do, is to engage provocatively with the history of the Revolution by recalibrating the latter's own recalibration of historical time. Indeed, so manifestly foundational is 1789 that many of the conceptual turns in scholarship on modern France (e.g. Barthes on 1848) have worked by reformulating our assumptions as to when (the) revolution(s) has or have begun (as here) or ended (à la Furet).

The second historical context which we would add to aesthetic and media analyses of the fiction of cultural labour in fin-de-siècle and belle époque France is that of gender history. To ignore in such novels and short stories the rocky road to cultural endeavour endured by heroines in the realms of literature, art, journalism, and theatre would in some sense mean replicating the much-reprised theory of separate spheres which excluded women from the public sphere, and indeed from publication. The tale of Marian Yule in *New Grub Street* provides a British example of the challenges faced by women on the verge of the culture industries as the nineteenth century draws to a close. To compare the experiences of British and French women of the long nineteenth century is notoriously difficult, not least because of the contradictions within each national narrative. If the notion of the *citoyenne* allows us to see in the French Revolution the seeds of a progressive view of gender relations, then in the first decade of the nineteenth century the Napoleonic Code set the tone for a reactionary history whose most damning outcome was that, infamously, Frenchwomen were not enfranchised until 1944. Indeed, in this sense one might provocatively conclude that the French nineteenth century was in fact even longer than has previously been reported. In this, of course, France is slower to progress than the raft of nations who did move forward in this domain in and around the First World War (Britain, Sweden, Germany, Poland the Soviet Union, Iceland, Denmark, Canada, Holland etc.). But it is also true that the French Chamber of Deputies tried

unsuccessfully to push the *arrière-gardiste* Senate to provide suffrage for women on six occasions between the Gautret bill of 1 July 1901 and, by 495 votes to zero, the exasperated final bill of 30 July 1936. As early as 1942 de Gaulle had made the promise he would fulfil two years later. This contestatory gender politics (with a capital P) of the twentieth-century decades of the Third Republic was in some sense the product of a more culturally diffuse gender politics (small p) current during the nineteenth-century decades of that same republic.

Recent work by historians in the field remind us of the break-throughs and glass ceilings of women's history in fin-de-siècle and belle époque France. To cite but a few conspicuous firsts in French history – in 1892 Madeleine Pelletier became the first woman to pass doctor's examinations; in 1897 women were admitted for the first time to the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and the Duchesse d'Uzès became the first Frenchwoman to hold a driving licence; in 1900 Daniel Lesueur became the first woman to receive the Légion d'honneur; women competed in the Paris Olympics, unlike the first modern games of 1896; and women could be called to the bar, Jeanne Chauvin becoming the first *femme avocate*; in 1906 Marie Curie became the first female professor at the Sorbonne; in 1908 Mme Decourcelle, the first female taxi driver; and finally, in 1910 Élise Deroche, the first woman to gain a pilot's licence. As impressive as this list may be, one could also argue that these women were exemplary but not typical. However, the list reminds us that amongst the clearest signs of progress in this domain were those instances of women's access to the public sphere via the routes of education and career. Those first decades of the Third Republic, for all their much-glossed conservatism, were vital in the development of women's education in France, the electoral victory of the republicans in 1879 leading to the Camille Sée Law the following year. This widespread debate on women's role in the world of work was echoed in fiction such as Émile Zola's accounts of the world of commerce in *Pot-Bouille* [*Pot Luck*] (1882) and *Au Bonheur des Dames* [*The Ladies' Paradise*] (1883) (see N. White, 2011). In the context of women's writing, I am

indebted to Juliette Rogers' study *Career Stories* which, in keeping with the taxonomical pre-eminence of German, gives such novels of professional development the name *Berufsroman* (2007, 1).

One particular world of work in which literature of the epoch had a reflexive-aesthetic interest as well as a gender political one was the realm we might term 'cultural labour', which includes literary, visual and performance arts, but also (in keeping with our first new context glossed above) journalism. Such forms of cultural production speak eloquently to the debate on women's education, not least because of education's role in widening the field of female consumers as well as producers of cultural artefacts. Much has also been written in recent decades about the growth of women's writing in France around the turn of the century (for instance, Waelti-Walters, 1990) and the growth of a specific kind of journalism written for women (Mesch, 2013). To sketch out the parameters of this particular field of male and female fiction on the cultural labour of women in the period, I offer as wilfully contrary examples: Émile Zola's short story, *Madame Sourdis* (1880), about the art world; Guy de Maupassant's novel of mainstream journalism, *Bel-Ami* (1885), and Marcelle Tinayre's rather different novel of feminist journalism *La Rebelle* (1905); and finally, Colette's *La Vagabonde* (1910) which charts quasi-autobiographically Renée Néré's post-divorce journey between stage performance and writing. In thus comparing male and female accounts of women's role and status in the realm of cultural labour, this matrix of texts not only maps out the historical movement between centuries but also the aesthetic movement beyond the limits of exclusively male-authored French Naturalism, not simply in modernist fiction but in women's writing too. For all of its capacity for social critique, Naturalism seems to have been condemned by the logic of its own mimetic copy to reproduce the iniquitous terms of the real in its resistance to the accusation of naivety to which idealism and utopianism were exposed.

In Zola's short story, as in the other plots we shall consider, women's social access to an active cultural life seems inextricably bound to the decisions they make about the men in their intimate lives. One of the most persuasive ways of conceptualizing this language of the hetero in its social and sexual forms is to be found in the matrix of homo/hetero/social/sexual elucidated in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's ground-breaking study of homosociability in English literature, *Between Men*. Sedgwick demonstrates the collusion between heterosexual norms and homosocial bonds (not least the homosocial bonds between men which subtend the practices of patriarchy). As she argues, patriarchal homosociability must repress the structural continuum which connects it to homosexual counterculture. In the matrix of permutations made possible by the homo/hetero and social/sexual distinctions, there should be four basic terms: the homosexual and the homosocial (on Sedgwick's repressed continuum), the heterosexual (naturally, or rather, normatively), but also the heterosocial. In affectionate pastiche of Sedgwick's definitions, we might propose that 'heterosocial' is a word which describes social bonds between persons of the opposite sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with 'heterosexual', and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from 'heterosexual'. Just as Sedgwick, and other historians of gender, have underlined the normative role of male homosocial relations within nineteenth-century patriarchy (whilst noting their structural, rather than genital or genetic relation to a homosexual counterculture); so too I would point to the avant-garde or progressive potential of heterosocial relations in late nineteenth-century society, whilst recalling their structural relation to heterosexual norms. This interplay between the progressive and the normative animates our four cases in point.

Given patriarchy's insistence on the biological roles of women (as wives, mothers and lovers), we might note with some irony that travail, the ancient English term which replicates the normal French word for work (with its etymological sense of torture), in fact refers to the pain of child *labour* (see John 16: 21, Jeremiah 6: 24 KJV, but also in our period of study,

Thomas Hardy's evocation of the 'Travails and teens around us here' in his poem 'To An Unborn Pauper Child'). Work, it turns out, enjoys a particular status in one of the most influential books of recent decades in the literary humanities, Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain*:

> Far more than any other intentional state, work approximates the framing events of pain and the imagination, for it consists of both an extremely embodied physical act (an act which, even in nonphysical labor, engages the whole psyche) and of an object that was not previously in the world, a fishing net or piece of lace where there had been none, or a mended net or repaired lace curtain where there had been only a torn approximation, or a sentence or a paragraph or a poem where there had been silence. Work and its "work" (or work and its object, its artifact) are the names that are given to the phenomena of pain and the imagination as they begin to move from being a self-contained loop within the body to becoming the equivalent loop now projected into the external world. (170)

If much of the cultural work of feminism has been to confront the reification of the feminine in biological form (and in Sedgwick's terms, to displace the hetero from the sexual to the social), then readers of this book on work will recall that Peter Brooks's major account of 'objects of desire in modern narrative' is tellingly entitled *Body Work*. In the nineteenth-century corpus of novelists and painters at the centre of Brooks's study, the work (of art) is masculine, but the bodies (and the work of sex, we might say) are feminine. Sometimes these bodies literally work sex, as in the depictions of prostituted bodies-for-sale such as Nana's and Olympia's to which Brooks attends. Indeed, his preface offers an apology: 'The reader who is distressed by the largely patriarchal model displayed by texts in Chapters 3 through 6 [think

Balzac, Flaubert, Zola, Gauguin] is respectfully urged to read on, since Chapters 7 and 8 [think Mary Shelley and George Eliot] bring some reversals of perspective' (xiii). If both the prostitute and the artist's model carry out the listless work of being desirable, then recent critical focus on the body at work (see C. White, 2014) helps to fulfil an expanded corporeal agenda prescribed by Harrow's account of Zola's bodies which takes us beyond erotic desire 'to consider those myriad forms of embodied subjectivity in Zola that have eluded our collective critical gaze […]: the body at work, at war, at play; the tired body; the injured or abused body; the transformed body or dehumanized body (2010, 14)'.

In Zola's most famous account of painting, *The Masterpiece* (1886), the heterosocial possibility of artistic collaboration recedes before the tense homosociability of the artistic circle (Claude, Sandoz, Dubuche, Bongrand) and before the norms of heterosexuality as 'the problem of the modern nude resurfaces' (Brooks, 134). But if Claude's model, Christine, suffers as muse and mother, Zola tells of the strange conjugal complicity of two painters in an earlier tale of the artist, namely *Madame Sourdis*, published in April 1880 in one of the numerous Russian translations of his work in Petersburg's *The Messenger of Europe*. The eponymous heroine (née Adèle Morand) is the daughter of a provincial shopkeeper, a middle-class reactionary who nevertheless entertains the feeling of being a failed artist. Old Morand sells artists' materials in Mercœur to the few clients he has, his most well-known customer being the artist Rennequin who has made his name in Paris, his only female customers being the Lévêque sisters, though their use of oils is considered quite scandalous. Mlle Adèle quietly dabbles in watercolours, encouraged in patronizing terms by Rennequin to 'keep at it' ('travaille', 312). Although ill-disposed to the romantic notion of marriage, she takes an interest in local artist and avid customer Ferdinand Sourdis and, though he does not find her sexually attractive, she feeds off his *Bildungsroman* obsession with Parisian success which she too adopts. He is also encouraged by Rennequin, even when the locals dismiss his painting *The Walk* for lacking in

'finish' and disobeying the lessons of Raphael. 'Travaillez; tout est là,' Rennequin insists ['The main thing is to keep on working'] (317). So considerable is the artistic complementarity between Adèle and Ferdinand that Rennequin initially mistakes Adèle for the painter of this work, until she corrects him. In a bid to dispel the gender trouble of misattribution, he notes, 'ça te ressemble […]. C'est toi, avec de la puissance' ['It's a bit like your work […] but with more force'] (316). She decides to learn oils by copying Ferdinand's picture, and the feminine copy achieves more local success than the masculine original. As a result, an 'amitié purement intellectuelle' ['purely intellectual friendship'], rather than love, develops between them (318).

Following her father's death, and her inheritance of 5000 francs, she (rather than Ferdinand) takes the lead and proffers with a handshake a marriage proposal and a new life in Paris: 'we could look forward to the future together' (318). The inheritance from the odd couple that is Rastignac and Paris, heterosocialized in Zola's couple, is even clearer in the original: 'l'avenir serait à nous…'. They wed and move to the capital to fulfil his (or perhaps her) fantasies of Salon success. Ferdinand, we learn, in this reversal of Pygmalion, would be 'son œuvre' ['her creation'] (321). But the splash made by *The Walk* is followed by an apparently insurmountable painter's block which he faces on his project for the Salon of the following year, *The Lake* (this manifestly Lamartinian title so ineluctably Romantic in its intertextual prescription of heterosexual gender roles where women can only inspire). Seduced by Parisian debauchery, Ferdinand's painting falters in spite of Adèle's encouragement, and slowly but surely she comes to collaborate with him, first painting backgrounds of his oil paintings before finally the entire paintings themselves. Consequently, he becomes a renowned and well-respected name in the art world, fêted by the Légion d'honneur and the Institut, much to Adèle's pleasure rather than envy. Compared to 'un roi constitutionnel qui régnait sans gouverner' ['a constitutional monarch who reigns but does not rule'] (337), he in turn accepts her aesthetic mastery as the years pass. She has, in quiet truth, succeeded where father and husband have

failed. Only later in the story does their friend Rennequin realize that it is in fact Madame Sourdis who is the talented artist; by contrast with 'la suppression totale de Ferdinand' ['Ferdinand's talent had sunk without trace'] (342), in his later years simply dabbling in watercolours as Adèle had first done. The role reversal is complete; solitary Romantic genius (this Naturalist story tells us) is dead. This chiasmic exchange of oils and watercolours between husband and wife is foregrounded in Douglas Parmée's insightful translation of the title as *Fair Exchange* – in fact, a translation so free as to be a renaming. As Parmée quips, 'Zola's titles are often rather unenlightening, and the translator has ventured, here and there, to provide English versions that may be found more stimulating' (356). At all events, the translation necessarily loses the title's focus on wife rather than husband, as well as the story's punning refrain on deafness which runs throughout (deaf rendered in French as *sourd*) and which bespeaks the artistic secrets within this marriage. The marriage may develop its own modes of affection, but even from the start is not based on passion; nevertheless, an unspoken painterly complicity develops between these spouses, though, as we know, oil and water do not in the end mix.

This pattern of overlooked feminine work in the realm of artistic collaboration (most famously, as we shall see, in the case of Colette) informs the mythology of allusive keys which has surrounded the story and its publication history. Zola only allowed the French original version to be published two decades later, in May 1900, in *La Grande Revue*, edited by the lawyer Fernand Labori, who defended both Zola and Dreyfus. As Parmée reminds us: 'It has been suggested that this unusually long gap may be explained by the fact that Ferdinand Sourdis's debauched life offers similarities with that of Alphonse Daudet, Zola's friend and fellow author, and that since it was also rumoured that Madame Daudet had a hand in the writing of Daudet's books, it would have been inappropriate to publish the story during Daudet's lifetime; he died in 1897' (363). Madame Daudet (née Julia Allard) was the author

of numerous creative, critical and journalistic works in her own right, as well as collaborations with Alphonse and others (see Irvine, 2008 and 2012). Julia Daudet was very well-known for her salon in Paris and in particular for its Thursday receptions, attended by writers such as Edmond de Goncourt, Maurice Barrès, Émile Zola, Édouard Drumont, Guy de Maupassant, and Rachilde. Indeed, without wishing to reprise Derrida on speech and writing, one might well argue that much of the cultural work of facilitation and conversation done by women such as Julia Daudet in hosting one of the many influential salons so central to Parisian high culture of the period (high, that is, but not necessarily normative) is lost in the evanescence of speech, or transmogrified in the subsequent written accounts of authors and diarists (see Martin-Fugier, 2009). But Mme Daudet also published a string of books, and articles in numerous organs, such as the *Journal officiel* as a literary critic under the pseudonym of Karl Steen, and she was an active member of the jury of the prix Fémina which gave her a venue to continue her literary activity after the death of Alphonse. In 1913, via her son Lucien, she became one of the first readers of the manuscript of *In Search of Lost Time*. She was herself best captured in oils, four years before Zola's story, in Renoir's remarkable 1876 portrait, the thoughtful gaze on her face supported by the writer's right hand (Musée d'Orsay). Alphonse, perhaps best known for his own short story collections *Lettres de mon moulin* [*Letters from my Mill*] (1869) and *Contes du lundi* [*The Monday Tales*] (1873), contracted syphilis. Julia would live on until 1940.

This male-authored Naturalist image in *Madame Sourdis* of creative women in the shadows of the culture machine returns in the context of journalism in Maupassant's *Bel-Ami* and Tinayre's *La Rebelle*. The two parts of Maupassant's *Bildungsroman* tell the tale of the handsome Georges Duroy who has returned to Paris from his military exploits in North Africa and, by virtue of a chance encounter with his old army buddy Forestier on the streets of the capital, gains access to the newspapers office of the immodestly named *La Vie française* which he owns. Unable to shine on the public stage as a journalist herself, Forestier's talented wife

Madeleine nurtures the rough-and-ready journalistic talents of Georges, and provides him with the necessary political connections until he rises to the role of chief editor. As the narcissistic Duroy seduces a string of women, from prostitutes who don't make him pay to society ladies for whom, in some sense, he prostitutes himself, Madeleine remains elusive, insisting on friendship rather than adultery precisely because of the different attitudes to love entertained by men and women: 'Je sais bien que chez vous l'amour n'est autre chose qu'une espèce d'appétit, tandis que chez moi ce serait, au contraire, une espèce de… de communion des âmes qui n'entre pas dans la religion des hommes' ['I know perfectly well that for you love is simply a kind of appetite, whereas for me it would be, on the contrary, a kind of… of spiritual communion that has no place in the religion of men!] (Maupassant, 2001, 89). Only once widowed does she accept Georges's advances, but as a second husband rather than a lover, and this only after she has dictated to him the egalitarian and liberated (and thus, implicitly, politicized) terms of such an 'association', as she calls it on the final page of the first half of the novel:

> Le mariage pour moi n'est pas une chaîne, mais une association. J'entends être libre, tout à fait libre de mes actes, de mes démarches, de mes sorties, toujours. […] [I]l faudrait aussi que [l']homme [que j'aurais épousé] s'engage6at à voir en moi une égale, une alliée, et non pas une inférieure ni une épouse obéissante et soumise.
>
> [Marriage, for me, is not a bond, but a partnership. I expect to be free, completely free, in what I do, whom I see, where I go, always. […] [T]he man I had married […] would also have to see me as an equal, an ally, not as an inferior or an obedient, submissive wife.] (146)

The second half of the novel charts the tale of this 'association', and Georges's failure to rise above the sexual double standard, expecting of Madeleine a virtue of which he is not himself capable. As this cynical, practical novel of self-advancement progresses, Georges sees a way to advance from journalism to politics by manipulating the Walter family and disposing of his ghost-writing wife. Zola too rehearses this worldly relationship between politics and the press. The figure of the archly pragmatic journalist in fact frames the entire series of *Les Rougon-Macquart*, as Harrow reveals in those paragraphs of her study of Zola tellingly subtitled 'Aristide Rougon's work on words' (2010, 175-76). In the opening novel, *La Fortune des Rougon*, we see this journalist, who has already welcomed the 1848 revolution, fall in line with the new regime. Aristide relaunches himself as Saccard in those novels of political and economic capital (in a double sense), *La Curée* and *L'Argent*. By the time we reach the opening chapter of the twentieth and final novel, *Le Docteur Pascal*, the Second Empire having been displaced in the previous novel by the Third Republic, Aristide has conveniently become the editor-in-chief of the republican newspaper *L'Époque*. Published in 1885, Maupassant's novel marks out its contemporary immediacy (the very *actualité* habitually associated with the press) by allowing its hero to use the new divorce law of 1884 (the Loi Naquet) to rid himself of Madeleine in the final pages of the novel, and to replace her with a younger model, Suzanne Walter, whose mother he has already seduced. If Duroy's serial narrative of private and public desires is seen to flourish, then Madeleine's is not wholly extinguished, or end-stopped, either, and we learn in a miniature detail in the final pages of the novel that she has already adopted another young beau of the journalism world. Women in this elite realm can also move on, like (if not quite like) men.

This notion of a life for women beyond divorce is examined with much greater vigour by Colette, as we shall see. But before turning in the case of Colette to a fiction which provides a route out of the strictures of nineteenth-century fiction and society, it is worth noting that

women writers such as Marcelle Tinayre also turned to the question of hetero collaboration in writing in general, and journalism in particular, most notably in her best-known novel *La Rebelle* (1907). The novel opens with its heroine, Josanne Valentin, a journalist for the women's magazine *Le Monde féminin*, about to lose her sickly husband whilst engaged in a rather insipid affair with a wealthy bachelor. The former dies, the latter marries another woman, and Josanne strikes up a relationship with the male feminist, Noël Delysle, whom she meets having reviewed his book on *The Woman Worker* (*La Travailleuse*), which she of course embodies, as she rises from the fashion column to becoming an investigative reporter. Theirs then is a relationship which is grounded in a highly literal sense in the use of language which will, later in the century, underpin Benveniste's classic definition of discourse as 'language put into action, and necessarily between partners' (225). Although she remains a rebel in her provocative journalism, her private life is defined by the compromises imposed by Noël's failure to enact his own authorial pronouncements. In one of the innumerable instances of retrospective jealousy in turn-of-the-century French fiction, Noël cannot accept the history of her previous adultery, and has her renounce her previous life, even though her feminist principles had led her to believe that she had a right to sexual fulfilment as much as any man. The novel ends with him then pronouncing to her editor that he won't be able to employ her for much longer as they are soon to be married. We do not see this unfold, but this conservative ending is contradicted in the denouement of our final novel, *La Vagabonde* (1910).

Here, Colette's novel recounts the personal and professional life of Renée Néré, recently divorced from the painter Adolphe Taillandy, who has given up her writing career to become a mime artist on the Parisian music hall scene. Whereas divorce functions at the end of *Bel-Ami* as a way for Georges to dispose of Madeleine, here divorce provides the trigger for the 'second life' of Colette's heroine. Her very name plays on the syllabic permutations of the feminine form of the 'reborn', 'renée', inverted and perhaps negated in her surname, Néré; and

thus speaking back to the natal etymology of the Christian first name of Tinayre's Noël Delysle, whose source is reborn on Easter Sunday in a manner that this would-be feminist, rather disappointingly, fails to live up to. In 1906 Colette herself had separated from her chronically unfaithful first husband, Willy (Henri Gaultier-Villars), the divorce only coming through in 1910, the year of this novel's publication. Having previously written with and for him, their break-up also signalled a new direction in Colette's cultural and professional life that was by turns both frightening and liberating, and *La Vagabonde* explores such ambivalence about the collapse of their heterosexual and heterosocial bond. The novel opens with the blossoming of her second relationship, this time with one Maxime Dufferein-Chautel, whose passion has been ignited by seeing her on stage. In a telling conflict between love and work, Renée insists on leaving Paris (and Maxime) to go on tour around France, and in this lies the novel's primary sense of the title's reference to the vagabond as itinerant worker, as peripatetic performer, as bohemian-cum-journey(wo)man of the cultural life.

The resonance of Colette's title for contemporary notions of working and loving is exemplified by Zygmunt Bauman's privileging of the very notion of the vagabond as the emblematic subject of 'liquid modernity', privileged above Deleuze's foregrounding of the nomad as such an emblem:

> The vagabond does not know how long he will stay where he is now, and more often than not it will not be for him to decide when the stay will come to an end. Once on the move again, he sets his destinations as he goes as he reads the road signs, but even then he cannot be sure whether he will stop, and for how long, at the next station. What he does know is that more likely than not the stopover will be but temporary. What keeps him on the move is disillusionment with the last place of sojourn and the forever

> smouldering hope that the next place which he has not visited yet, perhaps the place after next, may be free from the faults which repulsed him in the places he has already tasted. Pulled forward by hope untested, pushed forward by hope frustrated. The vagabond is a pilgrim without a destination; a nomad without an itinerary. (1993, 240)

In correspondence between Renée and Maxime which ensues during her tour, Renée expresses her fear of repeating the painful experience of husbandly infidelity. With his epistolary offer of marriage comes an increasingly authoritarian tone, which Renée realizes she must evade, 'preferring,' in Rogers's phrase, 'solitude to domination' (229). In this affective sense too, then, Renée is something of a vagabond, eluding the linear logic of the feminine life narrative prescribed a century earlier by the paternalistic Napoleonic Code, and embracing what Zygmunt Bauman terms 'liquid love'.

It is Colette herself who completes for Renée her desired manoeuvre back from stage to page, from performance to writing, from body to hand (the very term 'manoeuvre' common to both English and French, both forms sharing the etymological sense of working by hand, as writers and painters do). In Brooks's terms, then, we might say that Renée has circled back from the performance of the *body* on view to the *work* of the writer. In Proust's subsequent endeavours, we may take the very existence of his seemingly incomparable *Künstlerroman*, *In Search of Lost Time*, to be the fictional manifestation of the literary desires of the novel's hero, Marcel. Unlike our first three texts in this chapter, Colette's novel is also a first-person narrative, and within the circularity of this intradiegetic logic we may identify the fusion of a feminist afterlife and of textual reflexivity. For it is as if the diary writing, to which Renée returns, has been actualized in the very existence of Colette's first-person novel. The novel, in turns, speaks back autofictionally to her own experience, and in the very act of writing

transcends the manipulative logic of Willy's desire for heterotextual collaboration. Renée, it transpires, is reborn in the work of art rather than in the art of love. In fiction's perpetual self-reworking, mimesis, it seems, has been defeated by diegesis, after all.

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Notes

[1] ‘Erziehung’ is to ‘enseignement’ (French) and ‘education’ (English) as ‘Bildung’ is to ‘éducation’ (French) and ‘upbringing’ (English).