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HUMORING THE THIRD REPUBLIC: *LE RIRE* IN FRENCH POLITICS AND POPULAR
CULTURE, 1894-1918

by

ANDREW KOTICK

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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ABSTRACT

Humoring the Third Republic: *Le Rire* in French Politics and Popular Culture, 1894-1918

by

Andrew Kotick

Advisor: David Troyansky

This dissertation studies the illustrated satirical periodical *Le Rire* in its historical context between its debut during the Dreyfus Affair and the conclusion of World War I. Adopting a multivalent approach to the historical study of graphic humor, it argues that *Le Rire* constitutes a significant corpus of evidence for understanding the political, commercial, social, and cultural novelties of its time, and maintained an ambivalent relationship with the young institutions and functionaries of the French Third Republic. As France's leading satirical periodical, *Le Rire* served as a powerful medium for broadcasting nascent and extreme ideas to a mass reading public in Paris and beyond. Organized into five chapters, this dissertation charts the growth of *Le Rire* from its inception during the Dreyfus Affair into a near-monopolistic enterprise of comic publishing, including its growth into a proprietary pavilion at the 1900 Exposition Universelle, a publishing house and sponsor of Parisian entertainments and spectacles, and its experience weathering the experience of World War I. Ultimately, this dissertation concludes that despite its incubation of nascent far-right political movements, being closely affiliated with antisemitic, ethnonationalist, and anti-parliamentary ideologues, *Le Rire* ultimately reconciled itself to the political culture and institutions of the Third Republic during the crucible of World War I. Its history thus relates a salient view of the close relationship and changing nature of politics and popular culture at the turn of the twentieth century, and the role of humor in mediating both.

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INTRODUCTION

Simply and deftly titled, *Le Rire* (“Laughter”) was a weekly illustrated humor journal founded in Paris in 1894 with the aspiration of becoming France’s preeminent organ of the illustrated satirical press. It achieved that goal swiftly, selling over 100,000 copies of its first issue and requiring additional print runs of its first three issues to satisfy consumer demand. It was even counterfeited and price-gouged in the torrent of interest that met its release.¹ Its niche in an already crowded market of satirical periodicals was straightforward: a profusely illustrated digest of graphic satire, featuring cartoons, comics, and caricatures of the highest artistic merit, alongside the work of the most popular comic writers of the time, at the lowest possible cost. The economical accessibility of the journal to a mass readership, not only in the municipal limits of Paris but across France and beyond its borders throughout much of Europe, made *Le Rire* an unrivaled and outstanding player in its field that effectively transformed the appeal of comic illustration and the satirical press in its time.

When the journal appeared in November 1894, it was a relative latecomer to a well-established mass medium. In the wake of France’s 1881 Law concerning freedom of the press, new periodicals inundated French markets, becoming an iconic fixture of the so-called Belle Époque, in what historians unanimously term the “Golden Age” of the periodical press. Among such new periodicals, satiric outlets like Albert Robida’s *La Caricature* and Jules Roque’s *Le Courier français* had been founded to demonstrate the artistic aptitudes of caricaturists and satirists in celebration of a moment of heightened press freedom. More broadly, these periodicals reflected the spirit, interests, and particularities of the burgeoning community of artists and bohemians living in the vicinity of the butte Montmartre and working in the cabarets that had

¹ *Le Rire* 3 (24 November 1894), 8.

begun to open there. For the next decade, such publications reshaped the cultural life of Paris, reflecting the broader phenomenon of growing commercial entertainments in the city, catering to the growing economic and cultural influence of the middle classes and those who entertained them, as well as the tensions that often arose between them.²

By the time *Le Rire* appeared, the influence of the Montmartre cabarets had begun to ebb from Parisian society. The Cabaret du Chat Noir's monopoly as the nexus of the community's artistic production and innovation had splintered into dozens of new establishments and short-lived imitators, seeking to replicate the meteoric commercial success proprietor Rodolphe Salis had generated at multiple locations. The novelty of the era had grown somewhat stale, despite the groundbreaking new media and subversive and satiric sense of humor that proliferated around the butte. Albert Robida, an acclaimed caricaturist, illustrator, and progenitor of science fiction in novels and comic art, had left his duties as editor in chief of *La Caricature* in 1892. *Le Courier français*, an institution unto itself that had played an instrumental role in the life and art of Montmartre, had proven itself a source of constant provocation, controversy, and scandal to bourgeois *Tout-Paris* and authorities alike through its costume balls, carnival parades, and exhibitions of avant-garde artistic movements like the *fumistes* of Montmartre and Jules Lévy's *arts incohérents*.³

At the same time that Parisian cultural life had undergone rapid transformation in the time between 1881 and 1894, so too had the young parliamentary republican regime of France

² See especially Jacques Lethève, *La Caricature et la presse sous la IIIe République* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1961), as well as Robert Justin Goldstein, *Censorship of Caricature in Nineteenth-Century France* (Kent, OH and London: Kent State University Press, 1989), 202-249.

³ See Phillip Dennis Cate and Mary Shaw, eds., *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabarets, Humor, and the Avant-Garde, 1875-1905* (New Brunswick, NJ: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 1996), as well as Laurent Bihl, *La grande mascarade parisienne: production, diffusion et réception des images satiriques dans la presse périodique illustrée parisienne entre 1881 et 1914* (Thèse de doctorat, Université Paris 1 – Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2010).

been shaken by near constant political turmoil and crisis. Intended as a provisional transition government, the parliamentary Third Republic had emerged as a permanent solution to failed monarchist designs for possible restoration of the crown, only to face down mounting anti-republican opposition, internal instability, and corruption scandals. Indeed, a newly unfettered free press helped actualize such scandals as objects of public interest and aided in the formation of new mass political movements in response. The most salient case that posed an immediate threat to the regime had coalesced in 1886 around the former Minister of War and beloved nationalist general Georges-Ernest Boulanger, whose mass appeal and cult of personality mounted an increasingly powerful and radical electoral campaign between 1888 and 1889 that unified disparate political threads around the central issues of nationalism, revanchism, and the revision of the republican constitutional laws, before its sudden defeat and dissolution.

Thereafter the French Republic was rocked by incessant corruption scandals and political violence. The revelations of the Panama Canal Company's bankruptcy and bribery of state officials, particularly the central involvement of two Jewish bankers responsible for bribing legislators, had profound implications for the antisemitic political movement. Anarchist political violence, including Auguste Vaillant's bombing of the Palais Bourbon during the legislative session of the Chamber of Deputies in December 1893, and culminating in Sante Caserio's assassination of President of the Republic Sadi Carnot the following June, had resulted in the *lois scélérates* limiting freedom of the press surrounding issues of political advocacy of criminal activities and anarchist organization. Beginning in August, the *Procès des trente* was held at the assizes court of the Seine to try thirty anarchists accused of criminal association. In the weeks just before *Le Rire*'s debut in November 1894, Édouard Drumont's antisemitic daily *La Libre*

Parole broke the first revelations of the Dreyfus Affair that would soon consume the whole of French society in seemingly intractable ideological division.

Thus, *Le Rire* debuted as a beneficiary of good timing. Founded by young entrepreneur Félix Juven in tandem with prominent art critic and historian of caricature Arsène Alexandre, *Le Rire* sought to bridge the divide between the niche artistic world of bohemian Montmartre and a broader mass-market public of all ages, enabled by the latest advances in printing technology. Its debut issue appeared on 10 November 1894 as a 12-page tabloid, sold for the price of 15 centimes.

Within several months' time, *Le Rire* had cemented its place as France's satirical journal *sine qua non*, printing without interruption until the coming of World War I in August 1914. The journal effectively preserved the most beloved elements of illustrated print satire, while refining the artistic and material quality of the product itself, benefitting from technological advances and the associated plummeting costs in graphic printing technology.⁴ In the first two decades of its life, *Le Rire* grew from a nascent humor journal into a titanic brand within its proprietor's publishing empire, effectively synonymous with illustrated comic publishing in turn-of-the-century Paris. By 1900, *Le Rire* comprised multiple tie-in and collectible products—including almanacs, illustrated guides, reissued albums and prints, as well as a proprietary theater pavilion and museum exhibit, dedicated to the history of puppet theater and comic art at the 1900 Exposition Universelle. Within another five years' time, *Le Rire*'s proprietor and editorial director Félix Juven had grown the journal's name even more into a promotional tool for the organization of annual exhibitions dedicated to comic illustration, banquet parties, and even the

⁴ See Claude Bellanger et al., eds. *Histoire générale de la presse française, de 1871 à 1945*, Tome 3 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1972), 89-98.

professional association of cartoonists in his employ. All the while, *Le Rire* remained Juven's flagship periodical and keystone in an expansive publishing portfolio that included trade titles of general interest, pedagogical texts for classroom use, illustrated volumes for children, literary classics in translation, comic albums, and gift sets, until Juven abruptly liquidated his publishing house in 1912 to refocus his attentions on *Le Rire* and its sister publication, *Fantasio*. The coming of war in 1914 irreparably damaged *Le Rire*'s near-monopoly in the satirical press and associated domains of comic art and publishing, from which it never recovered, though the journal successfully weathered wartime restrictions and adapted to survive the war when so few of its peers emerged intact come 1919.

Le Rire's impact upon the visual culture, political life, and entertainment of turn-of-the-century Paris is difficult to measure quantitatively, but also difficult to overstate. The journal was founded amidst the first tidings of the Dreyfus Affair and contributed to the visual record and vitriolic polemics of the scandal. It was subject to censorship proceedings and seizure twice for obscenity, though otherwise maintained a relatively free laissez-faire relationship with press authorities. Most significantly, *Le Rire* played an active role in diplomatic relations with Britain and Germany on several occasions, provoking government intervention twice amidst mounting tensions on the international stage between the imperial powers of Europe. *Le Rire* participated in the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle, received a contract to supply textbooks to state schools, and in 1907 founded the Salon des Humoristes and patronized the professional association of *artistes humoristes* that organized and operated it.

And yet, despite its contemporary fame and popularity, little attention has been paid to *Le Rire*'s place in the public life of *Belle Époque* France. Perhaps owing to the fundamentally unserious nature of satire and caricature, historians have long relegated *Le Rire* to a footnote or

paragraph in the cultural mosaic of its time. Even extensive histories of the press ignore the significance of satire, comic illustration, and sequential art as mere frivolities, a facet of the nascent mass culture that typified the *fin de siècle* but merit little more than superficial acknowledgment.

The aim of this dissertation, in turn, is to more diligently examine the life and story of *Le Rire*—its mission, its political interventions, its cartoonists, its commercial machinery, and its eventual decline—in tandem with the trajectory of the political regime into which it was inextricably interwoven. *Le Rire* maintained, for the entirety of its existence, a functional, if ambivalent, working relationship with the institutions of the French Republic until the regime's collapse in 1940 under the weight of Nazi occupation. In that time, *Le Rire* positioned itself as a satirical pillar of the press, a politically neutral watchdog of governmental affairs that also offered nonpolitical graphic, promotional, and satirical content. Consequently, the weekly's popularity grew, in part, in step with the political life of the Third Republic.

The enormity of *Le Rire*'s success between its founding and the course of World War I, when it temporarily suspended publication and reemerged as an illustrated organ of wartime propaganda, makes the journal an ideal case study for broader historical considerations. Its circulation and broad reach were unrivaled within the satirical press in France, and the longevity and stability it achieved as a relative latecomer to a crowded market were unique among its many peers: the journal stayed in continuous publication until August 1914, reemerged in its wartime format for the duration of the war, and returned to its regular format in 1919 until the coming of World War II in 1940. The title even reappeared in a monthly format in January 1946 following the conclusion of the war, running until 1949, and was last reprised in 1951, running until its disappearance in 1971. This dissertation focuses on the initial period of growth and the zenith of

Le Rire's popularity between 1894 and 1914. It ends with World War I, as the journal never recovered from the war's destructive impact on its readership and relevance, despite its survival.

Outline of Chapters

This dissertation comprises five chapters, as well as a conclusion and epilogue, organized principally in chronological fashion, though also addressing key thematic issues according to *Le Rire*'s evolution over time. The first is dedicated to the journal's embryonic years and its growth into the principal organ of comic illustration and graphic satire in France. Founded in November 1894, *Le Rire* was a relative latecomer to the crowded marketplace of the satirical press in France. The country had seen the development of a dynamic and evocative satirical press in the course of the nineteenth century, under the repressive regimes of the Bourbon Restoration, Orleanist July Monarchy, and Bonapartist Second Empire. Following an initial restrictive period in the early years of the Third Republic, the 1881 law on freedom of the press had inaugurated a deluge of new satirical titles dedicated to graphic art and caricature, chief among them Albert Robida's *La Caricature* (1880-1904) and Jules Roque's *Le Courrier français* (1884-1914). Despite its belated advent, *Le Rire* was designed to be a composite product, a digest that married trends in comic art to issues of topical concern. Its key innovation and market niche, I argue, was its marriage of quality with accessibility. Taking advantage of an independent artistic director, technological advances in lithographic printing, and significant capital investment, *Le Rire* fused high quality color prints with ample advertisement space, aggressive self-promotion, and established artistic talent to afford its contributing artists near-total license and freedom of expression on the page.

The second chapter more closely interrogates the nature of *Le Rire*'s place and intervention in the foremost political scandal of its early life—the Dreyfus Affair. Indeed, *Le*

Rire was founded concurrently with the controversy's eruption in French public life, and sought to profit from the topicality of the affair, tying much of its early content to developments in the story and the associated trials. Relative to other satirical journals, especially those founded in order to stake a claim or choose sides in the controversy, *Le Rire*'s significance in the Dreyfus Affair was peripheral: the journal insisted on its editorial neutrality and never served as a conduit for political mobilization or mouthpiece for any single cause. Nevertheless, *Le Rire* was eager to publish anything its directors thought would sell, and routinely broadcast the polemics of its contributing artists. Though *Le Rire* never came into direct conflict with Republican authorities over its Affair-related content, the journal indeed provided a willing platform for some of the scandal's most notorious and virulent images, almost uniformly anti-Dreyfusard and frequently anti-republican in character.

The third chapter turns away from *Le Rire*'s political intrigue to instead examine its participation in the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900. Conceived during the Dreyfus Affair as a lucrative promotional opportunity, *Le Rire* established its own proprietary exhibit at the 1900 Exposition, simply called the Maison du Rire. Situated in the Rue de Paris pavilion on the Cours de la Reine, the Maison du Rire functioned doubly as a theater and museum dedicated to the history of laughter and comic entertainments, both in France and across Europe. For the daily admission price of 1 franc, the Maison du Rire staged a rotating ensemble of puppet shows and live performances, including the revival of the famous Chat Noir shadow plays, in two theaters, as well as a walk-through exhibit of original illustrated works published in *Le Rire*. The space itself was ornately decorated by the hands of *Le Rire*'s most prolific contributing artists. Though original plans also intended to include a bar for on-site consumption, the plan was defeated. Despite Juven's grand designs and heavy promotion of the exhibit, however, the Maison du Rire

suffered a number of setbacks that proved a significant financial loss. Nevertheless, the ordeal did not deter Juven from similar ventures.

The fourth chapter explores more thoroughly the growth of *Le Rire* after 1900 into a multimedia brand under Juven's leadership. The lessons of the Maison du Rire proved fruitful, as Juven pressed to grow the journal away from the constraints of the printed page and into a powerhouse of comic publishing, professional development, and event planning. By the Exposition's inauguration in the Spring of 1900, *Le Rire* was the flagship publication in a larger portfolio of periodicals owned by Juven's eponymous publishing house. Rapidly, the Maison Juven grew into a general trade publisher, with a particular emphasis on popular fiction and illustrated albums for children, but also featuring pedagogical texts for state schools, deluxe library editions, gifts, and translated works. At the same time, Juven diversified the activities of *Le Rire*, growing the journal into a brand name for all comic publishing activities and the professional development of caricature and cartooning. The journal's offices moved, integrated into Juven's publishing empire housed in a three-story headquarters on the Rue Réaumur. Beginning in 1902, under the name of *Le Rire*, Juven began sponsoring themed galas and dinners. In 1906, Juven founded *Fantasio* as a sister publication to *Le Rire* for the promotion of such events and similar entertainments in Paris. The following year, he founded the *Salon des Humoristes* under *Le Rire*'s name, and began organizing the independent trade association of cartoonists under the umbrella name of *les Humoristes*. Come 1910, a professional schism had developed between Juven and *Le Rire*'s most famous and prolific contributing artists, leading to a semi-formal strike and boycott of *Le Rire* that endured over a year. By 1912, Juven suddenly sold off his publishing assets and liquidated his catalogue, downsizing to keep just *Le Rire* and *Fantasio* as his sole business focus.

The vacillating fortunes of *Juven* and *Le Rire*, though not tied to the political life of the Third Republic, were nevertheless impacted by them, especially with the coming of war in 1914. The fifth and final chapter of this dissertation focuses on the impact of war upon *Le Rire*, and in turn, *Le Rire*'s place in the French war effort during the course of World War I. *Le Rire* abruptly suspended publication, without notice, in the first week of August 1914 as the order for general mobilization was issued. It reappeared in late November under a modified wartime title, which it maintained for the duration of the conflict: *Le Rire Rouge*. The wartime edition of *Le Rire* was a wholesale and willing organ of wartime propaganda, marshaling the engines of satire and graphic humor to sustain public morale, both civilian and martial. Through pervasive and dogmatic self-censorship and patriotism, *Le Rire Rouge* relayed a complicated chronicle of the war through the pens of its contributing artists, many of whom had been mobilized to fight the war on the Western Front. Adapting to wartime conditions, *Le Rire* was one of the few satirical publications of the *Belle Époque* that survived the conflict intact—it reverted to its normal format and content in January of 1919, and continued publication uninterrupted until the Nazi invasion and occupation of France in 1940. In that time, *Le Rire* continued to chronicle and parody the travails of the Third Republic in an increasingly tense and politically polarized Europe. Nevertheless, the crucible of war had permanently reshaped the journal, and it never recovered its prewar relevance, as consumer tastes increasingly turned away from print, and toward newly accessible or emergent mass media like film, radio, and television.

Methods and Sources

This dissertation largely relies on original archival research and extensive use of print sources, published and unpublished, held principally in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF) system, Bibliothèques spécialisées de la Ville de Paris (BSVP), and research divisions of

the New York Public Library (NYPL), to chart a multifaceted history of *Le Rire* and its relationship to the politics of the French Third Republic. In support of those findings, I also marshal and, when possible, engage, a developed corpus of scholarly literature in both French and English on the histories of the satirical press, politics, popular culture, and print technology in the early French Third Republic. On the other hand, scholarly interest in *Le Rire* remains halfhearted at best. At present, only one other scholar, Laurent Bihl of Université Paris 1 – Panthéon-Sorbonne, has studied the journal in depth. His work and methodology are foundational to this project as the sole point of reference for archival research on the history of *Le Rire*, as well as the broader history of the caricatural press in France.⁵

Laurent Bihl's work, centered on the history of the production, diffusion, and reception of satirical illustration, attempts rigorous case studies of major satirical publications in Paris between 1880 and 1914, as a means to more fully elaborate a comprehensive cultural history of the satirical press. *Le Rire* is one of his four major case studies. His work necessarily orients much of the structure of this dissertation's engagement in the scholarship of the field, and this work indeed owes a debt of gratitude to the trail he blazed. However, the focus of this dissertation is more expressly interested in the political workings of humor in the same period, taking *Le Rire* as its sole case study. The conclusions of this dissertation were arrived at independently and though they in large part agree with Bihl's findings, it is my distinct approach to the question of *Le Rire*'s political engagement and relationship with the Third Republic, its institutions, and the political culture of parliamentary republicanism that remains the principal focus of this dissertation, rather than the popular reception of graphic satire. Whereas Bihl

⁵ See especially Laurent Bihl, *La grande mascarade parisienne: production, diffusion et réception des images satiriques dans la presse périodique illustrée parisienne entre 1881 et 1914* (Thèse de doctorat, Université Paris 1 – Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2010).

ultimately concludes that *Le Rire* was foremost a mass-market periodical whose conservative politics were subordinate to larger forces, this dissertation contends that *Le Rire*'s amorphous, ambivalent political orientation indeed reflected conservative values, among others, insofar as it mirrored—and distorted—the political life of the Republic itself.

The extensive use of archival sources is essential to this dissertation. Nevertheless, archival records have also posed a significant challenge to reconstructing and interpreting the significance of *Le Rire* within its historical milieu. Despite *Le Rire*'s size and popularity for the duration of its existence, its archival footprint is remarkably and curiously sparse—a problem which itself raises questions about the fate of the publication outside the period under study here. Within a collection key to recording the history of the press in the Archives Nationales de France (AN—Série F18, on the regulation of the press in France), *Le Rire*'s file is conspicuously absent from the recorded list of published periodicals. Whereas extensive records on legal proceedings, revenues, sales, employment, and state depositions exist for similar publications, access to such records for *Le Rire* eludes this study. Instead, I have extensively consulted records held within Série F12, on commerce and industry, which contain a detailed record on the Maison du Rire pavilion at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900, as well as an extensive police surveillance dossier on Félix Juven, compiled in 1911, in consideration of Juven's candidacy for admission to the Légion d'honneur at the rank of Chevalier. I also intended to consult the private collection of nationalist poet and demagogue Paul Déroulède, held by the Archives Nationales, for which I received special permission to consult his correspondence with Félix Juven, who in 1907 published a collection of the former's writings. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this dissertation was unable to make use of those sources.

In addition to the collections of the Archives Nationales, the Archives de Paris (AP) were of limited value to the making of this dissertation. The vital records (*état civil*) of both Félix Juven and inaugural artistic director of *Le Rire*, Arsène Alexandre, are held in AP Série VE. The collection of the *Tribunal de commerce de la Seine* (Série D3U) contains all records pertaining to the legal incorporation, relocation, and dissolution of Juven's businesses, which were essential to reconstructing a timeline of events and associated correspondence. Série D1U, the collections of the *Tribunal correctionnel de la Seine*, contains judiciary records of two police interventions against *Le Rire*, in 1897 and 1899, respectively, the only recorded legal proceedings initiated against *Le Rire*, entailing the censure and seizure of two separate issues.

The collections of the BNF and BSVP systems hold the lion's share of *Le Rire* and Félix Juven's archival footprint in public record. Nearly all of Juven's published catalogue is available via the print and microfilm holdings of the BNF's general collection, as well as via the Gallica digital library. Gallica has been and remains vitally important to any researcher outside Metropolitan France, and it can safely be assumed that any image reproduced from print sources in this dissertation, unless otherwise noted, was consulted via Gallica. The Manuscripts and Performing Arts divisions of the BNF hold sparse collections of letters written by Juven to numerous figures in his employ or authors whose work he published. Their usefulness to this dissertation was limited.

Naturally, *Le Rire* provides the most useful corpus of evidence for this project, and its arguments largely rely on a close reading and reconstructive approach to the journal itself. Though, in the service of self-promotion, *Le Rire* is frequently an unreliable and overstated advocate of its own success, the interventions of its editors in response to current events and ongoing developments in the life of the journal, its readership, reach, and reception were

invaluable to assessing its overall impact in public life. A full print run of *Le Rire* in its entirety is held at the BNF – Bibliothèque François-Mittérand and the NYPL Schwarzman Building. Additionally, digital facsimiles of *Le Rire* are available via Gallica (until 1920) and Heidelberg University Digital Library (until 1919).⁶ Additional published supplementary products and tie-in merchandise are also available digitally via Gallica.

Alongside the journal itself, a small number of memoirs and published autobiographical texts written by former editors and contributors recount, in detail, the work and operations of *Le Rire*'s offices, as well as individual relationships with Juven. Among them, memoirs by *Le Rire*'s former artistic director Rodolphe Bringer, as well as former contributing humorists Gabriel de Lautrec and Francis Carco, provide deep insights into the lives of comic artists, cartoonists, and authors in Paris at the turn of the twentieth century, as well as their relationships with the press.⁷ Such sources provided especially rich detail on the planning and failure of the Maison du Rire at the 1900 Exposition Universelle, as well as biographical and personal insights into Félix Juven's management style and working relationships.

In addition to primary sources, this dissertation engages an existing, if sparse, scholarly literature on the history of caricature, satire, and humor in the French Third Republic that ties together several distinct threads of study. An initial wave of mid-twentieth-century scholars, chiefly working in France, looked to print culture and the press as the social institution *sine qua non* of the Third Republic. Sweeping syntheses of the press like the multivolume *Histoire générale de la presse française* (published by the Presse Universitaire de France in four volumes

⁶ Images inserted digitally in the body of this dissertation as figures are all reproduced from the Heidelberg University Digital Library's collection unless otherwise noted. The entire collection can be consulted at the following stable URL: <https://www.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/helios/fachinfo/www/kunst/digit/rire.html>

⁷ See, individually: Rodolphe Bringer, *Trente ans d'humour* (Paris: France-Édition, 1924); Francis Carco, *Les Humoristes* (Paris: Paul Ollendorff, 1921); and Gabriel de Lautrec, *Souvenirs des jours sans souci* (Paris: Éditions de la Tournelle, 1938).

between 1969 and 1975) revived earlier modes of historical writing that integrated the Third Republic more seamlessly into the *longue durée* of modern France. Smaller, more focused studies, like Jacques Lethève's *La Caricature et la presse sous la IIIe République*, underscored the popularity of the illustrated satirical press relative to the technological possibilities of the means of mass production that enabled mass political movements to emerge in the late nineteenth century. Similarly, Élisabeth and Michel Dixmier produced a foundational case study of *L'Assiette au beurre* in 1974. Their historiographical heirs, the likes of Christophe Charle, Christian Delporte, Dominique Khalifa, Jean-Yves Mollier, and Bertrand Tillier, among others, have developed a more methodical and critical approach to the analysis of print, the institutions of publishing, and the graphic arts in French society.

Yet another cohort of scholars has more directly focused on the political, cultural, and social history of humor in modern France, elevating the subject of laughter to a category of analysis worthy of broader historical consideration. Though the exhortation of Mikhail Bakhtin, quoting Alexander Herzen, to urge historians to write the history of laughter marks a convenient point of origin, it is doubtless the work of Robert Darnton that situates laughter as a central methodological problem in writing the history of France. In light of Darnton's work, scholars like Antoine de Baecque, Amy Forbes, and Daniel Grojnowski have pioneered the historical and literary study of laughter in French politics, culture, and society.⁸ A 2002 monograph by Allen Douglas on the birth of *Le Canard Enchaîné* provides perhaps the most important and immediate methodological model for this project, especially as it pertains to the significance of World War

⁸ See in particular the following works: Antoine de Baecque, *Les Éclats du rire : la culture des rieurs au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2000); Amy W. Forbes, *The Satiric Decade: Satire and the Rise of Republicanism in France, 1830-1840* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010); and Daniel Grojnowski, *Aux commencements du rire moderne : l'esprit fumiste* (Paris: José Corti, 1997).

I.⁹ A 2012 volume of essays problematizes *The Politics of Humor* in twentieth-century Europe as a significant facet of social relations between national and ethnic groups.¹⁰ Even as this dissertation was being written, an edited volume of essays under the joint direction of Matthieu Letourneux and Alain Vaillant appeared in March 2021, published by the CNRS, on the *Empire du rire* in France between the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries.¹¹ That is to say, the literature on the history of laughter in France is embryonic, but ever growing. This dissertation builds upon such work to better develop the shape of sustained dialogue amongst historians and the interested reading public on the interpretation and writing of the history of laughter in post-revolutionary France.

Historical Significance

Le Rire is perhaps the ideal case study through which historians can hope to understand the significance of laughter in the political, economic, and cultural life of France—and France’s place in the world—between its founding and the end of the First World War in late 1918. As the preeminent organ of the satirical press, and unrivaled standard-bearer of caricature and comic art in French public life in the *Belle Époque*, *Le Rire* is uniquely situated to clarify the importance of laughter in the public life of the early Third Republic, while making sense of, or perhaps muddling, major developments in the changing landscapes of politics and popular culture.

The junction between those two domains is the focus of this dissertation. The political and historical significance of laughter has long been accepted, but only sparsely examined critically. In light of recent terror attacks in France, particularly the Charlie Hebdo massacre of

⁹ Allen Douglas, *War, Memory, and the Politics of Humor: The Canard Enchaîné and World War I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

¹⁰ See *The Politics of Humour: Laughter, Inclusion and Exclusion in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Martina Kessel and Patrick Merziger (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

¹¹ *L’Empire du rire: XIX – XXIe siècle*, eds. Matthieu Letourneux and Alain Vaillant (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2021).

January 2015, the political significance of humor within the institutions of the French Republic has received renewed scrutiny and discussion, whether as a pillar of free expression, a rite of belonging and exclusion within the nation, or, more sinisterly, as cause for violence. Though I do not wish to overstate *Le Rire*'s importance by drawing a straight line between its time and twenty-first-century terrorism, it is nevertheless important to bear in mind long-term continuities: since the coming of the French Revolution and turn of the nineteenth century, satire, graphic art, and laughter have all played prominent roles in shaping the political culture of French republicanism. That genealogy arguably begins in earnest with the satirical prints of the French Revolution and matured with the pen of Honoré Daumier. It became a mass medium in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the art of French caricature and humor became a global export in the industrialized world in large part due to the mass appeal of *Le Rire*.

Ultimately, *Le Rire* was simply a caricatural microcosm of its time, and it remains a funhouse window to the world of fin-de-siècle France. Its life between the first tidings of the Dreyfus Affair and the coming of World War I weaves together countless threads of public life: commerce; publishing and mass media; technological change; cultural anxieties over nationality, religion, race, sex, and gender; politics and governmental administration; domestic and international affairs; colonialism and empire; war; work and leisure, among others. To study any one theme in isolation from another is to miss the central point of this study: as France's most widely circulated and popular humor journal, *Le Rire* provides a distorted reflection of its time and place. In the subtleties of its comic representations of reality lay the fabric of French society in the *Belle Époque*.

CHAPTER I. THE MAKING OF FRANCE'S PREMIER JOURNAL HUMORISTIQUE: *LE RIRE* IN TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY PARIS

When it appeared in November 1894, *Le Rire*'s debut issue was both visually striking and profusely illustrated, featuring full color covers on back and front, and included both a prospectus and model rubrics for future columns and features. The cover illustrations bore signatures of famed artist Jean-Louis Forain on the front, and Gyp and Bob, the pseudonyms of the infamous antisemitic writer and salonnière, the Comtesse de Martel, on the back. Inside, a short *fantaisie* about parliamentary deputy François Bachimont, signed by "John Falstaff" (one pen-name of Franco-Belgian writer and journalist Clément Vautel), and a lyric poem by chansonnier Jules Jouy parodied Émile Zola's newly inaugurated *Trois Villes* series.

The journal's prospectus followed, relating its statement of purpose in plainly straightforward terms: *Le Rire* intended to provide an antidote to the drudgeries of modern life, seeking to bring levity to the gravitas of politics and money. It saw itself in direct continuity with a caricatural tradition constructed over the course of the nineteenth century, inheriting the legacy of masters like Honoré Daumier and Henry Monnier. It promised the best quality comic illustrations from renowned artists and emerging talents alike. It hoped to solidify an international dialogue between likeminded satirical publications like London's *Punch* and Munich's *Fliegende Blätter*, promising to reproduce caricatures from the foreign satiric press on a weekly basis to keep readers abreast of international trends. Lastly, it promised to foster a participatory and democratic spirit amongst its readership by promoting the publication of reader submissions and compensation or reward for any contribution deemed fit to print.

The pages that followed the prospectus variously featured model columns for the promotion of recently published literary works, theatrical reviews, *faits divers* news and rumors, promotional advertisements, and single-panel cartoons and sequential comic strips from a host of prominent cartoonists. The issue's centerpiece, a two-page spread inaugurating the journal's *Le Rire d'autrefois* series, reprinted an 1834 lithograph by Honoré Daumier caricaturing the legislative session of the Chamber of Deputies, titled *Le ventre législatif*.¹²

The issue was a success. It garnered a warm critical reception in the daily press, and generated sales figures that exceeded initial expectations.¹³ Coupled with its cast of outstanding contributing artists and writers, *Le Rire*'s appearance brought a spell of levity to an otherwise tense moment in Parisian public life. In the weeks that followed, *Le Rire* reported that its offices at 10 rue Saint-Joseph had been inundated with reader submissions and thanked them for "at least forty issues'" worth of material. If we are to cautiously believe the journal's reports of its own success, demand far surpassed the initial print run, prompting a parallel market for forgeries and price-gouging at newsstands and other points of sale. A full-page editorial notice at the end of issue 3 addressed these problems, appealing to readers' sense of taste and discretion and asking them to refrain from submitting scatological or pornographic illustrations: "there are a thousand subjects for witty observation beyond the water closet and digestive tract." The notice also imposes a limit on the length of written submissions, and asks readers not to expect responses via post due to prohibitive costs, lastly promising an additional print run on back

¹² *Le Rire* 1 (10 November 1894), 6-7.

¹³ The most detailed review of *Le Rire*'s debut issue, written by Charles Duharnel, appeared in *Le Figaro* 312 (8 November 1894), 2. *Le Figaro* also corroborated *Le Rire*'s report of logistical issues meeting consumer demand and the reissue of another print run. See *Le Figaro* nos. 313 (9 November 1894), 1, and 319 (15 November 1894), 2.

issues and reminding readers to notify approved vendors of low stock at points of sale rather than seek out illicit or counterfeit buying options.¹⁴

The veracity of *Le Rire*'s report on the matter is questionable, as no other reports of the scarcity appeared during or after the fact, though individual counterfeit issues had been confirmed in Belgium and other European countries.¹⁵ Though the report of speculation and overzealous demand was in all likelihood a publicity stunt, the tactic worked. *Le Rire* continued to report speculation and price inflation on back issues from illicit resellers. By December, editors announced a new print run of back issues and cautioned readers to buy from only licensed vendors or directly from the sales desk on the Rue Saint-Joseph at the standard price of 15 centimes, contending that speculators had driven prices as high as 40 francs per copy on counterfeit issues. *Le Rire* used the same notice to announce the promotional sale of a collectible giftbox available exclusively to subscribers at the price of 1 franc, or 1.60 for out of town or international subscribers. The sale continued through the end of the year, and was advertised as a holiday gift of historical value, "worthy of the greatest interest" for conservation.¹⁶

Though its self-reported numbers were and remained unreliable in the long-term, the immediate success of *Le Rire* proved enduring. By the end of its first year in publication, *Le Rire* cemented its place as France's premier and bestselling satirical periodical, a record it would retain for the duration of its existence. Though the quantitative data on *Le Rire*'s production, circulation, and reception is largely missing from historical record, the journal's evolution from its origins until the turn of the twentieth century offer unique window into the workings of life in

¹⁴ *Le Rire* 3 (24 November 1894), 11.

¹⁵ Bihl, *La Grande Mascarade parisienne*, 160-161.

¹⁶ *Le Rire* 6 (15 December 1894), 8.

fin-de-siècle France. Through the study of *Le Rire*'s particular synthesis of trends in comic art, historians are better disposed to understand the ways laughter informed French public life.

This chapter examines *Le Rire*'s early growth and mode of operation, from its debut in late 1894 until the turn of the twentieth century, to ascertain the ways it informed its readers through the satiric and parodic reporting of current affairs, as well as how it impacted public life in the French capital and beyond. What precisely was the significance of the satiric press in fin-de-siècle France, and what made *Le Rire* the giant among its competitors? On one hand, this chapter examines the publication history and content of *Le Rire*'s formative years: its engagement with contemporary political, social, cultural, economic, and diplomatic affairs. How did *Le Rire* appeal to, or even foster, a particular collective sense of humor amongst its readers? On the other hand, this chapter also studies *Le Rire*'s editorial and artistic evolution, alongside its commercial growth, as it rapidly cemented its status as France's bestselling, most popular, and longest-lived illustrated comic journal.

I first assess *Le Rire*'s production and history in its first years of publication. I study the journal's formal and visual innovations within the wider context of graphic humor and the comic press in fin-de-siècle France. Though *Le Rire* was a thoroughly *modern* publication that provided artists nearly total creative liberty and encouraged formal and stylistic experimentation, the publication routinely commemorated the longer historical tradition of French caricature, especially the work of nineteenth-century masters of the form. This interplay between past and present was a consistent theme of *Le Rire*'s publication history and identity, and allowed the journal to found its claims to artistic integrity and authenticity in the legacies of the past, as well as adapt new techniques and artistic forms to readers' changing tastes.

Studying *Le Rire*'s formal and technical inventiveness on the page, I maintain, helps to understand the evolution of the journal's political and cultural significance in the press and public life of fin-de-siècle Paris. *Le Rire* cemented its popularity and success through novelties both on and off the printed page: comic strips, high quality color illustration that showcased the idiosyncratic styles of individual artists, puzzle games and rebuses, and thematic special issues. Tie-in merchandise and deluxe anthologies and reprints helped the journal build sustainable commercial appeal and boosted *Le Rire*'s name recognition not only as a satirical periodical, but as a brand synonymous with comic publishing that helped proprietor Félix Juven grow *Le Rire* into a veritable business empire, which we shall explore further in chapter 4.

I then turn to the political dimension of *Le Rire*'s satirical content. Founded amidst the early developments of the Dreyfus Affair, *Le Rire* rapidly seized on nascent tensions and divisions burgeoning in public discourse to parody prominent public figures. Though *Le Rire* nominally maintained an editorial policy of steadfast political neutrality, the journal's editors upheld a commitment to providing artists a platform for total freedom of expression, which in practice privileged whichever political views sold best. As a result, *Le Rire* directly participated in and benefitted from the promulgation of anti-Dreyfusard, antisemitic, and anti-republican political caricatures that excoriated the institutions of the French parliamentary republic as corrupt, humorless, weak, and undermined variously by foreign or Jewish influences. *Le Rire*'s direct intervention in the Dreyfus Affair, which constituted a longstanding focus of the journal's first decade in publication, is the subject of this dissertation's following chapter. However, several important themes emerged from its involvement in the public debate and visualization of the Dreyfus Affair that permeated its content well beyond the scope of the scandal.

Using the work and career trajectory of one of *Le Rire*'s most notable and prolific contributing artists, Charles Léandre, as a case study, I examine how *Le Rire* propagated and entertained key talking points of the political far-right that had coalesced around the anti-Dreyfusard cause. Under the guise of satire and parody, *Le Rire* profited from the immense popularity of its cartoonists' antisemitic and anti-republican nationalist political views. I then turn to *Le Rire*'s interventions in foreign affairs and international, chiefly European, diplomacy and the particular role of its special issue format in mediating, or perhaps instigating, crises in international relations, chiefly through the works of artists Caran d'Ache and Adolphe Willette. Likewise, I briefly examine *Le Rire*'s coverage of colonial affairs within the global French empire. *Le Rire* was generally reserved in its attention to developments within the French colonial empire, but its artists expressed ambivalent opinions regarding colonial conquest, administration, and military campaigns in Africa and Asia, as well as lighthearted ethnographic interest in colonial cultures.

The significance of *Le Rire*'s popularity and success in French politics, society, and culture at the fin de siècle is farther reaching than one might initially assume for a fundamentally unserious publication. The periodical achieved a tangible impact on political life in France and abroad, several times provoking international controversy and diplomatic scandal. It effectively stood alone as the country's preeminent caricature and satiric periodical until the 1901 foundation of *L'Assiette au beurre* as its principal competitor, having achieved international renown through provocative stunts. By the turn of the century, it began to grow into a multimedia comic publishing enterprise, and achieved consistent growth until the coming of

World War I in 1914, with sales estimates reaching figures as high as 100,000 copies per issue.¹⁷ Ultimately, *Le Rire* demonstrates that the enterprise of satiric art was indeed commercially viable in fin-de-siècle France, but even more meaningfully, an essential aspect of the cultural life and popular medium of commercial entertainment in its time. It commands the full attention of even the most serious historians.

Production and Style

Le Rire was designed as a weekly periodical in tabloid format, released on Saturdays. Editor-in-chief and proprietor-director Félix Juven first established its offices on the rue Saint-Joseph in the second arrondissement of Paris, a block around the corner from the heart of the city's printing press industry on the Rue du Croissant. Ultimately, *Le Rire* would move house several times before World War I: first to a much larger location integrated with Félix Juven's other press holdings at 122 rue Réaumur, in March 1900; then to 14 boulevard Poissonnière in February 1909; and 1 rue de Choiseul in October 1912. All addresses lay within the vicinity of the *République du Croissant*. The journal's principal innovation and selling point upon its debut was the publication of graphic prints at an economical price point. Indeed, *Le Rire* sold for 15 centimes per individual issue. Until World War I, *Le Rire* only raised its price once, in April 1902, to 20 centimes. The journal's focus lay in the preservation of visual quality, to the detriment of the material product, extracting the maximum value from the small tabloid format with vivid illustrations printed on lower quality paper, with exceptional collections of "deluxe" print runs issued on coated paper.¹⁸

¹⁷ Estimates regarding *Le Rire*'s circulation are a subject of scholarly speculation in the absence of definitive quantitative data. See Bihl, *La Grande Mascarade parisienne*, 575-577.

¹⁸ See for example, *Le Rire* 114 (9 January 1897), 8.

Such a business model was only possible due to recent conditions and innovations in print. Félix Juven had made a swift and bullish investment in the industrial application of new printing processes: halftone relief printing and subtractive chromolithography. These advances had drastically lowered the costs of color printing, allowing *Le Rire* to print illustrations more liberally, without augmenting consumer prices. Moreover, the journal enjoyed a longstanding and stable working relationship with its printers that allowed administrative continuity through 1914: the Imprimerie Dupont, in Clichy, retained the regular business of *Le Rire* from its inception through World War I, later being listed variously as the *Imprimerie Juven* or *Imprimerie spéciale du Rire* beginning in 1896.¹⁹

Juven, a young entrepreneur with a military background and limited savoir-faire in the satirical press, shrewdly enacted a division of labor in the administration of *Le Rire*'s editorial operations. He personally assumed control of the journal's business, logistical, and financial affairs, and delegated artistic and editorial duties to an insider, naming art critic and journalist for *Le Figaro* Arsène Alexandre as *Le Rire*'s artistic director. Alexandre had recently published a seminal historical study of French satire and caricature, *L'art du rire et de la caricature*, two years prior, and had been an active champion of comic art in the press both at home and abroad—earlier in 1894, he had reported on recent trends in French caricature for *Scribner's* magazine in New York.²⁰ A respected and well-connected scholar of the field, Alexandre had the purchase and established professional relationships necessary to marshal his influence to the journal's benefit, and was able to secure preeminent talent to contribute to *Le Rire* from the beginning. Writing in 1938, former editor and contributing satirist Gabriel de Lautrec noted, for

¹⁹ The name-change was first listed in *Le Rire* 63 (18 January 1896).

²⁰ Arsène Alexandre, "French Caricature of To-day" in *Scribner's Magazine* XV, 49 (1894): 477-488.

example, that “Félix Juven, having the vague idea for *Le Rire*, had the merit to entrust the realization of that idea to the excellent Arsène Alexandre, who made *Le Rire* what it was.”²¹

Under the dual powers of Juven’s ambitious business plan and eye toward mass appeal, and Alexandre’s artistic savoir-faire, *Le Rire* was an immediate and explosive success. Every aspect of the journal’s production and design was constructed with careful precision. Sharp discounts were extended to both long-term subscribers and in wholesale bulk orders direct to press kiosks and booksellers in collaboration with printers on the Rue du Croissant. Juven coordinated for his sales office to support bulk international shipments across Europe and even across the Atlantic. Alexandre meticulously designed a working formula for the journal’s weekly structure to feature a diverse range of content: front and back cover illustrations in full color; a gossip and rumors column, to be headed by artist Henry Somm; theater and literary review columns; an “amateurs’ corner” for reader-submitted artworks that invited any and all readers to submit their work, and a promise to both publish and compensate any work deemed fit to print; a *Rire à l’étranger* feature, aggregating cartoons and caricatures from the foreign press to sustain an international awareness and exchange of comic art. Interior pages relied on an admixture of short fictions or fake news, called *fantaisies*, by contributing staff or guest writers, and graphics, but were always profusely illustrated with single-panel cartoons and sequential comics in varying scales, and a feature insert, either a full-page illustration in black ink or, later, a deluxe double-page in color. Two pages of advertisements and announcements, and later, a small column on finance, rounded out the back pages of the journal.

²¹ Gabriel de Lautrec, *Souvenirs des jours sans souci* (Paris: Éditions de la Tournelle, 1938), 89.

The cornerstone of *Le Rire*'s mission and focus was the creative liberty and license of its artists. Editors expressly distanced themselves from the messaging of the works they published, insisting on *Le Rire*'s political neutrality and affirming its status as a *tribune libre*, committed to the principles of unfettered freedom of expression for its contributing artists and writers. In practice, *Le Rire* sought to rid itself of any legal responsibility for the content it published, but it also sought to make its pages a welcoming site for artistic experimentation and push the limits and capabilities of print media. Indeed, artists took advantage of the relative freedom *Le Rire* afforded them to innovate and explore the constraints of graphic form.

At the heart of that experimentation was the interplay between image and text, and the narrative power of both. Though *Le Rire* frequently relied on standard margins to organize page space and frame both single-panel and sequential cartoons, breaking down spatial divisions between works and the nonlinear or nonstandard formatting of the page became an increasingly visible part of *Le Rire*'s content. For *Le Rire*, design itself became an instrument of humor and play, for engaging editor, artist, and reader alike in a tacit, knowing dialogue on the constraints of the medium and the boundaries of cartoon art.

The forms by which the design of *Le Rire* became a vehicle for comedy were varied, and comprised the work of numerous artists, both established and renowned talents as well as lesser known or emerging names. *Le Rire* was careful to provide equal opportunity to both. The common thread that bound them all was the bohemian community in the artistic enclave of Montmartre, centered around the *cabarets artistiques* at the foot of the hill. The growth of Montmartre as the nucleus of the Parisian art world at the end of the nineteenth century had begun when Émile Goudeau moved his Hydropathes club, founded in 1878 and made famous by its raucous and convivially silly public meetings, to Montmartre from a café in the Latin Quarter

in 1881 to help a young, entrepreneurial failed artist by the name of Rodolphe Salis found the *Chat Noir* cabaret on the Boulevard du Rochechouart. The move cemented the neighborhood at the top of the butte and on the boulevards in the 9th arrondissement below as a burgeoning commercial pleasure district of establishments for artists to drink, perform, and work to entertain a paying, largely bourgeois clientele, and spawned countless imitators. Indeed, *Le Rire* itself acknowledged its pedigree in a two-part history of Montmartre as the *Capital du Rire* in January 1895.²²

The artistic community of Montmartre provided the creative labor that shaped and continually fed *Le Rire*'s success. Over time, *Le Rire* developed a rotational structure to feature its ensemble cast of Montmartre habitués. Front and back cover illustrations alike alternated between showcasing more "traditional" styles of caricature, featuring the likes of Forain, Willette, or Charles Léandre, and more modern or experimental works by Gustave-Henri Jossot, Caran d'Ache, Théophile Steinlen, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Félix Valloton, Lucien Métivet, and Raymond de la Nezière. As the journal's profile grew, emerging and younger talents featured more prominently, with the signatures of artists like Léandre, Métivet, Jules Depaquit, Georges Delaw, Abel Faivre, and Henri Avelot becoming mainstays of the journal.

The journal's laissez-faire approach to artists' creative whims and idiosyncrasies built a publication that became known for an eclectic, but wholly poignant and flippant style of satire. *Le Rire*'s editors simply ensured that the unique character of each artist's style was preserved, regardless of the size of their contributions. Alongside traditional single-panel cartoons with captions and sight-gags, *Le Rire* increasingly incorporated nonstandard and sequential, serial, or

²² "La Capitale du Rire" in *Le Rire* nos. 11 and 12 (12 and 19 January 1895).

“deluxe” formats in their published content, allowing emerging or new artists to showcase their work with total creative liberty. Both publication and artist stood to benefit, and indeed, artists took advantage of *Le Rire*’s approach.

Two such young, emerging talents, recent arrivals to the artistic enclave of Montmartre, were Jules Depaquit and Georges Delaw. Originally from Sedan in the Ardennes, the two cartoonists were childhood schoolmates and friends who had both developed penchants for cartooning in schoolyard newsletters. In 1893, the pair relocated to Paris together, initially moving into the Hôtel du Poirier at the top of the butte Montmartre before finding separate lodgings and studios in the neighborhood, while quickly assimilating into cabaret life at the *Chat Noir* and the *Lapin Agile*. Both debuted as cartoonists at the same time, contributing to numerous journals before being featured in *Le Rire*’s inaugural issue.

Depaquit and Delaw both became prolific mainstays of *Le Rire*’s team of contributing artists, featuring heavily in the journal’s promotional materials since its debut. The two shared a common style and thematic interests in the corpus of their work, inspired by the Épinal prints of Jean-Charles Pellerin. The drawings of both were defined by a childlike and whimsical use of heavy contour lines, simply detailed personages, broad color palettes, and a mutual fascination with folklore, fantasy, and fairytales, especially a bucolic nostalgia for their native province. Both were broadly categorized as *fantaisistes*, typically preferring fictional or historical subjects to satirizing topical issues or actualities. But it was their inclination toward sequential and narrative graphics that proved most innovative and most popular. Although both artists most commonly contributed traditional single-panel cartoons with printed captions, each was afforded a blank check to innovate on the page, and their influence grew steadily in *Le Rire*. Depaquit supplied fantastical illustrated letters, printed as facsimiles of his own hand, peppered with

doodles, countless cartoons, and *histoires sans paroles*, sequential narrative comic strips that avoided any use of text. By February 1895, Depaquit was charged with the design of *Le Rire*'s weekly rebus contest, which ran in 17 parts until October. Like Depaquit, Delaw became an increasingly visible fixture of *Le Rire*'s front and back cover, applying color liberally to imaginative and playful comic strips about pastoral subjects like Christmas traditions, schoolbook Latin grammar, and fairytales and legends.

Alongside more famous names like Caran d'Ache, Depaquit and Delaw were both early innovators of, and instrumental figures in, the development of the comics medium in the pages of *Le Rire*. Though not entirely a novelty when *Le Rire* debuted in 1894, the comic strip was indeed a recent phenomenon in mass media, entirely a construct of the nineteenth century. The medium, juxtaposing the sequential use of illustrated graphics with narrative text, had arrived in France between 1830 and 1840, by way of the Swiss artist Rodolphe Töpffer, especially the Maison Aubert's counterfeit reproductions of his *histoires en images* text comics under the direction of Charles Philipon.²³ It was under the patronage of Philipon that the interrelated media of caricature and sequential comics came of age in France, through publications like *La Caricature* and *Le Charivari*, especially in the works of artists Honoré Daumier, Grandville, Henry Monnier, Traviès, and Cham. In the first years of the Third Republic, Albert Robida had founded *La Caricature* in 1880 to showcase the medium, and Georges Colomb, under the penname Christophe, had begun publishing France's first recorded serialized comic strips in *Le Petit Français illustré* starting in 1889. Though intended for a child audience, Christophe's work proved immensely popular with a much larger readership of educated adults. The artist had

²³ See Thierry Groensteen and Benoît Peeters, *Töpffer, l'invention de la bande dessinée* (Paris: Hermann, 1994), 123 and 164.

pioneered the serial narrative format over longer periods of time. His first comic strip, *La Famille Fenouillard*, had run in *Le Petit Français illustré* in 53 installments between August 1889 and June 1893. Thereafter, Christophe published three more in the journal. *Les Facéties du sapeur Camember* began in January 1890, and would run over 55 installments until September 1896. *L’Idée fixe du savant Cosinus* first appeared in December 1893 and would run in 63 installments until November 1899. *Les Malices de Plick et Plock* appeared several weeks later at the end of December 1893, running in 55 installments over ten years.²⁴

It was largely Christophe’s impact and influence that prompted *Le Rire* to grant its artists the license to experiment with the form. Unlike Christophe’s work, *Le Rire* typically forewent long-term serialization of comics, but featured them as integral and premium content within their issues, typically dedicating $\frac{3}{4}$ or a full page to sequential graphics, sometimes even double-page inserts or multiple pages. Over time, comic strips in color by various artists, including Depaquit, Lucien Métivet, and Raymond de la Nezière, but especially Delaw, became a signature mainstay of *Le Rire*’s back cover, beginning with Depaquit’s comic strip in January 1895 lampooning rotund theater critic Francisque Sarcey of *Le Figaro*, in different theatrical contexts across Paris, ending with him dancing at the *Moulin Rouge*. (See Figure 1.1) Full- or double-page comic strips commonly featured as interior inserts, whether in black ink or deluxe supplements in color, especially as chromolithographic printing grew cheaper. Depaquit, for example, contributed a back-cover illustration in December 1904 that recounted the Biblical “holy story, revisited and corrected” in a massive 32-panel comic strip, constructed around puns.²⁵

²⁴ For a complete account of Christophe’s comics work, see the revised edition of François Caradec’s biography of the artist, *Christophe, préface de Raymond Queneau* (Paris: P. Horay, 1981).

²⁵ Jules Depaquit, “L’Histoire sainte revue et corrigée” in *Le Rire* N.S. 98 (17 December 1904), 16.

In total, Depaquit would contribute 33 feature comic strips between 1894 and 1918, as well as countless single-panel cartoons or short-form strips, while simultaneously contributing to competing comic journals like *Cocorico*, *Le Bon Vivant*, and, after the start of World War I, *La Baïonnette* and *Le Canard enchaîné*. Delaw drew more prolifically for *Le Rire*, publishing a total of 143 featured comic strips and Épinal prints between 1894 and 1918, including nearly a dozen that were submitted after his 1914 mobilization to Verdun in World War I. Both artists became integral collaborators to Félix Juven’s growing publishing business, contributing to *Le Rire* as well as other comic journals. Additionally, both Delaw and Depaquit increasingly illustrated written works and comics albums, chiefly intended for children, published through Juven’s proprietary publishing house, founded to consolidate the press baron’s periodicals, editorial offices, bookshops, and press under a single corporate umbrella.²⁶ Delaw’s body of comics albums published through



Figure 1.1. Jules Depaquit. “Les différentes attitudes de M. Sarcey dans les théâtres de Paris.” *Le Rire* 10 (12 January 1895), 12. The final panel at the Moulin Rouge is an intertextual reference to an 1892 watercolor by Adolphe Gérardot, depicting Sarcey dancing at the Moulin de la Galette.

²⁶ Juven’s publishing endeavors began, according to archival record, in 1890. His proprietary publishing house was officially constituted in 1898 and expanded progressively over the next two decades before its dissolution and sale of its catalogue to Hatier in 1912. See Mélissa Rousseau, *Félix Juven, libraire-éditeur 1862-1947* (mémoire de DEA d’histoire socioculturelle sous la direction de Jean-Yves Mollier: Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, June 1999).

Juven's imprint became important milestones in the development of a comics publishing industry in France at the turn of the 20th century.²⁷

As *Le Rire*'s profile grew, its formal innovations extended beyond the printed page. Like its competitors, *Le Rire* constantly sought novel attractions. Recalling designs of its satiric competitors like Albert Robida's *La Caricature* or Jules Roque's *Le Courrier français*, *Le Rire* had experimented with special themed issue formats, dedicated to a single subject or illustrated by a single artist, as early as issues 5 and 6 in December 1894. Those issues covered the opening of the Salon du cycle at the Palais de l'Industrie and the history of popular song in Paris, respectively. Nearly a year later, in October 1895, *Le Rire* ran a themed issue dedicated in its entirety to celebrating the 100th anniversary of lithographic printing. The issue featured a broad survey of the most celebrated French caricaturists of the nineteenth century, with a narrative text by Clément Vautel under the John Falstaff pen-name.

The special issue format did not reach its apogee, however, until *Le Rire* found a more focused use. In 1896, *Le Rire* began to promote special issues, either thematic or showcasing a single artist's signature, and the format eventually became a salient tool for *Le Rire* to offer readers satiric views of current events in world diplomacy and politics, while promoting the artistic integrity of its published product, at a premium price. The special issue also brought *Le Rire* into direct confrontation with legal authorities, as its most subversive special issues

²⁷ Delaw published several comics albums, primarily intended for children, through Juven's publishing house, the first of which was *La première année de college d'Isidore Torticolle* in 1899. Delaw's works published by Juven grew steadily through the first decade of the twentieth century, comprising at least seven works and a series following the character *Til d'Espagne*. For more information see the collected catalogues of the Librairie Félix Juven, listed in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Fonds Q10B, *Catalogues de libraires et éditeurs, 1811-1924*. The collection includes the Juven catalogues for 1898 and 1908, as well as one listed as *sans date* but is most certainly that of 1906, owing to an annex for that year attached to the main catalogue.

prompted several notable inquests, anomalous in *Le Rire*'s otherwise quiet relationship with the law.²⁸

After having established itself as a prominent comic journal in its own right, *Le Rire* increasingly looked to grow beyond the constraints of the periodical format. Under Juven's entrepreneurial leadership, the journal progressively sought to supplement its regularly published content with miscellany, novelties, and attractions, printed or not. The inclusion of the *Rire à l'étranger* column, reproducing celebrated cartoons and caricatures in the foreign press, had been an integral attraction of the journal's debut. Charging Jules Depaquit with the design and direction of a weekly rebus contest in 1895 was also a significant early sign of the journal's success and growth, as editors awarded contest winners prints of original works published in the journal, or a limited subscription to one of Juven's manifold other periodicals.²⁹

Le Rire's early aptitude for self-promotion, and embrace of multimedia merchandising, represented the commercial viability and popularity of comic art in its time. Following the successful marketing of a deluxe collectible carton in response to the manufactured shortage of its first print runs, *Le Rire*'s editors employed similar tactics to promote special tie-in products or supplementary inserts, puzzle contests, or the debut of works by new artists.³⁰ By the end of its inaugural year, *Le Rire* announced a contest for the decoration of an imminent "Hôtel du Rire" project in tandem with a back-issue collection of its first year, to feature a stained glass homage

²⁸ For the duration of its existence, *Le Rire* was only subject to two instances of seizure and ensuing legal proceedings, both regarding special issues. The first concerned Adolphe Willette's cover for the Christmas issue of 26 December 1896, seized on charges of obscenity that were later dismissed by the Tribunal correctionnel de Paris. A second inquiry was opened concerning Jean and Pierre Veber's special issue on Wilhelm II's visit to Ottoman Palestine on 26 November 1898, but never followed. Both instances were reported in *Le Rire*. See *Le Rire* 117 (30 January 1897), 2, and nos. 213 and 214 (3 and 10 December 1898), respectively.

²⁹ See *Le Rire* 15 (16 February 1895), 8.

³⁰ *Le Rire* 51 (26 October 1895), 3.

to Adolphe Willette by Albert Eloy-Vincent. (Figure 1.2) No follow-up to the announcement ever occurred.³¹

Le Rire increasingly promoted a wide variety of events, games, and tie-in products that grew its name into a multimedia brand. The journal aggressively promoted, above all, Félix Juven's publishing catalogue, featuring sister periodicals, fiction, and comic albums, as well as local balls and festivals, including Adolphe Willette's 1896 mid-Lenten *Fête de la vache enragée* in Montmartre, celebrating bohemian poverty and social marginalization in the neighborhood after the conclusion of the annual Paris carnival.³² Later that

same year, *Le Rire* began marketing its own illustrated almanac, titled *L'Année illustrée*, sold for 50 centimes through Juven's office on the Rue Saint-Joseph. The promotion became a recurring annual tradition, advertised as a new year's gift, and appeared every year through 1914.

Following the popularity of Depaquit's rebus contest, *Le Rire* ran more: in early 1897, a costume and mask design contest for the Bal de l'Opéra; in 1898, a series of contests for reader



Figure 1.2. "Projet de vitrail pour l'Hôtel du 'Rire.'" *Le Rire* 42 (24 August 1895), 12.

³¹ *Le Rire* 42 (24 August 1895), 12.

³² The Fête de la Vache Enragée was first announced with a double-page print by Adolphe Willette in *Le Rire's* carnival special issue, no. 67, on 15 February 1896, and reported on after in issues 70 and 71 (7 and 14 March 1896), respectively. For more information, see also Venita Datta, "A Bohemian Festival: La Fête de la Vache Enragée" in *Journal of Contemporary History* 28, no. 2 (April 1993): 195-213.

submissions including *découpage* (cut-out drawing compositions), *étymologies fantaisistes* (illustrations based on puns), and *photographie comique*.³³

The formal and stylistic innovations that *Le Rire* implemented were not wholly novel when they appeared, but speak to both the significance of the journal's financial power and the changing nature of media consumption in fin-de-siècle France. That France's most popular and successful satirical journal increasingly relied on multimedia attractions and entertainments to retain and grow its audience evinces an underlying tension between the past and present of French caricature at the turn of the century. *Le Rire* helped to elucidate those changes in a moment of considerable technological, political, and social change.

The Presence of the Past: *Le Rire* as a *Lieu de mémoire*

One of the most salient aspects of *Le Rire*'s mission at its debut was its deliberate effort to mediate between the past and present of French caricature and comic art. The journal's prospectus in its first issue explicitly addressed its desire to preserve and maintain the canonical tradition of satiric illustration in French history, while showcasing the work of contemporary and emerging talents to continue and develop that tradition. The very notion of caricature's significance and place in the wider history of French art had been contested for much of the second half of the nineteenth century, with a cohort of art critics and historians evaluating the importance of laughter, caricature, illustration, and mass media to French history and identity.³⁴

³³ See in order: for the *concours de masques*, *Le Rire* 116 (23 January 1897), 7; for the *concours de découpage*, *Le Rire* 181 (23 April 1898), 10-11; for the *concours d'étymologies fantaisistes*, *Le Rire* 188 (11 June 1898), 9; for the *concours de photographie comique*, *Le Rire* 196 (6 August 1898), 18.

³⁴ Several landmark histories of caricature, especially of the art as it developed in France, appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century, beginning with the works of Champfleury published through Dentu in five volumes between 1865 and 1885. Champfleury was followed principally by John Grand-Carteret's *Les Moeurs et la caricature en France* (Paris: La Librairie illustrée), 1888. Arsène Alexandre's own history of caricature, *L'Art du rire et de la caricature*, appeared in 1892.

Artistic director Arsène Alexandre had himself been a prominent voice in the ongoing debate. Other critics bemoaned how French caricature had atrophied and declined in their time. An 1888 history of French caricature by John Grand-Carteret, for example, praised the likes of Adolphe Willette, Jean-Louis Forain, and Caran d'Aché, who had come of age in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War and made their names in the “golden age” following the Third Republic’s 1881 law on press freedom, but lambasted more recent trends in French humor, particularly the *fumistes* and *Incohérents*, as decadent and directionless. In turn, nearly all commentators had agreed that the medium was shaped in the shadow of midcentury masters—Honoré Daumier, Paul Gavarni, H.P. Monnier, J.J. Grandville, Cham—and the growing popularity of circulation of caricatures was a double-edged blade that diluted the value and quality of the form.

Le Rire was founded with such concerns in mind, and sought to seize on those broader social and cultural anxieties to sell more issues. Its prospectus sought to frame its own timeliness and significance to the history of caricature on France, relating an earnest vision for its mission: *Le Rire* envisioned itself as the antidote to the banal drudgeries of modern life and the gravitas of politics, work, and money. It aspired to be a more democratic instrument of the satirical press, fostering a participatory forum for readers to submit their own works to be considered for publication and engage in dialogue between editors, artists, and readers alike, both in France and abroad. Subject to editorial vetting, the *Appel du Rire au rire* promised to publish and compensate any reader submission fit to print, insisting on the openness of its pages as forum for unrestricted free expression. Alongside its commitment to the liberal principles of press freedom, *Le Rire* also sought to incorporate an internationalist affinity between kindred publications abroad, in order to reassert the significance of laughter and good humor in public life. Comparing its mission to that of Europe’s established satirical journals, mentioning *Fliegende*

Blätter of Munich by name, *Le Rire* hoped to foster reader awareness of global fashions in caricature and satirical cartoons by reproducing highlights from the foreign press in a dedicated column on a weekly basis.³⁵

Much of *Le Rire*'s earliest content was focused on establishing the journal's authenticity and historical legitimacy, promoting itself as France's *premier journal humoristique*. Crucial to promoting that identity was the construction of a narrative history, genealogy, and artistic tradition that situated *Le Rire* as the rightful heir to a venerated past. *Le Rire* thus promoted itself as the authoritative arbiter of all things caricatural and comic in French art, lionizing the past while promoting the interests of contemporary artists and emerging talents. Its first issues avowed that *Le Rire*, and not its competitors, was uniquely positioned to rehabilitate the noble tradition of the art and elevate it to international preeminence. The inaugural issue's centerpiece featured a reproduction of an Honoré Daumier lithograph, *Le ventre législatif*, originally published by Charles Philippon's Maison Aubert in January 1834. The print appears as the first entry in *Le Rire*'s column for reprinting caricatures of historical value and importance, titled *Le Rire d'autrefois*, which showcased famous works by celebrated cartoonists of the past century. Daumier's print caricatures the legislators of the July Monarchy Chamber of Deputies as elderly men of wealth and high status, though hideously deformed and grotesque, corrupt, senile, and incompetent. An editorial note provides continuity between past and present, reading "Not much has changed since 1834."³⁶

The retrospective commemoration of the history of French caricature became an integral aspect of *Le Rire*'s weekly content for its first year in print, such that *Le Rire*'s early issues

³⁵ "Appel du Rire au rire" in *Le Rire* 1, 4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

functioned as a print museum to the history of comic art and satire. Laying direct claim to continuity with past masters of the form provided the basis for *Le Rire*'s artistic and spiritual authenticity. That legacy was most frequently reinforced in the *Rire d'autrefois* series: in its first year of publication, the journal ran no fewer than thirteen reproductions of prints by Daumier, Monnier, Gavarni, and Eugène Lami, as well as earlier prints by English caricaturists like Thomas Rowlandson. In October 1895, *Le Rire* marked the centenary of the invention of lithographic printing, with its 48th issue being dedicated to the subject. The issue featured a curated selection of nineteenth-century lithographic prints by the same midcentury masters, accompanied by a text by Clément Vautel under his John Falstaff pen-name.³⁷ By February of 1896, the *Rire d'autrefois* series was completely discontinued. When *Le Rire* launched the *Maison du Rire* at the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris, it drew on many of the same historical themes, tracing *Le Rire*'s genealogy even further back to the laughter of Rabelais, Renaissance-era legends, and puppet shows to reinforce its satiric authenticity in the present.³⁸ Following the exposition's conclusion in October 1900, *Le Rire* began marketing its collected volumes of back issues as *L'Histoire Humoristique* in advance of Christmas. The promotion avowed that "*Le Rire*'s success has been the effect of neither fleeting snobbism nor an appeal to crude instincts, but, to the contrary, the result of a real and continuous effort in continuous renewal." Advertising the entire print run in six collected volumes, *Le Rire* maintained that although a lighthearted amusement, the journal nevertheless held "a real philosophical significance" for the remembrance and historical interpretation of the past six years.³⁹

³⁷ *Le Rire* 48 (5 October 1895).

³⁸ See the out of series issue announcing the *Maison du Rire*, 1900.

³⁹ *Le Rire* 319 (15 December 1900), 11.

Images and iconography of the past, whether real or imagined, romanticized or maligned, provided a salient lens and useful visual metaphor for *Le Rire* to satirize the present. The full scope of world historical events, ideas, and persons provided a seemingly inexhaustible source of comedy, with individual artists' interests and needs providing seemingly infinite variations on common historical tropes: Biblical and Classical Antiquity; the Gallic Wars and the distant past of France; medieval and Renaissance legends and folktales; industrialization, and societal adaptation to technological progress. Such themes afforded artists expressive license to adapt received knowledge of the past to make sense of ongoing developments and tensions in the present, especially as *Le Rire*'s debut became inextricably intertwined with the onset of the Dreyfus Affair.

Politics and Satire, 1894-1900

Le Rire materialized in the wake of some of the Third Republic's most turbulent political crises to date, and at the dawn of another. It saw its mission as the antidote to such tribulations. In its first issue, *Le Rire* explicitly insisted on the separation of fun and state: humor was, in the view of its editors, the most effective antidote to the gravitas and tedium of politics. As mentioned above, artistic director Arsène Alexandre had even lamented in *Scribner's Magazine*, some months before *Le Rire*'s launch, that contemporary French caricature had suffered a lack of general interest or belief in the sanitized politics of the parliamentary republic, and that even serious political scandals had failed to produce worthwhile satire or comic art. In retrospect, the sentiment proved almost prophetic, as the political tumults of the time that were to follow proved irresistible for *Le Rire*. The governmental scandals of the French Republic, plagued by a young and unstable frame of government, and the solemnity of its tenuous civic rituals, became a favorite target for *Le Rire*'s clownish and flippant style of graphic humor.

Despite its pretensions to political apathy, *Le Rire* was founded amid the initial throes of the Dreyfus Affair, and the burgeoning scandal soon became an inevitable dimension of daily life in the French capital, quickly consuming the young journal's attentions. Nominally, *Le Rire* sought to maintain editorial neutrality as a *tribune libre*, distancing its own positions from those of its contributors while in theory affirming its commitment to pluralism and publishing diverse, often contradictory, points of view. Indeed, the messaging of *Le Rire*'s political satire never amounted to a coherent or stable program, and left-wing artists and outspoken Dreyfusards, radicals, and socialists like Hermann-Paul, Henri-Gabriel Ibels, Félix Vallotton, and Théophile Steinlen were featured alongside anti-Dreyfusard reactionaries.

In practice, however, a plurality of the journal's most renowned contributing artists regularly espoused extreme points of view, and *Le Rire* was a willing platform for their political messaging. As such, nationalist, populist, and reactionary tendencies dominated the political content of *Le Rire*'s first years of publication. Indeed, it might be said that nationalism was the sole thread that unified the disparate, often contradictory, political positions published in *Le Rire*'s pages, championed by former Boulangists like Adolphe Willette, Jean-Louis Forain, and Charles Léandre, as well as the Russian-born Caran d'Ache, himself a reactionary Bonapartist.

That is not to say, however, that *Le Rire* functioned as an illustrated organ of far-right politics. Its editorial board often publicly disavowed itself of the views of its artists, only maintaining that they upheld their right to free expression. Archival evidence plainly shows that neither the journal's editors nor Félix Juven himself espoused anti-republican, antisemitic, or extreme nationalist political views in public or private life.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, charged political

⁴⁰ The dossier on Juven collected for his nomination and candidacy for the Légion d'honneur, within the Archives Nationales de France Série F/12, contains a police report on his career, inquiry into his criminal history, and political activities, concluding that "he has not been the object of any political inquiry, but his sympathies to republican

satire featured prominently in *Le Rire* from its debut issue, and played a principal role in establishing the journal's identity and reputation for high caliber illustration. Many of its most prominent illustrations—full-color covers, back covers, and double-page spreads—engaged directly with developments in the case and trial against Dreyfus, as well as peripheral governmental intrigue that involved key public figures. While the following chapter examines *Le Rire*'s intervention in the Dreyfus Affair more closely and directly, the journal's parodic approach to the controversy is inextricable from both its political identity and its commercial success and popularity.

Though much of *Le Rire*'s early political content was chiefly concerned with events pertaining to the Dreyfus Affair, the young satirical weekly offered defined stances, visual and textual, on nearly all aspects of contemporary public life. Early issues chiefly focused on developments in the arts and entertainment worlds of Paris, as well as seasonal events, attractions, and civic rituals: the Salon du Cycle at the Palais de l'Industrie, the history of song, theatrical and musical performances by such figures as Yvette Guilbert, for example, as well as mandatory military service, holiday seasons, and summer vacation. Of equal importance were social caricatures, or *caricatures de moeurs*, of Parisians of all classes and stations, both in private and in public life on the boulevards of Paris. A wide variety of artists, established and newer talents, contributed works caricaturing Parisian customs, attitudes and behaviors at all echelons of society: most notably Jean-Louis Forain, Gustave-Henri Jossot, Oswald Heidbrinck, Jules Depaquit, Georges Delaw, Félix Vallotton, Hermann-Paul, and Pierre-Georges Jeannot.

institutions are assured. He is unknown to judiciary ledgers...[there is nothing] objectionable to this candidacy's favorable reception." See AN Série F/12/8632, Dossier Félix Juven, 5-6.

The coming of the Dreyfus Affair, however, had sowed unavoidable political divisions throughout every echelon of French society, to which *Le Rire* held a funhouse mirror. As French society effectively split in two, longstanding and deep-seated discontents resurfaced, including in the pages of the comic press. *Le Rire* sought to profit directly from such divisions, intervening in the Affair whenever it seemed economically advantageous. Most of its interpositions had little to do with the details of the case itself or the legal battles it engendered, instead raising more general commentary on the sources of division that the scandal sowed: parliamentarianism; antisemitism and the question of Jewish integration into French society; divisions within the private life of families; corruption in government; espionage; nationalism; and the virtue and honor of the military.

Several themes emerged from *Le Rire*'s interest in the Affair that informed its political satire long-term. The relative immaturity and unstable parliamentary frame of government of the French Republic, its seemingly ever-rotating ensemble of executive ministers, and the solemnity of its young traditions and civic rituals, had emerged as a favorite target of many of *Le Rire*'s most celebrated cartoonists. Governmental incompetence, corruption, and pageantry were ubiquitous themes observed through topical issues. In notable cases, *Le Rire* provided a launching pad for the careers of emerging artists whose political caricatures and cartoons for the publication garnered them renown and continued success. For example, artist Charles Léandre, among others, marshaled aspects of the Dreyfus Affair and details of the ongoing scandal to articulate a much larger fundamentally anti-parliamentarian skepticism and nationalist ideology which resonated widely in the press of the day. Ultimately, Léandre's anti-Dreyfusard work for *Le Rire* earned both *Le Rire* and himself enough recognition that would establish his name as one of the premier caricatural talents of turn-of-the-century Paris.

Charles Léandre, despite his close proximity in age to the generation of comic artists that preceded him, was a relative newcomer to the world of the Parisian satirical press and graphic humor. Much of his early work had been dedicated not to illustration, but to academic painting, for which he had received several distinguishing awards. Born to a career military officer and mayor of a village in Normandy, Léandre's mediocrity as a student and penchant for drawing defied his family's expectations for a future military career. On a train ride to Paris in 1878, his mother had met the wife of painter Émile Bin and arranged for her son to take up residency with him as the painter's apprentice. Aged 18, Léandre studied with Bin for two years before enrolling at the École des Beaux-Arts alongside his friend Maurice Eliot, under the tutelage of Second Empire painters Adolphe Yon and Alexandre Cabanel. After his exams, Léandre worked as a painting instructor within the incipient Parisian public-school network while continuing his oil and pastel works in a Montmartre studio. Long nostalgic for his native Normandy, Léandre returned to his childhood home every summer, painting both landscapes of the countryside and family portraits. He had received some institutional recognition for his paintings: in 1882, he was admitted to the Salon des artistes français; in 1888, the Salon awarded him honors for his painting *les Mauvais Jours* and again in 1891 for a successor titled *les Longs Jours*; in 1889, he won the bronze medal in competition at the Exposition Universelle for his oil painting *La Mère ou, Dormio cor meum vigilat*. In 1890, he moved his studio to Rue Lepic in Montmartre, where he integrated into the artistic life of the Montmartre cabarets. Léandre's work as a cartoonist began in earnest in Montmartre. He had continued to draw since his apprenticeship under Bin, but it was Montmartre life that jumpstarted his full-time pursuit of illustration: first for Rodolphe

Salis' famous cabaret *Le Chat Noir*, then for *La Vie moderne*, *Le Figaro*, and, come 1894, *Le Rire*.⁴¹

Léandre worked in a traditional physiognomic style of caricature that recalled nineteenth-century masters that preceded him: contemporaries and critics alike compared his work to that of Daumier, Gavarni, and André Gill, for the deeply personalized exaggerations of physical features that marked his satire. His pastel work in painting informed both his use of line and color in lithographic prints. Readily identifiable, his characteristic style largely developed in his political caricatures for *Le Rire*, which betrayed his steadfast militarism, as well as a sentimental and nostalgic nationalism, inflected with his longing for Normandy, in the midst of the Dreyfus Affair. Léandre's illustrations for *Le Rire*, especially his cover illustrations in color and full-page interior features, frequently targeted government officials and political leaders, accusing them of corruption, avarice, and complicity with the schemes of industrialists and financiers to dominate world politics. An avowed anti-Dreyfusard with antisemitic leanings, Léandre cemented a prominent role in *Le Rire*'s interventions in the Dreyfus Affair from its second issue in November 1894, with his back cover caricature of General Auguste Mercier proclaiming the embattled War Minister an honorable and benevolent statesman.⁴²

Léandre was both a prolific and adept caricaturist of his time, above all in the pages of *Le Rire*. His work constituted a mainstay of the journal's graphic repertory, and scarcely did an issue omit his signature between 1897 and 1905. His preferred subjects were his ideological adversaries, especially Radical or Socialist party leaders, though he was equally capable of poking fun at both himself and his associates. *Le Rire* regularly granted him space to freely

⁴¹ Musée de Montmartre, ed. *Charles Léandre, intime et multiple* (Paris: Magellan & Cie., 2007).

⁴² Charles Léandre, "Le député-soldat" in *Le Rire* 2 (17 November 1894), 12.

ridicule political officials—parliamentarians, bureaucrats, or executive ministers, both on front and back page covers in full color, or interior full-page feature cartoons in black ink. A deft physiognomist, Léandre excelled at the exaggeration of individuals' distinguishing physical features and traits, to both derisive and sympathetic ends. A double-page feature included in *Le Rire*'s 37th issue in July 1895, for example, demonstrates the range and versatility of Léandre's satiric style. Extravagantly titled "In the water, in the water! Or, Tout-Paris at the beach, or, *extremes touching*, or, reconciliation by dirty water," Léandre's lithograph depicted a carnivalesque parade of Parisian high society at a waterfront party. An irreverent and ribald who's who of affluent Paris, Léandre's subjects include the President of the Republic Félix Faure at center on a flagship, surrounded by juxtapositions of prominent liberals commingling with anti-Dreyfusards, most of whom are shown nude. Included in Léandre's spread are caricatures of *Le Rire*'s editorial directors; fellow cartoonists Adolphe Willette and Jean Veber, as well as a self-caricature; Émile Zola courting the serpentine Académie française; and Colonial Minister Émile Chautemps kissing Queen Ranavalona of Madagascar. (Figure 1.3)



Figure 1.3. Charles Léandre. “À l’eau ! À l’eau ! ou Tout-Paris sur la plage, ou Les extrêmes se touchent, ou la réconciliation par l’eau salée.” *Le Rire* 37 (20 July 1895). Visible in the left background, supporting the scaffolding holding the marching band, are the editors and cartoonists of *Le Rire*, including Arsène Alexandre, tall with beard, and Juven, short with upturned moustache.

As a chiefly political caricaturist of current events, Charles Léandre was narratively consistent in his satirical interventions. His caricatures for *Le Rire* distilled current events through a rigidly Manichean prism into a battle for the soul of France, lionizing the army and excoriating parliamentary republicans. His most longstanding and notable contributions to *Le Rire* exemplified these traits. Initially, Léandre collaborated with his friends and *Le Rire* colleagues Jean Veber and Eugène Cadet to caricature foreign dignitaries and heads of state across Europe. Beginning in May 1897, the cartoonists began releasing their series, titled *Le Musée des souverains*, as cover illustrations for *Le Rire*. The series debuted with Veber’s ferocious condemnation of Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid’s state-sanctioned massacres of

Armenian and Assyrian Christians, depicting him courting death, his hands soaked red with Christian blood.⁴³ Thereafter, Veber, Cadel, and Léandre alternated weeks. Léandre's successive contributions to the series included caricatures of Victoria, Félix Faure, Philippe Crozier (the director of protocol in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) Menelik II of Ethiopia, and Franz-Joseph of Austria. Eleven installments had appeared through October 1897, before *Le Rire* announced that the series would be compiled and published as an album in November. The album sold for 1 franc 50, and included all the previously published works in the series, as well as a new caricature of Pope Leo XIII by Veber and an original cover by Léandre, depicting Marianne caricaturing the monarchies of Europe. (Figure 1.4)⁴⁴



Figure 1.4. Charles Léandre. Cover for *Le Musée des Souverains*. Paris: Félix Juven, 1897.

Léandre's work in the *Musée des souverains* series served as a model for his working relationship with *Le Rire*. The series underscored the depth of his talent and betrayed an artistic and historical continuity with the masters of old. Soon Léandre's pen was inextricable from *Le Rire*'s profitability, and his caricatural series were cemented as a hallmark of *Le Rire*'s visibility and popularity, more often than not being featured as cover illustrations in color. Léandre issued successive series of similarly composed caricatures of public figures. Amidst

⁴³ Jean Veber, "Abdul-Hamid" in *Le Rire* 134 (29 May 1897), 1.

⁴⁴ *Le Rire* 160 (27 November 1897), 8.

ongoing developments in the Dreyfus Affair, Léandre embarked on another cover series for *Le Rire*, related to the *Musée des souverains* but broader in scope. Titled *Le Gotha du Rire*, Léandre's new series lampooned public elites from all provinces of French and international high society—statesmen, intellectuals, military officers, entertainers, authors, journalists, diplomats, among them. Though framed as the caricaturist's pillory of the ruling classes, the *Gotha* series permitted Léandre to convey a forceful ideological commentary on current affairs, particularly surrounding the intrigue of the Dreyfus Affair and the adjacent political fallout it sparked. Run in 38 parts over a five-year period between November 1897 and February 1903, the series was an immediate and enduring success that largely shaped Léandre's career as well as the longevity of *Le Rire*'s dominance within the French satirical press.

The *Gotha* series provided Léandre his first substantial platform in *Le Rire* to showcase his mastery of the caricatural medium. He channeled his characteristic style to scathing fruition in the series, caricaturing subjects across the full spectrum of public life: among them, statesmen, generals, authors, polemicists, entertainers, and foreign notables. Individual caricatures varied considerably in tone, but motifs emerged that followed Léandre's own political leanings. Léandre beatified nationalist polemicists and anti-Dreyfusards, especially within the general staff of the army officer corps, as martyrs to the civic struggle against corrupt institutions. After nationalist firebrand Paul Déroulède was arrested in 1899 following a failed coup attempt during the funerary procession of deceased president Félix Faure, Léandre lionized the deputy from Charente. A former Boulangist who had been elected to parliament on Boulanger's coattails, Déroulède was a militaristic revanchist and vocal anti-Dreyfusard who had attempted to foment insurrection during Faure's funerary procession by rerouting the military escort under general Gaudérique Roget to lead an assault on the Elysée Palace, in order to overthrow the newly

elected president, Émile Loubet. When his pleas failed, he voluntarily surrendered. After his acquittal in the assizes court of Paris, Léandre dedicated the twentieth installment of his *Gotha* series to Déroulède's juridical victory. Léandre depicted Déroulède as a well-intentioned if misguided Don Quixote, tilting at windmills to take the Elysée Palace with a bleeding heart around his neck. (Figure 1.5)⁴⁵ When Déroulède was again tried, and convicted, later that year by the parliamentary High Court, alongside antisemitic militant Jules Guérin for conspiracy



Figure 1.5. Charles Léandre. “Le Gotha du ‘Rire’—No. XX: Paul Déroulède. *Le Rire* 232 (15 April 1899)

against the state, Léandre extolled him again in *Le Rire* as a noble and righteous “Representative of the People,” shedding a tear for his homeland as he is judged guilty and sentenced to ten years’ banishment.⁴⁶

In contrast to his deep-seated affinity for both the army and nationalist demagogues, Léandre’s *Gotha* caricatures spared no venom for his ideological adversaries. An unabashed antisemite, Léandre reserved his most malicious caricatural observations for his Jewish Dreyfusard subjects. In the ninth *Gotha*

caricature, Léandre notoriously depicted the Baron Edmond Rothschild as a grotesque monstrosity wearing an idolatrous crown of a golden calf, gripping the world in his birdlike

⁴⁵ Léandre, “Le Gotha du *Rire*—No. XX, Paul Déroulède” in *Le Rire* 232 (15 April 1899), 1.

⁴⁶ Léandre, “Paul Déroulède, représentant du peuple pour le département de la Charente” in *Le Rire* 267 (16 December 1899), 7. See also Ze’ev Sternhell, “Paul Déroulède and the origins of modern French nationalism,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 6, no. 4 (1971): 46-70.

talons and enshrining it in his shadow against a sun that beams the words “God protect Israel.”⁴⁷ Other caricatures depicted Jewish champion of the Dreyfusard cause Joseph Reinach as the secretary of a shadow puppet government under Jewish control, the “chief of the *other* general staff.”⁴⁸ Even the arch-conservative press baron and anti-Dreyfusard Arthur Mayer, the Jewish patron of *Le Gaulois* who would convert to Catholicism several years later, was subjected three months earlier to Léandre’s antisemitic accusations of dual loyalties: “Arthur when he defends the throne, Mayer when he defends the altar.”⁴⁹

The primary target of Léandre’s caricatural polemics, however, were never individual persons involved in the Dreyfus Affair, but the institutions of the parliamentary republic itself. Above all, Léandre used his profile in *Le Rire* to delegitimize and disparage the still volatile republican regime, its statesmen, institutions, advocates, and embryonic traditions. Of the 38 portraits included in his *Gotha* series, fifteen caricatured republican statesmen in various governmental positions, among them executive ministers, legislative deputies, and especially the office of the President of the Republic. Léandre chiefly attacked Dreyfusard figures, but the significance of his satiric edge always sought to undermine republican deference to procedure and justice. Figures like Auguste Scheurer-Kestner, as well as Radical ministers Georges Clemenceau and Henri Brisson, were disparaged as bigheaded and pretentious elitists, with duplicitous claims to principles of justice and the rule of law. A former supporter of Boulanger, Léandre firmly cast his lot with the revolutionary nationalist movement of Déroulède and championed the cause of overthrowing the parliamentary republican regime, lamenting the loss

⁴⁷ Léandre, "Le Gotha du *Rire*—No. IX: Rothschild" in *Le Rire* 180 (16 April 1898), 1.

⁴⁸ Léandre, "Le Gotha du *Rire*—No. XXIV: M. Joseph Reinach, Chef de l’autre État-Major" in *Le Rire* 254 (16 September 1899), 1.

⁴⁹ Léandre, "Le Gotha du *Rire*—No. XXI : M. Arthur Meyer, Directeur du *Gaulois*" in *Le Rire* 240 (10 June 1899), 1.

of the movement's figureheads with Déroulède and Jules Guérin's conviction for conspiracy in 1900.⁵⁰

Léandre's prolific anti-Dreyfusard and anti-republican contributions to *Le Rire* earned both himself and the journal immense popular and critical acclaim. The visibility of both his cover illustrations in color in the *Musée des souverains* and *Gotha* series, and full-page cartoons of French public life, carried him from Bohemian painter to household name amidst the agitations of the Dreyfus Affair. His signature became *Le Rire's sine qua non*, and the journal readily acknowledged their interconnected successes. When in January 1900 he was awarded the rank of knight in the Légion d'honneur, *Le Rire* dedicated an issue in tribute to his accomplishments. The issue's cover featured a caricature of Léandre by Leonetto Cappiello jokingly titled *Le Gol-Gotha du Rire*, depicting Léandre being "crucified" by the ghosts of his most controversial caricatures. (Figure 1.6) Inside, a note by the editors was careful to note the circumstances by which Léandre and *Le Rire* made each other's successes possible. Later that month, *Le Rire* announced the journal was staging a banquet to honor him, to take place in the first week of February in the ballroom of the *Grand Hôtel* on the boulevard des Capucines. A writeup, appearing in the 17 February issue of *Le Rire*, recounted the ceremonies and notable personalities in attendance, "the *Tout-Paris* of the pencil, paintbrush, and pen," followed comically by a recipe for the *poularde Léandre* the chef de cuisine served at the banquet. Accompanying the article, a cartoon by illustrator Henri de Sta (Henri-Arsène de Saint-Alary)

⁵⁰ *Le Rire* 267 (16 December 1899), illustrated entirely by Léandre, is dedicated to the trial of Déroulède, Guérin, and their associates before the Senate High Court on charges of conspiracy against the security of the state. A guilty verdict was rendered on 4 January 1900. On 6 January, *Le Rire's* special issue on the year in review proclaimed plainly, "Vive Déroulède!"



Figure 1.6. Léonetto Capiello. “Le Premier Crucifié.” Cover for *Le Rire* 272 (20 January 1900), dedicated to Charles Léandre.

compiles a selection of *Le Rire*'s most notable cover illustrations and artists' signatures congratulating Léandre. Later that year, Léandre was awarded a gold medal in competition at the Exposition Universelle of 1900, for a lithographic print submitted for display in the *musée centennal*. Léandre, who had been integral to the planning and decoration of *Le Rire*'s own pavilion in the Rue de Paris section of the fair, was given an exhibition in the *Maison du Rire* in praise of his accomplishment.⁵¹

Léandre's rendezvous with artistic

celebrity did not encumber his productivity for *Le Rire*. For the duration of the Exposition Universelle and beyond, Léandre continued to illustrate prolifically for the journal. In September 1900, in the closing weeks of the Exposition, *Le Rire* published a thematic issue, illustrated exclusively by Léandre, covering the presidential Mayors' Banquet, timed to mark the anniversary of the revolutionary proclamation of the French Republic in 1792. Following the Exposition's conclusion in October 1900, Léandre returned to the *Gotha* series and similar caricatures of public figures outside the *Gotha* name, as well as contributing full-page spreads in color for *Le Rire*'s special issues. In 1902, Léandre began a new series of physiognomic

⁵¹ See *Le Rire* 272 (20 January 1900), dedicated to Léandre's career achievements. See also the Musée de Montmartre's *Charles Léandre, intime et multiple* (2007), 56.

caricatures of parliamentary leadership during the legislative election cycle between April and November, titled *Nos grands électeurs*, contributing nine installments as deluxe supplements to *Le Rire* before being joined by collaborators Cappiello and Godefroy.⁵² As the tides of the Dreyfus Affair ebbed from French public life, Léandre increasingly directed his sights to the scandalous case of socialite and salonnière Thérèse Humbert, who had been exposed as a fraudulent heiress to a mysterious American fortune and used the fictitious capital as collateral on government loans and phony bonds. Léandre's interest in the media circus culminated in a special issue for *Le Rire* dedicated to her trial in August 1903.⁵³ Come 1904, he debuted yet another series in *Le Rire*, titled *Les Hommes du jour*, that predated the similarly formatted anarchist satirical journal bearing the same name by nearly four years. Léandre would remain a fixture of *Le Rire*'s artistic team for the duration of his lifetime, participating in the professional development and organization of the *Société des dessinateurs humoristes* under the patronage of *Le Rire*'s director Juven, serving as its first president.⁵⁴

The total impact of Charles Léandre's contribution to *Le Rire* is not to be understated. The making of Léandre's career and *Le Rire*'s rapid commercial success were interconnected processes, as the fledgling newcomer to the world of the Parisian satirical press provided the willing platform for the Norman artist to make his name. The legacy of Léandre's prolific contributions to *Le Rire* betray the value of the journal's satiric edge and character: *Le Rire* was content to traffic in highly charged political caricature and indulgent of any kind of political

⁵² *Le Rire* announced the appearance of the *Nos grands électeurs* series as illustrated supplements in no. 387 (5 April 1902), 7. The addition coincided with a permanent price raise of standard issues to 20 centimes.

⁵³ *Le Rire Nouvelle Série* (NS) 29 (22 August 1903). *Le Rire* began its new series in its ninth year of publication, in January 1903. In addition to beginning another enumeration cycle, the Nouvelle Série slightly redesigned the headline banner and added new columns to the interior pages, including sports, finance, and more cartoons reproduced in the *Rire à l'étranger* section.

⁵⁴ See the foreword of *Les Humoristes*, numéro liminaire (January 1924), 3.

point of view if it turned a profit. Léandre indeed proved an asset to the journal's sales and public profile, as both the quality of his illustrations and subversive anti-republican views cemented the role of graphic humor in the public imaginary of the Dreyfus Affair and its adjacent political tumults. Under the name and patronage of *Le Rire*, Léandre helped transform *Le Rire* into the premier organ of the Parisian satirical press and buttressed its role as a powerful mediator of contemporary political, social, and cultural affairs both at home and abroad.

The Satiric World Stage: International Affairs in *Le Rire*

Alongside its place in mediating the domestic culture war that had gripped France in its time, *Le Rire*'s growth facilitated an attentiveness to foreign policy, and the turbulent nature of international and European diplomacy, as a fruitful source of satiric commentary. The domestic melodrama and culture wars of the Dreyfus Affair had been compounded on the world stage by increasingly fraught relations between European powers over rival imperial ambitions and interests. The mercurial state of European diplomacy, marked by ever-shifting alliances, deep-seated enmities, and an arms race that perpetually menaced a fragile peace, provided *Le Rire* abundant opportunities for incisive ridicule. Against the backdrop of imperial struggles for military supremacy on land and sea, as well as mounting colonial rivalries in Africa and Asia, *Le Rire* delighted in the xenophobic mockery of France's enemies and gentle repartee with its allies.

When *Le Rire* debuted in 1894, European diplomatic relations were in a state of near constant flux. The French Republic had achieved rapprochement with the Russian Empire after several years of negotiations, galvanized by a common contempt for the German Kaiser's aggressive *Weltpolitik*. Longstanding enmity with Germany had been solidified for nearly two decades after Bismarck had engineered the unification of the German states by provoking war with France, leading to a humiliating defeat and the dispossession of Alsace and Lorraine in

1871. Nationalist revanchism to recover the lost provinces had been a powerful undercurrent of republican politics and foreign policy in the decades since.⁵⁵

Alongside nationalist irredentism, the French Republic had undertaken military operations on a global scale to expand its colonial empire, attempting to undermine and rival British hegemony. In 1881, the Treaty of Bardo had established a French protectorate in Tunisia. The Tonkin Campaign of 1883-1886 had established protectorates in Tonkin and Annam, unifying Indochina under French colonial rule. The invasion of Madagascar in 1883 had commenced the Franco-Hova Wars, leading to a French colonial protectorate over the port city and surrounding bay of Diego-Suárez. Laos was annexed to Indochina in 1893, and by the end of 1894, the Republic had established new West African protectorates in Dahomey, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, the Upper Volta and Sudan. The following year, the West African territories were incorporated into a larger federated administrative structure under a colonial governorate in Senegal, and the French army resumed hostilities in Madagascar to force the capitulation of its sovereign government, forcing the surrender and exile of Queen Ranaivalona III and declaring Madagascar a French colony in 1897.⁵⁶

Tensions with Britain over colonial expansion across West and Central Africa had significantly soured relations across the Channel. As French conquests across an East-West axis in the Sahel disrupted British designs for the Sudan, international conflict became an increasingly likely possibility, culminating in the confrontation between French and Anglo-Egyptian expeditionary forces at Fashoda in 1898. Following a war scare in both countries'

⁵⁵ See especially Karine Varley, "The Taboos of Defeat: Unmentionable Memories of the Franco-Prussian War in France, 1870–1914," in Jenny Macleod, ed. *Defeat and Memory: Cultural Histories of Military Defeat in the Modern Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 62-80.

⁵⁶ Tyler Stovall, *Transnational France: The Modern History of a Universal Nation* (New York: Routledge, 2018), chapter 6.

presses, the crisis resolved with a French withdrawal from the Upper Nile, and provoked an upsurge of anti-British sentiment. French indignation at the dominance of British influence in Africa was only compounded the following year, when hostilities broke out between British forces and the Boer Republics in South Africa.⁵⁷

Le Rire sought to capture these tense developments with glib levity from its debut. The life of the French colonial imperial enterprise, both in Africa and Asia, was of peripheral interest to the embryonic publication, but not beyond the horizons of comedy. For its part, *Le Rire*'s editors remained ambivalent about the politics of colonialism, neither expressly favoring nor opposing the *mission civilisatrice* of the empire. Individual artists, like Léandre and Willette, for example, were more unequivocal in their criticisms, decrying abuses of power and violence in remote parts of the globe, chiefly from nationalist points of view rather than humanitarian concern. Initially, the Hova Wars in Madagascar commanded *Le Rire*'s most immediate attention. Charles Léandre and Henri Avelot had denounced the Madagascar expedition as excesses of the state: Léandre underscored the humiliation and exile of Queen Ranavalona as disproportionate upon the return of the expeditionary forces under General Jacques Duchesne,⁵⁸ while Avelot decried the wretched conditions endured by French soldiers.⁵⁹ Cartoonist Maurice Radiguet, on the other hand, used the colonization of Madagascar to reproach both British and Spanish imperial designs for the island.⁶⁰ A cartoon by L. Blanchet-Magon quipped that the

⁵⁷ J.E. Blockley, *Cross Channel Reflections: French Perceptions of Britain from Fashoda to the Boer War* (PhD diss., Queen Mary, University of London, 2015), 238-275.

⁵⁸ Léandre, "Le Retour du général Duchesne" in *Le Rire* 57 (7 December 1895), 12.

⁵⁹ Henri Avelot, "Le Char de Madagascar" in *Le Rire* 67 (15 February 1896), 8.

⁶⁰ Radiguet, "À Madagascar" in *Le Rire* 98 (19 September 1896), 2.

French colonization of the island would be more successful than a British effort owing to French monks' possessing tools of conquest unavailable elsewhere: Chartreuse.⁶¹

Still, *Le Rire*'s interest in the enterprise of French imperialism remained noticeably tepid. The goings-on of distant colonies was of marginal concern to readers and artists in the metropolitan capital, who were more interested in charitable aid and relief for soldiers returning from the wars abroad than the colonies themselves.⁶² Expeditions to the Sudan in 1898 were treated with negligible interest, and by the turn of the century even the Boxer Rebellion and joint European invasion of China in 1900 was an insignificant matter for *Le Rire*. Insofar as the journal's editors and artists took any interest whatsoever in colonial developments, it was underpinned by nationalist passions regarding ongoing imperial rivalries between the European powers, especially longstanding animosities toward Britain and Germany.

Though *Le Rire* had employed the special issue format earlier, the most effective use and apogee of the format arrived between 1896 and 1905, principally to chronicle and caricature the ongoing competition between European imperial powers. The format acquired a new significance, both for the commercial appeal of *Le Rire* and for its comic potential in response to mounting tensions on the world stage. The earliest iterations of the format that garnered any real cultural or political significance honored, and gently parodied, the continual solidification of the Franco-Russian alliance that had been ratified in 1894 after three years of serious talks. The French Republic had secured a formal diplomatic and military partnership with its unlikely, autocratic ally through a common alarm at German overtures to revive a Triple Alliance with Austria-Hungary and Italy. Between 1891 and 1894, the two countries negotiated a series of

⁶¹ Untitled cartoon by Blanche-Magon in *Le Rire* 68 (22 February 1896), 8.

⁶² "Les Gaîtés de la rampe," in *Le Rire* 60 (28 December 1895), 8.

conventions and military exchanges, notably reciprocal naval visits at Kronstadt and Toulon in 1891 and 1893, respectively. After an instrument of alliance was officially ratified in 1894, popular opinion warmed to Russian influence. The tsarist regime had commanded *Le Rire*'s discomfiting obeisance, and the journal only gently lampooned France's key ally to the east, deferring to its manpower and size with positive stereotypes and deliberately gushing pleasantries. A back-cover illustration by Adolphe Willette for *Le Rire*'s fifth issue in December 1894, for example, had welcomed the allegorical Russian Bear to a card game with Marianne, while both scorn the overtures of Anglo-Saxon Britannia.⁶³

Le Rire's first major special issue appeared to mark Nicholas II's first state visit to France in October 1896. *Le Rire* had dedicated most of that month's content to the occasion, culminating in a thematic issue, illustrated entirely by Russian-born cartoonist Caran d'Ache. By the time *Le Rire* had debuted in 1894, Caran d'Ache was an already established talent in the Parisian press, but had not figured prominently among his more celebrated peers. His name was included in early promotional materials for *Le Rire*, but his cartoons did not initially appear in *Le Rire*'s earliest issues. His first mention appeared in *Le Rire* in a two-part history of Montmartre by Henri de Wendel, titled *La Capitale du Rire*, in January 1895. But it was not until October of that year that *Le Rire* had announced the permanent acquisition of his services. His first cover illustration, a comic strip of his family history and Napoleonic roots across Europe, appeared the following week.

Pseudonym of illustrator Emmanuel Poiré, the name Caran d'Ache was adopted from the artist's native language's word for pencil, *карандаш* (*karandash*), during his military service in

⁶³ See Adolphe Willette, "Essai de rapprochement" in *Le Rire* 5 (15 December 1894), 12.

France. Poiré had been born and raised in Moscow to a family of French origin: his grandfather had served in Napoleon's disastrous invasion of Russia, and opted to stay following the Grande Armée's retreat in 1812. In 1877, at the age of 20, Poiré decided to emigrate to France and enlist in the French army to recover the French nationality his family had lost. Poiré served five years, chiefly working on the design of uniforms for the Ministry of War, and contributing illustrations to the army newspaper *La Vie militaire*. Following his military service, Caran d'Ache became increasingly integrated into the artistic community of Paris based around the *cabarets artistiques* of Montmartre. His first published cartoons had appeared in Albert Robida's weekly, *La Caricature*, in 1880, as well as *La Chronique Parisienne*, before he began collaborating with Rodolphe Salis for the famous *Chat Noir* cabaret. Salis had commissioned Caran d'Ache to produce a play about the Napoleonic invasion of Russia, titled *L'Épopée*, for the *Chat Noir*'s shadow puppet theater. The play premiered in 1886 and garnered immediate critical acclaim and popularity. Thereafter he contributed prolifically to the Parisian illustrated press, most notably to *Le Figaro* and *Le Petit Journal*, as well as their weekly illustrated supplements. Caran d'Ache equally experimented with sequential comics in the vein of Rodolphe Töpffer, publishing two albums of comics—one on army officers and uniforms in 1889, and an antisemitic satire of the Panama Scandals of 1892, framed as the illustrated checkbook of Jewish financiers bribing a host of corrupt government officials. Comics historian Thierry Groensteen has additionally shown that Caran d'Ache proposed a draft of what he termed a new genre of comic illustration—a *roman dessiné*, or graphic novel—to *Le Figaro* in 1894, though the project never materialized.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Thierry Groensteen, "Caran d'Ache, le retour du Maestro" in *Art 9*, no. 7, Centre national de la bande dessinée et de l'image (January 2002): 10-15.

Until the release of Caran d’Ache’s special issue in October 1896, his contributions to *Le Rire* had remained infrequent, although his sequential comics were given prominent page space. Nevertheless, his special issue on military tactics and strategy, timed symbolically to mark the celebration of the Franco-Russian Alliance with his signature, represented a milestone, his figurative investiture into the ranks of *Le Rire* at a moment of meteoric growth for the young journal. Its release was first announced on 3 October, and *Le Rire* promised the imminent release of more “surprise” special issues to follow.

The Caran d’Ache special issue appeared out of series ten days later. Unlike *Le Rire*’s previous themed issues, “Tactique & Stratégie” comprised ten full-page illustrations with captions, and commanded an augmented price of 30 centimes. The issue, nominally dedicated to the history of military field tactics and strategy, satirized current affairs through the visual metaphor of notable battles in history since Biblical Antiquity. The Battle of Jericho is a thin veil for Caran d’Ache’s antisemitic commentary on the Dreyfus Affair; the Roman army’s garb bears a striking resemblance to Prussian uniforms; medieval chivalry mimics the civic rites of the French Republic receiving the tsar; the first use of cannons in the field prefigures the Sino-French War of 1884; and Russian Cossacks in Crimea imitate the successes of the Napoleonic Empire some 35 years prior. The issue culminates with a terse indictment of “English tactics” in Britain’s imperial conquests, showing a British artillery corps plundering Ottoman gold stores in a nameless battlefield. The artist asserts the strategy “still works, but you have to put a price on it!”⁶⁵

⁶⁵ See Caran d’Ache, *Tactique et stratégie : numéro spécial du Rire* (13 October 1896).

The special issue was an immediate success, and prompted the release of two more special issues before the year's end. An antisemitic issue on the "History of the Third Republic" by Gyp comprised sixteen pages, including a double-page spread in color, and crudely cast French Jews as a corrupt plague parasitizing the nation. Editors were careful to note they had not raised the issue's price. Controversy stirred when outraged readers wrote letters to the editors accusing *Le Rire* of condoning antisemitism, which they publicly dismissed the next week, defending artists' right to free expression in *Le Rire*'s pages.⁶⁶ Six weeks later, *Le Rire* released an extended-length Christmas issue, comprising 24 pages, 12 in color, including a double-page spread by Léandre. The Christmas issue stirred even more controversy after a magistrate issued an order of seizure against *Le Rire* for an alleged phallic obscenity depicted in Willette's cover illustration. The ensuing proceedings against *Le Rire* made national headlines as the press rose to the journal's defense, and further investigative reviews declared the case null and void.⁶⁷ Another special themed issue, illustrated by Lucien Métivet, on the history of dance, appeared to mark the occasion of mid-Lent in March 1897.⁶⁸

The success of the Caran d'Ache issue served as an enduring model for *Le Rire* to approach issues of diplomatic or international political interest. The French Republic's alliance with Russia, an autocratic state seemingly anathema to the civic principles of French republicanism, provided abundant fruit for satiric insight, but forced *Le Rire*'s contributing artists to tread lightly so as not to offend France's key ally as it emerged from its continental isolation. Nevertheless, *Le Rire* reprised the project of special issues dedicated to the evolution of the alliance, often using the pretense and visual metaphor of diplomacy to lambast French domestic

⁶⁶ "Ni l'un, ni l'autre" in *Le Rire* 108 (28 November 1896), 5.

⁶⁷ See "Le Rire saisi...d'étonnement" in *Le Rire* 117 (30 January 1897), 2.

⁶⁸ *Le Rire* 124: *La Danse et les danseurs, texte et dessins de Lucien Métivet* (20 March 1897).

policy and ridicule French statesmen. When President of the French Republic Félix Faure embarked on a reciprocal state visit to the tsar's court in Saint Petersburg in September of 1897, *Le Rire* secured the contribution of painter and illustrator (and notable Dreyfusard) Hermann-Paul's signature for a special issue dedicated to the occasion. The journal promoted the issue aggressively, more than a month in advance of its release, timed to coincide with the president's arrival at Peterhof. *Le Rire* advertised the issue as an unprecedented innovation in the history of the comic press, facetiously claiming to have dispatched Hermann-Paul as a *reporter humoristique* in Félix Faure's press detail.⁶⁹

The Hermann-Paul issue, titled *Émile Ier chez Nicolas II*, appeared on 18 September 1897. The artist was styled as *Le Rire*'s special envoy to Russia, and promoted his compositions as *d'après nature*. The issue developed on the model of the Caran d'Ache special issue, comprising 32 pages, all of which were full-page illustrations with captions, save for eight pages reserved for advertisements, as well as three double-page spreads and a front and back cover in color aquarelle. The issue is careful to ridicule only the French party, to the extent that the diplomatic significance of the visit, or the presence of Russian officials, is scarcely mentioned. Instead, Hermann-Paul uses the issue to censure Faure as a senile and vainglorious egomaniac, obsessed with public image and enjoying an unprofessionally cozy relationship with the press.⁷⁰

The Hermann-Paul special issue proved an immediate success and had a far-reaching impact on *Le Rire*'s operations, spurring the journal to further promote the single-artist special issue format in response to developments on the world stage. On one hand, the ceremonial nature of the occasion had provided *Le Rire* a salient pretext for veiled critique and cutting political

⁶⁹ The first announcement of Hermann Paul's issue appeared in *Le Rire* 147 (28 August 1897), 4.

⁷⁰ See Hermann-Paul, "Félix Ier chez Nicolas II : croquis humoristiques du Voyage du Président de la République exécutés d'après nature en Russie" numéro exceptionnel, *Le Rire* 150 (18 September 1897).

satire. On the other, the special issue format provided the journal an opportunity to market minimal formal changes to its standard production methods at over three times its standard profit margins. Hermann-Paul's issue did not prompt *Le Rire* to increase the frequency of release for special issue—they continued to appear unsystematically, typically in response to topical developments—but it became a legacy for the promotion of future issues, especially with regard to issues devoted to the burgeoning alliance with Russia. The following year, *Le Rire* released two more special issues: one was a collective work dedicated to seaside summer vacations; the other reprised Caran d'Ache and Hermann-Paul's legacy upon the occasion of the German Kaiser's state visit to Ottoman Palestine as a guest of Sultan Abdul Hamid II in November 1898, as a pretext for anti-German polemics.

Germanophobia had been a commonplace motif in the pages of *Le Rire*, as it was across the French mediascape in the late-nineteenth century. The Franco-German enmity that had resulted from the Franco-Prussian War occupied a prominent place in the public opinion and life of the French capital, and commanded equal attention from cartoonists as well. A unified and ascendant German Empire, its statesmen, its culture, its eminent status as an emerging imperial power, whose economic and military might had quickly surpassed those of its European



Figure 1.7. Pierre-Georges Jeannot. “Le Toast de Bismarck.” Cover for *Le Rire* 176 (19 March 1898).

neighbors, was a seemingly everlasting source of frustration, scorn, and derision. French cartoonists regularly seized on the latent Germanophobia that had underpinned much of popular opinion in Paris, finding German imperial ambitions especially an abundant source of ridicule.

Le Rire regularly indulged in the mockery of German statesmen, none more so than the former Prussian Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck. Having engineered war with France in 1870 to unify the German states under Prussian command, Bismarck was unanimously reviled in French media. The press delighted in his 1890 dismissal and early retirement from German political life, and celebrated his deteriorating health in old age. Until his death in 1898, *Le Rire* marked the occasion of his birthday in early April with mordant festivities: cartoons by Jeannot, for example, depicted Bismarck in hell alongside Louis-Napoleon, or toasting the Prussian aristocracy while drinking blood flowing from a Pickelhaube chalice. (See Figure 1.7) When Bismarck died suddenly several months later in the summer of 1898, *Le Rire* disparaged his legacy as a warmonger, showing Marianne leading his funeral procession bearing the burden of her war dead under a crown of skulls.⁷¹

Bismarck's death prompted *Le Rire* to shift its attentions toward the Emperor himself for anti-German ridicule. Wilhelm II provided *Le Rire* an abundant source of cartoonish inspiration after his dismissal of Bismarck, as he embarked on a mission to consolidate personal rule as well as his turn toward an erratic, aggressive, and blundering imperialist foreign policy. *Le Rire* had often reprinted foreign caricatures of the German emperor from satirical publications across Europe, as well as less frequent originals emphasizing his blustering behavior on the international stage. When the Kaiser traveled to Ottoman Palestine as an invited guest of Sultan

⁷¹ Fernand Fau, "Les Obseques de Bismarck" in *Le Rire* 197 (13 August 1898), 6.

Abdul Hamid II in late October 1898, *Le Rire* seized the opportunity to mock his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, hoping to replicate the success of Hermann-Paul's issue the year before.

Le Rire first announced the appearance of a new special issue dedicated to the Kaiser's voyage on 6 November. The announcement recalled the "considerable success" of Hermann-Paul's issue, and promised more to its readers, advertising the brothers Jean and Pierre Veber as the coming issue's authors and "representatives" to Wilhelm's entourage in Palestine.⁷² The issue appeared three weeks later, advertised as being banned from sale in Germany, owing to the suppression and prosecution of the Munich satirical journal *Simplicissimus* following their publication of a Palestine special issue on 29 October.⁷³ The issue appeared in a format identical to Hermann-Paul's: 32 pages, eight in color, including three double-page spreads and two covers, at a price of 50 centimes. Unlike Hermann-Paul's issue, however, the Veber issue relied heavily on the interrelation of text and image, juxtaposing a written narrative by Pierre Veber, a prolific playwright and author, with sequential illustrations from his brother Jean, a prolific caricaturist and painter who had worked on staff at *Le Gil Blas* as well as contributing to *Le Rire*.

Styled as a travel diary from the pen of Wilhelm himself, Pierre Veber's text portrays Wilhelm as an obtuse, garish and vain guest, offending everyone he encounters from his ignorance and lack of environmental and situational awareness, before progressively revealing his deep-seated Messianic complex while touring the Holy Land on a "divine mission." Wilhelm's visit had, in actuality, been staged in support of German Christian settlers in Palestine: his itinerary culminated with a triumphal entry to Jerusalem, where he dedicated the

⁷² See *Le Rire* 209 (6 November 1898), 5.

⁷³ Ann Taylor Allen, *Satire and Society in Wilhelmine Germany: Kladderadatsch and Simplicissimus, 1890-1914* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 41.



Figure 1.8. Jean Veber. "L'Entrée à Jérusalem." From the special issue of *Le Rire* 212, dedicated to Wilhelm II's state visit to Ottoman Palestine (26 November 1898), 24-25.

Lutheran Church of the Redeemer and ceremonially laid the cornerstone of the Dormition Church of Mount Zion.

Alongside Pierre's text, Jean Veber's illustrations caricature Wilhelm as progressively descending further into messianic delusions: he is initially received warmly in the Sultan's court in Istanbul, where he visits the imperial harem in the costume of a eunuch, negotiates the acquisition of a Mediterranean "porc," and reviews a formation of massacred civilians alongside Abdul Hamid. After his departure from the capital, Wilhelm sets off for Palestine and writes a Dormition March dedicated to the Sultan. In the Holy Land, he resurrects a leper to the horror of local residents in Jericho; "ascends" to the skies over the town in a hot air balloon; hunts Armenians for sport alongside Abdul Hamid; preaches in the wilderness as a dissident German cleric; baptizes himself in the Jordan river; observes the dormition of his virgin courtesan; enters

Jerusalem on the back of a donkey; and walks the Via Dolorosa before a traveling press corps.⁷⁴
(See Figure 1.8)

The special issue generated an international uproar. German authorities had banned a similarly themed special issue from *Simplicissimus*, issuing arrest warrants for the journal's editors and contributors. Publisher Albert Langen and contributing author Frank Wedekind had fled the country to escape prosecution for high treason, with Wedekind arriving in Paris, while cartoonist Thomas Theodor Heine was sentenced to prison for the crime of *lèse-majesté*. Wedekind eventually returned to face his sentence, but Langen remained in exile, first in Switzerland then in Paris, until 1903 when he was pardoned and ordered to pay 20,000 marks in order to return.⁷⁵ In the weeks after *Le Rire* released the Veber issue in response, the journal issued two notices to readers of confusion regarding a state inquiry into the issue's possible seizure and suppression from sale, ostensibly at the request of the German embassy in Paris. The dispatch was ultimately a false alarm, as *Le Rire* had contacted investigators at the Prefecture of Police, Ministry of the Interior, and the Germany embassy itself, all of whom had no knowledge of any pending proceedings regarding the issue, and no claims were ever filed against *Le Rire*. The following week, *Le Rire* issued another notice, informing readers that they had filed a complaint at the Ministry and clarifying the confusion: first reports of a state seizure had appeared in the Parisian newspapers *La Liberté* and *Le Journal des débats*, as well as dispatches from "international colleagues—in good faith, we hope." After editors at *Le Rire* had contacted investigators, it was determined no such proceedings had existed.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ *Le Rire* 212 (26 November 1898).

⁷⁵ Ann Taylor Allen, *Satire and Society in Wilhelmine Germany*, 41.

⁷⁶ *Le Rire* reported on the mishap in issues 213 and 214 (3 and 10 December 1898), both notices on page 3.

The veracity of the story is unverified in any official documentation, but it was likely not a hoax: *Le Rire* speculated that the prosecutor's office moved prematurely to seize the issue independently of their chain of command within the Ministry of the Interior to appease the German ambassador but without his direct intervention, and that the report had been published before proceedings had been officially annulled. However, the truth of the matter was complicated by *Le Rire*'s readiness to exploit the controversy as a promotional stunt, claiming that demand for printed copies had skyrocketed as rumor of its censure had spread. The notice in issue 214 had proclaimed that although the issue had sold 125,000 copies, vendors had continued to claim the issue had been banned in order to gouge its price. The notice concludes by avowing the matter not to be a publicity stunt.⁷⁷

In the aftermath of the Kaiser's Palestine visit and the scandal the satirical press had generated around the incident, *Le Rire* noted and increasingly invested in the reputation for scandal its special issues had developed. The journal continued to reserve its most outrageous and potentially offensive content for such special occasions, and heavily promoted them in the weeks preceding their releases, always recalling the success and tumult of previous iterations. Such was the case the following year, when it announced the release of a special issue dedicated to chronicling the history of England and its people, bearing the signature of Adolphe Willette.

Willette's special issue, titled "V'là les English!" would appear at a critical juncture in the history of Anglo-French relations, owing chiefly to escalating tensions over rival imperial interests in Africa and Asia. Anglophobic sentiment had been mounting throughout 1898 over a highly dramatized scare in the press between London and Paris over the crisis at Fashoda,

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

whereupon a French colonial expedition to the White Nile, intended to block British access to the Sudan, was ordered to stand down to prevent war. *Le Rire* had participated in the jingoist commotion, publishing cartoons by Léandre and Abel Faivre that mocked “perfidious Albion” and the allegorical Britannia as a hideous brute terrorizing Egypt and Sudan. After tensions had deescalated, *Le Rire* then turned the blame inward: a cartoon by Maurice Radiguet admonished the press, antimilitarists, and parliamentary opposition for undermining French national unity and strength on the world stage.⁷⁸

Such hostilities had hardly subsided when war between Britain and the Boer Republics broke out in South Africa in October of the following year. Near unanimous public outrage against Britain reverberated across Europe, as the press decried Britain’s motives as shameless aggression and applauded both John Kruger and the Boer militias as heroic underdogs. *Le Rire* reproduced foreign cartoons castigating British coercion and commissioned covers from Léandre denouncing British hypocrisy in its claims to championing the rights of minority *uitlanders* in the South African Republic.⁷⁹ A cartoon by Radiguet, quoting the Comte d’Anterroche at the Battle of Fontenay in 1745, invited Britain to declare war on France: “Messieurs les Anglais, tirez les premiers!”⁸⁰ An outpouring of support for the Boers soon followed, and on 11 November, *Le Rire* announced the imminent release of a special issue by Willette, “a great artist, beloved by the public and whose soul has always quivered at social and political injustice,” dedicated to France’s “friends across the Channel.”⁸¹

⁷⁸ M. Radiguet, "Après Fashoda" in *Le Rire* 211 (19 November 1898), 7.

⁷⁹ Léandre, "L'Angleterre, éternel champion de la justice, protège les faibles" in *Le Rire* 257 (7 October 1899), 1.

⁸⁰ M. Radiguet, "Courtoisie française" in *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸¹ *Le Rire* 262 (11 November 1899), 7.

Adolphe Willette's issue, "V'là les English," appeared on 23 November, just weeks after hostilities had begun in South Africa. The issue followed the same formula as its antecedents: 32 pages, eight in color, with three double-page spreads, on sale for 50 centimes. Like the Veber issue, a text by satirist and literary critic Gaston de Pawlowski accompanied Willette's illustrations. Pawlowski's satirical *fantaisie* related a vilifying and counterfactual history of the British Empire, written in pseudo-academic jargon, as if Britain's vast imperial presence had remained integral since biblical antiquity. A sardonic prefatory note from the editors states *Le Rire*'s intent to recount "the history of this beautiful country, to describe its admirable customs, and thus interest our fellow citizens in the deeds and gestures of our age-old friends," alongside a cartoon of Pierrot, Willette's alter-ego, rubbing John Bull's face in his own waste.⁸²

The pages that follow unrelentingly disparage British history, society, culture, and imperialism. Pawlowski surveys the British Empire's fantastical conquests of Ancient Greece, Rome, Carthage, Babylon, and even Herodian Judea, attributing Pontius Pilate's execution of Jesus to British imperial interests in the region. He then reimagines the medieval and early modern British past: Arthurian legend is revised as a fable of expansionist destiny; the Hundred Years' War as France's colonial rebellion against the British metropole; Edward III reviving the plague in Europe; the "modestly" boastful commemoration of the victory at Agincourt; the crime of burning Joan of Arc; the War of the Roses as a rivalry between London butchers; and the beginnings of the "feminist movement" during the Tudor period as women ascended the throne, first as the doomed consorts of Henry VIII. Pawlowski continues on this same derisive note to the recent past and contemporary affairs. He reimagines the many wars of the nineteenth century as further instances of colonial rebellion against imperial Britain, beginning with the French

⁸² Adolphe Willette, "V'là les English !.." numéro spécial du *Rire* 264 (23 November 1899), 2.

Revolution and Napoleonic Wars as further instances of colonial rebellion; the Battle of Navarino and Russo-Turkish War as colonial wars on Britain’s behalf; British naval supremacy; and lastly, the refusal of the “Boer savages” to submit to the magnanimity of British rule in South Africa.



Figure 1.9. Adolphe Willette. “Cambronne.” Back cover for Willette’s special issue of *Le Rire* 264, “V’là les English!...” (23 November 1899). Notably, Willette’s cartoon imitates the style of famed English caricaturists James Gilray and Thomas Rowlandson.

Alongside Pawlowski’s hyperbolic saga, Willette’s cartoons unrelentingly denounce British hypocrisy, neglect of its subjects, and wartime atrocities, chiefly through the political lens of working-class populism. Not one to shy away from severity, Willette decries the plight of the working poor across the British Empire. His caricatures include: the nineteenth-century famines across British India; the deprivation of the English working class in London dockyards despite nominally owning “India, Canada, Egypt, and half of Africa”; the “boredom” of the English

aristocracy despite owning “nearly a quarter of London, India, Canada, and half of Africa”; English “respect” for women starving homeless in London streets; an academic nude study of the

“severe” figure of an Englishwoman; English hunters’ use of Indian children as live bait on a crocodile hunt; a young English girl being whipped and bathed before her family and a preacher; the crucifixion of Ireland; and the death of “perfidious Albion” as an occasion for universal jubilation.⁸³ Three double-page spreads depict British atrocities in history, and the back cover condenses the whole of English history into the apocryphal word uttered by Pierre Cambronne upon his surrender at Waterloo: “merde.”⁸⁴ (Figure 1.9)

Less significant was the content of Willette’s “V’la les English” special issue than its reception and the scandal it generated across the Channel. The issue’s vitriolic polemics, especially those against Victoria, spawned outrage in London, as commentators berated *Le Rire*’s attack on the Queen’s womanhood: the *Daily Chronicle* charged that if *Le Rire* continued its attacks on Victoria, the ambassador in Paris ought to be recalled. Even Joseph Chamberlain, then British Colonial Secretary and the architect of the Boer War, spoke out against *Le Rire* on the Westminster floor, to the delight of the journal’s editors and cartoonists. In a gesture of diplomatic overtures to London, even the German Kaiser banned the sale of *Le Rire* momentarily as an act of solidarity.⁸⁵

Such controversy only heightened *Le Rire*’s international profile, bolstering the issue’s sales both at home and abroad while a polemical war broke out between journalists in Paris and London over freedom of the press, the Transvaal campaign, and the boundaries of professionalism for satire and caricature.⁸⁶ In the days that followed, the Prince of Wales

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁸⁵ See Laurent Bihl, “V’la les English par la rhétorique satirique anglophobe autour de 1900” in *Ridiculosa* 19 (2012): 127-144. See especially 137-142.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* Ongoing tensions were also openly reported in *Le Rire* well into 1900. See “Incident Diplomatico-Grotesque” in no. 277 (24 February 1900), 10; and “Les éclats du *Rire*” in no. 279 (10 March 1900), 2-3.

threatened to cancel his appearance at the inauguration ceremonies of the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris in an interview with *Le Figaro*. Moreover, the exiled pretender to the French throne, the Duke of Orleans, residing in the court of the British royal family, wrote a congratulatory letter to Willette. Though Willette tried to keep the note secret, a friend delivered it to the offices of Parisian daily newspaper *Le Gaulois*. Within days, the text was reprinted the world over. The Duke of Orleans was stripped of his courtly privileges and exiled again, first to Belgium then Portugal, and press correspondents mulled the stark possibility of a looming war between Britain and France, before *Le Rire* was briefly banned from sale in Britain.⁸⁷

The Willette issue unquestionably reinvigorated Anglophobic themes in the pages of *Le Rire* and more widely across the satirical press in France. In the wake of the issue's release, *Le Rire* continued to fan the flames of English outrage: cover illustrations by Léandre, variously caricaturing Victoria, parliamentarians, and military leaders, proliferated widely. A notice from the editors directly addressed the scandal, subversively inviting Britain once again to declare war and shoot first. English affairs, especially colonial administration and the course of the war in South Africa, became a veritable obsession for the remainder of the year, even as preparations for the 1900 Exposition Universelle and the opening of the *Maison du Rire* commenced.⁸⁸ The issue helped fashion the Boer War into a *cause célèbre* within the French press, as mass-circulation and specialized organs, satirical or not, clamored for French assistance to the Boer republican cause.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Bihl, "V'là les English," 137-138.

⁸⁸ Preparations for the opening of the *Maison du Rire* at the 1900 Exposition Universelle were announced in January of that year, first in *Le Rire* 271 (13 January 1900), 13, and then followed in the *Maison du Rire numéro spécial hors série*.

⁸⁹ See especially John Edward Blockley, *Cross Channel Reflections*, 238-275.

Nearly a year after the Willette issue's release, *Le Rire* ran yet another special issue to commemorate its anniversary, this time reprising the signature of Caran d'Ache. The issue repurposed many of the same themes as the first, but focused more intently on the conditions of the war in South Africa, rebuking English war profiteers and jingoists for sending soldiers to their deaths in the service of torturing innocent Boer families. At the same time, Caran d'Ache lionized the honor and valor of the Boer militias and Paul Kruger himself.⁹⁰

Caran d'Ache's South Africa issue hardly carried the same effect as Willette's had the previous year, but it continued to emphasize the function of the special issue as *Le Rire*'s most influential and impactful medium for satiric innovation, as well as the staying power of Anglophobia in the French press. The extent to which that Anglophobic sentiment mattered, in real terms, however, is uncertain. Was this surge of anti-English sentiment an earnest expression of deep-seated nationalist yearnings, or a salient opportunity to boost sales and heighten *Le Rire*'s international profile? Historian Laurent Bihl maintains that although the issue reinvigorated Anglophobic tropes in the satirical and illustrated press of France, the effect was short-lived: the Anglo-French rivalry effectively disappeared following the conclusion of the Boer War and coming of the Entente Cordiale in 1904.⁹¹

Although categorically true, *Le Rire*'s vociferous indignation towards the British war effort in South Africa, regardless of motive, ought not to be taken lightly. *Le Rire*'s opposition to British motives and tactics in uprooting Boer guerillas was steadfast for the entirety of the conflict, and the publication remained a prominent mouthpiece for the French public's disapprobation of British imperialism. As the conflict evolved, so too did *Le Rire*'s Anglophobic

⁹⁰ Caran d'Ache, *Kruger le Grand et John Bull le Petit: numéro spécial publié par Le Rire*, no. 315 (17 November 1900).

⁹¹ Bihl, "V'là les English," 141-142.

opposition grow more vitriolic, culminating in the outward celebration of Victoria's death in early 1901, and again on the occasion of Cecil Rhodes' death in April 1902.⁹² The impact of its belligerence, though difficult to define, remains significant to the historian because but it was enough to merit censure directly from Westminster, further exacerbating international tensions over the outbreak of the Boer War.

Le Rire's attentions gradually shifted away from British imperialism almost entirely after the conclusion of the Boer War and the ratification of the Treaty of Vereeniging in 1902, but the special issue format endured as a lucrative model for lampooning international affairs. While the 1900 Exposition Universelle and the operation of the Maison du Rire was the journal's central focus for much of that year, special issues resumed after the fair's conclusion, beginning with that of Caran d'Ache. One month later, amidst Paul Kruger's tour of Europe in exile after fleeing the Transvaal, *Le Rire* ran yet another special issue in solidarity with his struggle to secure assistance from the European powers. After his arrival to fanfare in Marseille and journey to Paris, Kruger had been refused an audience and reception with the German Kaiser, his most vocal European backer. The French republican government had declined to extend military assistance, despite public opinion favoring such a move. In response, *Le Rire* released a thematic issue on its disgust at Europe's betrayal of the Boer president.⁹³ Another special issue appeared in July 1901 to commemorate the occasion of the Paris-Berlin automobile race that took place at the end of June. Largely apolitical in scope, the issue instead gently parodied the novelty and spectacle of high-velocity automotive racing through the countryside. Despite one anti-German cartoon by Jeannot, the virulent Germanophobic sentiment that had characterized *Le Rire's*

⁹² *Le Rire* 326 (2 February 1901). The issue, published just a week after Victoria's death, featured a cover by Léandre caricaturing Edward VII's inauguration. An interior double-page lithograph by revolutionary syndicalist Jules Grandjouan, titled "Les Guerres de son règne," appears on pages 8 and 9.

⁹³ *Le Dégout : numéro spécial du Rire dédié aux Gouvernements européens*, no. 319 (15 December 1900).

position toward Franco-German relations was remarkably absent: representations of both Wilhelm II and the Prussian countryside instead depicted idyllic and peaceful village life. An aerial “tour” of the circuit, passing through Luxembourg, Koblenz, Aachen, Mainz, Hannover, Frankfurt, and even Berlin, described jubilant crowds and the peaceable camaraderie of French and German citizens intermingling on the streets.⁹⁴

Le Rire's interest in the Franco-Russian alliance had waned after Hermann-Paul's issue, despite important diplomatic and symbolic developments that strengthened the two countries' bond. In 1899, French Foreign Minister Théophile Delcassé visited Saint Petersburg to reinforce the alliance, negotiating Russian cooperation on the question of Alsace-Lorraine in exchange for French support of Russian interests in the Balkans. A year later, the Pont Alexandre III, whose foundation stone Nicholas had laid during his 1896 visit, was completed in time for the inauguration of the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris. The following year, Nicholas traveled to Danzig to accompany Wilhelm II, his cousin, to the German Army's *Kaisermanöver*. In response, Delcassé invited Nicholas to attend French military maneuvers in the company of then President of the Republic Émile Loubet. The tsar accepted the invitation and arrived in Dunkirk by boat in late September, where the imperial family and their attending parties observed a naval review, before touring the city and traveling south to Compiègne by train, then east toward Reims to attend a field review of the French army in Bétheny, comprising more than 130,000 troops. *Le Rire* released a special issue to commemorate the visit in September 1901. Unlike its predecessor, however, the issue lacked a single marquee signature and featured fewer spreads and color illustrations, commanding a lower price at 30 centimes.⁹⁵ Though by all accounts the

⁹⁴ *Le Rire* 349 (13 July 1901), *Paris-Berlin Automobile : numéro spécial*.

⁹⁵ *Le Rire* 359 (21 September 1901), *Nicolas II chez Émile I*.

tsar had been received with public enthusiasm and fanfare, the issue appeared without advance notice and seemed to leave no remarkable impression in the weeks that followed. Come December, *Le Rire* ran another special issue dedicated to the history of press censorship and repression in nineteenth-century France.⁹⁶

By 1902, *Le Rire*'s special issues had begun to undergo a clear transformation. Political focus on international and diplomatic affairs declined in favor of more diverse and lighthearted general interest topics. *Le Rire*'s first special issue of the year appeared on the first of March, marking the centenary of Victor Hugo's birth in the last week of February. Profusely illustrated with eight pages in color, the collaborative issue—featuring the signatures of eleven artists—comprised 24 pages and sold for 30 centimes, and included a parody of both *Don Carlos* and Hugo's own *Le roi s'amuse* by Édouard-Paul Lafargue.⁹⁷ In June, *Le Rire* reprised the single-signature special issue, commissioning Caran d'Ache to produce another travelogue of President Émile Loubet's visit to Saint Petersburg the month before. Titled "How I conquered Russia," Caran d'Ache's issue framed Loubet as a triumphant military commander entering a subjugated but friendly city.⁹⁸

Thereafter, special issues variously turned towards domestic politics, entertainments, and sport: Caran d'Ache's issue was followed by one dedicated to aerial views of Bastille Day festivities in Paris on 14 July, and a thematic issue by the pseudonymous illustrator Charly on military reviews and exercises from the point of view of common soldiers in September, which

⁹⁶ *Le Rire* 371 (14 December 1901), *Anastasie*.

⁹⁷ Featured artists included Emmanuel Barcet, Caran d'Ache, André Devambez, Pierre-Georges Jeannot, E.P. Lafargue, Charles Léandre, Lucien Métivet, Georges Meunier, Albert Robida, Théophile Steinlen, and Adolphe Willette. See *Le Rire* 382, *à l'occasion du Centenaire de Victor Hugo* (1 March 1902).

⁹⁸ *Comment j'ai conquis la Russie : Album de voyage de M. Émile Loubet, Président de la République Française, mis au point par Caran d'Ache et publié par Le Rire*, no. 396 (7 June 1902).

he reprised the following year. Charly followed the issue with another dedicated to the French army in November. In the following year, special issues appeared on the booming popularity of the American cakewalk minstrel dance, the Thérèse Humbert affair, and another issue on military reviews by Charly.

The special issue format continued intermittently until the coming of World War I, but it indeed fell into decline by the end of 1905. The reasons for that waning importance are varied, however speculative. The turn of the twentieth century saw seismic shifts in public opinion and media influence. On one hand, the Anglophobia underpinning much of *Le Rire*'s most acerbic special issues on the British Empire and the Boer War was all but dissolved with the conclusion of the Entente Cordiale between France and Britain in 1904.⁹⁹ In December 1905, the Law concerning the Separation of Church and State established republican secularism, limiting the political influence of the Catholic Church and directly prompting the severance of relations with the Vatican. The Dreyfus Affair had symbolically concluded with the officer's legal rehabilitation and reinstatement to the army officer corps in 1906. The total effect of such ruptures had recalibrated many of the social and political tensions underlying French media and public opinion in the previous decade. In the case of *Le Rire*, was it simply a matter of earlier themes of novel concern beginning to fade from fashion?

Equally important to the decline of *Le Rire*'s special issue was the technological evolution of mass media, and the preservation of the comic press's relevance in an increasingly crowded consumer marketplace. New competitors emerged around the turn of the century, galvanized by *Le Rire*'s success. Under the patronage of Maurice Méry, humorist Alphonse

⁹⁹ Michel Dixmier, *Quand le crayon attaque : images satiriques et opinion publique en France, 1814-1918* (Paris: Autrement, 2007). See also Christopher Andrew, "France and the Making of the Entente Cordiale" in *The History Journal* 10, no. 1 (1967): 89-105.

Allais founded *Le Sourire* in August 1899 to directly compete with *Le Rire*. In 1901, a naturalized Hungarian Jewish immigrant, Samuel-Sigismond Schwarz, a bookseller and relative newcomer to periodical publishing, founded *L'Assiette au beurre* as a satirical weekly to rival the quality and technical innovations of *Le Rire*, while offering more substantive and subversive social and political criticism. Drawing much of its content from the same pool of comic artists and caricaturists, *L'Assiette au beurre* sought to further develop the material quality of its product, laying out standard issues in album format and featuring at least sixteen full-page illustrations in duotone or tritone color. Taking cues from *Le Rire*, *L'Assiette au beurre* quickly seized on the profitability of single-artist and thematic issues, garnering critical praise for the artistic quality of its polemically charged content at a time when *Le Rire* increasingly abandoned its more austere satire for popular entertainments and lighthearted humor.¹⁰⁰

Likewise, the comic press at large was under immense pressures from new media at the turn of the century. With the advent of motion pictures in the 1890s, first with Émile Reynaud's praxinoscope and the animated *pantomimes lumineuses* of his *théâtre optique* at the Musée Grévin and then the Lumière cinematograph, the comic press was compelled to innovate new attractions to retain readers, beginning with serial and sequential visual forms. The two-dimensional page had become a double-edged sword for publications like *Le Rire*, which had sought to preserve the integrity and quality of a popular nineteenth-century medium in a changing media landscape. Under pressure not only from rival publications, but the burgeoning popularity and technical capabilities of motion pictures from filmmakers like Georges Méliès,

¹⁰⁰ See Élisabeth Dixmier and Michel Dixmier, *L'Assiette au beurre : revue satirique illustrée, 1901-1912* (Paris: François Maspero, 1974), 15-16.

himself a trained caricaturist, *Le Rire* sought new visual attractions to retain its readership and market dominance.¹⁰¹

How then did *Le Rire* adapt to these market pressures, especially as the long-term profitability of its special issues declined? Juven, ever attentive to new trends, increasingly turned away from the printed page as his, and *Le Rire*'s, primary source of revenue. Later chapters in this study explore the full scope of Juven's efforts to transform *Le Rire* from a successful satirical weekly into a multimedia comic empire as he expanded his brand first into a pavilion at the 1900 Exposition Universelle and then into an even larger umbrella publishing house for professional cartooning and comic art. That transition largely occurred after the end of the World's Fair, between 1900 and the eventual dissolution of Juven's proprietary publishing house in 1912.

Conclusion

The publication history of *Le Rire*, especially its first decade of existence, presents a complex window into the history and life of fin-de-siècle Paris. Its debut and first years in publication intimate the complex and multivalent nature of laughter and comic art, whether as commercial enterprise, entertainment, or as an even larger social ritual. *Le Rire*'s emergence, its success, and the significance of its art and comedy are inextricably tied to the times they lampooned. Indeed, *Le Rire* held a mirror to a decade of rapid change and escalating tensions, both at home and abroad. Through the prism of graphic humor, historians are better poised to

¹⁰¹ For historical discussion on the relationship between the illustrated press, animation, and early cinema, see: Donald Crafton, *Émile Cohl, Caricature, and Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Matthew Solomon, "Georges Méliès: Anti-Boulangist Caricature and the Incohérent Movement" in *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 53, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 305-327; and Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 177-199.

more intimately understand the times it chronicled and caricatured, as well as how its artists, editors, and readers alike made sense of such turbulence.

Le Rire was born of political turmoil—sandwiched between the repression of press freedom in the wake of anarchist violence and the dawn of the Dreyfus Affair—and thrived in its midst. On several occasions, it reaped the rewards of scandals it sowed. Anathema to boredom, *Le Rire*, like its contemporaries, instead fashioned entertainments and spectacles from the commonplaces of daily life. In doing so, it quickly established itself as a titan of the satiric press and an institution of Parisian life and popular culture. It benefitted from shrewd management, both administrative and artistic, that sought to make the medium of comic art and its printed product accessible to a burgeoning mass market that blurred clear class boundaries. It reflected the prosperity of the time it was bound to, the conflicts embedded within it, and the changes that marked it.

This chapter, above all else, has sought to delineate the ways *Le Rire* embodied, and indeed, responded to changing historical realities and conditions. Questions of change, whether of progress, of change, or adaptation, were central to the journal's evolution from its beginnings until the coming of World War I in 1914. In certain ways, *Le Rire* itself embodied the tensions of ongoing changes. The elements that differentiated the journal from its contemporaries—its accessibility and affordability while maintaining rigorous artistic integrity with high profile contributors—were largely the result of recent technical innovation and progress, even as the journal itself maintained a nostalgic eye toward the past. Although it insisted on its own editorial neutrality in matters of politics, *Le Rire* was an instrumental and active player in the arena of political caricature, shaping the visual imaginary of both domestic and foreign conflict in its pages, and furthering the ideological polarization that marked the time through virulent

caricatural polemics. It outwardly disavowed itself of espousing the views of its artists while fiercely affirming their freedom of expression, all the while profiting from their outrages. It expressed a love of country with a pronounced skepticism of parliamentary republicanism, giving a willing platform to its most reactionary, and indeed, bestselling artists. All this is to say that ultimately, *Le Rire* skillfully betrayed the uneasy contradictions of its time through the uneasy prism of humor.

The chapters that follow offer more narrowly focused studies of *Le Rire*'s evolution through the end of World War I. Their thematic attentions vary considerably, in order to contextualize the breadth of *Le Rire*'s interests and reach. Underscoring all of them, however, is the same tension that this chapter has revealed: *Le Rire* was bound to both past and present in contradictory ways. It lionized the past with sentimental yearning, was reticent and ambivalent about the present and future, welcoming of progress, but not at the expense of a very defined vision of tradition, history, and identity. Though not a principal actor in the visual domain of the Dreyfus Affair and its ensuing ideological and existential battle for the soul of France, it nonetheless gave its artists total license to articulate extreme views. *Le Rire* abandoned its anti-Dreyfusard partisanship in 1900 to instead concentrate on the Exposition Universelle, using its proprietary pavilion at the fair to stage a retrospective exhibition on the history of caricature, puppetry, and cartooning. Thereafter, *Le Rire* increasingly looked away from print to other media in order to grow its profits, resulting in the decline of novelties and promotional tie-ins in the print periodical, and greater emphasis on the growth of Félix Juven's proprietary publishing enterprise until its sale and dissolution in 1912.

Nevertheless, the core of *Le Rire*'s enduring contribution to the media landscape of fin-de-siècle France, satiric or not, was shaped in its beginnings. Its vision of making laughter a

central facet of public life in fin-de-siècle Paris, and vindicating caricature and cartooning as mediums of profound artist merit, was swiftly realized in an environment of mounting social, political, and diplomatic tensions. With one eye focused on the past and one on the present, *Le Rire* wholly transformed the significance of the humor and comic journal from a market niche into a politically and culturally relevant, and commercially viable, institution of the press, and revitalized the caricatural tradition of nineteenth-century France.

CHAPTER II. *LE RIRE* AND THE DREYFUS AFFAIR

The extent and impact of *Le Rire*'s participation in the Dreyfus Affair, the principal and most bitterly divisive political scandal of the last decade of the nineteenth century with the most tangible consequences in French society and daily life, is difficult to ascertain. Relative to other satirical journals, some of which were founded specifically to stake a claim in the dispute, *Le Rire* played a bit part.¹⁰² Its participation in social and political conversations was not of central concern to Republican authorities in the course of the scandal, nor did it serve as a primary mouthpiece for popular agitation or mass mobilization. As such, there is no detailed record of *Le Rire*'s involvement in the Dreyfus Affair in any public archive.

Still, *Le Rire*'s large ensemble of contributing artists, as well as editors, played varying roles in the affair. Their contributions to its pictorial and polemical legacy, both in the pages of *Le Rire* and independently of the journal, remain significant. Nominally, *Le Rire* fervently maintained a stance of editorial neutrality in the matter, and insisted that the seriousness of the controversy was incompatible with the spirit of laughter and gaiety it sought to uphold. On the other hand, over the course of the many hotly contested developments in the story, *Le Rire* consistently found the Dreyfus Affair a potent source for political, social, religious, and racial

¹⁰² The historiography of the mass circulation press's role in the Dreyfus Affair is abundant and dynamic. Historical interest in the question has remained consistent for over a century. See for example: Claude Bellanger et al., eds., *Histoire générale de la presse française, T. 3: de 1871 à 1940* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1972); Patrice Boussel, *L'Affaire Dreyfus et la presse* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1960); and Ruth Harris, *Dreyfus: Politics, Emotion, and the Scandal of the Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010), especially 105-153. Less attention has been heeded to the satiric press, though specialist studies do exist. See: Patricia Eckert Boyer, "The Artist as Illustrator in Fin-de-Siècle Paris," in Phillip Dennis Cate, ed., *The Graphic Arts and French Society, 1871-1914* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 113-163; Phillip Dennis Cate, "The Paris Cry: Graphic Artists and the Dreyfus Affair," in Norman L. Kleeblatt, ed., *The Dreyfus Affair: Art, Truth, and Justice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Jacques Lethève, *La caricature et la presse sous la IIIe République* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1961); Bertrand Tillier, *La RépubliCature: la caricature politique en France, 1870-1914* (Paris: Éditions CNRS, 1997), 52-58 and 89-97; Bertrand Tillier, *Les artistes et l'affaire Dreyfus: 1898-1908* (Seysssel: Champ Vallon, 2009). Important works in their own right, these volumes nevertheless tend toward descriptive analyses of the oversaturated field of satirical journals, clarifying the partisan fault lines. They pay very little attention to nonpartisan motives for intervention in the affair.

ridicule. Historian Laurent Bihl has counted 91 total instances of antisemitic imagery, including 16 cover illustrations and 45 interior pages, in the journal between its founding and the outbreak of World War I in 1914. The lion's share of such images appeared during the Dreyfus affair between 1894 and 1900.¹⁰³ Though *Le Rire*'s interventions in the broader conversation were comparatively infrequent, they were decidedly partisan in nature, relating charged antisemitic and anti-republican positions typical of nationalist and populist opposition to the Dreyfusard cause.

That is not to say that *Le Rire* played a central role in organizing mass mobilizations or popular responses to the events of the Affair. Deciphering the reception of *Le Rire*'s contribution to the visual record of the scandal is nearly impossible without substantive archival evidence of the journal's operations. Archival records plainly show that *Le Rire* director Félix Juven was neither anti-republican nor expressly antisemitic in his public or private life.¹⁰⁴ The editorial board of *Le Rire* never explicitly professed an antisemitic agenda, and throughout the duration of the affair rejected any such motives when publishing content that targeted Jews, Dreyfus, or republican institutions. The production and publication of antisemitic images in *Le Rire* at the time of the Dreyfus affair was not of programmatic design, and did not occur with any predetermined frequency. *Le Rire*'s interventions were always reactive, published in response to the latest developments in the scandal.

¹⁰³ Laurent Bihl, *La Grande Mascarade parisienne*, 771.

¹⁰⁴ The limited and scattershot archival record on Juven affirms, in a file considering his candidacy for the Légion d'Honneur in 1910, that he had never been subject to any politically motivated investigation, but that "his sympathies to republican institutions had been *acquired*." Archives Nationales (AN) F/12/8632, 4. Nevertheless, Juven maintained warm professional and personal friendships with several prominent nationalists and anti-Dreyfusard figures, most notably Paul Déroulède: AN 401AP/29.

Nevertheless, a preponderance of *Le Rire*'s most notable contributors professed radical nationalist and antisemitic views, and ardently supported the exclusion of Jews from French public life, nationality, and civil rights on the basis of both race and religion. As such, antisemitic and anti-Dreyfusard caricature was largely the province not of a single publication, but of a particular nationalist milieu within the graphic arts. A small but significant coterie of comic artists produced nearly all anti-Jewish, anti-parliamentary cartoons, and pro-military cartoons that appeared in *Le Rire* between 1894 and Dreyfus' restoration to the French army in 1906. These cartoonists did not limit their submissions to *Le Rire*: they were prolific visual commentators on the Dreyfus Affair across the illustrated, satirical, and popular press. Nevertheless, *Le Rire* directly profited from the promulgation of such artists' negative racial, religious, and physiognomic stereotypes of Jews and diatribes against Dreyfus, his sympathizers, and supporters of judicial review that favored a retrial of his case.

The tension between *Le Rire*'s insistence on its own editorial apolitical neutrality with its willingness to broadcast and benefit from hyper-partisan representations of the Dreyfus Affair constitutes the focus of this chapter. My argument is multifaceted. I argue on one hand that *Le Rire*'s long-term contribution to the visual record of the Dreyfus Affair played an important, if historically understated, role in the dissemination of increasingly vitriolic anti-Dreyfusard propaganda. Its motives for doing so, I maintain, were largely nonideological, though ultimately irrelevant to the broader effects of its interventions. A nascent satirical weekly, *Le Rire* profited from and fed burgeoning currents of popular antisemitism and nationalism in its early life in

order to grow its readership. The decision proved effective, as *Le Rire* achieved both immediate and enduring success.¹⁰⁵

On the other hand, despite frequent affirmations of neutrality, *Le Rire*'s interventions in the Dreyfus Affair were unequivocally, pointedly, and increasingly partisan over time. Antisemitic caricature was the principal, but not sole, platform for expressing that agenda. The presence of antisemitic images in *Le Rire* never occurred in isolation from other political considerations: hatred of Jews was not an ideology apart, but deeply interconnected and interwoven with other polemical talking points of the nationalist right. The caricatural image of the Jew became an allegorical blank slate: it often served as a vehicle for larger, often contradictory structural anxieties, chief among them anti-parliamentarianism, anti-republicanism, anti-capitalism, anti-internationalism, anti-socialism, anti-finance, anti-landlordism, anti-modernism.¹⁰⁶ Such representations served to define the contours of the national community and criteria for belonging against the idea of an ambiguous and foreign other.

Viewing *Le Rire*'s interventions in the Dreyfus Affair both chronologically and thematically is especially revealing to historians. Visual and textual analysis of such representations plainly shows the gradual intensification and ideological radicalization of *Le Rire*'s satire. More impactfully, it demonstrates both editors' and contributors' willingness to directly engage with and respond to readers' attitudes and perception of different political ideas, especially antisemitism and anti-parliamentary nationalism. The cumulative effect of *Le Rire*'s satire, circulated through a truly mass graphic medium, reveals a simultaneous contempt for and

¹⁰⁵ Bihl, *La Grande Mascarade Parisienne*, 153-176.

¹⁰⁶ A rich historiography on the politics and visual representations of antisemitism in nineteenth-century France exists. Most pertinent to the line of reasoning pursued in this chapter and, in my opinion, most authoritative, is Stephen Wilson, *Ideology and Experience: Antisemitism in France at the Time of the Dreyfus Affair* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982), especially ix-xviii, and 602-652.

humor about mass politics, at the same time as the journal willfully engaged in and profited from the crystallization of the anti-Dreyfusard cause.

This chapter's analysis of *Le Rire's* interventions in the Dreyfus Affair is structured chronologically, in order to emphasize the interconnections between the distinct ideological threads of anti-Dreyfusard political critique, as well their utility to cartoonists as instruments of humor. I first examine the twin beginnings of both the Dreyfus Affair and *Le Rire* in late 1894, and how the Affair informed *Le Rire's* early life. I then turn to what Pierre Birnbaum has termed the "Antisemitic Moment" of 1898 in the wake of Émile Zola's intervention, as seen from the pages of *Le Rire*. Turning to 1899, I emphasize *Le Rire's* focus on political turmoil and the shift from the anticlimactic conclusion to the Dreyfus Affair to the charged courtroom drama of the conspiracy trials of rightwing nationalists under the "Government of National Defense." The chapter concludes by retracing the development of key political themes in *Le Rire's* body of graphic satire on the Dreyfus Affair, resolving that *Le Rire's* interest in the controversy was rooted in opportunism rather than any deeply held political conviction. Nevertheless, its intervention and imaging of the scandal demonstrates the profound and varied uses of laughter to chronicle the full spectrum of political messaging in its time.

Beginnings: 1894-1897

The case against Alfred Dreyfus began in September 1894, when the general staff of the War Ministry's military intelligence office intercepted a memorandum in a trashcan that suggested internal leaks to the German military attaché in Paris and confirmation of payment to a spy. The head of the military intelligence office, Colonel Jean Sandherr, notified Minister of War General Auguste Mercier, who initiated an internal investigation to identify the culprit. The investigating committee concluded the mole had to be an artillery officer in the general staff

office, narrowing the pool of potential suspects to roughly half a dozen men. On the recommendation of Sandherr and his assistant, both of whom held antisemitic views, Dreyfus' name was put forth. Dreyfus, a recent graduate of the *École Militaire* from a wealthy Alsatian Jewish family, had been on probationary rotation in the departmental offices of the War Ministry. Lacking incriminating evidence of Dreyfus' guilt, the heads of the general staff summoned Dreyfus to dictate a letter and consulted graphologists to compare the handwriting of the intercepted memo and Dreyfus' sample. Dreyfus was summarily arrested and imprisoned. A subsequent judicial investigation recommended a court-martial indictment on charges of high treason. A closed trial was held over three days in December, in which a secret dossier of evidence incriminating Dreyfus was divulged to the investigating judges, but withheld from the defense. The military court unanimously convicted Dreyfus of high treason and sentenced him to public degradation and lifetime deportation to the penal colony of Devil's Island in Guiana. The following week, a final petition for appeal was denied.

The initial procedural motions against Dreyfus did not happen in isolation. Between October and December 1894, the Parisian press became eager consumers of new developments in the case. The earliest news of Dreyfus' indictment arrived two weeks after his arrest: through an internal leak, Édouard Drumont's antisemitic *La Libre Parole* broke the news of a Jewish officer's arrest on charges of treason on October 29. Two days later, both *Le Soir* and *La Libre Parole* identified the suspect as Dreyfus. The news generated a relentless and elaborate antisemitic campaign within the nationalist press that endured two months. Daily papers like *La Libre Parole*, alongside Henri Rochefort's republican-socialist *L'Intransigeant*, mass-readership news dailies *L'Éclair*, *Le Gaulois*, *Le Matin*, *Le Petit Journal*, and *Le Temps* railed against Jews as a hostile enemy of the French nation, fabricated false rumors of confessions, and pilloried

Mercier himself as a supposed conspirator complicit in Dreyfus' treason.¹⁰⁷ While several newspapers attempted to uphold constraint and neutrality rather than presuppose Dreyfus' guilt, the press was instrumental in shaping pre-trial consensus against the captain. Satirical journals joined the smear campaign en masse. *La Libre Parole* and *L'Intransigeant* by all measures coordinated the assault on Dreyfus' character on the basis of his race and religion, but even longstanding republican and radical papers moved to pillory Dreyfus, the most notable example being *Le Grelot*.¹⁰⁸

Le Rire had the coincidental good fortune of publishing its very first issue amidst these initial rumblings. For its part, the editorial board insisted on political neutrality, contending that the seriousness of politics was incompatible with the spirit of amusement. Nevertheless, the early life of both *Le Rire* and the Dreyfus Affair were inextricably bound in time, and their trajectories inevitably dovetailed. *Le Rire*'s inaugural issue appeared exactly one week after Drumont's revelation of Dreyfus' identity in *La Libre Parole*. The issue advertised a list of anticipated contributing artists that included such illustrious names as Forain, Willette, Caran d'Ache, and Gyp, the pseudonym of Sibylle Riquetti de Mirabeau, the Comtesse de Martel. Gyp was not a newcomer to the public arena at the time of the Dreyfus Affair. She had been a vocal backer of General Boulanger from 1886 until his electoral defeat and exile in 1889, a prolific novelist and playwright, as well as a major mouthpiece for antisemitic activism during the Panama scandal of 1892. Willa Silverman's seminal biography of Gyp has demonstrated her centrality to the initial wave of nationalist agitation celebrating Dreyfus' conviction, owing to her close friendships with

¹⁰⁷ Joseph Reinach, *Histoire de l'Affaire Dreyfus, Vol. 1 : Le procès de 1894* (Paris: La Revue Blanche, 1901), Chapter 5, 191-241. Reinach uses poetic and metaphorical language in his descriptions of the antisemitic campaign as a storm, flood, or cataclysm, bestowing the moniker of *presse de mensonges* or *presse de sang* on the outlets mentioned.

¹⁰⁸ Guillaume Doizy, "Le Grelot, un journal satirique républicain illustré," in *Ridiculousa* 18 (2011):

polemicists Drumont and Jules Guérin, as well as President of the Republic Félix Faure, through their common involvement with the Ligue des Patriotes.¹⁰⁹ Though Gyp contributed more frequently to Drumont’s *La Libre Parole* and its illustrated supplement, as well as *La Vie Parisienne* and Marguerite Durand’s feminist daily *La Fronde*, *Le Rire* served as a willing mouthpiece for Gyp’s coarse and violent antisemitism, as well as more generalized attacks on the weaknesses of the parliamentary republic.¹¹⁰ The same inaugural issue included a back cover illustration by Gyp, satirizing feminist views of history by depicting French peasant women as prehistorical foragers, suckling their infant children, picking herbs, and wearing dresses fashioned from their own overgrown body hair.¹¹¹

Le Rire began publishing Gyp’s series of antisemitic cover illustrations in its third issue on 24 November. The series appeared in six installments over four years, from 1894 until 1898. Four appeared as front covers, and one as a back cover. A dedicated special issue, an antisemitic “History of the Third Republic,” appeared in November 1896. Each installment maintained both thematic and stylistic cohesion typical of Gyp’s pen. The front



Figure 2.1: Gyp, Untitled Cover Illustration for *Le Rire* no. 3, 24 November 1894.

¹⁰⁹ Willa Z. Silverman, *The Notorious Life of Gyp: Rightwing Anarchist in Fin-de-Siècle France* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 170-172.

¹¹⁰ Silverman, *The Notorious Life of Gyp*, 119-122.

¹¹¹ *Le Rire* no. 1 (November 10, 1894).

cover for the third issue is strikingly crude. Gyp lambasts president Casimir-Périer as a cuckold looking on helplessly tied to a ball and chain as his consort, the Faubourg Saint-Germain, rejects him for a Jewish suitor. The image is a visual pun laying blame on the president for allowing the Faubourg, a historically wealthy district in the 7th arrondissement of Paris and symbolic administrative center for the national government, to be overrun with parvenu Jewish bourgeois. Depicted as various insects, the invasive species bring with them the forces of modern finance and industrial capitalism, crowning Casimir-Périer with the revolutionary Phrygian bonnet, long an icon of French republicanism. Gyp suggests an insidious alliance between the forces of the secular republican regime and Jewish immigration in order to “pull [French society] in two.” (Figure 2.1) Here, Gyp’s caricature establishes a canon of visual tropes for how she would continually portray Jews in the context of political affairs: the symbolic image of the insect as invasive vermin, as agents of modernity acting in concert with parliamentary institutions, and the physiognomic stereotypes long typical of antisemitic caricature.¹¹²

The interior pages of issue 3 largely focus on denouncing parliamentary corruption through mockery of procedure. First, a column by Charles Léandre and Jean Veber imitates a Baedeker tourist guidebook through the National Assembly chambers at the Palais Bourbon, where Victor Hugo humiliates a young deputy and ignites the official documentation of hilarity in the assembly. The *Rire hors séance* column, signed by a pseudonymous bailiff of the court, identifies a number of deputies from Paris as senile old men sleeping through legislative debate sessions and soliciting bribes to pass bills.¹¹³ Lastly, a cartoon by Georges Delaw, the first in a series based on the legend of the Wandering Jew, depicts a vagabond, arrested by gendarmes on

¹¹² For a detailed study of the visual tropes of antisemitic caricature, see Frank Felsenstein, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes: A Paradigm of Otherness in English Popular Culture, 1660-1830* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 1-26.

¹¹³ *Le Rire* no. 3 (November 24, 1894), 2-7.

horseback at a rustic village inn, being led through town to prison and subjected to public shaming—a thinly veiled metaphor for Dreyfus’ indictment and allusion to the antisemitic canard of the rootless cosmopolitan.¹¹⁴

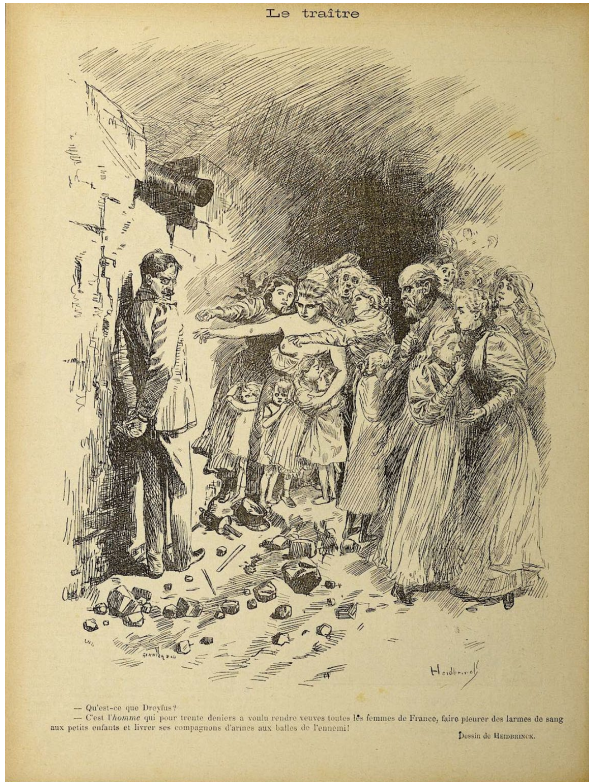


Figure 2.2: Heidbrinck, “Le traître,” in *Le Rire* no. 9, 5 January 1895.

The next mention of Dreyfus came after the New Year, on 5 January 1895, the day of his degradation at the *École militaire*. Notably absent from *Le Rire*’s field of vision was any mention of the proceedings of Dreyfus’ court martial and conviction in December. Even so, the January 5 issue minced no words in its condemnation of Dreyfus. The first caricature by Oswald Heidbrinck denounces him as a traitor who, like Judas Iscariot, betrayed his nation for the meager sum of 30 silver coins. (Figure 2.2) The scene is framed as a fictionalized degradation, with

Dreyfus standing handcuffed before a mob of widows and children shaming him for his treason.¹¹⁵ In the *Rire à l'étranger* column, the editorial board itself makes a statement to introduce a cartoon reproduced from *Kikeriki* in Vienna. The board condemns the “abominable crimes of the ex-captain” which “gave rise to reprobation everywhere,” but notably disavows the antisemitic nature of the caricature itself, which depicts Dreyfus as a feral beast with exaggerated Jewish facial features in a menagerie cage. General Auguste Mercier, the Minister of War who

¹¹⁴ *Le Rire* no. 3, 8.

¹¹⁵ The caption reads: “What is Dreyfus? He is the *man* who for 30 denarii wanted to make widows of all Frenchwomen, make little children cry tears of blood, and give up his comrades in arms to the enemy’s bullets!”

greenlighted Dreyfus' arrest and prosecution, is shown as a zookeeper directing a guest to view his untamed and voracious appetite for bribery payments.¹¹⁶

Following Dreyfus' deportation to Guiana in late February 1895, *Le Rire* resumed its focus on Jews in Paris in its 2 March issue. There, Falstaff (pseudonym of writer Clément Vautel) mocks the playwright Albin Valabruège's conversion to Judaism as reported by Drumont in *La Libre Parole*, quipping that "until now, the children of Israel have mostly been known for their financial conversions." Falstaff, fearful that Valabruège would concern himself too much with biblical studies, bemoans the conversion as a loss for French humor, lamenting that France had "gained a neophyte and lost a comic." Accompanying Falstaff's vignette, a cartoon by Jules Depaquit lampoons stereotypes of Jewish physiognomy, particularly exaggerating the nose and baldness of a Jewish gambler.¹¹⁷ The same issue includes, on its back cover, a lithographic portrait by Heidbrinck of Gyp to promote the stage premier of her play, *Mademoiselle Ève*, at the Comédie-Parisienne.¹¹⁸

While *Le Rire* displayed the creeping prevalence of antisemitic opinion and provocations, violently antisemitic images appeared relatively infrequently in the pages of *Le Rire* for much of 1895 beyond the Affair's initial sounding. When Joseph Reinach, the Jewish deputy from Digne-les-Bains, intervened in Dreyfus' defense for a public trial, he too became the object of antisemitic mockery, though his caricature is largely absent from *Le Rire*. The paper continued nevertheless to publish Delaw's *Album du Juif errant*, which he used as an allegorical window into the divisions the Dreyfus Affair sowed in French society, depicted as the insular and parochial world of a medieval village. Under Jeannot's signature, the "Chateau Life" cartoon

¹¹⁶ *Le Rire* no. 9, 9.

¹¹⁷ *Le Rire* no. 17 (March 2, 1894), 3.

¹¹⁸ *Le Rire* no. 17, 12.

series appeared in November issues, some of which featured caricatures of a Jewish baron out of place in high society and bemoaning his Jewishness. Jeannot dedicated such images to Gyp.

The issue of 28 December 1895, a thematic Christmas issue, featured the second



Figure 2.3: Gyp, Untitled cover illustration for *Le Rire* No. 60, 28 December 1895.

installment of Gyp’s antisemitic cover series.

Marianne, symbol of the French republican nation, is seen de-robed of her tricolor flag dress and nude, tied to a post. She is the object of a high-striker fairground game, the object of which is to hit her in order to bleed her of varying amounts of money, which will spout forth from the face of a “King Jew.” (Figure 2.3) In the background, Jewish picketers are seen holding signs reading: “Panama, goldmines, military provisions” and *Chemins de fer du Sud*. Both are references to the business

ventures of Jewish finance banker Jacques de

Reinach, who was implicated in the Panama scandals and found dead in an apparent suicide after leaking the names of politicians accepting bribe money to Édouard Drumont at *La Libre Parole*.¹¹⁹ In the foreground, two caricatures of Jewish men defile Marianne: one swings the hammer to win more money as another, holding his winnings, defecates on the flag of the Republic. The caption reads, “I’m sure France isn’t enjoying herself!” The rest of the issue largely focuses on various satirical takes on Christmas festivities. The illustration draws a line of

¹¹⁹ After handing a list of parliamentary deputies implicated in taking bribes from the board of the Panama Canal Company to cover up its bankruptcy to Édouard Drumont for publication in *La Libre Parole*, Reinach was found dead before he could be brought to justice. Jacques de Reinach was the father-in-law of Joseph.

continuity between the corruption of the Panama scandals and Dreyfus' alleged treason, laying blame with Jews' inherent otherness and interest in destabilizing the French nation for their own ulterior, cosmopolitan and internationalist motives. Moreover, it incorporates a longstanding antisemitic scatological trope, which gained widespread use after the French Revolution to differentiate emancipated Jews from Frenchmen as unhygienic and foul.¹²⁰

The issue following Gyp's Panama cover debuted new series of literary *fantaisies* presented as ethnographic studies in the daily life of Parisian Jews.¹²¹ These *contes juifs*, introduced January 4, carry a preface with the editorial board's direct intervention that again disavows any antisemitic motive: "too bad for Drumont." Instead, *Le Rire* insists the series, written under the pen name Solomon, is purely anecdotal, comic fiction of a quasi-scientific nature. They are jokes about the study of a race, and are not intended to exclude other racial groups from the microscope of observational comedy.

Despite the editors' insistence to the contrary, the *contes juifs* are explicitly charged in their supposedly ethnographic representation of Parisian Jewish life. They rely on negative racial stereotypes in order to convey the foreignness of being Jewish in French society. The first vignette of the series examines the last will and testament of a fictional patriarch named Meyer, who amassed a small fortune in life before his death. He leaves as his heirs and executors of his will three friends named Cohen, Cahn, and Lazarus, asking each to leave a thousand-franc bill in his casket to be buried with his wealth. Cohen and Lazarus each abide by the request before Cahn pockets their bills and leaves a fake three-thousand-franc bill in their stead.¹²²

¹²⁰ The trope is connected as well to the German *Judensau* image. See Richard S. Levy, ed., *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005).

¹²¹ The comic genre of *fantaisie* denotes here a sketch, written or illustrated, that represent an imagined or fictionalized mirror of reality or current events.

¹²² *Le Rire* no. 61 (January 4, 1896), 2.

The series continued in four additional installments. The second appeared the following week, on 11 January, depicting a conversation in a traditional Jewish restaurant between two nondescript locals, Hayem and Bloch, complaining about their misfortunes. Much of the text is dedicated to mocking the foreign accents and mispronunciations of French words typical of German- and Yiddish-speaking Jews. An accompanying caricature depicts a Jewish father and his children, decrying their supposed financial hardship when they wear expensive furs in the winter.¹²³ The third installment of January 18 continues this thread of mockery by ridiculing Jewish patterns of speech and sociability. An interaction between restaurant proprietor Madame Jacob and patron Mayer produces a circular conversation, in which they pepper their French liberally with Yiddish, only to establish how the other is doing that day and that they'll be leaving to go elsewhere shortly. The author again includes intentional misspellings to emphasize both the Jewishness of their mispronounced French sounds and their general foreignness to French culture.¹²⁴

A statement from the editorial board concerning the reception of the *contes juifs* appeared two weeks later, in the 1 February issue. The statement, entitled "To oversensitive readers" and signed by "Jacob-Jeroboam Dreyfus," responds directly to letters from Jewish readers denouncing the antisemitic character of the series. The notice denies any implication of antisemitism, accuses certain Jewish readers of excessive sensitivity to jokes that have no malicious intent, and defends its use of stereotypical representations to parody Jewish life. The

¹²³ *Le Rire* no. 62 (January 11, 1896), 2.

¹²⁴ To mimic, and indeed mock, the phonetics of Jewish-accented speech in written French, the author irregularly switches voiced and unvoiced consonants: b and p, c and g, d and t, f and v, j and ch, s and z, etc. The author also uses Yiddish words in reference to inanimate or culturally specific objects, rather than their French equivalents, and makes common grammatical errors typical of immigrant non-native speakers. Thus, "*Tu sais ce que je dois faire maintenant pour vivre ? Je vends des almanachs*" is rendered as "*tu sais ce que je tois maintenant faire pour fivre ? Che fendes des luch (l'almanach isralite).*"

logic of the editors' justification for targeting Jews is a kind of political equal opportunism: that Jews do indeed constitute an active part—if a minority—of the fabric of national community in France. “The desire that *Le Rire* relentlessly mock the President of the Republic, our governing officials, members of parliament, artists, the army, magistrates, indeed everyone except the Jews, is an absolutely unjustifiable demand...” The statement concludes by reiterating its denial of any bias or malicious intent, and that *Le Rire*'s only ethical responsibility is to make its readers laugh.¹²⁵ A third installment in the series appeared three weeks later, on 22 February, and a fourth on July 4 before disappearing entirely from publication.¹²⁶

A special issue by Gyp, framed as a satirical history of the early Third Republic, appeared 14 November 1896. The tone of Gyp's polemic is decidedly more extreme than anything *Le Rire* had previously been willing to publish. Gyp's polemical survey from the Republic's foundations to the Dreyfus Affair insinuates a conspiratorial overthrow of French interests, with Jews and opportunist republicans working in concert to subjugate French nationals and deprive French society of its historic identity and self-determination. The narrative begins with the Third Republic, depicted as a forest nymph, and her pet Jewish bat, welcomed into the embrace of Marianne and the French people while promising economic reform, integrity, and honor to uphold the virtues of the French Revolution. Gyp then turns to Decree 136 of the Government of National Defense in October 1870. Also known as the Crémieux decree due to the lobbying efforts of Justice Minister and founder of the *Alliance israélite universelle* Adolphe Crémieux, Decree 136 granted French nationality and pathways to citizenship for all Jewish indigenous inhabitants of Algeria, allowing them to travel freely to the metropole and fall under

¹²⁵ *Le Rire* no. 65 (1 February 1896), 4.

¹²⁶ *Le Rire* no. 68 (22 February 1896), 5, and *Le Rire* no. 87 (4 July 1896), 2.

the jurisdiction of metropolitan law. Gyp depicts Jewish migration as a plague of locusts swarming the Third Republic, depicted as a bare-breasted Marianne, while she condescends to the “real French people,” embodied in the Gallic rooster, to treat the newcomers warmly.

Most of the illustrations in Gyp’s special issue directly implicate the Republic as conspiring against the will of the people to undermine French sovereignty. The Third Republic is shown soliciting backroom favors from different political factions for its own corrupt gain. Recounted in Gyp’s own scribbled pen, the Third Republic progressively alienates itself from its first political allies—conservative opportunist republicans Adolphe Thiers and Léon Gambetta—before repressing its political rivals, the Catholic Church and Bonapartism. A two-page spread insert in full color caricatures the ensemble of republican Presidents until 1897. Adolphe Thiers jumps rope over the dead body of Paris. Patrice de MacMahon, monarchist disgraced after the parliamentary crisis of 1877, defends the honor of the Tricolor. Jules Grévy rests in a pile of Peruvian guano. François Sadi Carnot hatches the egg bearing the Franco-Russian alliance while covering up the Panama scandals. Jean Casimir-Périer, in a white dress and imperial crown, furiously stomps on the freedom of expression for the nationalist and monarchist rightwing press in violation of the 1881 law. Félix Faure, largest and most patriotic among the presidents, offers simultaneous strategic military alliance with Russia and amnesty to political exiles. Gyp’s narrative concludes with the Third Republic growing ever isolated, plagued by corruption scandals and alienating potential allies, and growing obsessive in her care of her pet Jewish rats. Rather than building strong bonds with her people, she attends to feeding her rats, herself feeding

parasitically on crumbs and scraps, exporting France's best goods abroad while the people suffer.¹²⁷

What precisely made *Le Rire* the appropriate channel to broadcast Gyp's increasingly violent rhetoric against, as Pierre Birnbaum termed them, the "State Jews" of the Republic?¹²⁸ Would not her friendship with Drumont be of use in publishing such an indictment of co-conspiracy between Jews and the republican government? What utility did *Le Rire* provide Gyp to voice her hatred and anxiety of Jews that another outlet did not? Willa Z. Silverman has attributed this issue to questions of sexual anxiety and Jewish perversion, perhaps her own attraction to Jews in positions of power in her professional life, her own publisher Paul Calmann-Lévy among them.¹²⁹ We must also read the decision in more pragmatic terms: *Le Rire* achieved the highest possible circulation, and thus, the greatest possible audience.

While no correspondence corroborates Gyp's rationale for favoring *Le Rire* over more politically charged journals or even her own publisher, *Le Rire* offered a brief intervention explaining its decision to publish Gyp in its November 28 issue. In a notice titled "Neither one nor the other," the editorial board reprises its defense of free expression against the zealotry of "oversensitive" readers. The brief statement again denies any political or antisemitic motive, instead plainly articulating a division between the points of view of *Le Rire*'s editorial board and those of its contributors. The board justifies freedom of expression as a kind of quality control of their product to ensure that artists and humorists can offer their best work without fear of

¹²⁷ *Le Rire: Histoire de la Troisième République racontée par Gyp et illustrée par Bob*, no. 106 (14 November 1896), 1-16. See also Amy B. Millstone, "Histoire de la Troisième République: A Right-Wing Satirical Cartoon," in *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History* 16 (1989): 464-472.

¹²⁸ Pierre Birnbaum, *The Jews of the Republic: A Political History of State Jews in France from Gambetta to Vichy*, trans. Jane Todd (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), *passim*.

¹²⁹ Silverman, *The Notorious Life of Gyp*, 122-123.

editorial board. The notice furthermore refuses any concession or apology to offended readers, and instead announces the coming of a new print run of Gyp's special issue, which enjoyed "an enormous success." The statement concludes on a sarcastic note: "For the love of God, or even Jehovah! Do not take *Le Rire* for an antisemitic paper! It reserves the right to laugh at everything, even Jews. That is all."¹³⁰ In reaffirming its status as a *tribune libre*, the journal both distanced itself from the controversial opinions of its contributors and absolved the editorial board of legal responsibility under the *lois scélérates* that regulated offenses of press incitement and defamation against the interests of public order.

Le Rire's interventions in the Dreyfus case during initial investigation, trial, and post-conviction period reflected the broader political reality of mounting popular antisemitism, but were ultimately neither remarkable nor especially violent for their time. The most vitriolic satires, whether graphic or otherwise, appeared elsewhere. Still, it had been evident that antisemitism had been steadily intensifying across France since the 1886 publication of Drumont's *La France juive*, even if its political and organizational cohesion were relatively novel phenomena.

Antisemitism's ideological consistency as a mass movement of rightwing racialism solidified in coalition with the rise of nationalist leagues and the growing political engagement of the Catholic Assumptionist and Ultramontanist orders around support for Boulangism. Drumont founded the Antisemitic League of France, for example, in 1889, and patronized electoral campaigns in local constituencies across the country.¹³¹ Nevertheless, antisemitic activity was perceived as an inchoate political threat, liable to ebb and flow. While anti-Jewish prejudice was

¹³⁰ *Le Rire* no. 198 (28 November 1896), 5.

¹³¹ See Laurent Joly, "Antisémites et antisémitisme à la Chambre des députés sous la III^e République," in *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 54-3, no. 3 (2007): 71-72.

commonplace by the time of the Dreyfus Affair, the Jewish community of France was both small and geographically limited: of an estimated metropolitan community of 75-80,000 people in 1895, more than half resided in Paris alone. A substantial Jewish community of roughly 50,000 people also existed in French Algeria.¹³² In this way, antisemitic violence was inherently self-limiting to the places where Jews lived.

The tenor of the Dreyfus case changed, however, following two years of political activism and internal investigation on behalf of the Dreyfus family. After the death of Colonel Sandherr due to illness, Lieutenant Colonel Georges Picquart had been assigned to the head of the military intelligence office in July 1895. Picquart, attuned to the controversies of the case, demanded direct access to intercepted communications from the German embassy, and uncovered evidence that Major Ferdinand Walsin Esterhazy had penned the memorandum used to convict Dreyfus. His attempts to inform the general staff of the error prompted his transfer to Tunisia in 1896. Lucie and Mathieu Dreyfus, wife and elder brother of Alfred, respectively, had petitioned incessantly for judicial review of the conviction through every conceivable channel, including lobbying parliamentarians to intervene. Jewish anarchist and polemical writer Bernard Lazare published a tract, *Une erreur judiciaire*, in support of their cause in Brussels in November 1896. Concurrently, Hubert-Joseph Henry of the general staff had procured forged documents as substantiating evidence of Dreyfus' guilt. With Picquart relieved of his post, Henry was appointed provisional head of the intelligence office in early 1897. In the summer of that year, Picquart, by way of his lawyer and lifelong friend and confidant Louis Leblois, secured the support of Vice President of the Senate Auguste Scheurer-Kestner, an Alsatian Protestant. Come November 1897, Mathieu and Scheurer-Kestner formally accused Esterhazy of espionage,

¹³² Stephen Wilson, *Ideology and Experience*, 662 and 231 respectively.

prompting the army to open an official investigation. Such agitation won the “Dreyfusards” the support of renowned writer Émile Zola, who published his first open letter in defense of Dreyfus in *Le Figaro* at the end of that month.¹³³

1898

It has become cliché to say that the Dreyfus Affair began in earnest with Zola’s intervention. Even so, Zola’s activism transformed a politicized wrongful conviction controversy into a national scandal that pervaded every aspect of French public life. The emotional tenor of the affair erupted seemingly overnight into a constant threat of political violence. The sporadic debate over antisemitism and institutional stability soon ballooned into deeply-entrenched factionalism. In support of Dreyfus, a small coterie of “intellectuals” and statesmen argued on behalf of lofty civic virtues: truth, justice, equality, and the integral unity of the republic. Against Dreyfus, a growing coalition of professed antisemites and racialsists, nationalists, traditionalists, and the Catholic Church argued the primacy of the military as the true spirit of the nation over that of a government corrupted by modern and foreign excesses.¹³⁴

The fault lines of the Dreyfus Affair in 1898 had crystalized within the first days of January. On January 1, Esterhazy, acting on advice from superiors in the general staff, demanded a court-martial hearing to clear his name. The proceedings took place on January 10 and 11. Without calling Lucie or Mathieu Dreyfus as witnesses, the *conseil de guerre* unanimously acquitted Esterhazy in a closed hearing. Émile Zola published his infamous invective

¹³³ General chronology of events by Jean-Max Guieu, “Chronology of the Dreyfus Affair” (Georgetown University, May 2000), URL: https://jean-max-guieu.facultysite.georgetown.edu/other-interests/dreyfus-today-basic-timeline-of-the-dreyfus-affair/chronology-of-the-dreyfus-case#h.p_ISoSzohhLBVa (consulted 29 March 2022).

¹³⁴ Ruth Harris, *Dreyfus*, 217-246.

“J’accuse...!” in Georges Clemenceau’s radical newspaper *L’Aurore* two days later. The result was an unrelenting international uproar.

Under the pretenses of an open letter addressed to President of the Republic Félix Faure, Zola formally accused the War Ministry of an internal conspiracy to frame Alfred Dreyfus for treason and espionage based on antisemitic prejudices and fabricated evidence that covered up Esterhazy’s guilt. His intent in “J’accuse...!” was to force the government’s hand and open slander investigation proceedings against him, in order to open a judicial inquiry into the evidence used to convict Dreyfus. On one hand, it worked. Zola was indicted for slanderous outrage, brought to trial, and on 23 February found guilty and convicted before fleeing to England to escape a prison sentence. Writer and art critic Octave Mirbeau paid the totality of his legal fees in his absence. On the other hand, Zola’s intervention inflamed public opinion to a violent tipping point against both himself and the Dreyfus cause. Minister of War Jean-Baptiste Billot sued both Zola and *L’Aurore* for defamation. The army promptly arrested and imprisoned Georges Picquart on false charges of forging evidence against Esterhazy. Antisemitic rioting broke out first in Paris under the purview of Édouard Drumont and Jules Guérin’s *Ligue antisémite de France*, and spread throughout the country. In total, throughout the month of January and more sporadically in February 1898, fifty-five riots largely organized as reactions to Zola’s agitations and libel trial, targeted the Jewish communities of both metropolitan France and French Algeria.¹³⁵

Le Rire’s intervention in the “Zola Affair,” on behalf of no one or no thing besides its own publicity, escalated the vitriol of antisemitic and anti-Dreyfus rhetoric to more overtly

¹³⁵ Stephen Wilson, “The Antisemitic Riots of 1898,” in *Ideology and Experience*, 106-124.

hostile extremes. The journal's entry into the fracas coincided with the developments of November 1897. The 20 November issue debuted Charles Léandre's *Gotha du Rire* series, issued in 30 installments over nearly three years. The series' first entry caricatured Émile Zola. While not explicitly related to the events of the Dreyfus Affair, Léandre's caricature of Zola parodies him as an aging and disfigured writer, exhausted from struggling to stay relevant as he releases his latest novel, *Paris*.¹³⁶ Two weeks later, Léandre published a caricature of *Le Temps* theater critic Francisque Sarcey as a vegetarian baby as the second installment in the series, before returning to the Dreyfusards in the third installment on December 18. (Figure 2.4) A caricature of Auguste Scheurer-Kestner depicts him as isolated from with exaggerated Jewish features and alienated

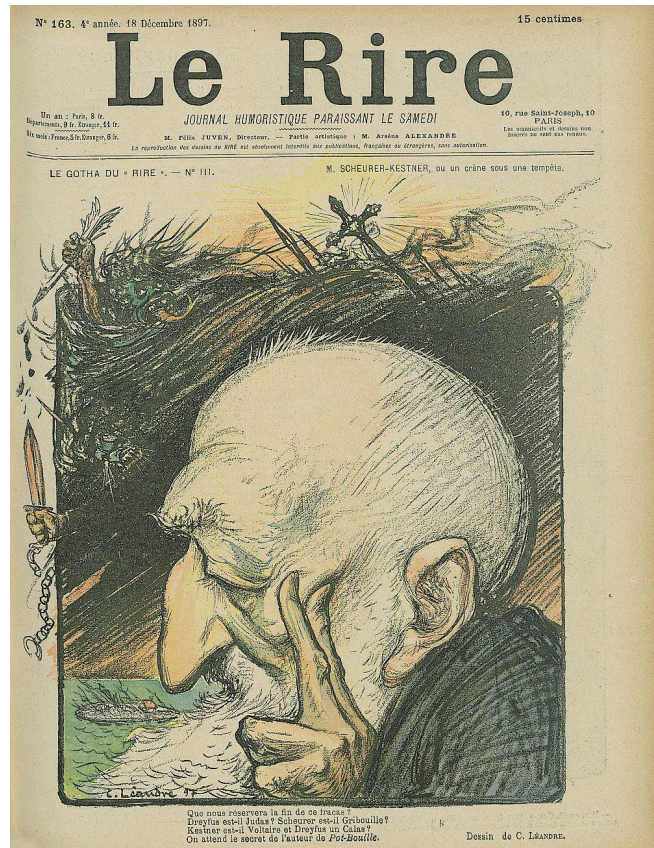


Figure 2.4. C. Léandre, "M. Scheurer-Kestner," in *Le Rire* no. 163, 18 December 1897.

and isolated from his allies as his enemies rage against him, "a skull under a storm." The caption, written in rhyming verse, mocks his advocacy for Dreyfus' cause: "Is Dreyfus Judas? Is Scheurer *Gribouille*? Is Kestner Voltaire and Dreyfus Calas? We await the secret of the author of *Pot-Bouille*."¹³⁷

¹³⁶ *Le Rire* No. 159 (November 20, 1897).

¹³⁷ *Le Rire* No. 163 (December 18, 1897). The literary and historical references in this caption are numerous. Beyond the antisemitic trope of associating Jews to Judas Iscariot's betrayal of Jesus, Léandre compares Scheurer-Kestner to *Gribouille*, a character from contemporary children's literature. *Gribouille* entered idiomatic expression

Le Rire made the Dreyfus Affair a primary focus following the uproar of the events of January 1898. Léandre published the fourth installment in his *Gotha* series on January 15, caricaturing the “brave generalissimo” Félix-Gustave Saussier. Saussier, then elderly and a known philanderer, had been the subject of controversy surrounding his early request for the general staff to halt any investigation into the source of the first memorandum discovered that was used to convict Dreyfus. Rumors had abounded among the anti-Dreyfusard camp that Saussier, who was serving as the military governor of Paris when the scandal began, conspired to protect Dreyfus to cover up his own history of adultery with his subordinates’ wives.¹³⁸

The following week, *Le Rire*’s gossip column included a tongue in cheek reference to the Affair’s ubiquity in Parisian public life: “Touching unanimity among newspapers regarding the Dreyfus Affair, decidedly buried, we hope!” The *fait divers* continues that one could read the exact same stories by the opposing sides, only assigning blame to different parties: “difficult to form one’s own opinion!” The next page features a full-page illustration by Charles Huard, an anti-Dreyfusard who openly professed antisemitic views and maintained a close working relationship with Édouard Drumont as a regular contributor to the illustrated supplement of *La Libre Parole*. Huard’s illustration of the current “state of the Dreyfus Affair” depicts a publicly assembled crowd of hundreds swarming and haranguing a small cohort of bourgeois Jewish men attempting to pass under police escort. (Figure 2.5) Their stovepipe hats cover their faces while their beards, lips, and noses denote their Jewishness. The image is compelling insofar as it

as synonymous with well-intentioned but shortsighted foolishness. Léandre also compares the Dreyfusard cause ironically to Voltaire’s advocacy on behalf of Jean Calas, a protestant who was tried and executed for the murder of his son in Toulouse in 1762. Calas was eventually exonerated two years later after Voltaire’s appeal to the King of France. His name became a symbol of the Catholic Church’s religious intolerance. Émile Zola was the author of *Pot-Bouille*, ironically first serialized in Arthur Meyer’s conservative *Le Gaulois* in 1882.

¹³⁸ Jean-Denis Bredin, *The Affair: The Case of Alfred Dreyfus*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (New York : George Braziller, 1983), 65-66 and 205-207. See also *L’Affaire Dreyfus: Dictionnaire*, ed. Michel Drouin (Paris: Flammarion, 2006), 50, and 66-67.

unifies the diverse threads and tropes of popular antisemitism into a single image. The likeness of the bourgeois connotes the excessive materialism and rigid class distinctions of capitalism and modernity, the grotesque physiognomy of the Jews marks their racial otherness. In contrast to the uniform image of the Jew, the crowd symbolizes the French nation, assembling visual archetypes representing all strata of French society. Present are men and women, young and old, rich and poor, civilians and soldiers.¹³⁹

The following issue of January 29 introduced a series of anti-Dreyfusard and antisemitic cartoons by Jules Depaquit. The first lampooned the

rhetorical style of Zola's "J'accuse..." in a sixteen-panel comic strip. In the comic, Depaquit repurposes Zola's accusatory voice, formally exposing flaws in French society through a series of scandalous revelations, despite Depaquit's observations being mundane common knowledge. Deriding the credibility or newness of Zola's accusations, Depaquit accuses Pontius Pilate of crucifying Jesus Christ, accuses husbands and wives of infidelity, Victor, Prince Napoleon of being a Bonapartist, and modern fashion of looking ridiculous, among others. In the next week's

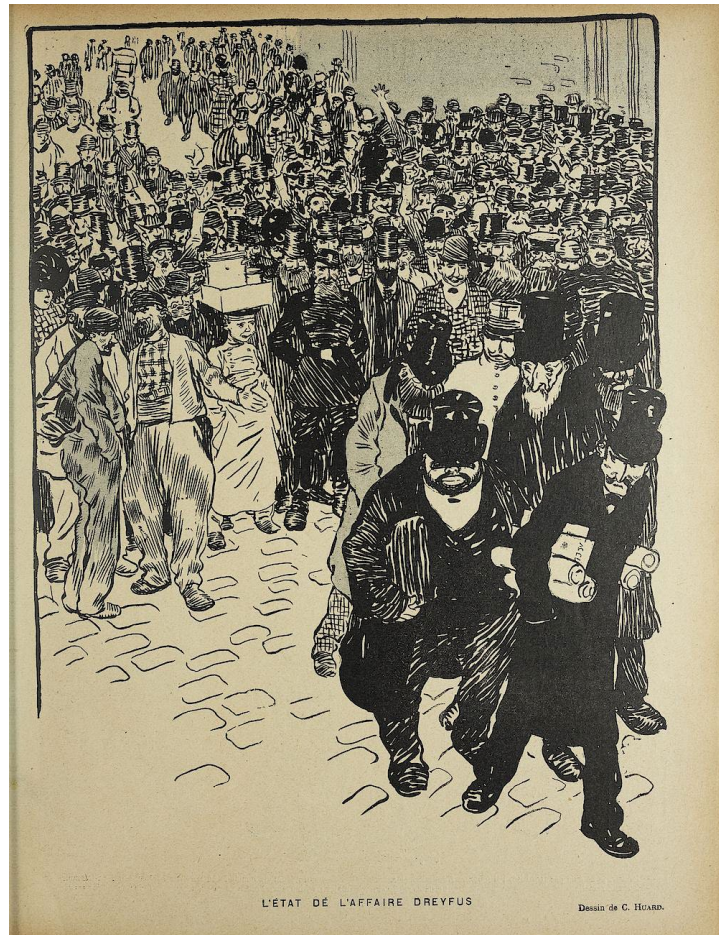


Figure 2.5: C. Huard, "L'état de l'Affaire Dreyfus," in *Le Rire* no. 168, 22 January 1898.

¹³⁹ *Le Rire* no. 168 (22 January 1894).

issue, accompanying Jules Hoche's reproduction of a letter sent to him by a Jewish reader, an ode and lamentation of his prominent nose, a doodle by Depaquit depicts a Jewish schoolteacher asking a pupil a question in class. (Figure 2.6)

"Pupil Michaud, what do you think we will have to burn once there is no more charcoal left on earth?" The pupil responds defiantly, "The Jews, sir."¹⁴⁰

The judiciary proceedings against Zola

and *L'Aurore* became their own veritable obsession under the close watch of the public eye, accompanied by sensationalist press

coverage and violent polemics that mirrored the antisemitism directed towards Dreyfus, Reinach, and their surrogates. The Chamber of Deputies had voted to indict Zola on January 13, the same day his open letter appeared. General Billot, Minister of War, lodged a formal complaint to indict Zola and Alexandre Perrenx, managing editor of *L'Aurore*, five days later on grounds of defamation against a public authority. The handwriting experts Zola accused of fraud and perjury filed a private libel suit against him on January 21.

The first trial against Zola took place at the Assizes Court of Paris, at the Palais de Justice, between February 7 and 23, 1898. Historians have long noted the violence it attracted, both from gathering crowds and relentless press coverage. The trial was nothing short of a judicial spectacle, with the chambers packed beyond capacity every day. Both legal counsels

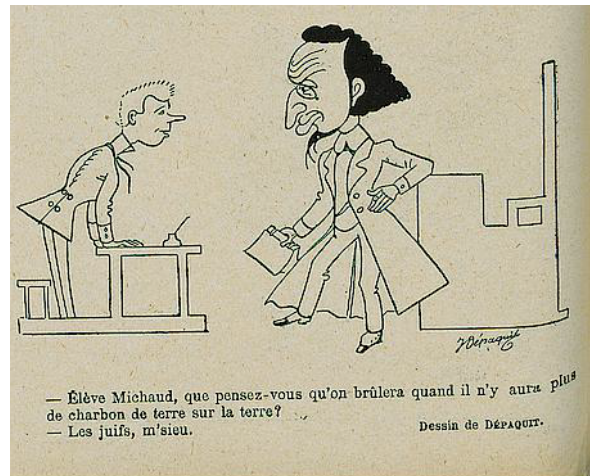


Figure 2.6: —Elève Michaud, que pensez-vous qu'on brûlera quand il n'y aura plus de charbon de terre sur la terre? —Les juifs, m'sieu. Dessin de Dépaquit.

¹⁴⁰ *Le Rire* no. 170 (5 February 1898), 4.

understood the stakes and scope of their arguments, transforming them from distinguished attorneys of the Paris bar into key strategists. Fernand Labori, representing Zola, intended to call an exhaustive list of witnesses. Anti-Dreyfusard nationalists, rallying behind Henri Rochefort, gathered inside and outside the Palais de Justice to intimidate the defendants and their supporters, and to incite and escalate violent confrontations. A significant delegation of soldiers in the gallery, supporting their comrades in arms, ensured a hostile convergence of the military and civilian worlds.¹⁴¹

Le Rire was an eager witness to the courtroom spectacle, and ran updates on the story weekly for the trial's duration. Most updates were relegated to the back-page *Échos du Rire* gossip column, penned by the pseudonymous Narcisse and illustrated by Henry Somm. More impassioned and partisan images, however, appeared more plentifully and more frequently in the *Rire à l'étranger* column, which reprinted caricatures published in the satirical press abroad. Cartoons from Berlin, London, Munich, New York, Turin, and Vienna, depicted Zola, Dreyfus, or any public figures or government ministers involved in the investigation in various lights. Anti-Dreyfusard representations made frequent use of pigs or porcine imagery to ridicule Zola, Dreyfus, Reinach, or Jews more generally. Dreyfusard cartoons emphasized neoclassical or Greco-Roman symbolism or even Christian martyrdom to underscore Zola and Dreyfus' moral triumph in their search for truth and justice. Nearly all emphasized the divisiveness and instability the affair generated in French society.¹⁴² All the meanwhile, *Le Rire's* own editors

¹⁴¹ Ruth Harris, *Dreyfus*, 116-132.

¹⁴² The foreign cartoons reproduced in *Le Rire* during the first half of 1898 are abundant. Caricatures from Berlin journals included, in alphabetical order: *Humoristische Blätter*, *Kladderadatsch*, *Lustige Blätter*. *Lustige Blätter* was most often reproduced for commentary on Dreyfus, specifically. Of the images reprinted in *Le Rire*, those of Berlin provenance featured Dreyfusard and anti-Dreyfusard representations in relatively equal proportions. Of the many London journals whose caricatures were featured in *Le Rire*, only *Moonshine* and *Pick-Me-Up* contributed cartoons relevant to the Dreyfus Affair. *Moonshine's* only cartoon was decidedly pro-Dreyfus, and depicted him as a martyr for the cause of justice, executed by firing squad in a military coup to overthrow the French Republic. Munich

lamented the damning images of France on the world stage. An editorial notice from the 12 February issue compels its readers to reflect on the moral lessons of the violent state of current “agitations,” and implicitly, the shame it brings to France before the foreign press. The notice is flanked by a caricature of street violence in France from the Turin journal *Fischietto*, and an anti-Dreyfusard cartoon praising the General Raoul de Boisdeffre.¹⁴³

The trial, and the outrage it generated, became *Le Rire*'s nonstop focus for its entire duration, and well beyond. Even after the verdict was rendered, the *affaire Zola* did not fade from view. *Le Rire* continued to publish increasingly venomous content in the weeks and months that followed, decrying both Zola and the Dreyfusard cause as existential threats to the safety of France. Beyond the *Échos du Rire* and *Le Rire à l'étranger* columns, *Le Rire* the journal ran cover illustrations, full-page feature spreads, serial comics, and short fictions (*fantaisies*) in order to direct readers' gaze, ire, and mockery towards the Palais de Justice. In the 12 February issue, a full-page comic in four panels by Huard, entitled “Those who do not interest ‘Intellectuals’”, rebuked Zola's advocacy on behalf of Dreyfus. The epigraph reads, “When the convict is named Dreyfus, it's called a judicial error. When he's named Dumanet, it's called necessary discipline.” Each panel tells the story of soldiers' experiences enduring abuse in prison.¹⁴⁴

caricature journals *Fliegende Blätter* and *Simplicissimus* each contributed a single cartoon for reproduction in *Le Rire* in 1898. American magazines *Judge*, *Life*, and *Puck* constituted the majority of *Le Rire*'s foreign reproductions on the Dreyfus Affair. Cartoons of American provenance varied considerably in content and political sympathies. A notable example of an antisemitic caricature from the American press was reprinted in *Le Rire* 186 (28 May 1894). The cartoon mocked a Jewish train passenger's poor attempt to disguise himself as a pious Christian, when his accent was unmistakably Jewish. Two Turin-based magazines, *Fischietto* and *Pasquino*, contributed pro-Dreyfus cartoons. Lastly, numerous Viennese satirical journals reproduced caricatures in *Le Rire*. In alphabetical order, they included: *Floh*, *Humoristische Blätter*, *Kikeriki*, *Neue Fliegende*, *Neue Glühlichter*, *Wiener Luft*, and *Wiener Witzblatt*. Viennese representations of the Dreyfus Affair were almost uniformly anti-Dreyfusard or antisemitic in character. For a contemporary analysis of the visual record and iconography of the Dreyfus Affair, see John Grand-Carteret, *L'Affaire Dreyfus et l'image* (Paris: Flammarion, 1898).

¹⁴³ *Le Rire* no. 171 (12 February 1898).

¹⁴⁴ *Le Rire* no. 171 (12 February 1898), 7.

Attention persisted, and even intensified, after the trial's conclusion. Following a guilty verdict and Zola's sentencing, *Le Rire* celebrated. The March 5 issue, for example, was almost entirely dedicated to applauding the defeat. Charles Léandre's cover illustration, the seventh installment in his *Gotha* series, featured a caricature of Édouard Drumont as an ogre and Catholic crusader, feasting on the dismembered and bloody heads of his Jewish kill, whom he wears strung around his neck in the shape of a rosary. (Figure 2.7)

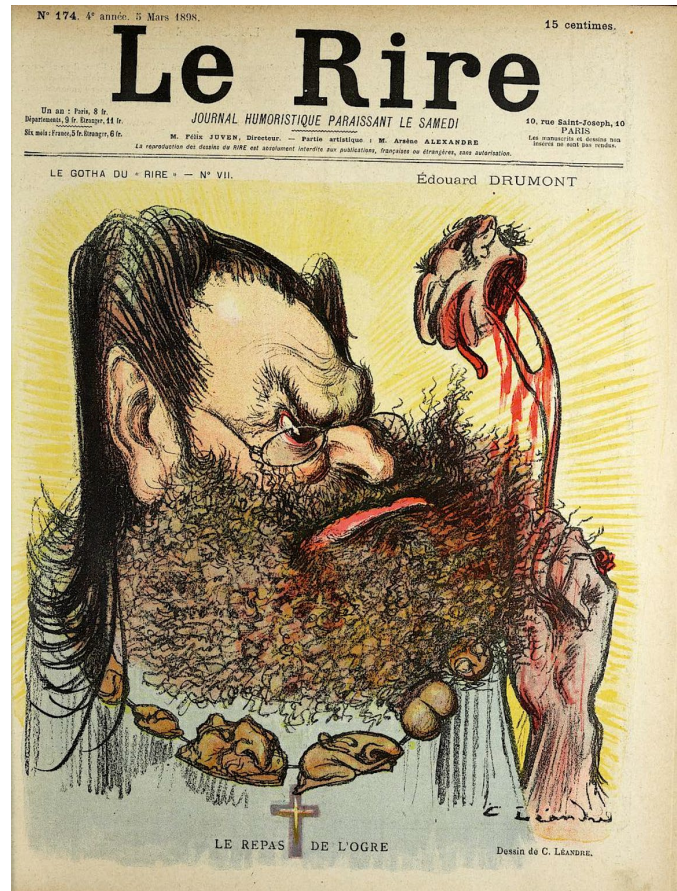


Figure 2.7: C. Léandre, “Le repas de l’ogre,” in *Le Rire* no. 174, 5 March 1898.

The interior pages of the issue are no less bellicose. The first column features a micro-fiction by Jules Hoche, entitled “Man of the Day.” The story recounts a day in the life of a fictional juror in the Zola case. After the verdict is rendered, he returns home exhausted. Asleep, he has a nightmare in which he relives the trial in pantomime. His wife stirs him awake attempting to comfort him, but an argument ensues. The dialogue between the two is peppered with tongue-in-cheek references to details of the Dreyfus Affair and culminates with the wife’s indictment of her husband, a veiled denunciation of the Dreyfusards: “Just because you think you have embodied the nation and so many other things, you have the right to make life insufferable!” The *Échos du Rire* column, illustrated by Henry Somm, emphasizes the trial’s

staying power even after its end, mocking Picquart's dismissal from the army as well as Henri Rochefort's confinement in Sainte-Pélagie prison for having incited a nationalist riot at the Palais de Justice. A double-page anti-republican cartoon by Radiguet follows. The illustration shows the Republic staging a costume ball in honor of the Beggars' Union, attended by senators, parliamentary deputies, the press, and the minister of arts. The function is shown to be celebrating illnesses and disabilities affecting the poor of Paris, the dispossession of the Catholic Church, and the debauched excesses of corrupt officials.¹⁴⁵

In the coming weeks, Léandre's *Gotha* series continued its heightened aggression. His eighth and ninth installments, published on March 26 and April 16, respectively, again caricatured public figures prominent in the affair. The former caricatured Henri Rochefort as a caged bird of prey receiving penance from his patron saint Pelagia of Antioch, depicted as a nun bearing a chalice. The scene is a pun on the name of the Sainte-Pélagie prison where Rochefort was confined for inciting a riot against Zola at the Palais de Justice.¹⁴⁶ The latter, one of the more infamous antisemitic images of the entire affair, peddled the conspiracy theory that the Rothschild banking family secretly controlled world affairs to advance their personal interests. Depicted as an elderly stereotypical Jewish man and shadow king, Rothschild wears the crown of the idolatrous golden calf, signifying adoration of wealth above all else, and a black shroud,

¹⁴⁵ *Le Rire* no. 174 (5 March 1898).

¹⁴⁶ *Dictionnaire de l'Affaire Dreyfus*, ed. Michel Drouin, 206-209.



Figure 2.8: “Rothschild” in *Le Rire* no. 180, 16 April 1898. Dessin de C. Léandre.

which cloaks the world in darkness. His silhouette eclipses the sun, which radiates “God protect Israel.” He constricts the globe between raptor-like talons, enveloping the edges of the earth in shadow, while France, illuminated in the center, remains the final frontier to resist his domination. (Figure 2.8) No further context or narrative is provided in the caption or elsewhere in the issue.

Apart from Léandre’s mounting invective in the *Gotha* cover series, as well as a single back cover illustration by Alfred

Le Petit mocking civilian jurisdiction over the military, the Dreyfus Affair faded from *Le Rire*’s view for much of April 1898. Picquart had been dismissed from the army and imprisoned on charges of forging evidence against Esterhazy, and Lemerancier-Picard, the author of Henry’s forged evidence against Dreyfus, was found dead after hanging himself. The Appeals Court of Paris overturned Zola’s conviction from the February trial. Despite the busy news cycle for the Affair, the outbreak of war between the United States and Spain over the status of Cuba had provided a momentary interlude that redirected readers’ attention toward events in the Americas.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ See for example *Le Rire* no. 185 (21 May 1898).

That lull shifted in May, however, when the divisiveness of the Affair became the central issue at play in the legislative elections. Held in two rounds on 8 and 22 May, the results of the vote were both polarizing and paradoxical. On one hand, the moderate Opportunist Republicans retained a clear majority, enabled by the decisive support of the Catholic *Ralliement*.¹⁴⁸ On the other hand, the Radicals, socialists, and antisemitic nationalist right all made significant, if numerically marginal, gains. In cooperation with Max Régis, leader of the Anti-Jewish League of Algiers, Édouard Drumont announced his candidacy as deputy for the colonial capital in April. The candidacy was part of Régis' larger electoral project to form an antisemitic bloc in Paris while running antisemitic candidates in local races in Algeria. On May 8, Drumont won the first round of the parliamentary vote by a margin of nearly ten-thousand votes. Of six deputies elected to parliament in Algiers, four were from Régis' antisemitic slate.¹⁴⁹ By the conclusion of the second round on 22 May, 28 candidates running on antisemitic platforms had won or retained their seats, going on to form the antisemitic voting bloc in the chamber when sessions resumed on June 4. At the same time, a number of notable socialists and Dreyfusards in parliament lost their seats, among them Joseph Reinach, Jules Guesde, and Jean Jaurès, even as their parties gained seats.¹⁵⁰

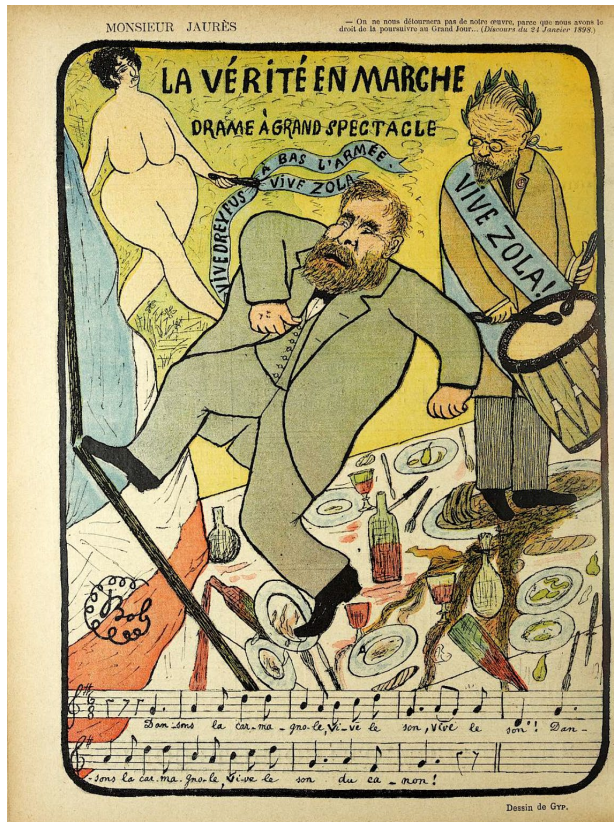
Amidst the clamor and controversy of the electoral campaign, *Le Rire's* political coverage largely avoided partisanship until the results arrived. Full-page cartoons by Abel Faivre and Charles Huard, both poking fun at the billposter wars and ubiquity of campaign posters proliferating across the city's public spaces, appeared on 30 April and 14 May, respectively. On 21 May, the day before the second round of runoffs, *Le Rire* published a fictitious interview with

¹⁴⁸ Bertrand Joly, *Histoire politique de l'affaire Dreyfus* (Paris: Fayard, 2014).

¹⁴⁹ Laurent Joly, "Antisémites et antisémitisme à la Chambre des députés sous la IIIe République," in *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 54, Vol. 3 (2007): 63-90.

¹⁵⁰ Bertrand Joly, *Histoire politique*.

Dreyfus himself by Jean Goudezki, in which Dreyfus refuses to answer questions pertaining to his case, but freely admits that he's "paying people a lot" to support his cause. Asked why he is staying silent despite the competence of his legal defense, Dreyfus quips about his solitary confinement: "I found the only little corner of French soil where you don't have to hear about the Dreyfus Affair."¹⁵¹



Figures 2.9 (left) and 2.10 (right): Gyp, “Monsieur Jaurès” in *Le Rire* no. 185 (21 May 1898), and “Monsieur Reinach et les électeurs” in *Le Rire* no. 186 (28 May 1898).

The back cover of the 21 May issue resumes Gyp’s Dreyfus series, and is of particular importance to the imagery of the legislative elections. Her illustration attacks Jean Jaurès and Zola as co-conspirators against the French nation. (Figure 2.9) Mocking Jaurès’s reputation as an eloquent orator, Gyp depicts the duo as a vaudeville act. Jaurès is shown marching to the beat of

¹⁵¹ *Le Rire* no. 185 (21 May 1898), 3.

Zola's drum, while the melody of the revolutionary anthem *La Carmagnole* plays. Both trample over a banquet dinner table, the tricolor underfoot. Marianne, disrobed, looks on and waves a sash as both defecate on the tabletop: "Truth on the march. Great dramatic spectacle. Long Live Dreyfus. Down with the army. Long live Zola."¹⁵² Gyp employs many of the same visual tropes in her cover illustration for the following week's issue. (Figure 2.10) For her May 28 cover illustration, Gyp mocks Joseph Reinach's lost seat as the incumbent deputy for Digne. Entitled "Mr. Reinach and the voters," the cartoon depicts him as an angel in a funerary gown, flanked by two priests, as he soils the tricolor in the midst of his own funeral procession. The Dreyfus Affair is represented as a ball and chain around his ankle. A working-class voter thumbs his nose at Reinach, proudly proclaiming, "He thinks his good friends will clean up his image again, but this time he's got no one."¹⁵³ The June 4 issue reprises the theme once more, with a full-page caricature by George Edward dedicated to "the blackballed" deputies who lost their seats.¹⁵⁴

The second round of the election cycle coincided with the start of Zola's second trial in Versailles. The impact of the results was felt rapidly, as Jules Méline lost his government's mandate and the ministerial cabinet was completely overhauled by the end of June. Henri Brisson succeeded Méline as Prime Minister and Godefroy Cavaignac succeeded Billot as Minister of War. For most of the summer, *Le Rire* relegated the affair to the back pages in the *Échos du Rire* or *Le Rire à l'étranger* columns, while deriding the transition of power as parliamentary politics as usual: corrupt, ineffectual, and idle.

¹⁵² *Le Rire* no. 185 (21 May 1898).

¹⁵³ *Le Rire* no. 186 (28 May 1898). The caption, written in vernacular, reads "Y croit que ses bons amis lui r'front core un' virginité...mais la fois-ci y a pas mèche...!"

¹⁵⁴ *Le Rire* no. 187 (4 June 1898).

Notable exceptions did arise. The cover to the July 2 issue, for example, celebrated the new Chamber of Deputies' return to legislative session the previous week. The illustration, by Jean Veber, venerates the nationalists' electoral triumph in a strikingly subversive way. The illustration depicts the effigy of Marianne, the allegory of the French Republic, both headless and bearing a child in her belly. In place of her head, the revolutionary red Phrygian bonnet rests atop her neck. Her dress reflects the nationalists' political ideals: an



Figure 2.11: Jean Veber, “La Nouvelle Chambre,” in *Le Rire* no. 191 (2 July 1898).

alliance between revolutionary socialists on her left side, bearing a torch in hand, and the blue royal standard and fleur-de-lis on her right, bearing a scepter in hand. Above her hover both the royal crown and the smoke plumes from her torch. In the background, a nationalist riot is staged in front of the Palais Bourbon, the Chamber's meeting place. The image is saturated with symbolism, culminating in the expected birth of Marianne's new child, the progeny of the alliance between revolutionaries and monarchists. (Figure 2.11)

The summer of 1898 saw a whirlwind of development in the Affair, both in the Zola case and the internal workings of the new government. In July, War Minister Cavaignac unwittingly

revealed evidence from the secret dossier, a letter from the Italian military attaché in Paris to the German Schwarzkoppen implicating Dreyfus as the spy, in a deposition before the Chamber of Deputies. Major Hubert Henry of the general staff had produced the letter in October 1896 as unfailing proof of Dreyfus' guilt. Cavaignac's blunder allowed the legal grounds for Lucie Dreyfus to file a motion to reopen the case. The following day, Picquart publicly denounced Cavaignac's testimony in *Le Temps* and accused the general staff of forging evidence, prompting his immediate arrest on charges of slander. Zola had been convicted in the libel trial brought by the three graphologists he had denounced in *J'Accuse* that same week. On 12 July, Esterhazy and his mistress, Marguerite Pays, were imprisoned on charges of telegraph fraud. On 18 July, Zola's second trial opened at Versailles. Amidst the violence of the proceedings, his counsel, Fernand Labori, advised him to flee to exile in England, which he did. In absentia, Zola was convicted again and sentenced to one-year's imprisonment.

By August, Esterhazy had been cleared of all charges, but dismissed from the army for habitual misconduct and compromising military intelligence. The following day, Captain Louis Cuignet of the military intelligence office, himself a militant anti-Dreyfusard, discovered while reviewing the classified dossier that the letter Cavaignac referenced in his parliamentary testimony was in fact a forgery. Cuignet reported his revelation to Cavaignac, accusing Henry of falsifying evidence to ensure Dreyfus' conviction. Two weeks later, at month's end, Henry was summoned for questioning. Initially recalcitrant, he confessed to having doctored the memorandum, and was summarily imprisoned at the Mont-Valérien fortress. The following day, he was found dead, having slit his own throat.

The fallout of Henry's suicide reverberated throughout the ranks of the army general staff. Raoul de Boisdeffre and Georges de Pellieux tendered their resignations. Esterhazy, upon

his release from prison, swiftly departed for exile in England. Cavaignac resigned his cabinet post in the following days. In his stead, military governor of Paris and avowed anti-Dreyfusard general Émile Zurlinden was appointed Minister of War. After Lucie Dreyfus petitioned the Chamber of Deputies for her husband's retrial, Zurlinden refused the possibility, and resigned within two weeks. His replacement, Charles Chanoine, also anti-Dreyfusard, reinstated him to his post as military governor. After Prime Minister Brisson expressed his support for a retrial and submitted a motion for judicial review to the Court of Cassation, Chanoine attempted to thwart the procedure a month later in open defiance of the government, which forced his resignation. The incident generated an uproar that resulted in antisemitic rioting across Paris, and the fall of Brisson's government.¹⁵⁵

The nationalist press responded to Henry's suicide by beatifying him as a martyr to their cause, deeming his forgery an act of patriotic sacrifice. In September, for example, Charles Maurras praised Henry in the monarchist *Gazette de France* as a "great man of honor" and "heroic servant" of French interests.¹⁵⁶ When Joseph Reinach began publishing a series of articles in *Le Siècle* accusing Henry of working in concert with Esterhazy, Drumont began a subscription in *La Libre Parole* to raise funds for Henry's widow. All proceeds were to go towards legal expenses to bring a libel suit against Reinach, as well as the construction of a monument in her late husband's memory.¹⁵⁷

For its part, *Le Rire* continued to run anti-Dreyfusard nationalist content throughout the latter half of 1898, though its emphasis on the minutiae of the Affair's political intrigue waned

¹⁵⁵ Joly, *Histoire politique*.

¹⁵⁶ Charles Maurras, "Autour de l'Affaire Dreyfus: Le Premier Sang," in *Gazette de France*, 6 September 1898. Found in Harris, *Dreyfus*, 238-240.

¹⁵⁷ Bredin, *The Affair*, 350-353, and Wilson, *Ideology and Experience*, 125-166.

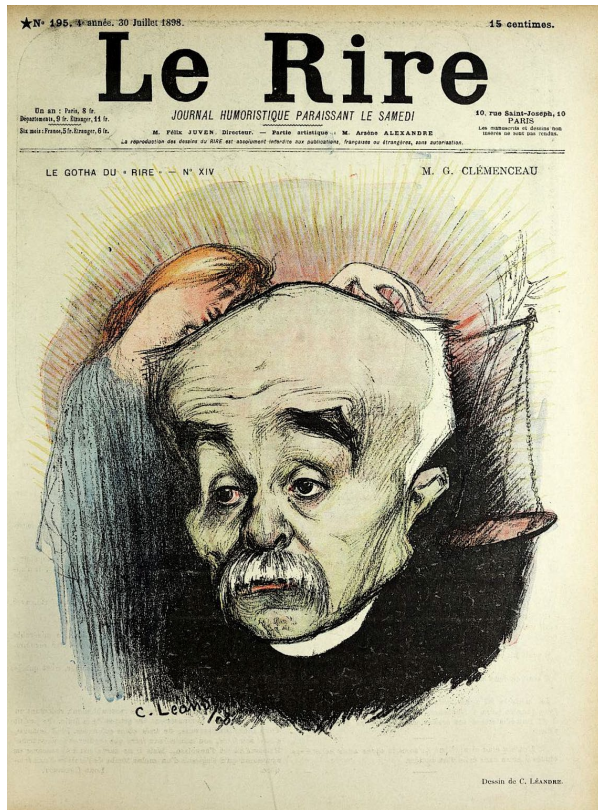


Figure 2.12: C. Léandre, “M. G. Clemenceau,” in *Le Rire* no. 195, 30 Juillet 1898.

over time. Having lost its novelty and grown increasingly macabre and violent, the *Affair* shifted from a central and weekly focus to ambient noise. Still, Charles Léandre regularly submitted covers and full-page spreads, both continuing his *Gotha du Rire* caricatures and inaugurating new episodic series. The editorial staff tended to aggregate his drawings in specific issues, tailoring them to highlight his commentary. His responses to Zola’s second trial, for example, comprised the majority of the July 30 issue, where he revealed anew at Zola’s expense. His cover illustration marked the

fourteenth *Gotha* installment, featuring a caricature of radical politician Georges Clemenceau. The allegory of Justice lays her head on his oversized skull, dangling the scales of justice behind him. The scene is uncaptioned, but framed through line and color as a visual confrontation between the light of justice and Clemenceau’s darkness. (Figure 2.12)

Inside, Henry Somm’s *Échos du Rire* column dedicates the near entirety of its page to parodying the trial proceedings as a gala event. Somm frames his report of the trial as the synopsis of an evening revue, as if the courthouse were playing host to a ball and banquet dinner for the elites of the press, with a performance by Labori before the court as the night’s entertainment.¹⁵⁸ On the next page, Léandre reprises his physiognomic caricatures of prominent

¹⁵⁸ *Le Rire* no. 195 (30 July 1898), 6.

figures in the scandal, inaugurating a series, in keeping with the theatrical theme of the issue, entitled “The Major Actors of the Dreyfusian Comedy.” A double-page spread, the first caricatured the counsel for the defense. Léandre derides Labori as both meek and humorless, ironically bestowing on him the title “the thunderous, otherwise known as the laughing man.” He mocks Louis Leblois, lawyer and confidant of Picquart, as “gentle” though his face is ragged and his hands monstrous. The next page mocks the witnesses: Léandre attacks Picquart as “enigmatic,” implying his complicity in acts of espionage. More remarkably, Léandre’s grotesque caricature of Esterhazy bemoans his disrepute, a fact that had severely damaged the military’s credibility and public image.¹⁵⁹

Léandre continued the series two weeks later, publishing a portrait disparaging the investigating magistrate Paul Bertulus as a corrupt agent of a conspiratorial Jewish syndicate. (Figure 2.13) Bertulus had been instrumental in the initial adjudication of cases against Mathieu Dreyfus and Joseph Reinach, and had remanded Esterhazy and Marguerite Pays to prison following their arrests for telegram fraud in connection with the forged memorandums. Resolutely

convinced of Dreyfus’ innocence, Bertulus was a longtime favorite target of the nationalist press. Léandre depicts him as devious and complicit in an invisible scheme, “the most instructed of the

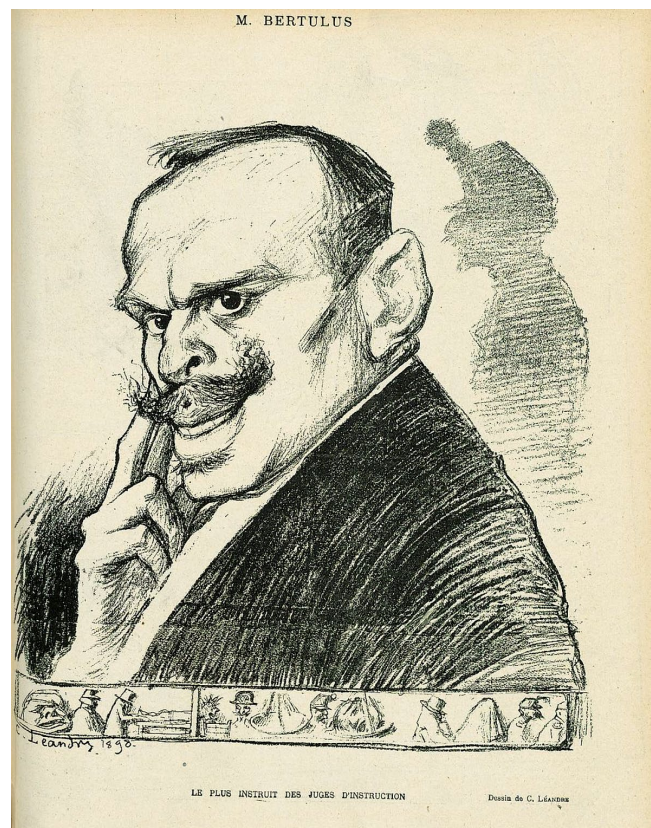


Figure 2.13: C. Léandre, “M. Bertulus,” in *Le Rire* no. 197, 13 August 1898.

¹⁵⁹ *Le Rire* no. 195, 7.

juges d'instruction.” Below his portrait, Léandre illustrates the alleged plot of the Jewish syndicate to guillotine innocents, defraud the state, and silence Esterhazy. Léandre’s final installment in the Dreyfus sketches appeared on September 17, with an homage to General Boisdeffre, depicting the former chief of staff in tears, defending the honor of the army with his hand gripping his heart.¹⁶⁰

Léandre published prolifically in *Le Rire* for the rest of 1898, caricaturing the rotating cast of War Ministers and, ultimately, the fall of Brisson’s government for the *Gotha* series.¹⁶¹ Despite his efforts, however, *Le Rire* progressively dedicated less and less space to new developments in the Dreyfus Affair. While it is questionable whether reader interest began to tire, even the editorial board itself expressed its regrets and exhaustion at “the state of anarchy and disorder this unfortunate affair has thrown our country into for a year.”¹⁶² Developments in international politics and diplomacy presented new, fresher opportunities for satiric insight and levity: the death of Bismarck, the Fashoda Crisis, and the aftermath of the Spanish-American War in Cuba all supplanted Dreyfus.

On the other hand, Juven had planned the launch of a new illustrated newspaper, *La Vie illustrée*, intended as a journalistic supplement to *Le Rire*, for October 22. Marketed as a profusely illustrated family newspaper, *La Vie illustrée* sought to apply new photographic innovations to journalistic uses under the corporate umbrella of *Le Rire* while maintaining its pioneering business model and publication schedule. Juven ultimately migrated most coverage of the Dreyfus Affair out of *Le Rire* and into *La Vie illustrée*. The second issue showcased the

¹⁶⁰ *Le Rire* no. 202 (17 September 1898), 7.

¹⁶¹ Léandre published four more caricatures for the *Gotha* series in 1898: Émile Zurlinden (24 September); Henri Brisson (5 November); Charles de Saulce de Freycinet (19 November); and Joseph Chamberlain (10 December).

¹⁶² *Le Rire* no. 203 (24 September 1898), 8.

Affair in a review essay written by feminist and left-anarchist activist Séverine, illustrated by Léandre. In light of the launch of *La Vie illustrée*, the Dreyfus Affair was further eclipsed from *Le Rire*'s purview.

Exceptions arose, particularly in the wake of antisemitic rioting at the Place de la Concorde on 25 October, organized by the Ligue des Patriotes and the Ligue Antisémite. The next week, *Le Rire* published a full-page cartoon by Radiguet caricaturing the violence. Featuring prominent public figures of the two sides clashing in an open street brawl, Radiguet bemoans the collapse of civil society into violence by making fun of it. Esterhazy is shown swept away in a flood of carnage, having lost hold of the forged evidence, while Lady Truth looks on helplessly, trapped in a gutter. While the two sides are distracted raining blows upon each other, France's enemies Germany and Britain look on in glee from afar. (Figure 2.14) The next week's issue features an antisemitic cover illustration by Jeannot, accusing Jewish nobles

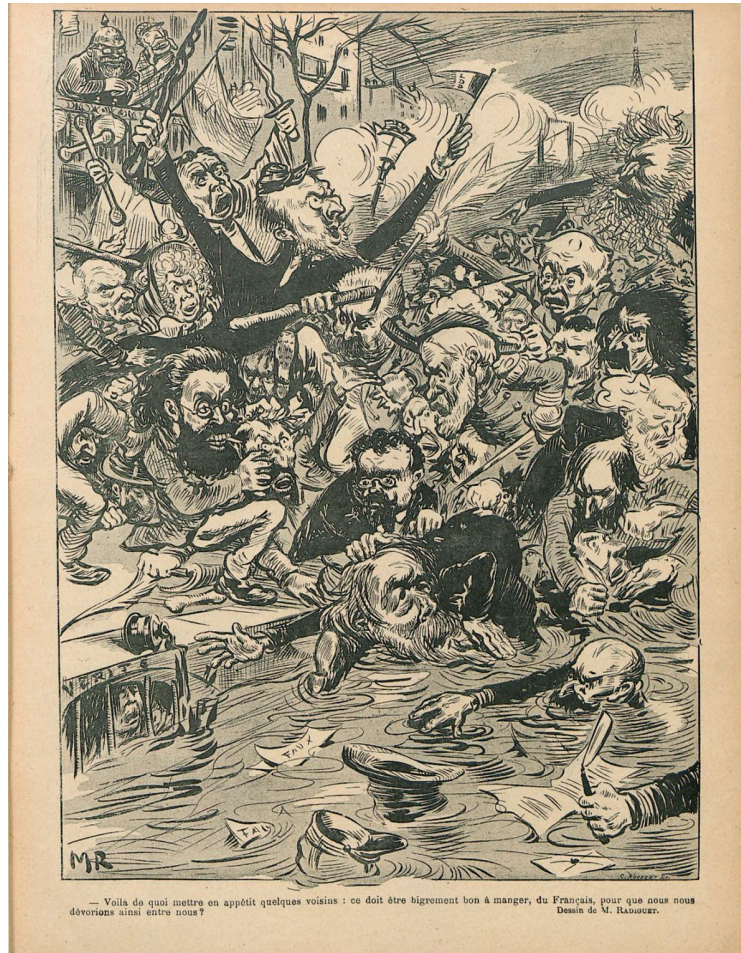


Figure 2.14: M. Radiguet, Untitled illustration in *Le Rire* no. 209, 6 November 1898. Caption reads: —Voilà de quoi mettre en appétit quelques voisins : ce doit être bigrement bon à manger, du Français, pour que nous dévorions ainsi entre nous ?

of conspiring with Germany to orchestrate the collapse of the French social order into violence.¹⁶³

The final issues of 1898 returned to the Dreyfus Affair, though broaching the subject with far more reserve and tepidity. Jean-Louis Forain’s cover for the Christmas Eve issue, simply titled “The Affair,” depicted a bourgeois couple somberly reflecting on the scandal’s corrosive effects on social relations between friends: “Another house we won’t eat at anymore.”¹⁶⁴ The New Year’s Eve issue made one final mention of the Affair, taking stock of Esterhazy’s flight to Britain and apparent betrayal of the military’s cause.

Jules Depaquit’s illustration, entitled “The New Game,” shows the twelve

faces of a deck of playing cards as prominent anti-Dreyfusards. (Figure 2.15) Esterhazy is portrayed as the jack of spades. His card alone is torn at the corner, marked by an asterisk. The caption reads: “*N.B. – Be careful of the jack of spades, he’s marked.” That same day, an



Figure 2.15: J. Dépaquit, “Le Nouveau Jeu,” in *Le Rire* no. 217, 31 December 1898.

¹⁶³ *Le Rire* no. 210 (12 November 1898).

¹⁶⁴ *Le Rire* no. 216 (24 December 1898).

association of academics and intellectuals founded the *Ligue de la patrie française* in alliance with the Institut de France, in order to demonstrate support for the nationalist cause within the ranks of public institutions of fine arts, sciences, and letters.¹⁶⁵

1899

If readers had indeed grown tired of the Dreyfus Affair and the limits of *Le Rire*'s satirical approach to it by the end 1898, the coming of the New Year marked a significant departure, both in the tenor of the journal's reportage and the growing complexity of the controversy. The shadow of Dreyfus loomed large within the journal's imagination, but French politics as usual in the first months of 1899 proved far stranger than fiction, satirical or otherwise.

January had been relatively calm, marked only by the dramatic resignation of magistrate Jules Quesnay de Beaurepaire from the Court of Cassation after denouncing his colleagues in the anti-Dreyfusard paper *Écho de Paris*. After leaving his post to enlist in the ranks of the nascent *Ligue de la patrie française*, Quesnay committed himself to the anti-Dreyfusard cause. In *Le Rire*, both Léandre and Radiguet lionized their new ally, depicting him in symbolic reconciliation with his former enemy, Rochefort, whom he had prosecuted in 1889 during the throes of the Boulanger crisis.¹⁶⁶

Come February, however, the Dreyfus Affair once again became an inescapable aspect of daily public life. In *Le Rire*, Léandre continued his invective against the Court of Cassation chamber presiding over the Dreyfus review. In a special thematic issue dedicated to Carnival festivities, he caricatured the flaws and cronyism of parliamentary democracy as a carnival float.

¹⁶⁵ Bredin, *The Affair*, 277-279.

¹⁶⁶ Bredin, *The Affair*, 368-370.

(Figure 2.16) Voters, depicted as beasts of burden, laboriously pull a cart full of politicians elected by “universal suffrage.” An ensemble of prominent republican ministers is caricatured: Jules Méline as the “Leek God,” shown squatting on a stool; Charles de Freycinet, the “White Mouse;” Charles Dupuy, the “Protector of the Auvergne.” At right, Drumont is depicted as a savage, “eating a Jew for breakfast.” His place on the float implies his immediate claim in the line of succession to the presidency of the ministerial cabinet. In the background, Henri Brisson, recently deposed, weeps solemnly beside Félix Faure, caricatured as King Félicque I. On the next page, a comic strip by Fernand Fau, titled “Victims of the Affair,” depicts the daily lives of a married couple divided by their support for opposing sides of the scandal. Fau criticizes the corrosive effects of the Affair on everyday life. The strip makes a moralizing argument on the absurdity of the rift between the two sides, showing the ways individual families have grown so distant that they prefer to spend time apart, in the isolation and constant validation of their own points of view, despite having

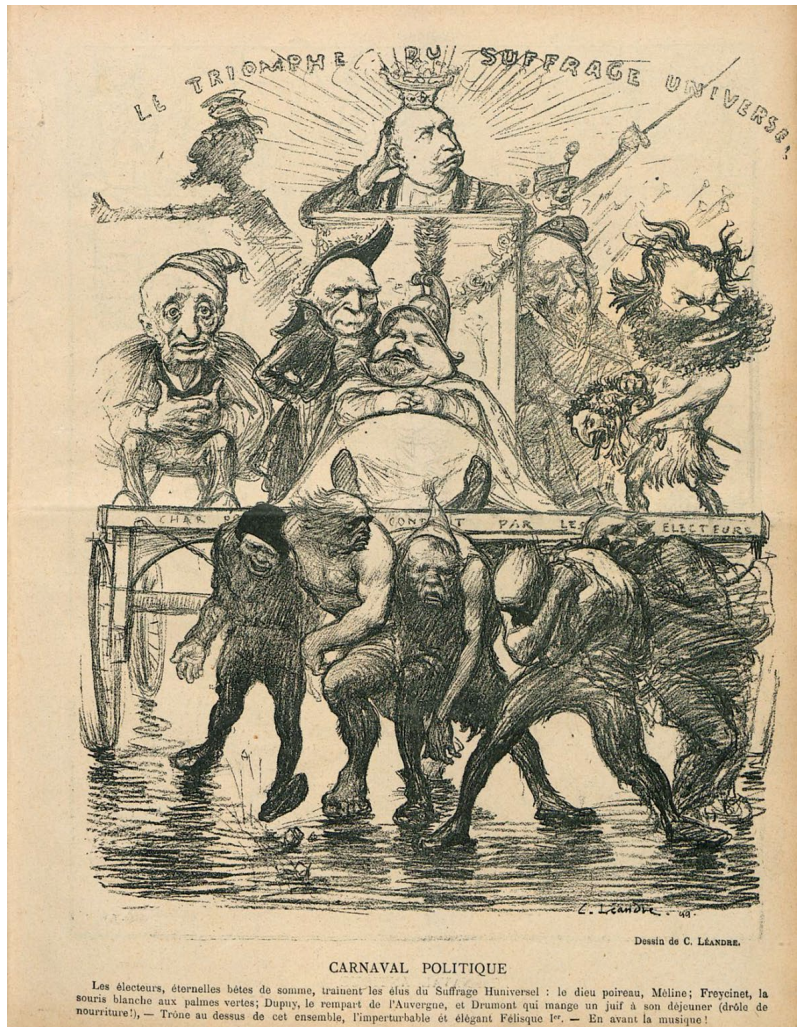


Figure 2.16: C. Léandre, “Carnaval Politique,” in *Le Rire* no. 223, 11 February 1899.

identical routines, desires, and needs. Ultimately, both husband and wife are visited by their own individual doctors to diagnose a common illness. The prognosis and treatment plan are the same: shower together. The last panel shows the pair showering together, albeit separated by a wall, unable to cope with the suffering of spending time together.¹⁶⁷

The following page includes two editorial announcements. The first briefly narrates an anecdote recounted by Léandre to the editors of *Le Rire*. The story concerned a military officer's visit to an art dealer in Paris who had been selling prints published in *Le Rire*. The officer purchased a print of Léandre's caricature of the general Félix-Gustave Saussier of his *Gotha* series. After purchasing the framed print, the officer smashed the print and its frame, shattering the glass, and threatened the shopkeeper: "I forbid you from showing caricatures of officers in your window display, or else you'll have a problem with me." Denouncing the violence of his act, *Le Rire* reaffirms its ambivalence about politics and longstanding loyalty to and admiration of the army. Nevertheless, the notice vows that *Le Rire* retains absolute freedom of expression and remains committed to satire above all. Concluding the notice, *Le Rire* mockingly pronounces the officer to be a hero acting in the public interest, his courage compelling him to attack a sheet of paper, an invisible artist, and a defenseless woman. The second notice concerned a copyright infringement claim on a small, unaffiliated street theater that had just opened using the name *Théâtre du Rire*. The editorial statement issues a public cease-and-desist notice, not only to the theater in question, but to all readers, about legal parameters concerning the use of a trademarked name to which *Le Rire* bears all legal rights.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ *Le Rire* no. 223, 9.

¹⁶⁸ *Le Rire* no. 223, 10.

Five days after *Le Rire* published its special issue on Carnaval, Félix Faure, the President of the Republic and longstanding nationalist resolutely opposed to the review of the Dreyfus case, died unexpectedly in office. The circumstances of his death became at once the subject of public controversy and ridicule; Faure died suddenly of an apoplectic stroke in his office while allegedly being fellated by his mistress, the young salonnière Marguerite Steinheil. Two days later, the National Assembly in congress elected Émile Loubet, the President of the Senate and pro-Dreyfus revisionist, to succeed Faure. In protest, the nationalist leagues staged demonstrations, and Paul Déroulède vowed mass action. *Le Rire*'s cover illustration for that same day featured the fourth installment in Léandre's series caricaturing the monarchist pretenders to the thrones of Europe. The cover caricatured Philippe, the Duke of Orléans, an archconservative anti-Dreyfusard and patron of Déroulède, who ultimately backed the latter's attempt at a coup d'état within the ranks of the army.¹⁶⁹

The caricature proved prophetic. Déroulède's attempted coup, hastily planned in conjunction with the Duke of Orléans and Jules Guérin of the Ligue Antisémitique over the course of a week, occurred immediately following Félix Faure's state funeral procession on 23 February.¹⁷⁰ At the Place de la Nation, Déroulède and his accomplices intercepted the infantry regiments under the command of General Gaudérique Roget on their return march to barracks at Reuilly. Seizing the reins of Roget's horse, Déroulède entreated Roget to redirect his men toward the Elysée Palace and seize it. Roget, despite his own sympathies to the anti-Dreyfusard cause, scoffed in refusal, and continued to the barracks. At Reuilly, Déroulède requested to be placed under arrest and surrendered without incident.

¹⁶⁹ *Le Rire* no. 224 (18 February 1899).

¹⁷⁰ Bredin, *The Affair*, 374-376.

Le Rire delayed addressing the February developments in full. Its 25 February issue made no mention of D  roul  de’s coup attempt. Instead, it published a back number of L  andre’s new *Pr  tendants* caricature series, which it declined to issue the week before. The third installment in the series (the caricature of the Duke of Orl  ans was numbered four), the illustration parodies “the claimants to F  lix’s throne.” Marianne is shown holding the heads of politicians depicted as a bunch of balloons: Dupuy, M  line, Brisson, Cavaignac, and others. The likeness of F  lix Faure’s face orbits them as a variety of different celestial bodies, such as comets, planets, stars, even an angel. The caption reads, “Guess if you can, and choose if you dare.” At the bottom of the page, an editorial statement issues an apology of sorts for the unseemly timing of the original drawing and macabre coincidence that L  andre’s joke heralded the morbid news of Faure’s death.¹⁷¹

Only on 4 March did *Le Rire* address the political crisis that had befallen the republican government in the wake of Faure’s death. L  andre’s cover reprised the *Gotha* series to caricature   mile Loubet as a bouquet of flowers being stung repeatedly by angry, venomous insects. The bouquet is presented as a gift to Marianne from the legislative congress, an offering of goodwill and an expression of love to shelter her from “bad weather.”¹⁷² Inside, a full-page comic strip by Jules Depaquit offers jokey advice to Loubet on presidential behaviors and customs in 24 sketches accompanied by rhyming verses. The next page presents another full-page comic strip by Radiguet on the “true story” of D  roul  de’s life in the style of   pinal prints, proverbially known for their pastoral and nostalgic representations of traditional life. In twelve panels, Radiguet narrates a parodic biography of D  roul  de as a militant nationalist since birth. Radiguet

¹⁷¹ *Le Rire* no. 225 (25 February 1899), 7.

¹⁷² *Le Rire* no. 226 (4 March 1899).

shows him: screaming *vive l'armée* immediately after exiting the birth canal; haranguing classmates who did not wish to play war; renouncing romance in pursuit of *revanche* against Germany; serving as Boulanger's noble steed on his ride to take the French throne; and attempting his failed coup against Loubet. The final panel entreats Loubet to release him from imprisonment: "give the Parisians their Pulcinella! Who will make us laugh now?"¹⁷³

The seeming absurdity of both Déroulède's attempted coup and the government's reaction provided *Le Rire* with bountiful sources of farce and ridicule in the weeks that followed. Many of Henry Somm's *Échos du Rire* tabloids and sketches targeted the Ligue des Patriotes, the nascent *Ligue de la patrie française*, and republicans' fears of nationalist conspiracies to overthrow the parliamentary regime. Even Léandre, the journal's bulwark of anti-Dreyfusard nationalism, could not resist the chance to take a potshot at his associates. On March 25, he caricatured the nationalist intelligentsia, the three founding directors of the *Ligue de la patrie française*, Maurice Barrès, François Coppé, and Jules Lemaître. The nationalist writers are depicted as three faces of a single soldier, in different states of grief, wearing a bearskin cap and dress uniform of the Imperial Guard. Léandre's caption reads, "Three heads under the same bearskin," punning an idiomatic expression for nudity that implies they have exposed their true political motives to restore imperial rule in France. (Figure 2.17) Likewise, on April 15, Léandre caricatured Déroulède as Don Quixote.

The process of judicial review of the Dreyfus verdict coalesced between March and May within the Court of Cassation. Following the explosive resignation of Jules Quesnay de Beaurepaire, Alexis Ballot-Beaupré was appointed presiding magistrate of the chamber.

¹⁷³ *Le Rire* no. 226, 7.

Investigative hearings ran until the end of April, with ten additional witnesses from the general staff being summoned for testimony. *Le Figaro* published daily minutes of the proceedings. On 31 May, Déroulède was acquitted in the Assizes Court, and summarily vowed to continue insurrectionary activities. The following day, 1 June, the Court of Cassation ordered the arrest of Armand du Paty de Clam. Two days later, the court overturned the 1894 verdict against Dreyfus and ordered a retrial.

The consequences of the court's decision were immediate. The next day, on 4 June, Émile Loubet was attacked at the Auteuil Steeplechase when an anti-Dreyfusard protest deteriorated into a brawl. The attacker, Baron Fernand de Christiani, lunged at the presidential gallery and struck Loubet with his cane when he noticed a lull in the security presence. Subdued and arrested immediately, Christiani was later sentenced to four years' imprisonment. The Auteuil incident brought Prefect of Police Charles Blanc's conduct under review: Blanc had previously come under

fire for inaction towards anti-Dreyfusard crowds jeering and harassing Loubet during his inauguration.¹⁷⁴ Later that week, Picquart was released from imprisonment at Cherche-Midi, and



Figure 2.17: C. Léandre, “Trois têtes sous un même bonnet...à poil.” In *Le Rire* no. 229, 25 March 1899.

¹⁷⁴ Bredin, *The Affair*, 384-385.

both Zola and Dreyfus received news of the court's decision. Zola left exile in England to return to France, and Dreyfus would board a ship to be repatriated from Devil's Island on 9 June.

Le Rire responded strongly to the events of that week in its 10 June issue. Léandre's cover illustration, *Gotha* number 21, featured an antisemitic caricature of Arthur Meyer, the Jewish director of the archconservative monarchist and anti-Dreyfusard newspaper *Le Gaulois*. Despite his resolute conservatism and traditionalist sympathies, Meyer was a favorite target of antisemitic conspiracy theories, even after his 1901 conversion to Catholicism. Léandre's caricature shows him covered in blood admiring a collection of golden trinkets, all symbols of the crown he wants to restore, and secretly covets. In the foreground, the revolutionary Phrygian bonnet of the republic is contained under glass, sitting atop a dossier titled "the Dreyfus Affair." Behind him, his shadow casts the image of the Duke of Orléans wearing the crown he holds. (Figure 2.18)

Inside, a comic strip by Fernand Fau celebrates the events of the preceding week. Framed as a tour of Paris in nine vignettes, Fau first ridicules the judiciary review as an exhausting process, with elderly magistrates falling asleep while hearing testimony and examining evidence, except the "ultra-secret" documents kept in quarantine, accessible only by payment of a 75-cent admission price. Fau next praises the triumphant acquittal and release of Déroulède, as well as the return of Jean-Baptiste Marchand, arriving at the Gare de Lyon from his command at Fashoda. Lastly, Fau ridicules Loubet's attack by emphasizing the results of the horse race at the Auteuil steeplechase, concluding his narrative by having the mob violently depose the president and naming the winning horse king of France. Fau reprised the joke of the Auteuil incident the

following week.¹⁷⁵ The next page features another Léandre illustration, a full-page caricature of Ballot-Beaupré denying the probability of Dreyfus' very existence.¹⁷⁶

The following day, a rally in support of Loubet and the republican government took place at the Longchamp Racecourse, just across the Bois de Boulogne from Auteuil. When reports arose of police brutality and excessive force in ordering the crowd dispersed, Charles Blanc was removed from his post as Prefect of Police. Charles Dupuy resigned as Prime Minister the following day, after having tried to prevent the Court of Cassation from overturning the 1894 judgment against Dreyfus. In *Le Rire*, Léandre paid tribute to both men. In

the 17 June issue, Léandre caricatured Blanc's distinctive facial hair while honoring his willingness to use force in the fight against Jewish interests. Below Léandre's drawing, lyrics to a song titled "Wrought Iron Lyre" by Charles Quinel honor his service to the nationalist cause, comparing him to Déroulède. The following week, Léandre's *Gotha* cover depicted Dupuy



Figure 2.18: C. Léandre, "M. Arthur Meyer," in *Le Rire* no. 240, 10 June 1899.

¹⁷⁵ *Le Rire* no. 241 (17 June 1899), 3.

¹⁷⁶ *Le Rire* no. 241, 4.

holding a ceremonial carbine blunderbuss firing a stream of red roses, an homage to his ministry. Below, an adaptation of Victor Hugo's *Gastibelza, l'homme à la carabine*, mourns Dupuy's resignation as the outcome of having lost his sanity working for Loubet. Inside, a cartoon by Léon Lebègue titled "Memories of Longchamp: Battle of Flowers" caricatures the political polarization of the Affair and its constituent mass movements as flowers. The far-right nationalist leagues, supporting the army, are represented as red carnations, a symbol of boulangism. The socialists, supporting Loubet, don the red rose. Lastly, the royalists, decrying the Panama Scandal to demonstrate their irrelevance, bear white carnations.¹⁷⁷

Following Dupuy's resignation, Loubet appointed Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau as Prime Minister, charging him with the formation of a new "Government of Republican Defense" on June 22. Waldeck-Rousseau's cabinet sought to form a broad coalition, regrouping Moderates, Radicals, and even the socialist Alexandre Millerand in the same united front against far-right nationalism and its center-right allies across the ministries. Léandre responded in *Le Rire* on July 8, with a cover illustration entitled "Marriage of Convenience," ridiculing the uneasy alliance between Millerand, appointed Minister of Commerce, with his sworn political enemy, the general Gaston de Galliffett, infamous for commanding the violent suppression of the insurrectionary Paris Commune. Waldeck-Rousseau is shown officiating at the nuptials, as the

¹⁷⁷ *Le Rire* no. 242 (24 June 1899).

“prudish” bride Millerand closes his eyes as he prepares to kiss his “shining” groom Gallifet.

(Figure 2.18)



Figure 2.19: C. Léandre, “Mariage de raison,” in *Le Rire* no. 244, 8 July 1899.

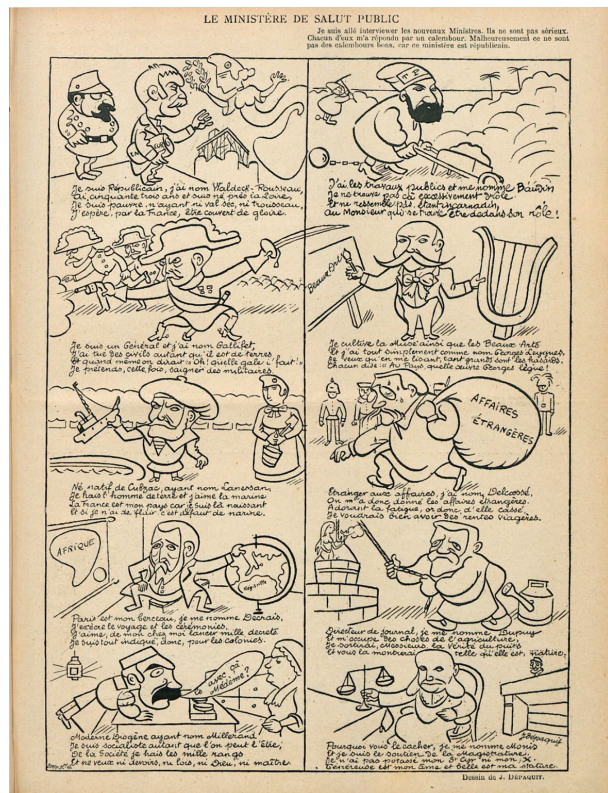


Figure 2.20: J. Dépaquit, “Le Ministère de salut public,” in *Le Rire* no. 244.

The cartoonists of *Le Rire* were almost uniformly hostile to or scornful of the constitution of the new government. Apart from Léandre’s marquee covers, Depaquit and Radiguet both lampooned the ministers’ agenda to reassert the symbolic vigor of republicanism under threat. In the 8 July issue, Depaquit derides the new cabinet as the “Ministry of Public Safety” in a full-page comic strip profiling the new ministers. (Figure 2.19) Alluding to the revolutionary Committee of Public Safety, Depaquit’s epigraph to the strip first condemns the cabinet’s poor sense of humor, unable to craft good riddles “because they are republicans.”¹⁷⁸ In ten vignettes, Depaquit crudely caricatures the cabinet as simultaneously incompetent, corrupt, and dogmatic

¹⁷⁸ *Le Rire* no. 244 (8 July 1899).

ideologues. In the 22 July issue, Charles Quinel published a micro-fiction framed as a conversation between customers at a café. In the scene, the Affair permeates so deeply into everyday life that three strangers' cordial interaction degenerates into squabbling over who to toast to...civil power, the army, or public politeness. In the same issue, a full-page illustration by Radiguet ridicules the executive cabinet's "republican defense" agenda as paranoid and out of touch with the French people. Symbolized by the archetypal bourgeois gentleman Monsieur Prudhomme, the State balks in fear at being surrounded by perils, depicted as bubbles that Marianne herself is blowing. Beneath her, the French people join in, blowing bubbles of different social perils and watching them pop: "Look what I'm doing with your perils! In a month there won't be any more."¹⁷⁹ Charles Huard's cover to the August 5 issue likewise lambasts the insipidness of republican education, mocking the stiffness and pageantry of school award ceremonies.

Dreyfus' second court martial began in Rennes on 7 August. To mark the occasion, *Le Rire* ran Léandre's caricature of Edgar Demange, Dreyfus' attorney, for its issue that week.¹⁸⁰ In Paris, state authorities executed a mass arrest of anti-Dreyfusard leaders after a secret investigation into the possibility of a conspiracy between the far-right leagues to overthrow the republic. Sixty-seven far-right leaders, including Déroulède, were arrested on August 12. Antisemitic agitator Jules Guérin, however, fled to the headquarters of his organization, the antisemitic and anti-masonic Grand Occident de France, at 51 Rue Chabrol. There, Guérin and dozens of nationalist militants took up arms and barricaded themselves inside the house. The subsequent police siege of "Fort Chabrol" would last over a month. In solidarity, the butchers'

¹⁷⁹ *Le Rire* no. 246 (22 July 1899), 6.

¹⁸⁰ *Le Rire* no. 249 (12 August 1899).

union of the abattoirs of La Villette, long a bastion of working-class antisemitism and reactionary political agitation, organized a street protest and barricaded the Boulevard Magenta on August 20 before succumbing to police force. On August 14, an anti-Dreyfusard extremist attempted to assassinate Dreyfus' attorney Fernand Labori, critically wounding him and preventing his appearance during witness examinations for eight days. Upon his return, tensions amplified further as negotiations between government and military officials collapsed, and courtroom hostilities in Rennes mounted.

After weeks of testimony and review of evidence, the court martial rendered its judgment on 9 September: Dreyfus was found guilty "with extenuating circumstances" and sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment. He filed for appeal immediately. Wanting to avoid a third trial, Waldeck-Rousseau weighed the possibility of a pardon, a measure necessitating Dreyfus' admission of guilt. Dreyfus reluctantly accepted on the condition that he could continue to protest his innocence. President Émile Loubet signed the decree on 19 September. Dreyfus walked free two days later.

The Fort Chabrol incident ended with Jules Guérin's surrender on 20 September. After a month of armed siege, a failed attempt to provision the Grand Occident lodge with supplies ended in a shootout from the rooftops. Guérin and his accomplices surrendered after a standoff that lasted 38 days, charged with conspiracy against the state. According to the state prosecutor Octave Bernard, the charges fell under the jurisdiction of the Senate, which was convoked as a High Court to hear the case of Guérin and sixteen others on 18 September. Bernard served as the prosecuting magistrate and René Bérenger presided over the senatorial investigative commission. Days after the proceedings opened, Bérenger expressed doubts about the substance and validity

of the dossier of incriminating evidence. On Bérenger's recommendation, only 17 of the 67 arrestees were indicted on 30 October, and the trial formally began on 9 November.

The End of the Affair

Le Rire had largely disregarded the anticlimactic denouement to the Dreyfus Affair, which ended not with a bang, but a whimper. Léandre stood alone in his continued attacks on government officials and caricature of Labori on 12 August. He ultimately concluded *Le Rire*'s chapter on the Dreyfus Affair proper in the 16 September issue with an antisemitic *Gotha* cover caricaturing Reinach as "the head of the other general staff," as well as a double-page spread bemoaning the injustice against Esterhazy.¹⁸¹ It was to be the journal's last substantial mention of the Dreyfus Affair before Minister of War Gallifet issued a memorandum on 20 September proclaiming: "*l'incident est clos!*"¹⁸²

On the other hand, *Le Rire* swiftly seized upon the absurdity of both the siege on Rue Chabrol and the uncertainties surrounding the dossier of evidence against the accused conspirators in the High Court investigation. A comic strip by Radiguet in the 26 August issue includes an epigraph by the editorial staff, directly commenting on the proceedings: "The government continues to conduct searches. Arrests will continue. The Police Prefect will be quite surprised to see that we are informed of his latest operations, despite the mystery he thought he wrapped them in." Radiguet's comic shows the prefect searching various businesses and families across Paris, seizing their property as evidence of anti-republican propaganda or agitation.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ *Le Rire* no. 254 (16 September 1899).

¹⁸² Joseph Reinach, *Histoire de l'Affaire Dreyfus Vol. 6: La revision* (Paris: Eugène Fasquelle, 1908), 3.

¹⁸³ *Le Rire* no. 251 (26 August 1899), 3.

The following week, on 2 September, *Le Rire* published a thematic issue dedicated entirely to the circumstances of the conspiracy and state investigation. Léandre's cover illustration, titled "The Conspirators," caricatures authorities' fears of elaborate right-wing plotting, depicting a cabal headed by the Duc d'Orléans, surrounded by his cabinet of Guérin, Déroulède, and the *saigneur de la Villette* (a pun on the butchers' riot and the noble title *seigneur*), scheming to take the Elysée Palace. Across the masthead, the issue bears a subtitle in bold red ink: "Curious revelations on the great conspiracy."¹⁸⁴ The bulk of the issue is dedicated to three short fictions, each framed as an investigative report into one operation of the alleged plot. The first, by Gaston de Pawlowski, parodies the "royalist" butchers' conspiracy. The second, by Rodolphe Bringer, frames the Fort Chabrol incident as an undersea military and science fiction. The last, by Charles Quinel, apes a war correspondence between militants of the Fort Chabrol and the staff of *Le Rire*. Mocking the ideological extremism of Guérin's organization, Quinel reports that the Dreyfusard Jewish Syndicate has taken control of Paris and renamed it Villejuif, causing Guérin's militants to assail the city's tramway network in an effort to "baptize it by force."¹⁸⁵ Sandwiched between the short stories, a comic strip by Fernand Fau recounts "the great conspiracy unmasked" in a double-page spread. The editors' epigraph presents the comic as Déroulède's personal copy of the coup preparations. Déroulède's revolution would unfold over the course of a single morning, culminating in the taking of the Bastille and relieving Guérin of the siege at Chabrol. The republican government would surrender, and a triumphal parade would sweep Paris. In the end, France would be divided in

¹⁸⁴ *Le Rire* no. 252 (2 September 1899).

¹⁸⁵ *Le Rire* no. 252.

thirds, between Déroulède's "plebiscitary republic" and the two rival royalist claimants.¹⁸⁶ Fau reprised a nearly identical graphic "true story of the great conspiracy" in *Le Rire* two weeks later.¹⁸⁷

The High Court remained a focal point in *Le Rire* for the length of its duration, from September until early January. The court rendered its verdicts on January 4. Four of the accused were found guilty: Déroulède, André Buffet, and Eugène de Lur-Saluze each received a sentence of 10 years' banishment from France; Guérin, for the aggravating circumstances of his standoff at Fort Chabrol, was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment, which was commuted to banishment the following July. In February, Marcel Habert, who had been tried separately from the others, was sentenced to five years' banishment. Several incidents of defendants' unruly behavior in the courtroom stirred controversy in the press: outbursts from Déroulède and younger members of the Antisemitic League disrupted proceedings and provoked commotions.

It was in response to such disturbances that *Le Rire* ran a thematic issue on December 16 dedicated to the High Court proceedings, entirely by Léandre and Émile Bergerat. Léandre's cover parodied the exhaustive nature of the hearings, caricaturing then-President of the Senate Armand Fallières falling asleep listening to chief prosecutor Bernard examine the 250th witness. The issue comprises a single short story by Bergerat about a fictional conversation with Sarah Bernhardt, accompanied by Léandre's profuse illustrations of the courtroom hearings. Léandre surveys a day's hearings, emphasizing allegations against the young antisemitic militant Jacques Cailly and his outbursts. Léandre depicts the senators of the High Court as incompetent and

¹⁸⁶ For a detailed explanation of Déroulède's notion of a plebiscitary republic and his ideological criticisms of parliamentarism, see: Ze'ev Sternhell, "Paul Déroulède and the Origins of Modern French Nationalism" in *Journal of Contemporary History* 6, no. 4 (1971): 46-70.

¹⁸⁷ Fernand Fau, "Véritable histoire du grand complot," in *Le Rire* no. 256 (30 September 1899), 5-6.

senile old men twiddling their thumbs, picking their noses, and reduced to being passive baldheaded spectators, unfit to serve as judges of political actions as they bear witness to Cailly's righteous indignation. In sharp contrast, Léandre portrays the defendants, most notably Cailly, Déroulède, and Guérin, as dignified men of honor, virtuously defiant before an illegitimate tribunal despite the injustice that has befallen them.¹⁸⁸ Likewise, in the December 30 issue, *Le Rire* published a satirical excerpt from poet Jean Goudezki's fictional deposition as a witness before the High Court. Answering judges' questions, Goudezki responds in rhyming alexandrine verses to their chagrin, before they respond in the same meter charging him with conspiracy to disrupt the court proceedings and having him imprisoned.¹⁸⁹

When the High Court issued its verdicts just after the turn of both the New Year and the twentieth century, *Le Rire* seized upon the moment to poke fun one last time, and published a topical year-in-review special issue on 6 January. Written by Charles Quinel and illustrated by Radiguet, the issue juxtaposes two parodic interpretations of the retrospective format side by side: on the left, in black ink, the dolorous *revue noire*; on the right, in red ink, the comedic *revue rose*. Both columns survey the talking points of the previous year in different emotional tonalities, mirroring each other as nearly identical opposites: *la revue noire* in austere formality, and *la revue rose* in joyful gaiety and optimism for the year to come. Both relate virulently anti-government poems, songs, and editorials about Dreyfus' second court martial, of Déroulède's coup attempt, and the High Court, first as tragedy, then as farce.¹⁹⁰ Ultimately, in Radiguet's back cover illustration, comedy triumphs over tragedy, with the year 1900, depicted as a bare-breasted cancan dancer in red ink kicking aside the personification of 1899, a morose and sickly

¹⁸⁸ *Le Rire* no. 267 (16 December 1899).

¹⁸⁹ *Le Rire* no. 269 (30 December 1899), 7.

¹⁹⁰ *Le Rire* no. 270 (6 January 1900).



Figure 2.21: M. Radiguet, “La Revue noire et la Revue rose,” *Le Rire* no. 270, 6 January 1900.

bourgeois in black. (Figure 2.21) In the Manichean struggle between bourgeois tragedy and popular comedy, *Le Rire* ensured the latter would always triumph over the former’s evils.

Two weeks later, the cover of the 20 January issue featured a congratulatory caricature of Léandre by Leonetto Cappiello. A recursive pastiche of Léandre’s *Gotha* covers, the illustration is entitled *Golgotha du Rire: le premier crucifié*.

Cappiello shows Léandre as a martyr to the cause of free expression, swarmed and attacked by his own

caricatures for previous *Gotha* covers. Inside the first page, an editorial statement honors the occasion of Léandre’s official recognition and decoration by the Minister of Public Education and Fine Arts Georges Leygues for his artistic merit as a lithographer and caricaturist. The statement commemorates Léandre’s anti-government contributions to *Le Rire*, among them the *Gotha* and *Musée des Souverains* series, as well as his special issues and caricatures of the Senate, Chamber of Deputies, and the High Court. The statement concludes with a word of foreboding to Léandre’s subjects: he will continue the virtuous work of portraying his

contemporary subjects with “malice, but always tactfully,” carefully measuring the ridicule they warrant.¹⁹¹ It was to be *Le Rire*’s final word on the controversies and political turbulence that uncomfortably ushered France into the new century.

In late 1900, just as the Senate was about to pass a bill granting a general amnesty to everyone implicated in the Dreyfus Affair, *Le Rire* announced a forthcoming six-volume collection of the entire print run of the first six years of the journal. The *histoire humoristique* would cost 60 francs paid in installments of 10 francs for 6 months, and commemorate the journal’s enormous successes as a token of gratitude to its readers. The initial print run of 100,000 copies sought to ensure that *Le Rire*’s successes in its foundational years would be committed to every reader’s living memory.¹⁹²

Conclusion

What, ultimately, is the significance of *Le Rire*’s pointed political humor in its treatment of the Dreyfus Affair? How ought historians interpret the humoring of the political violence, instability, polarization, and hatred that typified the scandal and permeated every crevice of French society in the last decade of the nineteenth century? What does *Le Rire* tell us, exactly, that other more brazenly partisan satirical journals cannot?

The lessons to be learned from *Le Rire*’s appraisal of the Dreyfus Affair are many. The journal illuminates the workings of humor and laughter as instruments for shaping, reshaping, and reflecting mass politics and mass culture. Although not an expressly political outlet for regular or especially extreme political messaging, *Le Rire* made editorial choices that reflected a sort of commercial opportunism with an eye towards mass appeal and sales: in brief, what was

¹⁹¹ *Le Rire* no. 272 (20 January 1900), 1-2.

¹⁹² *Le Rire* no. 319 (15 December 1900), 12.

funniest to the widest possible audience. Its editorial decisions over time reflect the ever-changing tide of public tastes for amusement.

What then, was the ultimate goal of laughter in such circumstances? In the absence of substantive archival record of *Le Rire*'s backend operations, the answer to that question cannot be definitively answered, but the journal itself provides sharp insights into the political and cultural uses of laughter. Despite its professed neutrality in the political disputes surrounding the Dreyfus Affair, *Le Rire* willingly and routinely gave outsized voice and support to anti-Dreyfusard artists like Gyp, Léandre, Willette, Forain, Caran d'Ache, and others, as well as sustained and sympathetic coverage of rightwing nationalist talking points. Very few, if any cartoons, comics, and writings published in *Le Rire* expressly sympathized with the Dreyfusard cause.

Visual analysis of such images reveals their symbolic and cultural complexity, as well as the rhetorical themes that readers ostensibly found funny. Reading *Le Rire*'s visual record of the Dreyfus Affair and its related controversies demonstrates that those themes—antisemitism, anti-capitalism, anti-parliamentary populism and nationalism— as well as classical and innovative visual forms of physiognomic and sequential cartooning, did not exist in isolation from one another. Rather, in *Le Rire*, they functioned as distinct, overlapping aspects of a common cause.

Historians have long read the Dreyfus Affair as a critical moment for the political culture of French nationalism, marking its sharp turn to the far right. Nevertheless, they have largely overlooked the importance of caricature and graphic satire in visualizing that transformation, a process that had been in the works since 1889 at the culmination of the Boulanger Affair. The Dreyfus Affair not only presented the ideal conditions for coalescing disparate political interests

against a common symbolic enemy, it afforded a technologically mature illustrated press the opportunity to intervene in public debate in a new key.

As for *Le Rire*, a nascent satirical organ at the Affair's onset, the timing of the controversy could not have been more opportune. In its attempt to stake a claim in an industry saturated with competition, *Le Rire* exploited burgeoning currents of popular outrage to its early advantage, tying its own commercial success and interests to the increasingly hostile tenor of public discourse. The images examined in this chapter therefore ought to be interpreted in multiple lights: foremost as tools of commercial entertainment and amusement, but also as salient tools of polemic, mass political engagement, and records of the emotional life and visual language of the Dreyfus Affair. They are, in short, testaments to the complex workings of humor in negotiating and making sense of daily life both private and public, past and present.

CHAPTER III. THE MAISON DU RIRE AND THE PARIS EXPOSITION UNIVERSELLE

1900

On the first of March 1899, at the height of the Dreyfus Affair, Félix Juven, director and editor-in-chief of *Le Rire*, filed an application with the Ministry of Commerce for permission to lease a parcel of land in order to build and operate a theater on the grounds of the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris. Ten days later, Juven and the Exposition's Commissioner General, Alfred Picard, agreed on the terms of a contract for a theater "for the performance of songs, poetry, and topical monologues." The space, tentatively called the *Théâtre des marionnettes et guignols*, would comprise two theaters for daily performances of comic puppet shows, as well as an "exhibit of comic literature, materials, and objects," and a bar. For the rights to use the space, Juven would pay 59,250 francs, plus a security deposit of 7,000.¹⁹³

The agreement formalized the beginnings of Juven's vision for the Maison du Rire, the pavilion for *Le Rire* to exhibit original works by caricaturists past and present, as well as a theatrical retrospective of the cultural traditions of popular humor across time and space, to visitors at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900. During its short life, the Maison du Rire, by all contemporary accounts, generated a fleeting whirlwind of financial strain, critical acclaim, legal controversy, and interpersonal strife between its directors. Even so, little record of the Maison du Rire remains. Histories of the 1900 Exposition relegate its mention, if at all, to a single sentence. Richard Mandell's *Paris 1900*, for example, long considered the seminal historical work in English on the Exposition, does not mention it at all.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ The incomplete archival record of the Maison du Rire is held in the Archives Nationales (AN) Series F12 on the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, within the papers on the 1900 Exposition, in F/12/4353. Cited here are folios 175 and 180.

¹⁹⁴ Richard Mandell, *Paris 1900: The Great World's Fair* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967).

Like the 1900 Exposition itself, the Maison du Rire has received only infrequent and limited scholarly attention. At present, no published works have examined the project, though Laurent Bihl's doctoral dissertation dedicates five pages to briefly narrating its story and eventual failure. Despite the scant consideration in literatures past and present, the Maison du Rire formed the central focus of *Le Rire*'s marketing and publicity throughout 1900, with promotional events extending beyond the Exposition's formal conclusion on November 12. The Exposition at large was also a ubiquitous object of fascination, hope, scorn, and ridicule inside the journal's pages for its entire duration.

Studying the Maison du Rire can elucidate several interconnected problems of historical interest. This chapter explores the multifaceted story of the Maison du Rire—its planning, opening, marketing, reception, financial struggle, and eventual closure—to manifold ends. On one hand, I wish to trace the exhibit's conceptual project to legitimate humor as a high art. The Maison du Rire's primary artistic function, like *Le Rire* itself, was to canonize satire as an essential constituent component of France's artistic tradition and, therefore, an integral part of its national spirit and identity. The vision of humor it sought to project to an international audience was intentionally crafted to reflect historical continuity with longstanding folk customs and entertainments: it was a universal facet of the human condition across time and space, a common tongue between disparate cultures who understood the unifying power of laughter.

On the other hand, this chapter equally accentuates the commercial trajectory of the Maison du Rire and its implications for Juven's future endeavors. Historians and contemporaries alike have derided the Exposition Universelle of 1900 as an utter failure that signaled the decadence and decline of French power. Where they have acknowledged the Maison du Rire, they interpret its financial losses as evidence of its unequivocal failure. I ultimately conclude,

however, that the Maison du Rire marked an experimental but transformative moment in Juven's enterprise, momentarily reorienting business interests away from the printed page and towards commercial entertainment. Part of the incipient, ever-changing landscape of urban mass culture that sought to monetize public amusements, the Maison du Rire sought to reify the satiric spirit of graphic art and print media typical of its parent magazine. Though the project indeed fell short of its anticipated gains, it clarified a way forward for future attempts to expand *Le Rire* into a multimedia enterprise, a premier brand name of comic media and entertainments, on the printed page and off.

The implications of the Maison du Rire's commercial and cultural impact, when contextualized in the wider fabric of the Exposition Universelle of 1900, extend well beyond the constraints of the fair itself. The interconnected anticlimaxes of the Exposition and its constituent exhibits generated considerable controversy and vociferous debate over the realities of modern civilization and urban planning, as historians like Peter Soppelsa have shown.¹⁹⁵ While the Maison du Rire never achieved its desired high public profile, it did seek to refashion its visitors' understanding of humor's place in and relationship to art and culture by blurring lines between information and amusement. Like its parent comic journal, *Le Rire*, the Maison envisaged modern world civilization founded in premodern traditions and community ties, mediated through the convivial spirit of laughter. Lighthearted in its essence, that vision nevertheless merits serious consideration.

Planning the Maison du Rire, Planning Paris 1900

¹⁹⁵ Peter Soppelsa, "Paris's 1900 Universal Exposition and the Politics of Urban Disaster," in *French Historical Studies* 36, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 271-298.

The plans for both the Maison du Rire and the 1900 Exposition Universelle emerged in the first years of the 1890s. Since the Second Empire of Louis Napoleon, France had hosted four world's fairs, all of which bore the name Exposition Universelle, in eleven-year intervals. That of 1889, marking the centenary of the French Revolution, had most famously debuted the landmark Eiffel Tower, as well as the cast-iron and glass Galerie des Machines. Provisional arrangements for the 1900 Exposition, however, envisioned an even grander project to capture a retrospective view of the entire nineteenth century in order to usher in the twentieth: as Alexander Geppert has termed it, recalling Walter Benjamin, "the century's protean synthesis."¹⁹⁶ Official preparations began in earnest in July 1892, when then Minister of Commerce Jules Roche issued a report to President Sadi Carnot endorsing the formation of a commission for staging a follow-up spectacle to the 1889 exhibition that would be both "the end of a century of prodigious scientific and economic growth...as well as the gateway to an era of grandeur foreseen by scholars and philosophers, an era in which realities will doubtless surpass the dreams of our imaginations."¹⁹⁷ On 13 July, the President decreed that the Minister of Commerce would be charged with its execution and administration.¹⁹⁸ Further presidential decrees in September 1893 and August 1894 established the administrative structure of the Exposition's High Commission and its organs of governance.¹⁹⁹

Given the symbolic importance of the turn of the century to Roche's original plan, determining a site that was at once imbued with historical meaning and suitable for staging the exhibition became an immediate and crucial priority. As previous iterations of the event had

¹⁹⁶ Alexander C.T. Gepper, *Fleeting Cities: Imperial Expositions in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 62-64.

¹⁹⁷ Ministère du commerce, de l'industrie, des postes et des télégraphes, *Actes organiques de l'Exposition Universelle Internationale de 1900 à Paris* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1895), 5-7.

¹⁹⁸ *Actes organiques*, 7-8.

¹⁹⁹ *Actes organiques*, 13-17 and 36-62.

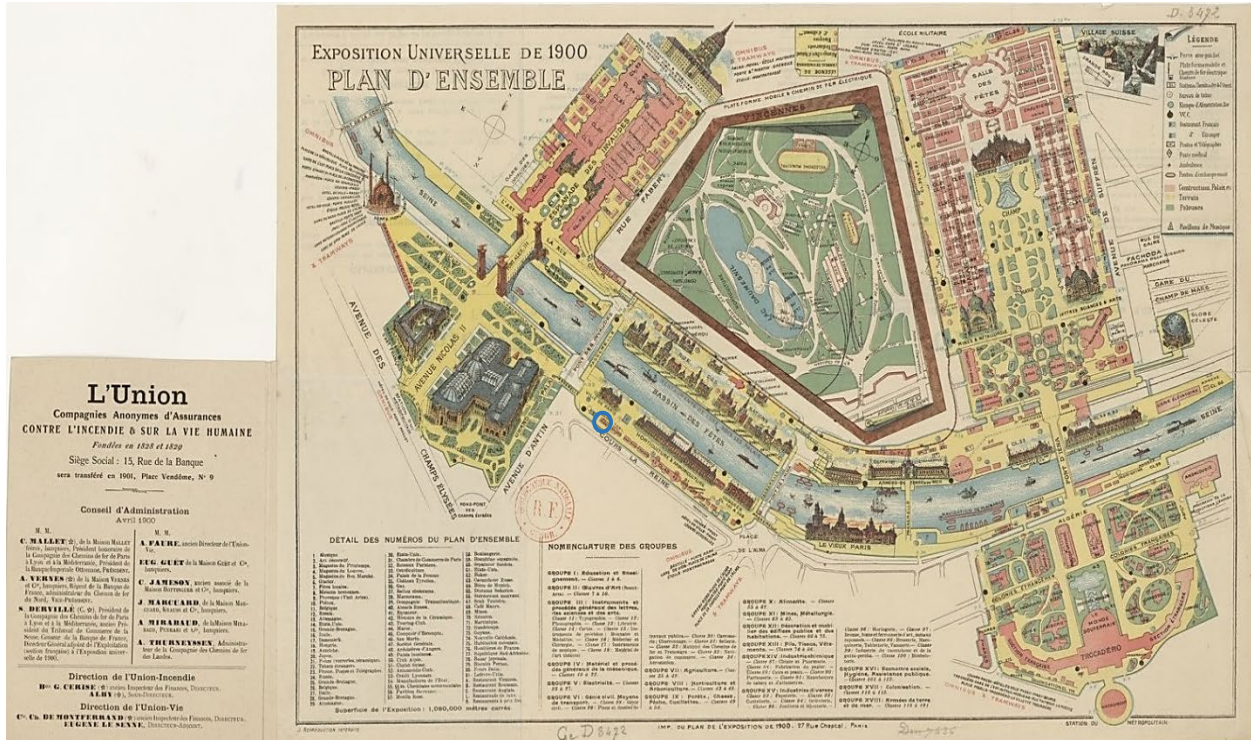


Figure 3.1: Exposition Universelle de 1900: Plan d'ensemble. Paris: Imprimerie du Plan de l'exposition, 1900. Source: Gallica, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 11 July 2007. The map is oriented with the South at top. The Vincennes annex is inserted at center. The location of the Maison du Rire on the Cours la Reine is shown circled in blue.

taken place on the Champ de Mars, a space long associated with its revolutionary past, the public greenspace was considered integral to the project. On one hand, local residents protested both the cost and material nuisance of yet another international exposition. On the other, several proposals submitted to the commission's design competition suggested demolishing the adjacent neighborhoods to expand the Champ de Mars' available open space.²⁰⁰ In the end, the commission settled on using the existing site as the exposition's core, with nearby sites supplementing the park to form a cohesive, if not wholly contiguous, fairground. In addition to the Champ de Mars and Trocadéro, planners further adjoined sites along the Invalides Esplanade, the Quais de Seine, and a strip of the Right Bank between the Place de la Concorde and Place de l'Alma. An exterior annex at the Bois de Vincennes would host a number of large-scale sporting,

²⁰⁰ Geppert, *Fleeting Cities*, 65-76.

agricultural, and industrial exhibitions, including the Olympic Games at the park's velodrome. The two sites were to be connected by Line 1 of Fulgence Bienvenüe's Paris Metropolitan Railway, under construction beginning in 1898. (Figure 3.1)

The fairgrounds inside Paris proper were further divided into six distinct sectors. The Champ de Mars was to host most of the marquee attractions showcasing technological and engineering marvels: the Salles des Fêtes, the Optical Palace, Château d'Eau and Electrical Palace, the Great Ferris Wheel, Celestial Globe, and Panoramic World Tour. Across the Seine in the Trocadéro gardens were the colonial and anthropological exhibits, including human zoos for the display of colonial peoples. Along the Quais de Seine, the Left Bank held the military and transport pavilions between the Pont d'Iéna and Pont d'Alma. Across the river was the Vieux Paris historical exhibit, directed by satirist Albert Robida.²⁰¹ Upriver from the Pont d'Alma were the international pavilions along the Rue des Nations on the Left Bank and the Rue de Paris, hosting entertainments typical of the city (including the Maison du Rire), along the Cours la Reine on the Right. At the Exposition's easternmost limit, the Esplanade des Invalides hosted architectural and manufacturing as well as artisans' exhibits. Across the Seine, the Beaux-Arts Grand and Petit Palais as well as horticultural gardens greeted guests entering the exposition site from the monumental gate at the Place de la Concorde.

While the preliminary plans for the 1900 Exposition were in development, *Le Rire* had been incubating its own idea to stage a public exhibition of caricatures and comics published in its pages. The journal had repeatedly engaged its readership beyond its printed issues with success in its early years of operation. Contests for reader submissions, puzzles, and open letters

²⁰¹ Elizabeth Emery, "Protecting the Past: Albert Robida and the *Vieux Paris* Exhibit at the 1900 World's Fair," *Journal of European Studies* 35, Vol. 1 (2005): 65-85.

had proven both effective and popular promotional tools. As early as its 42nd issue, *Le Rire* hinted at organizing a special exhibition space. The issue of 24 August 1895 included a facsimile of a stained-glass mural by Éloy-Vincent dedicated to Adolphe Willette, which was to feature in a forthcoming project for a *Hôtel du Rire*. The project never materialized and saw no further mention, and was likely included as a promotional feature advertising a special collection of back issues for that year.²⁰² Nevertheless, the notion of planning a promotional exhibition space was evidently considered within *Le Rire*'s first year of operation.

From the few accounts available to historians, planning the Maison du Rire began in earnest at the beginning of 1899. Juven submitted a preliminary plan of the exhibit to the commission on 7 January. The proposed site would occupy an area of 30 by 13 meters, in a location that had formerly been reserved by puppeteer Ernest Maindron for a marionette theater. Juven's proposal envisaged the Maison du Rire as "an ensemble of spectacles, pictures, objects, and publications, artistic and fun in essence, that will not fail to please the public." The Maison du Rire would foremost comprise two theaters, one for live performances and the other for puppet shows and shadow theater. The two theaters would be separated by a bar. To plead his case for the bar, Juven insisted on its artistic function and necessity as a site to display a historical retrospective exhibit of comic art. More practically, the pavilion would have a maximum seating capacity of 200, and the price of daytime entries would be fixed at 50 centimes, while evening admissions would simply cost "more." In his concluding reassurances to the commission, Juven insisted that direction of the site would be entrusted to "artists of merit and men of talent."²⁰³ On 13 January, *Le Rire* announced the plan for the Maison du Rire in a

²⁰² See *Le Rire* no. 42 (24 August 1895), 12.

²⁰³ AN F/12/4353, 217-218.

full-page promotion. Detailing the proposed exhibit's blueprint, the advertisement insists on the centrality of laughter to the building's design: the bar, as the centerpiece of the pavilion, will unify the distinct wings of the exhibition space. Citing Horace, the ad insists the time for drinking leads to the time for laughing, and vice versa.²⁰⁴

The commission approved the plan on 26 January, pending approval of an official contract. The terms were agreed on 1 March, according to Juven's exact specifications as mentioned in the proposal. Juven was held financially liable for all safety and security measures, according to law, at personal expense. The contract also enumerated terms of payment. Juven was to pay the commission a security deposit of 7,000 francs, and 59,250 francs in total rent, due in three installments over a year: 20,000 upfront, 20,000 in July 1899, and 19,250 the following March. Payment of the security deposit was confirmed 24 March, and construction could move forward.²⁰⁵

In accordance with Juven's promises, artistic license for the design, construction, and decoration of the *Maison du Rire* was handed over to the journal's most renowned artists and specialists. Arsène Alexandre was charged with artistic direction. However, due to a deteriorating relationship with Juven, he delegated management of specific aspects of design and choreography to contributing artists who were specialists in particular media. Architect Bruno Pellissier designed the building. Lucien Métivet decorated the façade, the main theater, and the exterior detailing. Georges Delaw and Auguste Roubille decorated the puppet theater. Abel Faivre painted the bar mural, and Charles Léandre sculpted the marionettes used in the puppet shows. Songwriter Jean Bataille produced the musical revue, while satirist and regular *Le Rire*

²⁰⁴ *Le Rire* no. 271 (13 January 1900), 13.

²⁰⁵ AN F/12/4353, 190.

contributor Rodolphe Bringer, whose memoirs provide the most detailed account of the pavilion's planning, directed the puppet shows.²⁰⁶

Given that the stated intent of the Maison du Rire was to exhibit original works by French caricaturists past and present, as well as provide a retrospective exhibit on the history of puppetry from around the world, much attention was directed to the puppet theater. Bringer, however, ignorant of the medium, was out of his depth, and turned to an antiquarian and collector in Asnières who introduced him to manifold traditions of puppetry from across Europe. Bringer curated a continental revue: Guignol from Lyon and Lafleur of Amiens for France; Punch and Judy from London; Hanswurst from Germany; Pulcinella from Naples; Kasperl from Bavaria and Vienna, and Karagöz from Ottoman Constantinople. In addition to puppet theater, Bringer also revived the shadow plays of Dominique Séraphin and the recently defunct Chat Noir cabaret's shadow theater, which featured works by contemporary humorists like Caran d'Ache and Henry Rivière, among others.²⁰⁷ Meanwhile, *Le Rire* ran weekly updates in its back pages to promote the Maison, providing readers news on construction progress as well as soliciting contributions from the public.²⁰⁸

The Special Issue of the Maison du Rire

In the spring, *Le Rire* released a special collectible issue on the Maison du Rire out of series.²⁰⁹ Sold at a luxury price of 50 centimes for the duration of the world's fair, the special issue provided readers a detailed walkthrough tour of the making of the pavilion, as well as a

²⁰⁶ Rodolphe Bringer, *Trente ans d'humour* (Paris: France-Édition, 1924), 179-187.

²⁰⁷ Bringer, *Trente ans d'humour*, 180, and *Le Rire* no. 290 (26 May 1900), 9.

²⁰⁸ See *Le Rire* nos. 273, 282.

²⁰⁹ The Maison du Rire special issue is undated in print. The earliest recorded mentions of the issue's release to appear in press advertisements date to May, to coincide with the debut of performances. It is possible, perhaps likely, that the issue went to print earlier, as a deluxe collectible item in the larger tapestry of *Le Rire*'s vigorous marketing campaign.

suitable forum to reflect on *Le Rire*'s publication history and broader, abstract significance to contemporary French culture and society. At 25 pages, the Maison du Rire special issue was profusely illustrated, featuring the normative front and back cover illustrations, as well as six double-page spreads, in full color, in addition to two full-page lithographic prints in black ink, and an abundance of photographic inserts. Illustrations largely detailed architectural features of the edifice, including an exterior view of the façade and entry, the interior theaters' decorative friezes detailed in sequential paneling typical of comic strips, and aerial views of the theaters' proscenia. While much of the issue's page space is dedicated to elaborate descriptions of the décor, the issue also includes a three-page narrative history of *Le Rire*.

Le Rire's historical imagination, as presented in the special issue, is deceptively complex. While present-day readers cannot discount the text's purpose as a promotional collector's item, its narration of history, both its own and the wider history of laughter, is multifaceted. On one hand, *Le Rire* uses most of the special issue's page space to celebrate the work of its most prolific contributors. On the other hand, it also articulates a broad statement of purpose. At the turn of the century, *Le Rire* was a six-year-old publication that had grown rapidly into "one of the most important and most widely followed" illustrated journals in the world. The article asks foremost, how was its success possible, especially in a time so inhospitable to the founding and long-term survival of new journals?

Le Rire's answer to its own rhetorical question is tortuous. It attributes its success to a confluence of factors, many of which are circumstantial rather than strategic. Firstly, *Le Rire* contends that it was able to find its niche in a saturated market by marrying real artistic talent to the variety magazine format, while keeping costs low. A more detailed explanation of the ebb and flow of comic illustration in France follows: "the heroic times of Daumier, of Gavarni, of

Monnier, of Cham, and Gill, had passed.” While a new generation of comic artists of immense talent had followed them, they lacked a platform “broad enough to host them, and young enough and liberal enough to let them do as they pleased” without sacrificing the honesty or integrity of their work. Moreover, *Le Rire* sought to shatter the banalities of inferior “junk” caricature and readers’ complacent acceptance of outmoded and old-fashioned formulas that failed to adapt to changing ways of life. Instead, *Le Rire* sought to innovate within the medium of comic illustration by any means possible while reaching out to the heirs of the masters of old. And thus, it turns to honor that founding cohort of contributing artists: established talents like Forain, Willette, Caran d’Ache, and Toulouse-Lautrec; as well as the younger generation whose careers and renown began with their work for *Le Rire*, like Léandre, Hermann-Paul, Métivet, Depaquit and Delaw, Jeannot, Henri Somm, Charles Huard, Abel Faivre, Capiello, and others. The column concludes with a prognostication for the future, insisting on the continuing “absolute independence” of the publication and every one of its contributors: “talent and true originality are the only requirements.” It leaves readers with a promise to continue publication for decades to follow, until the Exposition of 1920, when it will rebuild the Maison du Rire.²¹⁰

²¹⁰ All abovementioned quotes are found in *Le Rire*, “La Maison du Rire: Numéro special hors série,” 14-18.

The special issue offers an invaluable insight into how *Le Rire* imagined its own historical significance at the turn of the century, as well as how it sought to imbue the Maison du Rire with that same meaning. *Le Rire* makes a universalizing claim to represent the collective sense of humor of all of France, and its exhibit at the World's Fair erected a museum and monument to that national spirit. The Maison du Rire's design and décor elaborate not only the story of *Le Rire*, but the wider history of humor, in France and elsewhere, in the medium of sequential comic illustration.



Figure 3.2: Lucien Métivet, “Les Frises extérieures.” Source: Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, 27 February 2019.

For example, Lucien Métivet’s exterior frieze, complementing the façade’s art nouveau style, depicts a “parade of nations” arriving at the Maison du Rire, in stereotypical costume and caricatural expression. (Figure 3.2) Métivet’s interior decoration of the *Théâtre de la Chanson* also accentuates the theater’s significance as a “museum of popular music and folk tunes.” Métivet’s frieze comprises eight tableaux in three sequences, which narrate a linear history of song through the evolution of form, genre, and feeling. The first band begins with a widow’s seaside lament; next, the song of classical antiquity, featuring a courtesan playing a lute with a bow as an armored knight bearing a lance and a squire pass in the background; medieval

chivalric romance concludes the band, featuring a lady playing a harp. The second sequence of the frieze comprises two tableaux, and depicts on one hand the chamber ensemble of one pianist and two vocalists performing in a private salon, and on the other a pantomime performance of the *commedia dell'arte* with the traditional characters of Harlequin and Colombine pursued by the tragic clown Pierrot and jealous father Pantalon. The final sequence, in three tableaux, portrays a military march, a modern concert ensemble featuring a guitarist and dancers, typical of a Parisian music hall, and the “dirty” songs of a Montmartre cabaret in the last panel.²¹¹ The entire frieze is characterized by a uniformity of color and form typical of art nouveau, and replete with comical anachronisms typical of *Le Rire*. (Figure 3.3)



Figure 3.3: “La Salle du Théâtre: Les Frises de Lucien Métivet.” Source: Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, 27 February 2019.

Georges Delaw’s decorative friezes in the puppet theater of the Maison du Rire tell a separate story. Rather than relating a linear, teleological history of puppetry, Delaw recounts the

²¹¹ The last panel of Métivet’s frieze is captioned “La chanson rosse.”

stories of different comic traditions and trickster figures from European folklore. The friezes are organized sequentially into four strips, each comprising three individual tableaux. Firstly, Delaw narrates two tales of Pulcinella, the popular heroic figure of the Neapolitan *commedia dell'arte*. The two scenes first show children pleading for clemency before a magistrate's bench. From the issue's descriptions, we learn that Minos, Aeacus, and Rhadamanthus are presiding as the judges of the dead. Looking on from the gallery benches are a crowd of "several famous criminals," including the pope, a landlord, and an American Indian who has cut off the scalp of Maurice Barrès. The second scene shows a village mob in pursuit of Pulcinella in Puppetown. The third scene moves to England, showing the puppet Mr. Punch (whose origins derive from Pulcinella) escaping the gallows to hang his executioner, the infamous crown executioner under King Charles II, Jack Ketch.

The second sequence depicts an even more diverse cast of folkloric characters. The fourth panel satirizes the medieval Belgian folktale of Genevieve of Brabant, discovered in her isolation by the Frankish knight and folk-hero crusader Godfrey of Bouillon. During their separation, Genevieve amassed the comforts of modern civilization, including fine coffee and milk. Next, the Moon appoints Pierrot Prime Minister of his kingdom as a court of masqueraders and other figures of the *commedia dell'arte* look on. Panel six shows the popular Turkish puppet character, the "famous Karagöz," in a palatial seraglio in either "Constantinople or Trebizond. In any case, it's the old Orient," attended to by odalisques and smoking hookah.²¹²

The third sequence altogether lacks a narrative logic. First, a town guard breaks up a noisy disturbance in a town square. Lyonnais puppet Guignol and his "hideous father-in-law" Ganfron are shown serenading an innkeeper, who rejects them by dumping her chamber pot out

²¹² *Le Rire*, "La Maison du Rire," 21.

the window. Next, the hero of Amiens puppetry Lafleur protects the infant Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and the three magi from Herod's soldiers in the manger at Bethlehem. Last in the series, a caricatural retelling of the temptation of Saint Anthony shows pranksters chasing the hermit from his dwelling in an act of revolutionary defiance.

The final frieze ultimately returns to the lore of fairytales. The first panel depicts a scene from a traditional French nursery rhyme where *La Mère Michel* has lost her cat. The townsfolk on the market square suspect the village grocer Lustucru of having taken the cat. The issue's description provides a darkly humorous explanation for the lyrics of the children's nursery rhyme, itself an allusion to the 1662 tax revolt and massacre of the Lustucrus in Boulogne. The second frame shows the rustic wedding of the Bavarian and Austrian puppet Kasperl. "His brother" Punch and his wife Judy are in attendance, visiting from London. The final frame shows Guignol moving house, accompanied by his wife Madelon and father-in-law Gnafron. They are being chased by their landlord, accompanied by the town bailiff and guard, ostensibly for refusing to pay their rent. Delaw includes in his textual description a rhyming aphorism he

attributes to Gnafron: “To your landlord you will pay, on Christmas or on St. John’s Day.”

(Figure 3.4)

However different Métivet and Delaw’s murals might have been in form and scope, they shared a common artistic function inside the Maison du Rire well beyond their decorative nature. The visual sequences use modern commercial media to depict sweeping, romanticized fictions of an idealized, but distant and bucolic premodern past that emphasize the centrality of laughter and comedy to the patterns and practices of daily life through time. The friezes create a caricatural,



Figure 3.4: “La Salle des Marionnettes: Les Frises de Georges Delaw.” Source: Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, 27 February 2019.

yet utopic world in which laughter is universal, the fabric of life and interpersonal relations.

Their notion of laughter, however, is not arbitrary or formless. It is rather deeply entrenched in the conventions of French literary comedy, specifically the carnivalesque popular laughter of Rabelais.

What precisely makes the humor of the *Maison du Rire* Rabelaisian? Nowhere in the special issue does *Le Rire* expressly mention the Renaissance author's name. However, Bakhtin's analysis of the generic forms of folk humor provides a particularly insightful theoretical framework for interpreting the decorative art of the *Maison du Rire*. For Métivet and Delaw both, the history of song and fairytale alike draw on Bakhtin's categorical forms of folk humor: ritual spectacles in public life; wordplay; and parodic violence and abuse.²¹³ They draw on the popular traditions of folk theater that in turn developed from medieval customs, rites, and festivities. In every frieze, laughter has a dual function: it is both playful and subversive. It serves to reinforce, suspend, invert, or altogether abolish normative social hierarchies and relations, even in the darkest and most somber of circumstances. In Métivet's frieze, for example, song's power to amuse and entertain collapses hierarchies and social distinctions throughout time, whether in court life or at war. Equally, in Delaw's composition, at Mr. Punch's hanging, it is the trickster puppet himself who inverts the power dynamic of his own public execution by hanging his hangman, in a moment of triumphal laughter that turns to violence against an agent of royal authority.

²¹³ See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 5-6 and 66-77.

Inside and outside the Maison du Rire, laughter is the essential spirit of cultures high and low across the continent. Métivet's exterior friezes, for example, underscore the intrinsic comicality of national stereotypes expressly by collapsing the normative civilizational hierarchy between colonial, exotic, or foreign peoples. The tensions between empires and nations are suspended, and the distances between them are collapsed into momentary intimacy. All cultures join the festive parade, a comic reinterpretation of the *danse macabre*, dancing towards the entry foyer of the Maison du Rire. (Figure 3.5) Laughter is presented as a universal and unifying constant that is, in Rabelais' own words, *propre de l'homme*, which is to say, the essence of the human condition.²¹⁴

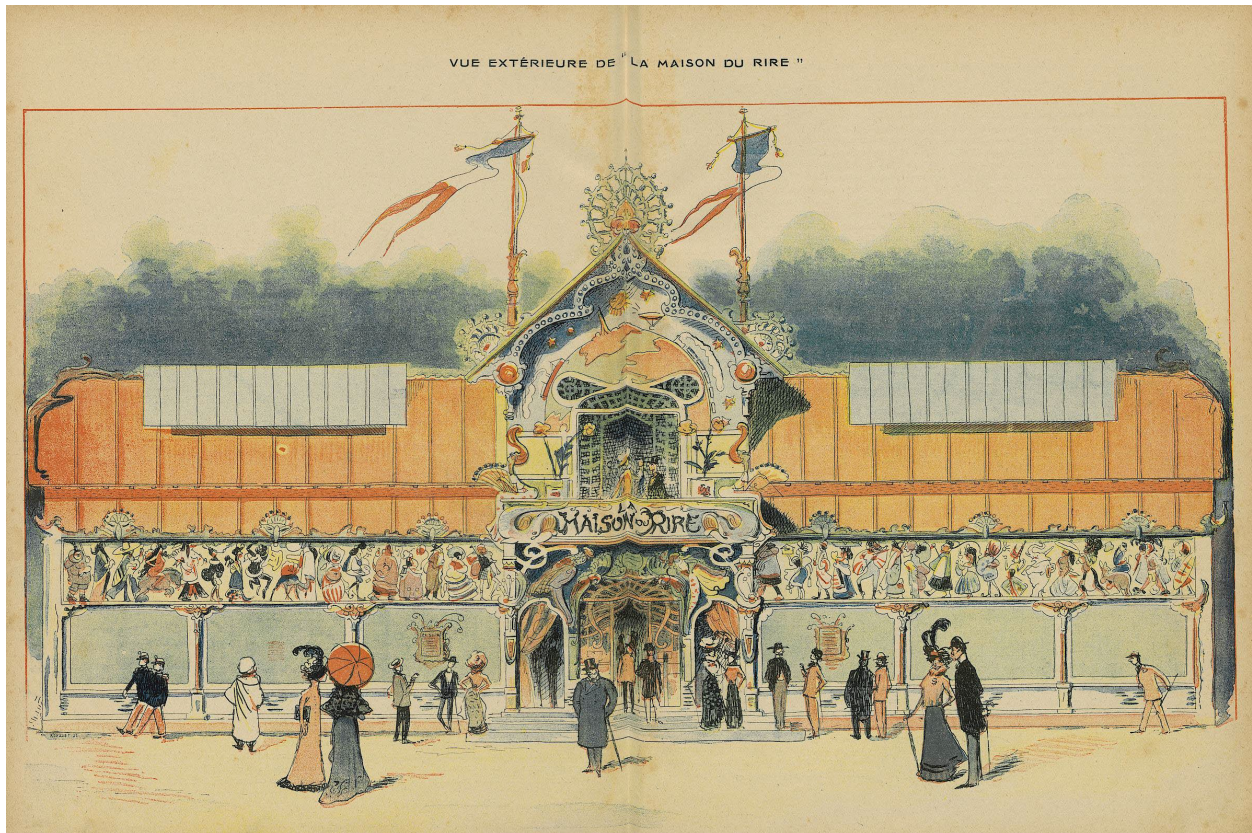


Figure 3.5: Vue extérieure de la "Maison du Rire." Source: Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, 27 February 2019.

²¹⁴ François Rabelais, "Aux lecteurs," in *Les Oeuvres de Maître François Rabelais*, T.1, ed. Charles Marty-Laveaux (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1868), xiv.

The cultural implications of *Le Rire* laying claim to the symbolic legacy of Rabelais are profound. On one hand, invoking the image of Rabelais aided *Le Rire* to contextualize its own purpose in a defined spirit of satiric art in France. Bakhtin has argued that the literary tradition of popular laughter, typified in French culture by Rabelais, experienced a decline concurrent to satire's ascendancy in the nineteenth century, conforming to bourgeois tastes for more "subdued" comedic forms. As Rabelais' style of humor fell out of fashion, scholarly interest in "Rabelaisiana" grew in the second half of the nineteenth century, and "low" humor was relegated to an object of historical fascination.²¹⁵ In step with the rapid growth of the satirical press, coupled with new comedic sensibilities exemplified in the graphic arts, the iconography and imaginary of Rabelais found a home in the artistic community of Montmartre and its organs in the satirical press in the closing decades of the century.²¹⁶ Gustave Doré had illustrated the complete edition of Rabelais's collected works in 1854, and a second edition of the anthology appeared in 1873. Satirist Albert Robida, editor of *La Caricature* and artistic director of the Vieux Paris historical exhibit at the 1900 Exposition, published his own edition in 1885. In symbolically claiming Rabelais' legacy, *Le Rire* situated itself, as well as the Maison, in historical continuity with not only the popular comic tradition of *le moine défroqué*, but also those of his *fin de siècle* advocates in the graphic arts. The Maison du Rire thus appropriated a historical imaginary informed by the ritual laughter of the Rabelaisian carnival that undermined the cultural mores of its time.

²¹⁵ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 120, 128,

²¹⁶ See Gabriel P. Weisberg, ed., *Montmartre and the Making of Mass Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 180-246, as well as Phillip Dennis Cate and Mary Shaw, eds., *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabarets, Humor, and the Avant-Garde, 1875-1905* (New Brunswick, NJ: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 1996), 200-203.

Similarly, the imaginary of the Rabelaisian “world turned upside down” provided the Maison du Rire a useful and potent visual language to idealize France’s past, in service of present-day interests. Elizabeth Emery, recalling Pierra Nora in her analysis of Albert Robida’s nearby Vieux Paris exhibit at the 1900 Exposition, has argued that similar uses of medieval imagery ultimately championed manifold technical advances, amenities, and prejudices of modern life, by staging the fictional past as a *lieu de mémoire*.²¹⁷ Informed by the contemporary politics of republican nationalism, images of the past, whether real or fictitious, became useful allegorical commentaries on the present. While the function of the Maison du Rire was ultimately not intended for topical criticism, its retrospective view of folk traditions in comic theater reinforced the space’s own modernity as the apotheosis of a century’s developments in the art of humor. Within the official forward-looking thematic framework of the larger Exposition, Rabelaisian laughter and the Maison du Rire’s shrewd use of it represented the material and symbolic inversion of nineteenth-century humor, on the grounds of the fair that was to usher in the twentieth.

At the Maison du Rire

Despite the artistic aptitudes of the team behind it, building the structure of the Maison du Rire was an arduous process plagued by delays. According to Bringer, the artists collectively labored from daybreak to sundown every day for the entire year, but Juven paid generously in wages as well as meals and drink, treating his workers to multiple bottles of champagne nightly. By the time the Exposition formally opened in April of 1900, the Maison du Rire, like most of the pavilions on the grounds, was still under construction and not yet ready to welcome visitors. Anxieties about the wider delays abounded across the Parisian press. Would the fair be ready in

²¹⁷ Elizabeth Emery, “Protecting the Past,” 79.

time? Commissioner General Alfred Picard remained intransigent, insisting the exposition open by Easter weekend. More uncertainties over the site's cohesiveness and the lack of a single star attraction, or *clou*, to anchor the fair's publicity and branding circulated.

Still, the inauguration proceeded. The Exposition Universelle of 1900 opened on April 14, to little fanfare, inclement weather, and a glut of scaffolding, ladders, and unfinished construction works crowding the site. First at the Champ de Mars and then at the Pont Alexandre III, President of the Republic Émile Loubet, accompanied by the incumbent Minister of Commerce Alexandre Millerand, dedicated the opening ceremony to the triumph of French spirit, labor, and the coming of a new century of hope and human progress. The national press unanimously derided the event as lackluster, bleak, and unbecoming of the occasion.²¹⁸

On the Cours la Reine, the inauguration of the Rue de Paris proceeded without fanfare, after Picard called off the procession.²¹⁹ *Le Rire* itself marked the occasion by parodying the haphazard conditions on the ground, as the public was welcomed to a morass of unfinished construction works. Mimicking the daily press with clever foresight, the issue begins with a review of the inauguration's pomp and ceremony before the fact, detailing the crowd, the presidential cortège, speeches, even the passage from the Champ de Mars towards the Pont Alexandre III. The satirical flourishes added to the review include Loubet gifting a gold bracelet to a boy dressed as a Russian guard, and several *fait divers* reports on accidents and injuries sustained in the crowd. The report concludes: "the crisis has opened." Cartoons by Abel Faivre, Guydo, Fernand Fau, and Henri Avelot lampoon the scandal surrounding the readiness of the works in progress. A "rhymed gazette" by Gabriel Montoya pokes fun at the influx of visitors to

²¹⁸ See for example *Le Matin* no. 5894 (15 April 1900), and *Le Temps* no. 14190 (15 April 1900).

²¹⁹ *Le Temps* (1 May 1900), 3.

the “land of stucco,” all of whom have transformed Paris into a new Babel.²²⁰ On opening day, *Le Rire* itself acknowledged the blatant artifice of the fair in which it was to play a part.

The Maison du Rire was not fully opened to the public until the end of May, nearly six weeks after the Exposition’s inauguration. Meanwhile, guests visited the spaces that had been built. 22 April marked the Maison’s official opening to the public, with visitors being permitted access to the two theater rooms. The cost of entry remained fixed at 2 francs for general admission, with a discount rate of 1.50 for Exposition passholders, significantly more expensive than stipulated in Article 8 of the commission’s contract.²²¹ *Le Rire* subscribers enjoyed an even greater discount, gaining entry for 20 centimes.

To coincide with the completion of the Maison’s construction in late May, nearly six weeks after the fair’s inauguration, *Le Rire* released a promotional illustrated tour guide to the Exposition in early June. Entitled *Les Plaisirs de Paris*, the “Guide du Rire” provided Exposition visitors a profusely illustrated handbook to the entertainments and attractions in the city, both within and outside the Exposition fairgrounds proper. Facsimiles of illustrations previously published in *Le Rire* by the artistic team behind the Maison, including Léandre and Métivet, accompanied descriptions of a curated list of attractions. The first section of the guidebook outlined attractions outside the Exposition grounds: comic theaters, music halls, cabarets, cafés, and circuses. The guide emphasized above all “fun” neighborhoods, paying special attention to the commercial entertainment districts of the Grands-Boulevards and Montmartre. The section on attractions inside the Exposition grounds functioned, unsurprisingly, as a detailed promotion for the Maison as well as the other pavilions of the Rue de Paris exhibit on the Cours la Reine:

²²⁰ *Le Rire* no. 284 (14 April 1900), 5.

²²¹ AN F/12/4353, 180.

the Théâtre des Bonshommes Guillaume, the Paris Aquarium, the Phono-Cinema Theater, the Palais de la Danse, and others. The third and final section provides a guide to the attractions of other areas of the Exposition grounds: the Cinéorama, Celestial Globe, and Optical Palace of the Champs de Mars, as well as the *voyages animés* simulator ride at the Trocadéro pavilion. The back matter of the guide includes a playbill and two complimentary tickets of admission to the Maison, as well as advertisements and subscription forms for *Le Rire* and Juven's second periodical venture, *La Vie illustrée*.²²²

Once the Maison was operational, *Le Rire* began issuing weekly updates to readers on the pavilion's show calendar, as well as news and events within the Maison and exposition grounds at large. The first such report appeared the week after the fair's inauguration to recap the debut performances. The premiere included a revue entitled *La Marchande des blagues*, featuring an ensemble cast of Alice Bonheur, Victor Maurel, and Armand Lurville. The second show in the theater hall, the revue *Chanson au XIX^e siècle*, featured vocalists Jean Bataille, Mary Auber, Eveline Jeanney, Marguerite Favard, and a high tenor named Marius Philippon. Marionette shows by Stéphane and Léandre, respectively, opened the puppet theater's repertory.²²³

The Parisian press gave the exhibit's opening performance a warm reception. Critics praised the debut theatrical troupe's performances, and above all the artistry of the space itself. Writing in *Le Figaro*, critic A. Mercklein proclaimed on April 22 that the Maison's decoration alone was worth the cost of admission. Four days later, another critic for *Le Figaro* called the theaters a "marvel of imagination and taste."²²⁴ Literary daily newspaper *Gil Blas* echoed the

²²² *Les Plaisirs de Paris: Guide du "Rire" dans Paris et à l'Exposition de 1900* (Paris: Félix Juven, 1900), especially 81-85.

²²³ *Le Rire* no. 285 (21 April 1900), 5.

²²⁴ *Le Figaro* (28 April 1900), 1.

sentiment, avowing that a visit to the Maison would soon become a “certificate of Parisian chic.”²²⁵ Responding to this initial success in the first weekly report, *Le Rire* snidely invited the Prince of Wales and Queen Victoria to visit the exhibit, recalling the controversy *Le Rire* had stirred both at home and in England after publishing Adolphe Willette’s violently Anglophobic special issue “V’là les English!”²²⁶

Weekly updates appeared consistently in *Le Rire* for the duration of the Exposition, with minimal interruption. Their primary function was to announce schedule rotations and changes in the Maison’s programming. By the end of April, the exhibition gallery had been completed, and its debut exhibit featured original works by comic artists Leonetto Cappiello, Maurice Réalier-Dumas, and Norwegian sculptor Hans Stoltenberg Lerche.²²⁷ In May, the gallery began exhibiting original works from foreign comic journals, in order to situate itself amongst the broader European institution of the satirical press. London’s *Ally Sloop*, Munich’s *Simplicissimus*, Berlin’s *Kladderadatsch* and *Lustige Blätter*, and the Viennese *Wiener Caricaturen* and *Kikeriki*, among others, participated in the showcase.²²⁸ In June, the Maison began showing shadow plays revived from the repertory of the defunct Chat Noir cabaret of Montmartre—including works by Caran d’Ache, Willette, and Henri Rivière, the shadow theater’s inventor—as well as a weeklong exhibition of works by Léandre in the gallery space.²²⁹ The increasing variety of the Maison’s repertory over time reflected contemporary tastes as well

²²⁵ *Le Gil Blas* no. 7478 (9 May 1900), 1.

²²⁶ *Le Rire* (21 April 1900), 5.

²²⁷ *Le Rire* no. 286 (28 April 1900), 7.

²²⁸ *Le Rire* no. 288 (12 May 1900), 7.

²²⁹ *Le Rire* no. 290 (26 May 1900), 10, and *Le Rire* nos. 293 and 294 (16 and 23 June 1900), pages 7 and 11 respectively.

as loftier, abstract aspirations of participation in an established, universal tradition of popular humor, both in France and abroad.

At the end of June, the Maison debuted a new shadow puppet show by Félix Galipaux, *Les Pantins du siècle*, to run for the duration of July. The show, using marionettes sculpted by Léandre, parodied in twenty-four scenes the major political scandals of nineteenth-century France. The premiere showing was critically lauded in the press for its originality and technical sophistication and quickly garnered wider public interest.²³⁰ Following its initial success, the revue attracted the attention of the commission's censors, who banned the act for twenty-four hours, owing to several puppets' close resemblance to commissioner general Picard and accusations of political subversion. According to *Le Figaro*, the Maison was fined one franc for failing to submit its script to censors. In response, *Le Rire* mockingly denounced the commission's censorship committee as "defenders of historical truth," averring: "*Le Rire* can only mock these official puppets, and take the opportunity to have our revenge through wit and ridicule; we will not fail to do so."²³¹ The following day, the commissioner of fine arts ruled in favor of the Maison, allowing the revue to continue on the condition that tickets be reserved in advance.²³² The matter piqued popular interest in the show to such an extent that King Leopold II of Belgium visited the Maison. Likewise, in August, reports circulated of a rumor that the entourage of the Shah of Persia, Mozaffar ad-Din Shah Qajar, stopped in to see Caran d'Ache's shadow play *L'Épopée* and the newly debuted revue *L'École du Rire*. The following day, *Le*

²³⁰ *Le Figaro*, *Le Gaulois*, *Le Gil Blas*, *Le Journal*, and *Le Matin* all lauded the revue's premiere showing and maintained favorable coverage throughout the month of July.

²³¹ *Le Rire* no. 297 (14 July 1900), 4.

²³² *Le Figaro* (5 July 1900), 5.

Figaro reported that the rumors were mistaken: the men wearing diamond-studded karakul hats were simply Persian tourists on vacation.²³³

The relatively minor annoyance of momentary censorship portended further difficulties for the Maison du Rire. Despite early successes and critical acclaim, crowd sizes waned as the season continued. On one hand, summertime heat kept visitors away from the fair in general. Those who braved the temperatures, however, opted for the more opulent marquee attractions that were included in the price of admission to the grounds. The Rue de Paris exhibits, on the other hand, levied individual surcharges, sometimes prohibitive, for entry, mandated to do so by the commission in order to turn a profit on their investments.

Plagued by a combination of financial mismanagement and inopportune circumstances, the pavilions of the Rue de Paris collectively suffered considerable losses during the height of summer. According to Rodolphe Bringer and Gabriel de Lautrec, several concessions had shuttered before August. In one extreme case, the Palais de la Danse never opened, as the project was insolvent “before the paintings finished drying.”²³⁴ An early historian of Paris’s nineteenth-century Expositions Universelles, Adolphe Démy, was even harsher in his reproach of the Rue de Paris. He characterizes the amusements of the Rue de Paris as “of mediocre interest” and only ambiguously carnivalesque, a lowbrow counterweight to the Rue des Nations across the Seine that was plagued by the poor circulation of foot traffic. His reprimand continues:

Incidentally, this street of fun, as it was so presumptuously named, bore a dreary sadness. A great number of the establishments that comprised it experienced, from the beginning, serious financial miscalculations, and during the last half of the Exposition, many of them found themselves managed under judicial sequester. Thus [Mélchior] de Vogüé could say,

²³³ *Le Figaro* (9 August 1900), 5.

²³⁴ Bringer, *Trente ans d'humour*,

speaking of this Triumphant Path of Joy: “We came looking for Sodom and Gomorrah, but we found only the Dead Sea.”²³⁵

Despite the severity of Démy’s words, his judgment is overstated. The critical reception of the Rue de Paris was largely warm, not negative. Correspondents for numerous major dailies and periodicals consistently praised the exhibit’s program throughout the duration of the fair. For Démy’s rebuke of the Maison’s lowbrow, “more Montmartre than Attica” character, the public welcomed Juven’s revival of the Chat Noir’s puppet theater and classic cabaret repertory. A fictionalized guide to the Exposition, written by Gaston Bergeret and illustrated by *Le Rire* contributor Henry Somm, even shielded the Rue de Paris from its critics. Feigning the identity of a black tourist on a walking tour of the Exposition, Bergeret defends the significance of the Rue de Paris as such:

People who do not wish to take the Exposition seriously have moved to compare the Rue de Paris to the fair of Saint-Cloud, because one may see street performers do their spiels onstage; they do not understand what its interest is for history, in its archaeological reconstruction of the genesis of fairground amusements. What scholar could stay unmoved by the teachings of the Palais de la Danse, or by the mention of the Bonshommes Guillaume? This entire passage is populated by street artists; they demonstrate their detachment enough in continuing to play in front of an audience that does not stop.²³⁶

The struggles of the Rue de Paris, however, did not end with their downturns in revenue. As numbers dwindled, the Rue de Paris was also rocked by several scandals in late summer. On August 18, a footbridge beside the Pont des Invalides, connecting the Rue des Nations to the Cours la Reine, collapsed, killing four and injuring dozens of others.²³⁷ Four days later, the Maison du Rire itself became the focus of sensational headlines: not for its performances, but for

²³⁵ Adolphe Démy, *Essai historique sur les Expositions Universelles de Paris* (Paris: Librairie Alphonse Picard et fils, 1907), 573. Démy cites de Vogüé’s essay “La défunte Exposition” in the *Revue des Deux-Mondes*. De Vogüé’s judgment is no less severe, however embellished with poetic exaggeration. See Eugène-Mélchior de Vogüé, “La défunte Exposition,” *Revue des Deux-Mondes* 4, t. 162 (15 November 1900): 380-399, but especially 385.

²³⁶ Gaston Bergeret, *Journal d’un nègre à l’Exposition de 1900* (Paris: Librairie L. Conquet, 1901), 6.

²³⁷ See reports in, for example: “L’accident de l’exposition,” *L’Aurore* (19 August 1900), 1-2, and by Henri Petitjean, “L’accident des Invalides,” *Le Figaro* (19 August 1900), 2.

an attempted murder. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon on August 22, just before a showing of the music revue, a gunman inside the theater pulled a revolver and fired three shots at the Maison's security personnel. The suspect was later identified as 27-year-old baker and former soldier Hippolyte Valat of Montpellier, and the victim as a 45-year-old ticket inspector named Georges Chappelet. Chappelet was wounded by a bullet lodged in his right cheek and taken by ambulance to undergo surgery, only after giving a full statement to investigators. Valat refused to provide a motive to investigators, and was jailed for the duration of the proceedings. He was eventually given a psychiatric evaluation after it was revealed he did not know his target. Valat was judged not guilty by reason of insanity and confined to a psychiatric hospital in early September.²³⁸ His motive for the attack was never clarified. *Le Rire* never addressed the issue in its pages, nor did they report the breakout of an electrical fire when a transformer short-circuited in the Maison's basement two weeks later on September 18.²³⁹ Instead, *Le Rire* continued to run its regular promotional campaign for scheduled programming at the Maison, emphasizing the imminent closing performances.²⁴⁰

The same weekend of the Maison's brief electrical fire marked the banquet of the mayors of France, jointly organized by President Loubet and Prime Minister Waldeck-Rousseau. The feast gathered nearly 23,000 mayors and prefects of the French communes and municipalities at the Tuileries gardens, on a date selected to commemorate the proclamation of the revolutionary French Republic in 1792.²⁴¹ The occasion was loaded with symbolic meaning. On one hand, the banquet continued an established republican practice that began as a subversive tool of political

²³⁸ *Le Figaro* reported on the attack at the Maison du Rire in the most detail of any Parisian daily newspaper. See *Le Figaro* (23 and 24 August 1900, and 2 and 8 September 1900).

²³⁹ *L'Aurore* (19 September 1900), 3.

²⁴⁰ *Le Rire* no. 307 (22 September 1900), 10.

²⁴¹ Démy, *Essai historique sur les Expositions universelles de Paris*, 644-648.

organization during the July Monarchy, and was revived during the Third Republic as a national rite of republican political culture and power. On the other hand, the banquet intended to serve as a moment of national unity and conviviality at a particularly turbulent political moment in the later throes of the Dreyfus Affair and its violent agitations.²⁴²

Le Rire's attention shifted away from its own controversies and increasingly toward the big-picture politics of the Exposition as the end of August neared. Two weeks after the mayors' banquet, *Le Rire* published a thematic issue dedicated to the festivities, written by renowned *Figaro* journalist Charles Chincholle and illustrated by Léandre. The issue is written from the perspective of a fictitious mayor of a village in the Pyrenees, as a letter home to his wife. "Prosper Chenavac" describes to his wife Jérachine the formalities and festivities of the banquet in detail. The running joke throughout his letter is the written emphasis on the solemnity of the ceremonies and their political significance, while Léandre's illustrations reveal the mayors reveling in the debauchery of drunkenness, adultery, and excess. The centerfold of the issue is Léandre's parody of the banquet's presidential table in the style of da Vinci's *Last Supper*. Émile Loubet is portrayed as da Vinci's Jesus, flanked on his left by president of the Chamber of Deputies Paul Deschanel, and by president of the Senate Armand Fallières. The eldest mayor in attendance, the 92-year-old Jean-Baptiste Rigaud of Marigny-sur-Yonne, is seated in the same place as da Vinci's Judas Iscariot, shadowed not in his betrayal but a look of senility and boredom. In the foreground, diplomat and Chief of Protocol of the Republic Philippe Crozier, one of the event's primary organizers, observes Loubet's speech. Léandre gives him the title of

²⁴² Démy, *Essai historique sur les Expositions universelles de Paris*, 645.

“mayor of the Elysée Palace,” a tongue-in-cheek reference to the Merovingian head of royal household. Above them all, the virgin Marianne watches and gives her blessing.²⁴³ (Figure 3.6)



Figure 3.6: Charles Léandre. “Au Banquet des maires: La Table présidentielle.” *Le Rire* 319, 6 October 1900.

Le Rire's deviation from its own publicity campaign signaled a broader problem: general interest in the spectacle of the century was plummeting. As the public's attention shied away from the Exposition, the ongoing debate within the press's editorial pages raged over the fair's efficacy, usefulness, and symbolic meaning for the future to come.²⁴⁴ The *Maison du Rire*, however, faded quietly from view. By the Exposition's end, *Le Rire* had reduced publicity features for the *Maison* from focal point to back-page byline. The journal announced the *Maison*'s closure in its October 20 issue: a cover illustration by Léandre depicted Émile Loubet

²⁴³ *Le Rire* no. 309 (6 October 1900).

²⁴⁴ See Geppert, *Fleeting Cities*, 97-100, and Soppelsa, "Paris's 1900 Universal Exposition," 296-298.

wheeling George I of Greece and Leopold of Belgium through the Exposition's monumental gate in a pushcart. The caption simply read: "We're closing!"²⁴⁵

The 1900 Exposition officially closed on 12 November. In the final weeks, *Le Rire* announced the Maison would be dismantled and its collection of original artworks available for sale to any interested parties. The promotion emphasized in particular the friezes of Métivet Delaw, and Roubille, as well as Léandre's hand-sculpted marionettes that appeared in *Les Pantins du siècle*. Priority was given to subscribers in Paris, who could write directly to *Le Rire*'s editorial offices at 122 rue Réaumur. Unsold works would thereafter embark on a brief tour of the countryside before heading to public auction on 24 February 1901.²⁴⁶

Official reports issued upon the Exposition's closing confirmed a dismal truth: the fair had proven to be a financial sinkhole and unequivocal disappointment. Figures for attendance and revenue had fallen well short of the commission's projections. Commissioner-General Picard reported 50,860,801 admissions in total between the Paris site and the annex at the Bois de Vincennes. A record attendance of any World's Fair event, the number nevertheless fell short of the expected turnout of 65 million.²⁴⁷ Figures of the financial deficit incurred over the course of the Exposition vary, though estimates typically range between a net loss of 1 to 2 million francs.²⁴⁸ The Maison du Rire, despite its critical acclaim and seeming popularity, incurred a net loss of 300,000 francs.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁵ Charles Léandre, "On ferme!" in *Le Rire* no. 311 (20 October 1900).

²⁴⁶ *Le Rire* nos. 314. See also the official catalogue of the auction, *Frises, Panneaux, Médaillons lustres, etc. ayant décoré la "Maison du Rire" à l'Exposition universelle* (Paris: Hôtel Drouot, 1901).

²⁴⁷ Démy, *Essai historique sur les Expositions Universelles de Paris*, 620-631.

²⁴⁸ Démy, *Essai historique sur les Expositions Universelles de Paris*, 625. For his data, Démy cites *Bulletin: Journal des Economistes* (15 July 1901), 107.

²⁴⁹ Rodolphe Bringer, *Trente ans d'humour*, 187. See also Gabriel de Lautrec, *Souvenirs des jours sans souci*, 100-101.

The “Juven Affair”

By the end of the summer, it was clear to all the concessioners of the Rue de Paris that the Exposition’s project had proven disastrous, and that some recourse was necessary to rectify their losses. In light of their shared struggles with financial setbacks, the directors of the Rue de Paris pavilions took collective action against the Exposition commission to combat their slump. At the suggestion of Madame de Chevigné, the proprietor of the *Auberge des cadets de Gascogne* restaurant neighboring the Maison du Rire, the concessioners unionized, following the example of their counterparts in the Champ de Mars. In September, they threatened to close shop in protest of the premature opening and delayed installations of critical infrastructure. In response, the Minister of Commerce negotiated a compromise: the concessioners would instead seek redress through the proper legal channels. As such, the concessioners of the Rue de Paris simultaneously filed grievances with the Exposition commission’s administrative court.²⁵⁰ Their claims sought compensation for damages of varying amounts, contending that the commission failed to uphold key promises as stipulated in the terms and conditions of their contracts. Commissioner-General Picard later derided their complaints in his official report as “louder and more deafening than even the parades.”²⁵¹

In the case of the Maison du Rire, Félix Juven’s complaint enumerated five separate claims for remuneration, totaling 260,000 francs. The first three clauses were identical across every complaint on behalf of the Rue de Paris. Firstly, a claim for 59,829 francs, just over a month’s rent on the pavilion’s site, asserted the right to compensation due to the administration’s deprivation of use, owing to the delay between the Exposition’s premature inauguration and the

²⁵⁰ Bringer, *Trente ans d’humour*, 186.

²⁵¹ Alfred Picard, *Exposition universelle internationale de 1900: Rapport général administratif et technique*, t. VII (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1902), 328.

effective opening of operations of the Maison. The second claim alleged the administration defaulted on fulfilling its promises to concessioners. The claim is itemized into three parts: the administration's failure to decorate the banks of the Seine, a lack of adequate lighting, and absence of official inaugural festivities; the closure of crucial pedestrian walkways and points of entry; and "changing the character" of the Rue de Paris. The third claimed a reimbursement of funds paid to the committee responsible for electricity and lighting. The last two claims were specific to the conditions of the Maison du Rire: reimbursement for the cost of installing accumulators in light of the administration's delay to supply electric current to the site, and reimbursement of the licensing fee required to operate a bar inside the Maison when the administration blocked the furnishing of the bar.²⁵²

The Exposition's administrative court began session just days after the fair had ended. Three magistrates composed the tribunal: one representing the commission, one representing the concessioners, and the presiding chairman as a neutral third party. Prominent finance lawyer Henri Barboux presided. Attorney for the Council of State and Court of Cassation Georges Devin represented the commission. Edgard Vatin, attorney for the Paris Court of Appeals, represented the concessioners, including Juven.

The concessioners of the Rue de Paris presented their cases beginning in December. Hearings lasted several weeks, and the court promulgated its decision on December 31. For Juven's complaint, the bench considered a broad range of evidence dating back to Juven's initial inquiry and correspondence with the commission, terms and conditions agreed for the rent and construction of the Maison du Rire, receipts of deposit and payment, as well as affidavits by

²⁵² AN F/12/4353, 192.

Juven and the commissioners. The tribunal dismissed Juven's case, ruling that he was not entitled to any amount of compensation from the commission.

The legal basis of the decision referred, on the first three claims, to the decision rendered in the case of the Bonshommes Guillaume complaint: the commission was not at fault for "false promises" or inadequate provision of lighting and electricity due to the explicit terms of the concessioners' contracts. On the issue of the Rue de Paris' early closing times and delayed opening, the court claimed that the Maison du Rire did not experience any real financial setback in the month of April, despite only being open the last five days of the month. On the issue of "abusive competition" between concessioners on the Rue de Paris, the court cited the commission's terms and conditions. For issues specific to Juven's claim, apart from the other concessioners of the Rue de Paris, the court further denied the commission's legal responsibility. The decision maintained, on the issue of the placement of hydraulic accumulators, that the contractor responsible for supplying steam power to concessioners on the Champs-Élysées was the party liable for damages, not the commission. On the issue of the Maison du Rire's unfurnished bar, the decision referred to the contract, which stipulated the bar must be confined to the pavilion's interior, and not extend outdoors. The Maison du Rire was thus held to be in violation of that article, and thus denied any compensation from the commission. The same decision extended to the rest of the Rue de Paris, though the Guillaume brothers were ultimately awarded 2,500 francs for the commission's late delivery of construction materials.²⁵³

In absolving itself of legal responsibility for the Rue de Paris's setbacks, the commission prompted Juven to scale back his ambition to grow *Le Rire* beyond the page. The immense losses

²⁵³ AN F/12/4353, 192-193. For a synopsis of the minutes of the court's session reproduced in the press, see also "Sentences du Tribunal arbitral de l'exposition," in *Le Figaro*, 5 January 1901, 2.

Juven incurred at personal expense halted further experimentation for the time being. In the Exposition's immediate aftermath, *Le Rire* sought to reestablish and grow a routine familiarity, and directed its attention to innovating the content of its printed pages. Print would remain Juven's primary focus for the first decade of the century: *Le Rire* ran more special focus issues, integrated sponsored advertisements and content, and full-color illustrations. Meanwhile, Juven continued to grow the catalogue of his own proprietary publishing house, tying it in to *Le Rire*'s advertising space. That venture would prove fruitful throughout the years to come.

Conclusion: Interpreting the Maison du Rire

Contemporary observers and historians alike have described the Maison in uniformly disheartening terms as an abject, unequivocal failure. Accounting solely for material gains and Juven's motive to turn a profit on the brand profile of *Le Rire*, it is a reasonable proposition to read the Maison as a disappointment. As previously mentioned, the Maison du Rire ultimately cost Félix Juven a net loss of 300,000 francs. The project's artistic director, Rodolphe Bringer, ultimately abandoned his post during the Rue de Paris's summer slump, leaving Paris in August to vacation in the countryside.²⁵⁴

Woven into the shortcomings of the larger Exposition, the Maison du Rire was a victim of circumstance, of poor planning, and the rigidities of a centralized administration whose priorities explicitly lay elsewhere. Peter Soppelsa's research on the 1900 Exposition has attempted to demonstrate the true extent of the Exposition's shortcomings, while demonstrating that the language framing the fair as an "urban disaster" or calamitous failure was largely politically motivated, the invention of conservative critics who sought to undermine and discredit

²⁵⁴ Bringer, *Trente ans d'humour*, 187.

republican institutions and their “progressive conception of urban modernity.”²⁵⁵ The event indeed suffered from manifold setbacks and technical difficulties, some fatal: construction accidents, mechanical and power failures, and transportation collisions, as well as high-profile crimes, among them. The impact of such setbacks on the overall functioning of the exposition, however, was ultimately negligible: the state ultimately decided to discontinue holding World’s Fairs in Paris, but for the six months that the capital of France played host to the international community in 1900, the show went on.

Just as the disastrous nature of the overall 1900 Exposition was overstated, characterizing the Maison du Rire as a total failure was, and remains, an exaggerated editorialization. Laurent Bihl has noted that notwithstanding its steep upfront costs, the Maison netted 133,878.10 francs in ticket sales, placing 21st of the 53 exhibits of the Rue de Paris, a wholly unremarkable and middling overall performance that hardly warrants the designation of failure.²⁵⁶ Moreover, positive critical reception and sustained coverage within multiple prominent outlets of the Parisian daily and weekly press point to a tangible public taste and critical interest in the Maison’s programming. On this point, Bihl’s assessment, I feel, is correct: the wider (albeit limited) corpus of evidence available suggests that the Maison du Rire was not nearly the flop its chroniclers have intimated it to be. Rather, I am inclined to believe the financial lessons of the Maison du Rire were instructive: the Maison proved an edifying trial-and-error experiment for an entrepreneur who sought to build upon his successes in the satirical press by expanding his franchise into a multimedia entertainment brand. The Maison du Rire ultimately did not achieve

²⁵⁵ Soppelsa, “Paris’s 1900 Universal Exposition,” 272.

²⁵⁶ Laurent Bihl, *La grande mascarade parisienne*, 519.

the commercial success he sought, but proved a valuable learning experience for future efforts to develop *Le Rire* beyond the confines of the printed page.

The significance of the Maison du Rire cannot be measured, however, in purely material terms. In its fraught six months of operation as part of the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900, *Le Rire*'s pavilion realized a vision that vindicated humor's integral place in French cultural identity and memory as an art unto itself. The Maison du Rire celebrated the comic as an art apart, an essential constituent component of French civilization as well as a universal facet of human life. The humor it celebrated, in both its décor and its programming, was narrowly conceptualized and highly idealized, drawing on the lasting influence of Rabelais. It drew on both premodern historical tropes of laughter as a bond of communal life and as a gently subversive force for change. It was a folkloric laughter that celebrated old local customs from across Europe, at the expense of the worldly and stately modernity heralded elsewhere in the larger Exposition. Whatever its revenues, the project proved that *Le Rire*'s sense of humor continued to effectively capture the public imagination, and directly prefigured Juven's imminent successes in the first decade of the twentieth century, branching *Le Rire* into a comic publishing house as well as annual exhibition space for the *Salon des Humoristes*.

CHAPTER IV. *L'HUMOUR C'EST MOI: LE RIRE* AND THE GROWTH OF FÉLIX JUVEN'S
PUBLISHING EMPIRE, 1900-1914

The ordeal of the Maison du Rire had proven a financial setback that precipitated long-term change for both *Le Rire* and the business practices of Félix Juven's publishing enterprise. Juven had been forced to offset his losses by organizing a sale of the artworks that had adorned the Maison's edifice and interiors. Mounting tensions between Juven and Arsène Alexandre over the management of the Maison had led to Alexandre's resignation in the summer of 1901, eventually being replaced by contributing writer and humorist Rodolphe Bringer, who had also helped plan the operation of the Maison.²⁵⁷ But such changes, despite the losses they incurred, did not augur a looming sense of ruin. To the contrary, the Maison, though a miscalculated letdown, also marked a strategic point of departure for Juven and *Le Rire*.

Juven ably learned the lessons of the Maison du Rire's shortcomings. Determined not to be dissuaded from potential growth opportunities, Juven's experience at the 1900 Exposition Universelle inaugurated a period of profound expansion and experimentation for his publishing enterprise. Alexandre's departure from *Le Rire*, and eventual replacement at the editorial helm by Rodolphe Bringer, ceded Juven greater creative control over the journal's affairs, but also signaled a shift away from the journal's sole focus on the print medium. Instead, the period between 1901 and 1914 was marked by a period of multifaceted and multi-directional growth.

This chapter explores the tensions and context underlying that period of profound commercial growth. On one hand, Juven was shrewdly attentive to the changing tides of the publishing industry and consumer tastes. Seizing on both the industrial advances of printing

²⁵⁷ Rodolphe Bringer, *Trente ans d'humour*, 179-180, and Gabriel de Lautrec, *Souvenirs des jours sans souci*, 100.

technologies as well as the volatile and contentious nature of political discourse, Juven further cemented *Le Rire*'s unrivaled place as the standard-bearer of modern comic publishing. Constantly incorporating novelties to reinvent the capabilities of *Le Rire*'s printed content, the continued growth of *Le Rire* in turn drove the growth of Juven's foray into new fruitful avenues of expansion away from the printed page. As such, *Le Rire* became the driving engine of Juven's transformation into a media baron. The journal and its name became the foundation and flagship product of a much larger multimedia enterprise. Alongside his other periodical holdings, *Le Rire* was integrated into one division of a larger corporate umbrella after Juven reconstituted his business as a publicly traded holding company in 1904. In addition to periodicals, Juven grew his proprietary publishing house's print catalogue into an expansive collection of titles in fiction, illustrated albums and gift books, specialized trade market titles, seasonal gifts, and even instructional materials for use in public primary and secondary schools. As Juven's business holdings grew, so too did the promotional utility of *Le Rire* as a vehicle for publicity.

Indeed, *Le Rire* was central to Juven's strategy for commercial growth, both as a tool of self-promotion and as the source of prestige for Juven's brand. In the period between 1901 and 1914, *Le Rire* effectively became just as effective a promotional forum as it was an organ of graphic satire, broadcasting the sale of seasonal and ephemeral novelties, deluxe reprints of back issues or supplementary volumes, or the works of its contributing artists. After *Le Rire*'s most prolific contributors independently formed a professional association for cartoonists under the name the *Société des dessinateurs humoristes* in 1904, *Le Rire* also became involved in the promotion of their professional activities, including banquet dinners, galas, festivals, and exhibitions. Beginning in 1907, under the auspices of *Le Rire*, Juven directly intervened in the

professional development of the cartoonists in his employ, backing and sponsoring the exhibition of their work at an annual *Salon des Humoristes*.

The total effect of these activities was multifaceted and profound. Commercial success brought immense, if impermanent, fortune, and generated new tensions between the media baron and the artists under his patronage. Prosperity was not without its difficulties, as professional disagreements ballooned into intractable rupture in 1910, and in 1912, seemingly at the apogee of its success, Juven's holding company was dissolved and its assets liquidated. The Maison Juven ceased to be a functioning publishing house, but his periodical holdings, as an independent division, were sheltered from the fallout, and continued operation uninterrupted until the outbreak of world war in August 1914.

Nevertheless, both Juven and *Le Rire* exerted an immense influence on the illustrated press and cultural life of Paris in this period.²⁵⁸ The fits and starts of Juven's larger business trajectory had little impact upon the popularity of *Le Rire*'s content or the prominent voice it had in the current affairs of Paris and the national community at large. *Le Rire* remained continually relevant and powerful, adapting with ease to the mercurial rhythms of both national and international politics, culture, and society. The journal's influence, relative to its competitors in the illustrated and satirical press, was unrivaled in scope, and it remained interwoven in the fabric of Parisian life after the turn of the twentieth century as it was before.

Félix Juven & Cie: The Rise and Fall of a Maison d'édition

²⁵⁸ See for example, Francis Carco, *Les Humoristes*, 41, and Fabrice Erre and Bertrand Tillier, "Du journal à l'illustré satirique" in Dominique Kalifa et al., eds. *La Civilisation du journal: histoire culturelle et littéraire de la presse française au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2011), 417-435.

At the time of the *Maison du Rire*'s debut at the 1900 Exposition Universelle, *Le Rire* had been in publication for only six years. In that time, director Félix Juven had grown his publishing business into an expansive and multifaceted enterprise, largely on the back of *Le Rire*. He had entered the industry only a decade earlier in 1889, at the age of 28. Prior to his publishing career, he had studied law before serving eight years' active service in the French Army, earning an officer's commission in 1884 and resigning his commission in November 1889. While enlisted, Juven had regularly contributed as a military correspondent to a host of Parisian newspapers, among them *Le Cri du Peuple*, *L'Événement*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Gil Blas*, *Le Paris*, and *Le Petit Journal*. He had authored seven volumes, which he published variously with Pierre-Jules Hetzel and Georges Decaux, the patron of Albert Robida and co-founder of La Librairie illustrée, the preeminent satirical publishing house in France in the second half of the nineteenth century. Upon leaving the service in 1889, Juven joined with Decaux and J. Louis Paulmier as a partner of the Paulmier & Cie publishing house, which had published since 1887 the bi-weekly illustrated literary magazine *La Lecture*, as well as the Edgar Sanderson method of language-learning manuals. Upon Paulmier's death in 1893, Juven took over the business, and Decaux, in declining health, conferred the collections of the Librairie illustrée to Armand-Désiré Montgrédien and Jules Tallandier, respectively, allowing a space for Juven to enter the illustrated publishing market as an independent player and rival to his elder colleague. As the head of the now rebranded Félix Juven & Cie. publishing house, Juven moved his offices to 10 rue Saint-Joseph, around the corner from the printing presses of the Rue du Croissant. He acquired the *Revue universelle des inventions nouvelles*, renaming it *La Vie scientifique* and appointing popular science journalist Max de Nansouty as editor in chief. The following year, in 1894, Juven founded several new periodical projects: *La Revue technique*, a bi-monthly magazine

dedicated to industrial engineering and public works technology; the acquisition of two cycling periodicals, the weekly *La Bicyclette* and daily *Paris-Vélo*; and *Le Rire*.²⁵⁹

From the beginning, Juven understood the utility of self-promotion. *La Lecture*, *La Vie scientifique*, and *Le Rire* all incorporated publicity for the Juven publishing house, advertising new acquisitions, seasonal sales and gifts, and cross-promoting one another as constituent parts of that enterprise. The formula seemingly worked, as Juven enjoyed commercial success unparalleled both in scope and rapidity. The popularity of *Le Rire* in particular prompted the young press baron to explore new avenues of growth, both diversifying his publishing catalogue and finding innovative content for his existing titles. As *Le Rire* embarked on puzzle contests, special issues, and deluxe supplements, Juven expanded his catalogue, incorporating new acquisitions from competing publishers that included collected series, standalone works, and periodicals alike. The release of new titles or promotional sales at Juven's headquarters on the rue Saint-Joseph appeared frequently and prominently in the advertisement pages of *Le Rire*, typically on pages 10 and 11.

Le Rire was central to the overall growth of Juven's business, and functioned as the publishing house's flagship product and brand. The journal had reported its sales at launch at 100,000 copies for the debut issue, a figure which was often reproduced in later estimations of the journal's sales around the year 1900, and whose veracity is suspect due to self-promotional interests.²⁶⁰ However, the success of *Le Rire* was doubtless integral to the expansion of Juven's

²⁵⁹ All abovementioned details may be found in Lucien Layus, *La Librairie à l'Exposition Universelle de 1900* (Paris: au Cercle de la Librairie, 1900), 105. Announcements for *La Bicyclette* and *Paris-Vélo* can be found in *Le Rire* as early as issue 2 (24 November 1894), 11.

²⁶⁰ There is yet no definitive data regarding *Le Rire*'s weekly or annual sales found in the existing historical record. *Le Rire* frequently vaunted its own success in nonspecific terms, typically to advertise sales of back issues or promotional limited-edition collections, but often referenced the figure of 100,000 copies for weekly sales. Outside references to *Le Rire*'s sales in print sources are scarce and largely anecdotal, but vary between averages of 100,000

portfolio. By 1898, the collected volumes and illustrated albums of *Le Rire*'s cartoonists, as well as back-inventory of special issues and written works by affiliated humorists under the "Petite collection du *Rire*" product line, accounted for nearly half of Juven's total catalogue.²⁶¹ The success of that product line enabled Juven to further diversify his holdings: later that same year, Juven founded *La Vie illustrée* to gain exposure to the burgeoning technology of photogravure printing and explore the market appeal of photography within the illustrated press. Simultaneously, he bought out his primary competition, Calmann-Lévy's longstanding *L'Univers illustré*, and later merged it with his own publication.

The significance of *Le Rire* as a promotional space, whether for itself, for Juven's business, or increasingly for events, exhibitions, festivities, and sales related to comic art and the work of *Le Rire*'s artists grew considerably over time. The journal had always included some promotional element for the arts, including theatrical and literary review columns for recently released works. Juven had quickly sought to merchandize *Le Rire*'s name for promotional tie-in products and ephemera, beginning as early as Christmas 1894 with the marketing of a collectible "carton du *Rire*" for the display of the journal's first seven issues. Thereafter, reissued collected volumes of back-issues, as well as souvenirs, puzzles, gifts, and knick-knacks became an increasingly visible part of both *Le Rire* and Juven's business.

The increasing importance of merchandising and publicity to *Le Rire*'s brand profile was reflected in the printed content of the journal itself. Jules Depaquit was commissioned to design a weekly rebus contest beginning in February 1895, and contests became increasingly frequent in

and 200,000 copies per weekly issue for the period between 1894 and 1914. See Bihl, *La Grande Mascarade Parisienne*, 575-577.

²⁶¹ See Félix Juven & Cie., éditeurs, *Catalogue général 1898*. Held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Fonds 8.Q10B.

1896 and 1897. Retrospective collected volumes, reissued in “deluxe” formats, appeared periodically. Beginning in 1896, *Le Rire* began marketing a seasonal almanac that amalgamated content from Juven’s periodicals as a New Year’s gift, under the title *L’Année illustrée*. The idea was revived perennially, and renamed *L’Almanach du Rire* beginning in 1901, and published through 1913.²⁶² In January 1902, *Le Rire* ran a *Fête des Rois* giveaway contest to promote their almanac, likening the contest to a *galette des rois* game: printed tokens were to be hidden in five copies of that year’s almanac, hidden on pages specified in the 18 January 1902 issue of *Le Rire*. Anyone in possession of such a copy could redeem the token for 100 francs through certified mail to *Le Rire*, and have their names published in the journal.²⁶³ *Le Rire* also seasonally promoted additional almanacs that Juven acquired for publication: from 1903 to 1913, that of clairvoyant and chiromancer Madame de Thèbes; the illustrated almanac of *Le Rire* contributing artist Albert Guillaume from 1905 to 1913; and occasionally those published by other presses that featured the contributions of *Le Rire*’s most celebrated artists.²⁶⁴

As a result of ever-growing sales, *Le Rire* expanded its issue size from 12 to 16 pages in October 1899, without increasing the price of sale. The change was made chiefly to accommodate more third-party advertising space, as well as incorporate more large-format illustrations. The change accompanied a significant reorganization of the Maison Juven. Holiday promotional sales became a permanent gift collection of *livres d’étrennes*. Juven’s periodicals began advertising new releases and acquisitions from the publishing catalogue around the

²⁶² See “Le roi des almanachs” in *Le Rire* 101 (10 October 1896), 4. Another advertisement in color appeared in *Le Rire* 106 (14 November 1896), 12.

²⁶³ The contest was first announced in *Le Rire* 374 (4 January 1904), 13.

²⁶⁴ *Le Rire* advertised, for example, the *Almanach de Paris et d’ailleurs* (Paris: D.L. Pélet, 1903).

holiday season, in advance of the issues released around Christmas and New Year's. *Le Rire* promoted the product line annually thereafter until the dissolution of the publishing house.

This pattern of growth continued. At the end of March 1900, on the eve of the Exposition Universelle's inauguration, the Maison Juven moved shop. From the Rue Saint-Joseph, the company relocated around the corner, to a much larger space, occupying three floors of 122 Rue Réaumur, to integrate all aspects of editorial production.²⁶⁵ The Maison Juven resided at that address for nearly nine years, and saw the apogee of its success and growth there. After founding and selling a family-oriented children's revue in late 1904, *La Joie des enfants*, Juven founded a sister periodical to *Le Rire*, a monthly titled *Fantasio*, more explicitly dedicated to Parisian entertainments and performing arts, in 1906.

In February 1909, the Maison Juven moved to 14 Boulevard Poissonnière on the Grands Boulevards for over three years. That same year, Juven acquired additional branch locations for both sales and offices at 13 Rue de l'Odéon and 7 Rue des Cannelles. In January 1912, Juven helped launch *Le Miroir* as a weekly supplement to *Le Petit Parisien*, showcasing the prolific use of journalistic photography. In March 1912, the limited partnership *Société d'éditions et de publications* that Juven had formed to spin off his publishing and bookselling enterprise from his periodical holdings in 1908 was dissolved, even with a positive balance sheet of 11,500 francs in assets and 300 in liabilities.²⁶⁶ In May, liquidation of the publishing house's holdings had begun: Boivin et Cie. acquired the *Livres de prix et d'étrennes* collection. In November, Flammarion acquired Juven's 95-centime octavo collection. By the following February, Hatier took over the *Librairie Classique* imprint, and in March, Édouard Mignot of *La Renaissance du Livre* took

²⁶⁵ See Rodolphe Bringer, *Trente ans d'humour*, 174.

²⁶⁶ Act of Dissolution, March Article 5.

over the *Librairie Générale* collection of books priced at 3.50 francs.²⁶⁷ In October 1912, liquidation forced Juven to downsize. His periodical holdings, including the flagship products *Le Rire* and *Fantasio*, had remained administratively independent of the publishing catalogue, and their offices were regrouped at 1 Rue de Choiseul.

The reasons for the Maison Juven's sudden dissolution in a moment of prosperous growth remain mysterious, as the archival record provides no hint as to why the company failed. Questions abound and historians may only speculate as to what happened: did Juven lose money in other investments, or experience growing frustration and dissatisfaction in his affairs, and simply want to retire from the publishing enterprise altogether? In my estimation, it is likely, though currently not verifiable, that protracted conflict with contributing artists in the wake of a publicly fought 1910 schism contributed to a growing unease and deadened ambition, prompting Juven to partially withdraw from his responsibilities as press tycoon, and instead concentrate on the more familiar labor of managing his periodical holdings.

What is far more certain, however, is *Le Rire*'s position as the engine that drove Juven's success. Despite his publishing house's sudden breakdown, Juven rapidly transformed a small portfolio of periodical holdings into a vast publishing empire over the course of a decade, recouping the losses of the Maison du Rire and surpassing perhaps even his own prognostications for growth. That growth, in turn, cemented *Le Rire*'s position as the preeminent and most powerful organ of the satirical press, and afforded it a renewed license to political expression and sense of political purpose.

²⁶⁷ Pascal Fouché, "Chronologie de l'édition française de 1900 à nos jours," <http://www.editionfrancaise.com/resultat.php?nbrep=40&rec=juven&jourdeb=-1&moisdeb=-1&annedeb=-1&Valider.x=0&Valider.y=0>. Website accessed 19 September 2021.

Le Rire and the Politics of the Belle Époque, 1901-1912

Le Rire had cultivated its readership and reputation in its earliest years on the pertinence and quality of its political satire. Willette and Léandre, in particular, had made the journal's covers and color inserts an iconic fixture of the Parisian mediascape and even the visual mosaic of the Parisian boulevard.²⁶⁸ After the turn of the twentieth century, however, mordant political satire and caricatures grew more infrequent in *Le Rire*, as the journal's repertory grew increasingly diverse. That is not to say that *Le Rire* deemphasized or tabled political satire as unfashionable; on the contrary, more sporadic use of political caricature and mockery of public officials permitted a certain license to more scathing invectives against the state and its functionaries.

A number of factors, both structural and intentional, explain *Le Rire*'s shifting approach to political humor after 1900. The internal partisan divisions inflamed by the Dreyfus Affair gradually subsided following President Loubet's pardon and general amnesty for implicated parties on the eve of the 1900 Exposition Universelle, which had captivated the French press for its duration. On the international stage, relations with Britain and Germany had remained palpably tense in the preceding decade, but also faded in immediacy as colonial or revanchist war seemed a less and less likely reality after 1898. By 1904, diplomatic ententes had been secured with both Britain and Italy, leaving Germany isolated as France's only continental and imperial rival. *Le Rire* had chronicled those international tensions in detailed special and

²⁶⁸ *Le Rire* was a ubiquitous sight at Parisian newsstands and bookstores, and the covers by Léandre and Willette in particular were celebrated, becoming iconic sights on the city boulevards, serving to stand out against competition. A cover illustration and interior double-page color insert by Jules Grandjouan in August 1902, about the inundation of advertising on Parisian boulevards, actually parodied the phenomenon. Grandjouan depicts a newsstand overwhelmed by titles of inferior quality advertising quasi-pornographic female nudes on their covers. Above the scores of competing titles, crowning the kiosk, hangs an issue of *Le Rire* featuring a cover caricature of a nude woman by Léandre. See *Le Rire* 406 (16 August 1902), 8 and 9.

thematic issues, but the novelty of that special format had declined. Compounded by shifting policy prerogatives in government that increasingly focused on securing the legitimacy of republican political culture in the wake of the Dreyfus Affair, *Le Rire*'s gaze, alongside that of much of the wider French public, turned toward the internal economic, social, and cultural developments that characterized the *Belle Époque* in France.

What that shift meant in practice was an increasing emphasis on commercial promotion of local arts, festivities, and entertainments in Paris, in a concerted effort to integrate *Le Rire*'s brand name into the public life of the elite Tout-Paris, which compelled its directors to toe a more politically moderate, ambiguous editorial line, so as not to offend readers' sensibilities. However, despite its new, sanitized, even toothless approach to political satire, which privileged critique over proposing defined solutions to perceived problems, *Le Rire* remained fully attentive to the ebbs and flows of state intrigue in the new century. The government of Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau, in office since 1899, continued to be a salient target of scorn, ridicule, and abuse for artists like Léandre, Grandjouan, and Fernand Fau, even as the Prime Minister led the Bloc des Gauches to victory over conservative opposition in the legislative elections of 1902 before resigning his post due to ailing health. (Figure 4.1) After Radical Émile Combes formed a new government, the new minister's unyielding anticlericalism became a favorite target for the likes of Léandre and Jeannot.



Figure 4.1: Charles Léandre. “À Saint-Étienne : répétition générale avant les élections” in *Le Rire* 376 (18 January 1902), 8-9. Caption reads: “Waldeck-Rousseau, to the candidates – The words don’t matter, but all in unison to the same tune, and don’t forget—I set the tone.”

Indeed, if *Le Rire* had any coherent political program between the denouement of the Dreyfus Affair and the coming of World War I, it was oppositional hostility toward the Radicals and their parliamentary allies. Every major policy initiative or legislative reform under the Radical governments of Émile Combes, Georges Clemenceau, and Aristide Briand caught the ire of *Le Rire*’s cartoonists. Though *Le Rire* enjoyed the commonplace ridicule of ministers, deputies, and above all the President of the Republic, its favorite target remained the pomp and ceremony of Republican statecraft itself. Whether with regard to foreign affairs, corruption scandals, or the private affairs of elected officials, *Le Rire* relished the opportunity to lay blame with the Radical republicans, who increasingly seemed a permanent political class weathering the instability of their own governments.

The eruption of the *Affaire des fiches* in 1904, and the ongoing debates over government anticlericalism that the scandal inaugurated, provided a salient occasion for *Le Rire* to deride the parliamentary republic yet again. The public outrage had begun in September, after nationalist

deputy Jean Guyot de Villeneuve infamously exposed War Minister Louis André to have overseen an extensive anti-Catholic internal surveillance program to preclude religious military officers from promotion, using connections in the Grand Orient masonic lodge. The revelations in the Chamber of Deputies had provoked a brawl that saw nationalist deputy Gabriel Sylveton slap the Minister of War and face prosecution, culminating in his mysterious death on the eve of his trial's opening. The scandal ultimately precipitated the collapse of Émile Combes' government and furor over the function and power of Freemasonry in French politics. *Le Rire* published a special issue in December, in the days immediately following Sylveton's death.

Parodying the sequential press releases of the files Villeneuve produced as evidence in his revelation of the scandal in the Chamber, *Le Rire* produced “6 of 74,000” of its own files, caricaturing various entertainers as persons of interest to the army.²⁶⁹ When the scandal precipitated the



Figure 4.2: Charles Léandre. “La Fin d’un règne” in *Le Rire Nouvelle Série* 103 (21 January 1905), 8-9. Caption reads, referencing the *affaire des fiches*: “Bienaimé fells Bellan, Doumer takes out my old friend Henri [Brisson]...O great [Narcisse] Vadécart, we’re ruined!”

fall of the Combes government, culminating in the Prime Minister's resignation in January 1905 and replacement by the Minister of Finance, Maurice Rouvier, *Le Rire* delighted again with a double-page by Léandre. (Figure 4.2)

²⁶⁹ See *Le Rire* NS 97 (10 December 1904), 2.

Le Rire's interest in the *affaire des fiches* ballooned into a more general opposition to the mounting anticlericalism of the Radical Party, especially after their governments embarked on a reform campaign to disestablish the Catholic Church from state institutions and vice versa. Mounting hostilities between Paris and the Vatican captured much of *Le Rire*'s attention in 1904, especially as relations improved with both Britain and the unified Italian kingdom. When President Émile Loubet paid a state visit to Victor Emmanuel III of Italy in April 1904, Pope Pius X denounced the visit, the first state recognition of the unified Italian state by a Catholic country's leader, as a betrayal of the Church and disavowal of the papacy's temporal power, and refused to meet Loubet upon his visit to Rome. Sensing mounting tensions, *Le Rire* released a thematic issue dedicated to Loubet's visit. Though most of the issue was illustrated by Fernand Bac, a cover by Léandre lampooned the animosity shared between the French Republic and the Holy See: as the pope receives the French president, he weighs how to best insult Loubet, by excommunication or by blessing, concluding his blessing would be more offensive.²⁷⁰ The joke proved prescient, as the pope's rebuff prompted the Combes government to recall the French ambassador to the Holy See, severing relations with the Vatican.

The growing matter of republican anticlericalism proved a hot-button issue for *Le Rire*, which followed closely the tensions between Church and State over the course of 1904 and 1905. *Le Rire* made no false claims to neutrality in this matter, publishing only polemics critical of the republican state. Léandre, a vociferous supporter of Gallicanism under the terms of the 1801 Concordat, derided the republic as corrupt and driven by nefarious interests, anathema to the identity, values, and morals of the French nation. Hermann-Paul, in turn, scorned the Church. When the law finalizing the separation of Church and State was promulgated in December, *Le*

²⁷⁰ Charles Léandre, "Le Président en Italie," cover for *Le Rire* NS 65 (30 April 1904).

Rire began publishing a series by Léandre in seven parts, titled *Les Amoureux de Marianne*, depicting the presidential candidates vying to succeed Loubet at the end of his term, as potential suitors for Marianne in light of her imminent “divorce” from the Church. Alongside the series, *Le Rire* also ran a contest for readers to vote on which of the caricatured “blackballed” candidates would receive the fewest votes at the parliamentary congress session held to elect the president at Versailles. Those who guessed correctly would receive print copies of the entire seven-part series of Léandre’s caricatures. The contest and series culminated in a special issue dedicated to the parliamentary congress, illustrated by Léandre and Hermann-Paul, which professed to report on the body’s election of Armand Fallières as President of the Republic.²⁷¹

Interestingly, the vociferous opposition to state anticlericalism helped to revive the special issue format for *Le Rire*. Even after separation of Church and State became law in France, the journal’s interest in attacking the matter persisted as a means to continue releasing special issues. To mark the one-year anniversary of the law’s passage, *Le Rire* released an issue in December 1906 dedicated to the notion of *paradis laïque*, as quoted in a speech given by then-Minister of Labor René Viviani. The issue lampooned the policies championed by the parliamentary *Bloc des gauches* as heaven on earth, the Council of Ministers having supplanted the Greco-Roman pantheons and Christian saints in various views of paradise.²⁷² The refrain became a common thread of anti-Radical critique in *Le Rire*, who frequently mocked state efforts to nationalize Church property: in February 1907, after Pope Pius X had issued an addendum to his encyclical denouncing the disestablishment of the Catholic Church in France, *Le Rire* reproduced a lithograph by James Gilray (misspelled as *Gilbray*) lambasting the French

²⁷¹ Léandre’s first installment appeared, and the contest was announced, in *Le Rire* NS 148 (2 December 1905). The special issue appeared, with the contest winners announced, in *Le Rire* NS 156 (27 January 1906).

²⁷² See *Le Rire* NS 201 (8 December 1906), subtitled, “le paradis laïque.”

Revolution. The print depicts a Sans-Culotte fiddler, his clothing in tatters, defecating on the streetlamp used to hang the Pope, two friars, and a magistrate, while another cleric is guillotined before a mob. The original caption, translated into French, reads, “the pinnacle of Liberty: religion, justice, loyalty, and other boogymen of enlightened souls, goodbye!” (Figure 4.3)

After the din of anticlericalism had subsided after 1906, *Le Rire*'s political outbursts against the Radical Republic grew more infrequent, but no less zealous. Having moved on from the anticlerical debate, *Le Rire* continued its invective against the Clemenceau government by shifting its attentions to labor struggles, which had become newly topical in early 1906. A strike wave across France, beginning with CGT (*Confédération générale du travail*) syndicalists in Lens in the north after the Courrières mine disaster in March, had captured the journal's

attentions for much of that year. In the coming weeks, the movement had ballooned into a general strike wave, centered on the demand for an eight-hour workday.²⁷³ Even *Le Rire*'s own printer went on strike in late March, prompting the journal to briefly release two weeks' issues without color illustrations.²⁷⁴ By May Day 1906, *Le Rire* had published a multi-part serial by Lucien Métivet parodying the strike actions of the nouveau riche and bourgeois in solidarity with



Figure 4.3: “Plus cela change...” back cover illustration attributed to James [sic] Gilbray, in *Le Rire Nouvelle Série* 212 (23 February 1907), 16.

²⁷³ See Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, *Les luttes et les rêves : une histoire populaire de la France de 1685 à nos jours* (Paris: La Découverte), chapter 12.

²⁷⁴ See *Le Rire* NS 165 and 166 (31 March and 7 April 1906), 2.

the miners, as well as multiple full-page illustrations ridiculing Georges Clemenceau's authorization of the violent repression of strikes in Lens and Fressenville, and the arrests of the CGT leaders.²⁷⁵

The following year, a wave of strikes that included the Paris electricians (temporarily plunging the city into total darkness at night) and the infamous vintners' revolt in Languedoc compounded into a state crisis, amidst Finance Minister Joseph Caillaux's plan to reform the national tax code and establish a progressive individual income tax. *Le Rire* released yet another thematic issue, denouncing Caillaux's proposed reforms, in March 1907. A cover illustration by Roubille, titled "Robbery," shows Marianne, portly and robed in red, taking all the clothes from an emaciated, nude, decorated soldier, before departing his home: "You didn't seriously believe you'd have a woman like me for nothing?"²⁷⁶ Inside, full-page illustrations by Joan Cardona, Léandre, Jules Fontanez, Delaw, and Henri Goussé disparage Caillaux and the government as insatiably greedy and corrupt. Goussé's cartoon shows bourgeois taxpayers being sifted through the "national sieve," passing through the other side into poverty and misery.²⁷⁷

In the late spring and summer of 1907, the situation in Languedoc worsened. Unrest in the region swelled in support of the vintners' revolt after the socialist mayor of Narbonne, Ernest Farroul, took up the cause and advocated a tax strike against the government in Paris. A revolutionary committee in the region formed. Crowds ballooned in size as upwards of 250,000 people gathered in towns like Narbonne, Montpellier, Perpignan, Carcassonne, and Béziers. Jean Jaurès and Jules Guesde took up the cause in the Chamber of Deputies. Clemenceau resorted to

²⁷⁵ See Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, *Les luttes et les rêves*, chapter 12, as well as Michel Dreyfus, *Histoire de la CGT : cent ans de syndicalisme en France* (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 1995), 50-56.

²⁷⁶ Auguste Roubille, "Entolage," cover for *Le Rire* NS 215 (16 March 1907).

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

military force to suppress the crowds beginning in June. Clashes in Narbonne between protesters and the regiment garrisoned there and charged with protecting public buildings resulted in the 139th infantry opening fire on the crowd, killing 5, including a young girl at market, and wounding dozens more. At Béziers, a mutiny within the ranks of the 17th infantry regiment broke out after they were ordered to fire on a crowd. As the Midi seemed on the precipice of open revolt, an anti-fraud law protecting regional winegrowers was adopted, and Clemenceau survived a parliamentary vote of confidence, escaping any political fallout from his heavy-handed repression of the crisis.²⁷⁸

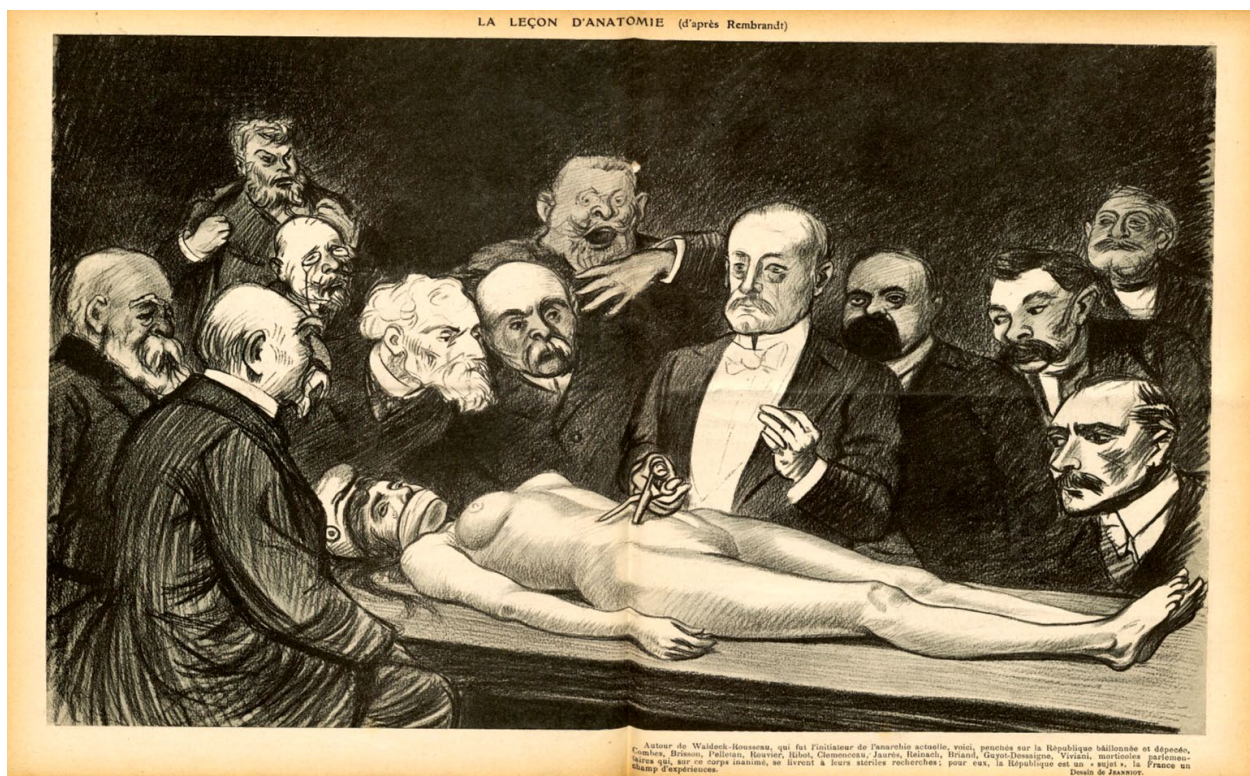


Figure 4.4: Pierre-Georges Jeannot. “La Leçon d’anatomie (d’après Rembrandt)” in *Le Rire Nouvelle Série* 231 (6 July 1907), 8-9. Caption reads: “Around Waldeck-Rousseau, the initiator of the present anarchy, are, hunched over the gagged and dissected [body of] the Republic, Combes, Brisson, Pelletan, Rouvier, Ribot, Clemenceau, Jaurès, Reinach, Briand, Guyot-Dessaigne, Viviani; parliamentarian-morticians who engage in their sterile research upon this inanimate corpse; for them, the Republic is a ‘subject,’ and France an experiment.”

²⁷⁸ See J. Harvey Smith, “Agricultural Workers and the French Wine-Growers’ Revolt of 1907” in *Past & Present* 79 (1978): 101-125.

Despite the clear left-wing, socialist motivations of the revolt in Languedoc, *Le Rire* joined the fracas on the side of the winegrowers, never to miss an opportunity to admonish the Clemenceau government's mishandling of the crisis. After the dust had settled, *Le Rire* released a thematic issue on 6 July dedicated to "Clemenceau the incompetent" and chronicling the "life and adventures of a Clown of State." Inside a double-page spread by Jeannot parodied Rembrandt's 1632 *Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp*, showing Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau, "the initiator of the present anarchy," and his entourage of ministers dissecting the corpse of Marianne. (Figure 4.4) A back cover, another Roubille contribution, shows "the horrors of peace" as Marianne contemplates the bloody carnage in the aftermath of the massacres at Narbonne.²⁷⁹

Though political content never fully disappeared from view thereafter, *Le Rire's* priorities had been in a state of flux since the turn of the century. Despite ongoing tensions and opposition to the governments of the Radical Party (*Le Rire* vociferously celebrated Clemenceau's resignation in July 1909), the journal's attentions increasingly lay elsewhere after 1907, with no special issues appearing until President Fallières' 1911 visit to Tunisia.²⁸⁰ Rather, *Le Rire* turned increasingly toward diversification and growth both on and off the page, focusing on technological novelties and industrial progress (aeronautics and aviation were of particular interest after 1908),²⁸¹ as well as its own expansion into a venue and sponsor of commercial

²⁷⁹ *Le Rire* NS 231 (6 July 1907).

²⁸⁰ *Le Rire* NS 431 (6 May 1911).

²⁸¹ France had been a pioneering force in the development of commercial and military aviation in the first decade of the twentieth century. Several important milestones had taken place in recent memory, including the inaugural *Salon de la locomotion aérienne* in December 1908 at the Grand Palais, followed by Louis Blériot's crossing of the English Channel by monoplane between Calais and Dover in July 1909 and the founding of the first military section dedicated to aeronautics within the French Army. In August 1910, Armand Dufaix crossed the length of Lake Geneva, and in September 1913, Roland Garros crossed the Mediterranean. *Le Rire* was acutely interested in such developments, dedicating two issues to aviation: See *Le Rire* NS 389 (16 July 1910), and *Le Rire* NS 568 (20 December 1913).

entertainments in Paris. Though the journal would always return, in some capacity, to matters of pressing political concern in French life, *Le Rire* progressively sought to profit from its promotional abilities, and integrate more closely into the fabric of entertainment life in Paris. This new direction ultimately proved fruitful and revitalized the growth of *Le Rire* and the Maison Juven more generally, but also brought new tensions to the publishing house.

Le Rire as a Promoter of Belle Époque Entertainments

The relationship between the Parisian satirical press and the wider milieu of the ever-expanding industry of commercial entertainments in the closing decades of the nineteenth century had been a durable one. Historians have well documented the extent to which the press had been transformed into one of the principal promotional vehicles for the burgeoning entertainment industry.²⁸² *Le Rire* had been no different, and promoted popular and commercial entertainments and festivities heavily since its inception.

The events of the Paris Carnival were of particular importance, playing a central role in the folkloric imaginary of Rabelais that had pervaded the world of bohemian Paris and the Montmartre cabarets in the years since 1880.²⁸³ For *Le Rire*, the Paris Carnival was a perennial focus. In its debut year, the festival commanded *Le Rire*'s fullest attention for the entirety of February and March 1895. Double-page features and cover illustrations caricatured the festive cortèges, like the Mid-Lenten Fête des Blanchisseuses. Writeups on the masked balls of the Opéra, Hôtel de Ville, Odéon, and student revelries in the Quartier Latin reported on the gaiety

²⁸² See especially Claude Bellanger et al., eds. *Histoire générale de la presse française* and Dominique Kalifa, ed. *La Civilisation du journal*, and Jacques Lethève, *La Caricature et la presse sous la IIIe République* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1961).

²⁸³ See, for example, Philip Dennis Cate and Mary Shaw, eds. *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabarets, Humor, and the Avant-Garde, 1875-1905* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), and Gabriel P. Weisberg, ed. *Montmartre and the Making of Mass Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

of the working classes and bourgeoisie alike during the Paris Carnival. Thereafter, *Le Rire*



Figure 4.5: Maurice Neumont. Promotional poster for the Bal Gavarni, organized by the Société des Peintres-Lithographes. Lithograph, 130 x 95 cm (Paris: Imprimerie J. Minot, 1902).

routinely made *Mi-Carême* a perennial special feature. In 1896, and again in 1897, *Le Rire* also promoted Adolphe Willette's *Promenade de la Vache enragée* in Montmartre, organized to lampoon the opulent revival of the *cortège du Boeuf Gras* in Paris that year and raise awareness of local poverty.²⁸⁴

In response to the enduring popularity of such festivities, Félix Juven sought to launch copycat events under the auspices of *Le Rire*'s name. In February 1900, *Le*

Rire organized a banquet dinner to honor Charles Léandre upon being awarded the rank of Chevalier in the Légion d'honneur. The opening of the Maison du Rire at the Exposition Universelle occupied much of *Le Rire*'s attentions until the fair's conclusion in late autumn of that year. Following the exhibition's lackluster financial performance, Juven delayed organizing new events for several years, but promoted the independent initiatives of *Le Rire*'s contributing artists.

The first of such initiatives, a costume ball and fundraiser at the Moulin Rouge, organized to support the construction of Denys Puech's monument to nineteenth-century artist and illustrator Paul Gavarni, was announced by the *Société des peintres-lithographes* in December 1901. Though planned as a joint effort between the Moulin Rouge and Jules Roque of *Le*

²⁸⁴ See Venita Datta, "A Bohemian Festival: La Fête de la Vache Enragée" in *Journal of Contemporary History* 28, No. 2 (1993): 195-213.

Courrier français, the organizing committee comprised a significant number of *Le Rire*'s most notable contributors: Maurice Neumont, who served as its secretary, also designed the event's promotional poster. (Figure 4.5) The event took place in April 1902, and *Le Rire* dedicated the following week's issue to Gavarni and featured a write-up of the ball as well as full-page illustrations paying tribute to the artist's influence.²⁸⁵ The carnivalesque celebration, recalling the Mid-Lenten corteges of the Boeuf Gras and Vache enragée, featured both a costume ball and comic parade of eleven floats, including Willette in costume as Louis Philippe leading his court in triumphal entry to the cabaret.²⁸⁶ Louis Morin recalled the "extraordinary" evening, in which crowds of "*Paris mondain* stopped by to see an age revived."²⁸⁷ In all, the celebration raised some 10,000 francs, nearly double its projected revenues, and received unanimous praise in the Parisian press. Another fundraising event, a matinée banquet at the Opéra-Comique, followed the next month.²⁸⁸

The enormous success of the Bal Gavarni prompted both Juven and the artists who had organized it to further consider, or reconsider, the economic viability of event planning as a promotional space for comic art. In Spring 1904, Louis Morin repurposed the formula of the themed costume ball as the basis for a charitable fundraiser, for the benefit of artists in need. Above all, the event hoped to raise money for donations to the artist Japhet, and especially the impoverished daughter of midcentury caricaturist and playwright Henry Monnier, who had created the archetypal caricature of the rigidly conservative Parisian bourgeois, Monsieur Joseph Prudhomme.²⁸⁹ The event was cross promoted in *Le Rire*, which announced on 28 May the

²⁸⁵ See *Le Rire* 389 (19 April 1902).

²⁸⁶ See *Les Humoristes 3: Vingt ans avant* (Paris: December 1924), 3-15.

²⁸⁷ See Louis Morin, *Montmartre s'en va* (Paris: Jean Borderel, 1908), 106.

²⁸⁸ As reported by Henry Hamel, the sitting president of the *Société des peintres lithographes*, in the *Journal des artistes* (27 April 1902), 3781.

²⁸⁹ See Louis Morin, "Le Bal Monnier" in *Les Humoristes 3*, 16-27.

inauguration of a mutual aid fund for artists in need, as well as the attractions planned for the Bal Monnier, which included objects, exhibits, floats, original artworks, as well as a raffle. The journal also announced that it would be in attendance as a boutique vendor, signaling Juven's sponsorship of the event.²⁹⁰ Concurrently, Juven had reconstituted his publishing house as a publicly traded *société anonyme*, with an initial market capitalization of 950,000 francs.²⁹¹

The Bal Monnier took place on the first of June at the Casino de Paris. Like its predecessor, contemporary observers acclaimed the event's success and joviality. In keeping with the satiric anti-bourgeois theme, the organizing committee banned undesirable bourgeois dress and character traits: tailcoats, boredom, pedantry, foolishness, and hypocrisy were expressly proscribed.²⁹² Less significant was the nature of the event, however, than its long-term implications for the professional activities of the artists who organized it. Parallel to the planning of the ball itself, the organizing committee had also laid the institutional groundwork and bylaws for a permanent, independent professional association of comic artists and cartoonists: the *Société des dessinateurs humoristes*. The purpose and function of the organization was twofold: firstly, "to encourage the development of comic art, and to give it the space in contemporary life that belongs to it"; and secondly, "to serve and assist its members by all means within its powers...offering, as means of action, to organize parties, performances, exhibitions, and all other events intended to promote the appreciation of *productions humoristiques*." That is to say, the organization intended to serve as a body for professional development, collective aid, and collective advocacy, integrated into a single apparatus. The association's bylaws established the

²⁹⁰ "Fête d'artistes ! Le triomphe de Joseph Prud'homme," in *Le Rire* NS 69 (28 May 1904), 13.

²⁹¹ The Acts of Creation and Dissolution of Juven's *société anonyme* under the name *Société d'édition et de publications* can be found in the Archives de Paris (AP) série DU3, the judicial archives of the Tribunal de commerce de la Seine, later Paris. For the act of creation, see D31U3-1176, f. 1475.

²⁹² See E. Lepage, "Le Triomphe de Monsieur Prudhomme" in *Le Journal* (15 May 1904), 2.

organization's framework: two tiers of membership, a general assembly as its principal decision-making body, an administrative council that comprised an executive committee and member delegates. The executive committee comprised four positions: Charles Léandre served as the body's first president and Louis Morin as vice president; Maurice Neumont, who had served as the secretary of the organizing committee for the Fête Gavarni, also served as the association's inaugural secretary; Abel Truchet served as treasurer.²⁹³

The formation of the *Société des dessinateurs humoristes* had a far-reaching impact on the lives of its members, the development of their work, and *Le Rire* itself. Though it was initially organized as a standing body for the planning of ancillary promotional and exhibition events like the Fête Monnier, the body also represented a new, formalistic development in the professionalization of comic art and publishing. An independent trade association for comic artists allowed for a greater degree of artistic and commercial autonomy, as well as collective advocacy and mediation of labor conditions with editors and publishers like Juven.

Initially, Juven and *Le Rire* were silent on the affairs and matters of the *Humoristes*. *Le Rire* promoted the Fête Monnier as the independent undertaking of *dessinateurs humoristes*, but stopped short of formally announcing the founding of their association. When the association again organized another fundraiser costume ball in the Spring of 1905 to honor the baroque illustrator and printmaker Jacques Callot, whose serial prints of *Les Grandes Misères de la guerre* in 1633 were instrumental to the history of sequential narrative in graphic art, *Le Rire* did

²⁹³ The 1904 bylaws of the *Société des dessinateurs humoristes* can be found in *L'Écho de Montmartre* 4, no. special: *La fête des humoristes et le bal Callot* (17 May 1905). BNF Tolbiac, FOL-Z-1016.

not promote the invent. Its sole mention of the ball appeared a week later, and instead cast it as the humorists' *fête Louis XIII*.²⁹⁴

Contemporary accounts avowed that the *fête Callot* of 1905 lacked the success of its two predecessors, a point that was later reiterated by the humorists themselves. Louis Morin attributed the problem to the presence of the bourgeois *élément mondain*, who stifled the atmosphere. Though the press was silent on the event's outcome, the *Société* lay effectively dormant for several years after the *fête Callot*, which was to be the last of the artists' independently organized themed costume balls. Apart from annual plenary assemblies, the association held no further promotional or charitable events until 1907, when Juven and *Le Rire* organized the inaugural *Salon des Humoristes* in tandem with the executive committee of the *Société des dessinateurs humoristes*.

In the meanwhile, the political tumult of the period between 1901 and 1907 returned focus again to *Le Rire* as the promotional hub and principal organ of comic artists' professional activities. Accompanying the resurgence of political satire in *Le Rire* was a revival of the special issue format and novelty ephemera like postcards, deluxe inserts, games, puzzles, and contests, all used effectively to promotional ends. Léandre's *Les Amoureux de Marianne*, for example, ran in seven installments during that year's presidential election cycle, between December 1905 and January 1906, as a promotional campaign for a reader contest in advance of the parliamentary congress that would elect a President. The terms of *Le Rire*'s contest were tied to the misfortunes of the electoral candidates: readers were to submit their choice for the candidates that they believed were to receive the fewest votes, as well as an estimate of how many. Whoever guessed

²⁹⁴ *Le Rire* NS 121 (27 May 1905), 6.

correctly, or came closest to the final tally, would receive Léandre's framed original draft. In the case that multiple readers guessed correctly, lots would be drawn.²⁹⁵ Twenty runners-up were to receive a deluxe color printing of the entire series of caricatures. At the end of the series, *Le Rire* commemorated the conclusion of the contest with two special issues. The first featured two deluxe illustrations by one L. Braun, depicting instances of "parliamentary jiu-jitsu," parodying recent brawls in the Chamber of Deputies. The second, dedicated to the plenary Congress convoked in mid-January to elect the President at Versailles, announced by a delay of nearly two weeks the election of Armand Fallières as President of the Republic. The issue also announced the results of the contest: approximately 12,000 readers had submitted their decisions, with Maurice Berteaux and Ferdinand Sarrien receiving zero votes each. The winner of the contest, ironically, was Eugène Derveloy, the Radical-Socialist deputy from Meaux in the Seine-et-Marne department, whose insider knowledge won him a signed portrait of the former War Minister. The twenty runners-up who won deluxe prints of Léandre's series included readers in Paris, and as far away as Montpellier, Toulon, Finistère, Algiers, and even Sweden.²⁹⁶

The political quarrels of the first decade of the twentieth century had proven lucrative for *Le Rire* and the vitality of Juven's business. In late July 1906, *Le Rire* announced the appearance of a sister periodical title to be released in August, titled *Fantasio*. Billed as a *magazine gai*, *Fantasio* would be published as a deluxe bimonthly illustrated volume on the 1 and 15 of each month, at an extended length of 48 pages and a premium price of 50 centimes. *Fantasio* was to serve a promotional focus on Parisian amusements, entertainment, and gossip, as well as literary

²⁹⁵ Léandre's first caricature in the *Les Amoureux de Marianne* series, of War Minister Henri Maurice Berteaux, alongside the editors' announcement of the series and contest, appeared in *Le Rire* NS 148 (2 December 1905), 1-2.

²⁹⁶ See the special issue "Les Joies du Congrès," *Le Rire* NS 156 (27 January 1906), 2.

comedic fiction and cultural reportage. As such, much of *Le Rire*'s cultural content was to migrate to its sister publication. *Le Rire* dedicated a full page to the announcement, and the following week included a promotional poster in color as a deluxe supplement. (Figure 4.6) *Fantasio* ultimately joined *Le Rire* as Juven's flagship periodical, and attained a similar stature in terms of sales and prominence.

Distinct from *Le Rire* in the tenor and tone of its content, *Fantasio* maintained a comedic focus while targeting a more middle-brow, intellectually minded literary readership, comparable in scope and

function to *Le Gil Blas*' weekly illustrated supplement. *Le Rire* promoted the new title heavily, and the bimonthly eventually grew alongside *Le Rire* to comprise tie-in merchandise and novelty products. By the end of 1906, *Fantasio* had begun to publish novels by Tristan Bernard as serial *feuilletons*, critical review essays by John Grand-Carteret, the pioneering art historian of nineteenth-century caricature, and an end-of-year retrospective special issue.²⁹⁷

The rise of *Fantasio* as Juven's entertainment review ultimately ushered in a second wind of commercial expansion for the upstart publisher and press baron. In 1906, Juven's publishing catalogue expanded. Beyond his general catalogue that included miscellaneous novels, series, and illustrated volumes in economical and deluxe editions, Juven added notable supplementary divisions for holiday gifts, or *livres d'étrennes*, and illustrated prize books, or *livres de prix*, for



Figure 4.6: Unsigned promotional poster for *Fantasio* in *Le Rire Nouvelle Série* 189 (4 August 1906), 13.

²⁹⁷ As advertised in *Le Rire* NS 196 (3 December 1906), 13.

primary school students, newly acquired from the Librairie Charavay.²⁹⁸ Additionally, Juven introduced a line of new pedagogical materials for use in public school classrooms at both the primary and secondary levels, in areas of study including mathematics, chemistry, literature, rhetoric and politics, grammar, history, and foreign languages.²⁹⁹ Come 1907, Juven sought to dovetail his business interests with those of the *dessinateurs humoristes*, intervening in their professional development, and again venture into new directions to maximize his profits.

Le Rire and Les Humoristes

In early Spring of 1907, Félix Juven proposed and organized a *Salon des Humoristes* in tandem with the executive committee of the Société des dessinateurs humoristes. The event was first announced in February, and confirmed in the aftermath of the electricians' strike in Paris in March. Artistic and patronage committees were announced, and participating artists and organizations were encouraged to start preparing their works for competition. Henri Goussé designed the promotional poster for the event, depicting André Gill with a pencil in mouth and enveloped in laurel garlands, bearing the fruiting heads of contemporary comic artists. (Figure 4.7) The directors of New York's *Life*, Munich's *Simplicissimus*, Berlin's *Lustige Blätter*, and London's *Punch* pledged delegations to attend by March, and submissions from across Europe had been so numerous that *Le Rire* announced the formation of a jury specially formed to judge foreign works. As the strike wave of that Spring intensified into civil unrest and acts of revolutionary sabotage, *Le Rire* promoted the upcoming inauguration in a special May Day issue, facetiously claiming that the *Syndicat des Humoristes* had gone on strike against *Le Rire*,

²⁹⁸ See the *Catalogue des Livres de Prix de la Librairie Félix Juven* for the year 1906. Found in the Archives Nationales (AN), série F12 – Commerce et Industrie. See sous-série F/12/8632 – Dossier Juven, 28.

²⁹⁹ See the catalogues for the *Ouvrages classiques pour l'année scolaire 1905-1906*, both *enseignement primaire* and *enseignement secondaire*, *ibid.*, 29 and 30.

reproducing a “revolutionary poster,” illustrated by Radiguet in the style of Caran d’Ache.³⁰⁰ On 14 May, in advance of the Salon’s opening, a banquet dinner was held at the Café de Paris for the organizing and patronage committees. Those in attendance included, in addition to Juven and the *dessinateurs humoristes*, deputy Henry Maret of the Cher, Luc-Olivier Merson of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, critics Adolphe Brisson, Armand Dayot, Robert de Montesquiou, Paul Gallimard, and the director of *L’Illustration*, René Baschet.³⁰¹



Figure 4.7: Henri Goussé. Promotional poster for the inaugural *Salon des Humoristes*. Lithograph, 88 x 120 cm. (Paris: Paul Dupont, 1907).

The Salon was held from 25 May to 30 June 1907 at the Palais de Glace on the Champs-Élysées. The price of entry per diem was fixed at 1 franc. The opening night was widely covered in the Parisian daily press, which acclaimed the event. By all contemporary accounts, Juven’s inaugural

Salon proved a resounding success. Reports in *Le Figaro* and *Le Gil Blas* were especially congratulatory, deeming the exhibition’s premiere as the apotheosis of French caricature, surpassing even the talents of Daumier.³⁰² The event attracted a high-profile clientele that included French and foreign public officials as well as celebrities like actors Sarah Bernhardt and Gabrielle Réjane. *Le Rire* promoted the event for its duration, with a dedicated issue appearing

³⁰⁰ *Le Rire* NS 222 (4 May 1907), 4.

³⁰¹ See "Le Dîner des Humoristes" in *Le Rire* NS 225 (25 May 1907), 11.

³⁰² Writeups on the Salon’s premiere appeared in nearly every major organ of the Parisian daily press. See, for example, *Le Figaro* and *Gil Blas*.



Figure 4.8: Charles Léandre, "Le Vernissage du Salon des Humoristes" in *Le Rire Nouvelle Série* 227 (8 June 1907), 11-14.

on 8 June that included a risqué cover illustration by Albert Guillaume and a deluxe quadruple-page insert by Léandre caricaturing high-profile attendees and the cartoonists themselves.

(Figure 4.8) Cross-promoting the Salon's opening, Juven began issuing a new series of collected works by featured cartoonists published in *Le Rire*, collectively titled *Les Maîtres humoristes*, in early May, on a monthly basis. Each volume sold for 95 centimes. The first was dedicated to the work of Albert Guillaume, followed by Abel Faivre. By the end of 1907, the series comprised volumes dedicated to the works of Ferdinand Bac, Benjamin Rabier, Caran d'Aché, Alfred Grévin, Lucien Métivet, and Henry Gerbault. The series would continue over twenty-two installments and ran for two years until 1909. Juven then reissued the entire collection in a 14-volume anthology set until the sudden dissolution of the Juven publishing house in 1912.³⁰³

The triumph of the inaugural Salon des Humoristes heralded a new cycle of prosperity for Juven, who wasted no expense seeking to replicate the success of the first. Thereafter the Salon

³⁰³ The deluxe reissue of the complete series was first announced in *Le Rire* NS 409 (3 December 1910), 2. A single volume sold for 2.25 francs, and the complete anthologized box set for 35 francs, available to finance in installments. A visual of the product appeared in an advertisement in *Le Rire* NS 448 (2 September 1911), 13.

became an annual affair, recurring every Spring at the Palais de Glace. By 1909, the Salon des Humoristes had grown enough to go on tour, and opened in Monte Carlo for the month of February, before its Paris premiere that April.³⁰⁴ When Caran d’Ache suddenly died from complications of a chronic nerve disease on 25 February, *Le Rire* announced that the Paris Salon would include a retrospective exhibition of his work, alongside the work of Wilhelm Busch.³⁰⁵ The enduring success of the annual Salon had brought the event and *Le Rire* even broader international renown. Popular and critical acclaim had attracted the attentions of even state officials, who invited individual artists in the exhibition to attend further international expositions and competitions, as part of the French Republic’s official *délégations humoristiques* to Brussels in 1910 and Turin the following year.

The Scission des Humoristes, 1910-1911

The profitable fruits and interconnected fames of *Le Rire*, the *Salon*, and the cartoonists themselves, organized in their independent association, ultimately generated new tensions between Juven and associates in his employ. The organizational disjointedness of these independent interests and entities had, since the formation of the *Société des dessinateurs humoristes* in 1904, generated a central structural problem that became a professional crisis in the wake of the Brussels Exposition of 1910, when the *humoristes* were invited to Belgium on behalf of the French Republic, but Juven was snubbed, to his great displeasure. The events that followed culminated in the declaration of a cartoonists’ strike against Juven and *Le Rire*, a formal schism in the ranks of the cartoonists’ association, and formation of two competing professional organizations holding competing Salons.

³⁰⁴ See the “Échos du Rire” in *Le Rire* NS 315 (13 February 1909), 10.

³⁰⁵ The announcement appeared in *Le Rire* NS 325 (24 April 1909), on the date of the Salon’s opening.

Though the structural origins of the strike and schism lie in organizational independence of *les humoristes* and their relationship to *Le Rire* and Juven's patronage, the events that led to the rupture materialized in November of 1910, after the conclusion of the Brussels International Exposition. That month, Juven took unilateral and coercive steps to abrogate the independence of the *Société des dessinateurs humoristes*, announcing in a memorandum to its members the creation of a parallel association, analogously named the *Société des artistes humoristes*. Drawn from the bylaws of the Salon des Humoristes, those of the *Société des artistes humoristes* sought to abrogate the creative independence of the *Société des dessinateurs humoristes* and place them under the creative and commercial control of *Le Rire*, accountable entirely to secretary-general Jean Valmy-Baysse, who also replaced Rodolphe Bringer as creative director of *Le Rire*. By Juven's design, the *Société des artistes humoristes* would grant *Le Rire* exclusive right of exhibition and reproduction, effectively forcing artists to renounce creative control over their own work even prior to sale.

At the moment Juven issued the memorandum, the presiding officer of the *Société des dessinateurs humoristes*, Charles Léandre, who enjoyed a close working relationship and friendship with Juven, was absent from Paris. In his stead, honorary co-president of the association, Adolphe Willette, known for his stalwart anti-capitalist views and cantankerous disposition, met with Juven at his office at 14, Boulevard Poissonnière. The meeting went poorly, as Juven reportedly lost his temper, and Willette reaffirmed the organization's commitment to the possibility of a boycott and strike against Juven.

In the following days, the *Société des dessinateurs humoristes* called an emergency assembly at the *Taverne de Paris* on the Boulevard de Clichy. The meeting took place during Juven's wedding. In his absence, Jean Valmy-Baysse attended as his representative, and was

expelled before debate took place on the issues of strike and boycott. Speaking before the body, Willette cited La Fontaine, arguing in favor of breaking with Juven, and was greeted with thunderous applause: "Our enemy is our master!" Of the 52 votes counted, 37 favored breaking with Juven.³⁰⁶

Further controversy unfolded in the following days, largely in open letters published in the pages of *Le Journal*. Juven responded angrily to the initial meeting at the Taverne de Paris on the first of December, defending his position. The letter betrayed a deep-seated resentment, as Juven claimed personal responsibility for the artists' successes, that he had undertaken the risks of the Salon at personal expense, and that he alone had rehabilitated comic art to attain the popularity and status it enjoyed in their time: "Exhibitions imitating the Salon des Humoristes have opened the world over, all the way to the Cape of Good Hope. Even the World Fairs themselves have made room for comic art, [which they] disdained until now." Juven continued to claim personal credit for artists' professional achievements, avowing that "Before me, the *Société des dessinateurs humoristes*, which had not met for at least four years until these recent moments, had every opportunity to form this idea and realize it: they did nothing." He concluded his letter stating that he was proud of his work, but he was taken aback that the artists would air their dirty laundry publicly to the press, rather than *en famille*.³⁰⁷ Meanwhile, *Le Rire* was silent on the matter.

The cartoonists responded in kind the following day, voicing even more longstanding grievances and resentment towards their boss, escalating the tenor of the disagreement into

³⁰⁶ The abovementioned account can be found in Gaston Quentin, "Les Humoristes vont faire la grève... Willette dit pourquoi," in *L'Intransigeant* 11095 (30 November 1910), and Édouard Helsey, "Chagrins d'humour" in *Le Journal* 6639 (30 November 1910).

³⁰⁷ "Une lettre de M. Juven" in *Le Journal* 6640 (1 December 1910), 2.

outright hostility. The letter mocked the “modesty” of Juven’s complaint, and his distortion of the conflict into Manichean terms between martyred patron and ungrateful artists. They then attacked Juven’s business practices as exploitative, accusing him of paying meager sums and building his success on the backs of others, including the deceased Henry Somm, whose death Juven hardly acknowledged.³⁰⁸ For several days thereafter, a back and forth between Juven and the artists played out in *Le Journal*, as they traded barbs that culminated with the announcement of a departure en masse from *Le Rire* and the founding of a parallel Salon des dessinateurs humoristes.³⁰⁹ The final word appeared on 10 December, in the anarcho-libertarian satirical weekly *Les Hommes du jour*. A report on the conflict concluded with a caricature of Juven by H.P. Gassier. One of the only known pictorial representations of Juven, the crudely drawn cartoon lambasts Juven as a tyrant, parodying the words of Louis XIV: “*L’humour, c’est moi!*” (Figure 4.9)

In the ensuing onslaught of meetings called to mediate between Juven and the association, including the calling of an “Estates-General,” the factionalization of the humorists became intractable. The dissident faction that supported a boycott of *Le Rire* and Juven rallied around the older artists, the generation of the Montmartre cabarets: Léandre, Willette, Théophile Steinlen, Francisque Poulbot, Louis Morin, Hermann-Paul, Maurice Neumont, and Henry-Gabriel Ibels. Reaffirming their

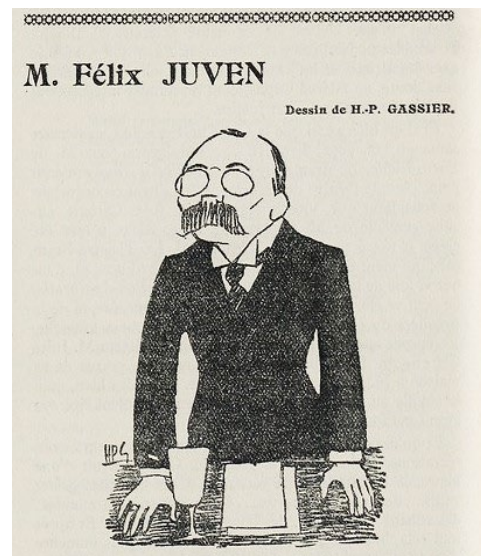


Figure 4.9: H.-P. Gassier, “M. Félix Juven.” Illustration in *Les Hommes du jour* 151 (10 December 1910), 4.

³⁰⁸ “Une lettre des Humoristes” in *Le Journal* 6641 (2 December 1910), 2.

³⁰⁹ See “Le salon des dessinateurs humoristes” in *La Vie artistique : revue d’information des collectionneurs et des artistes* (“Les Salons,” April 1911), 68-69.

loyalty to Juven was a crop of younger artists, whose work was notably more lighthearted and entertainment-driven, and who largely depended on *Le Rire* and Juven's patronage as their principal sources of income: Abel Faivre, Albert Guillaume, and Lucien Métivet were named as the executive committee of Juven's *Société des artistes humoristes*. They were joined in turn by the likes of René Préjelan, Maurice Radiguet, Auguste Roubille, Georges Delaw, and Jules Grün.

The schism's impact upon the operation and nature of *Le Rire* was paradoxical: limited in scope and significance, but transformative in its immediate impact upon the journal's published content. Juven won the numbers game, retaining the contributions of a great majority of the member artists. The contributions of the dissident older artists like Willette and Steinlen had already grown more infrequent, and the impact of the strike upon Juven's labor pool was limited. Most notably, the dissidents founded a competing Salon that operated independently for four years until the outbreak of World War I, when the two Salons merged and moved from the Palais de Glace to the Galerie La Boétie in the 8th arrondissement.³¹⁰

However, the split had longstanding repercussions for the nature of *Le Rire*'s content and identity. The departed dissident faction founded its own illustrated weekly publication in early 1911, titled *Les Humoristes*, to showcase their works.³¹¹ Léandre's celebrated caricatures all but disappeared from the covers of *Le Rire* that same year. In his stead, the leaders of the Société des artistes humoristes—Abel Faivre, Albert Guillaume, Auguste Roubille—assumed his place on the covers, alongside an ever-growing number of newer signatures. Younger or newer talents, like Gus Bofa, Umberto Brunelleschi, Marcel Capy, Fabiano, Ricardo Florès, Charles Genty,

³¹⁰ Though the Salons merged, the two associations continued to function separately until they unified in May 1920 under the name *Société des dessinateurs humoristes*, with Forain serving as its president. See Jean-Émile Bayard, *Montmartre hier et aujourd'hui*, 103 and interview with Maurice Neumont, 291.

³¹¹ The preliminary issue of *Les Humoristes* appeared February 1911. Number 1 appeared 2 April 1911, at the price per issue of 20 centimes.

Henry Gervèsè, Fabiano, Joseph Hémard, Henry Mirande, and Georges Pavis, all became more prominent fixtures of *Le Rire* as a result of the exodus of the *anciens*. Accompanying this generational transition was a marked shift in the tenor and focus of *Le Rire*'s content away from the scathing satire that characterized the turn of the century towards more lighthearted social caricatures of daily life. Laurent Bihl attributes this shift in part to Juven's long-term designs to pivot the journal away from public scandal and outrage, chiefly in response to the force of market trends in the satirical press towards lighthearted entertainment.³¹²

In this sense, the schism bore Juven a silver lining, providing a fortuitous occasion to effect such changes. With Gus Bofa at the artistic helm of the journal, having replaced Jean Valmy-Baysse in 1908 due to the latter's appointment to manage the Salon des Humoristes, *Le Rire* focused increasingly on lampooning the entertainment life and leisurely class of *Tout-Paris*. Bofa debuted the comic writings of a Montmartre writer, Pierre Mac Orlan, alongside a host of new cartoonists and his own contributions to the *Rire au théâtre* column. When the Mona Lisa was reported stolen from the Louvre in August 1911, *Le Rire* made a meal of the widespread coverage, and remained attentive to developments in the investigation while indulging in making jokes of the security breach.

Political satire of affairs both foreign and domestic was not entirely eclipsed from *Le Rire*'s field of vision in the wake of the schism, but was both marginalized and muzzled. When France authorized military intervention to suppress a revolt against Sultan Abdelhafid of Morocco in early 1911, the situation escalated into diplomatic crisis with Germany, which had dispatched two warships to the port of Agadir to counter French designs in North Africa. While

³¹² See Laurent Bihl, *La grande mascarade parisienne*, 173-176.

the German press had rattled sabers clamoring for war and territorial concessions, *Le Rire* parroted the dismissive attitudes of French diplomats, calling the German bluff and only mentioning the crisis in passing. Even the downfall of Prime Minister Joseph Caillaux, who was forced to resign after revelations that he secretly negotiated the Morocco-Congo Treaty with Berlin without input or authorization from President Armand Fallières, was of next to no concern to *Le Rire* in early 1912.³¹³ Nevertheless, a back-cover illustration by Adrien Barrère welcomed the appointment of Raymond Poincaré, an anti-German hardliner, as Caillaux's replacement to launder the government of its secrecy and deceit.³¹⁴ Similarly, the Champagne riots of 1911, which saw the deployment of more than 40,000 troops of the French Army's 31st Dragoons Regiment to quell civil unrest in the Marne department over wine appellation protections and production standards, received little more than passing glances.³¹⁵

Though the *Salon des dessinateurs humoristes* persisted as an independent event until 1915, the real effects of the schism were short-lived. *Le Rire* continued to promote the sale of works featuring dissident artists published by Juven, who was happy to elevate their names as part of the *Maîtres Humoristes* series. By April Fool's Day 1911, *Le Rire* even issued a caricatural pastiche of the prodigal *anciens* as part of a *Musée de l'humour* feature, where works by younger artists aped the styles of their elders in sardonic tribute to the departed. A note from the editors mordantly proclaims: *les signatures disparaissent, tant pis ! Mais les oeuvres restent*. The issue provided an occasion for comic introspection and self-indulgence. The cover

³¹³ Christopher Clark, *Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (New York: Harper Collins, 2013), 204-213.

³¹⁴ Adrien Barrère, "L'Affiche du jour" in *Le Rire* NS 470 (3 February 1912),

³¹⁵ See for example Lucien Métivet's "Contre la sabotage" in *Le Rire* NS 419 (11 February 1911), 4. For more on the Champagne riots of 1910-1911, see Alexandre Niess, "Champagne rouge, Champagne sang. De l'épineuse question de la définition du vigneron champenois (1908-1914)" in *Vin et République, 1907-2007 : actes du colloque organisé à Montpellier le 17-18 octobre 2007*, eds. Philippe Lacombrade and Fabien Nicolas (Paris: Pepper/L'Harmattan, 2009), 97-111.

illustration by Fernand Fau aped the *caricatures de moeurs* and terseness of Forain; Jean Villemot caricatured artistic criticisms of the cartoons of Jean Veber; Maurice Réalier-Dumas, the grotesques of Léandre; Léonce Burret spoofed the allegories of Willette and Avelot parodied Delaw's characteristic fairy-tale Épinal graphics.³¹⁶ Meanwhile, Juven continued to aggressively promote in *Le Rire* the reissued collection of *Les Maîtres Humoristes* as well as new titles in his publishing catalogue. By late 1912, reconciliation was nearly total: Willette reappeared on the cover of *Le Rire* at Christmastime.³¹⁷ Léandre returned in January 1913, with a trademark caricature of the presidential election to succeed Armand Fallières.³¹⁸

The Aftermath of the Schism

While the wounds of the rift within the ranks of *les humoristes* gradually healed, the economic bearing of the quarrel had become evident to Juven over the course of 1912. In March, Juven's holding company that he had constituted in 1904, the *Société d'édition et de publications*, was dissolved, even with a positive balance sheet of 11,500 francs in assets and 300 in liabilities.³¹⁹ In May, liquidation of the publishing house's catalogue had begun: Boivin et Cie. acquired the *Livres de prix et d'étrennes* collection. In October, *Le Rire*'s editorial offices relocated to a smaller space in the 2nd arrondissement of Paris at 1, rue de Choiseul, and come November, Flammarion acquired Juven's 95-centime octavo collection. By the following February, Hatier took over the *Librairie Classique* imprint, and in March, Édouard Mignot of *La*

³¹⁶ All in *Le Rire* NS 426 (1 April 1911).

³¹⁷ See Willette's cover for *Le Rire* NS 516 (21 December 1912).

³¹⁸ Léandre, "Mariage de raison," cover for *Le Rire* NS 520 (18 January 1913).

³¹⁹ For the act of dissolution of the *Société d'édition et de publications*, see AP D31U3-4295, f. 428, article 5.

Renaissance du Livre took over the *Librairie Générale* collection of books priced at 3.50 francs.³²⁰

Ironically enough, the wholesale liquidation of Juven's publishing house heralded a resurgence for his periodical holdings. *Le Rire* and its sister publication *Fantasio* again reclaimed their place as Juven's flagship products. Equilibrium was restored to its pages as *Le Rire* again struck a balance between the politically charged physiognomic grotesques of Léandre, the scathing allegories of Willette, the *caricatures de moeurs* of Parisian bourgeois life offered by Faivre, Guillaume, Mirande, and others, and the whimsical and naive *fantaisies* of Delaw. In the period between late 1912 and the coming of war in the summer of 1914, *Le Rire* again saw a period of resurgent prosperity, richness of content, and innovation that largely accompanied the European descent into international conflict.

In this period, *Le Rire* regained its charged edge for nationalist polemics, largely due to the return of Willette and Léandre to its ranks, but also in the wake of significant internal reforms within the French government, and rapidly deteriorating relations among the European powers. Since the summer of 1912, conflict in the Balkans had become an object of increasing public concern, especially after the eruption of war in October. The Balkan Wars had commanded a serio-comic fixation in *Le Rire* that included both frequent updates on financial markets and a constant inundation of foreign caricatures, and even a featured double-page spread by Georges d'Ostoya in November.³²¹ In February 1913, a deluxe special issue dedicated to Raymond Poincaré's electoral victory in the presidential campaign appeared, marking the return of the

³²⁰ Pascal Fouché, "Chronologie de l'édition française de 1900 à nos jours," <http://www.editionfrancaise.com/resultat.php?nbrep=40&rec=juven&jourdeb=-1&moisdeb=-1&annedeb=-1&Valider.x=0&Valider.y=0>. Website accessed 19 September 2021.

³²¹ Georges d'Ostoya, "Tout le monde aux Balkans" in *Le Rire* NS 509 (2 November 1912), 8-9.

format after a seven-year absence.³²² In the wake of Poincaré's accession to the Élysée, Léandre resumed his trademark *portraits-charges*, reviving the popular *Gotha du Rire* series name to caricature the new government formed under Prime Minister Louis Barthou.³²³ The extension of the term of compulsory military service to three years, one of the major legislative initiatives of the new government under political pressure from Poincaré, marked a major political flashpoint that saw widespread unrest within the ranks of enlisted troops as well as left-wing protests in opposition to the law, spearheaded by Jean Jaurès of the SFIO. Owing to his steadfast antimilitarism and political maneuvers to thwart mounting calls for war with Germany, Jaurès became a frequent and salient target of *Le Rire*. After initial demonstrations against the Barthou law, a cover illustration by Léandre acerbically caricatured Jaurès as the German "Angel of Peace" statue in Bogenhausen, being stabbed by the bayonets of the German army. The following week an anonymous "exchange of telegrams" more explicitly accused Jaurès of being a German spy and ridiculing his proposal for a citizen militia as an alternative to national conscription.³²⁴

Such criticisms of Jaurès and socialist antimilitarism continued throughout the remainder of 1913 and 1914 until Jaurès's sudden assassination and the coming of war in late July and the first days of August. In light of the legislative elections of April and May 1914, which saw sizeable gains for the SFIO and Radical-Socialists in the Chamber of Deputies, *Le Rire* again railed against the parliamentary left. Willette denounced the "sheep" of the French Republic, voting for the wolf candidate against their own interests. (Figure 4.10) Auguste Roubille, quoting

³²² "Marianne et Raymond : souvenirs & espoirs," special issue of *Le Rire* NS 525 (22 February 1913).

³²³ Léandre's target for the *Gotha du Rire* revival was newly appointed Prefect of Police, Célestin Hennion. See *Le Rire* NS 533 (19 April 1913).

³²⁴ See Léandre, "Jaurès, chérubin de la paix," cover for *Le Rire* 527 (8 March 1913), and "Échange de télégrammes" in *Le Rire* NS 528 (15 March 1913), 6.

Stendhal, censured Jaurès as a hypocritical “courtier candidate of the muddy masses” in his cover for the issue of 25 April.³²⁵ After the second round had cemented the SFIO as the second-largest parliamentary group in the new Chamber, Léandre again caricatured Jaurès as a victorious Roman consul, leading his newly enslaved war captives from the Radical and Republican-Socialist parties, including Gaston Doumergue, Joseph Caillaux, and Victor Augagneur.³²⁶



Figure 4.10: Adolphe Willette. “Au loup !” Cover illustration for *Le Rire* Nouvelle Série 585 (18 April 1914). Caption reads: “Why weep, shepherdess...the sheep will always vote for me.”

With a renewed sense of purpose reflected in the SFIO’s parliamentary gains, Jaurès’s antiwar politicking had gained momentum in light of deteriorating relations between France and Germany. The heir presumptive to the throne of Austria-Hungary was assassinated in Sarajevo at the end of June, sparking the diplomatic maneuvers that plunged Europe into war. *Le Rire* was indifferent to the news, too distracted by the amusements of summertime seasonal travel and recreation to announce the crisis. When Jaurès traveled to Brussels to attend an emergency plenary meeting of the International Socialist Bureau

³²⁵ Roubille, “Les Salivards,” cover for *Le Rire* NS 586 (25 April 1914).

³²⁶ Léandre, “Le Vainqueur,” cover for *Le Rire* NS 591 (30 May 1914).

to further oppose Europe's slide into war, Abel Faivre caricatured him as the landmark *Manneken Pis* fountain statue, labeling Jaurès the *Manneken Parle* and depicting him spewing water from his mouth to the fountain below.³²⁷ When Republican-Socialist Prime Minister René Viviani had accompanied President Raymond Poincaré to Saint Petersburg to affirm Franco-Russian alliance and cooperation, Léandre mocked Viviani's political convictions, quipping that if Viviani had been a socialist Russian subject, Nicholas II would have decorated him with a different kind of noose.³²⁸ Lucien Métivet joked in *Le Rire*'s 1 August issue that Jaurès's futile calls for a general strike were better served by Jaurès organizing a "partial and local" personal strike. The joke was ill-timed, as unbeknownst to Métivet, Jaurès was assassinated the day before the issue appeared. Decapitated of its leader and most vociferous pacifist, the SFIO rallied to President Poincaré's calls for national unity and political reconciliation in the face of war. The government ordered a general national mobilization the following day, and *Le Rire* suspended publication without announcement.

Conclusion

The dissolution and liquidation of the Maison Juven publishing house had, ironically and only momentarily, breathed renewed purpose and poignancy to Juven's flagship periodical. *Le Rire* had weathered artistic and administrative divisions, financial tribulations, technological progress, market changes, and its director's increasingly unfocused vision for commercial growth, yet it remained the foremost organ of France's national illustrated and comic press by circulation, age, and number of contributors.³²⁹

³²⁷ Abel Faivre, "Projet de monument à la gloire du Parlement," cover for *Le Rire* NS 598 (18 July 1914).

³²⁸ Léandre, "À Cronstadt," cover for *Le Rire* NS 599 (25 July 1914).

³²⁹ See Bihl, *La grande mascarade parisienne*, vol. 2, Annex 1: VI. Bihl counts a total of 448 contributors, though does not specify the parameters of that figure. Though no exact figures of total circulation are available, *Le Rire* regularly reported special issue circulation at over 100,000 or 200,000 copies sold.

Despite the sudden collapse of Juven's publishing enterprise, *Le Rire* and its sister publications were largely sheltered from the resulting windfall. The *Salon des Humoristes*, despite its split in two, continued uninterrupted at the Palais de Glace until the outbreak of war in 1914. The salon of the *dessinateurs humoristes* persisted in competition with Juven from the Galerie La Boétie all the while. By 1915, the majority of cartoonists having been mobilized into service, the two organizations officially reconciled in the name of national unity, insisting that war would not divide *les humoristes*. The merger was ultimately a compromise. The apparatus of Juven's association would remain in operation, but the executive committee would be effectively autonomous; on the other hand, the reunified association would take back the older *dessinateurs humoristes* name, and the salon would move shop to the gallery at 64 rue la Boétie in the Spring of 1915 to stage a wartime benefit exhibition, with all proceeds forwarded to aid their war-wounded colleagues and the families of artists killed in action. The *La Guerre et les humoristes* salon would continue annually for the duration of the war, and the reconciled *Société des dessinateurs humoristes* would operate uninterrupted until 1968.³³⁰

The longevity of the *humoristes*, coupled with the continued popularity of *Le Rire* and the rise and fall of the Maison Juven publishing house, all speak to the immensity of Félix Juven's place in history of comic art, publishing, and the satirical press in France at the turn of the twentieth century. Despite the shortfalls of the Maison du Rire at the 1900 Exposition Universelle, Juven was not deterred from growing *Le Rire*'s influence and brand profile into a multimedia name. Between 1901 and the coming of World War I, Juven grew his press venture into a titan of comic and entertainment publishing, expanding his portfolio of four periodicals in

³³⁰ See Gérard Solo, *Dico Solo. Plus de 5000 dessinateurs de presse et 600 supports en France de Daumier à l'an 2000* (Vichy : AEDIS, 2004), 801-802.

1894 into a publishing empire that comprised comic and trade book publishing as well as the specialized periodical press, by the turn of the century. *Le Rire* had anchored Juven's commercial activities, and had oriented the growth of his catalogue and further forays into exhibition, performance, and the professional development of satirical illustration. It is thus that the story of *Le Rire*, until the coming of a world war, was woven into the fabric of Parisian life in the Belle Époque.

CHAPTER V. LAUGHTER IN WARTIME: *LE RIRE ROUGE* AND WORLD WAR I, 1914-1918

For the satirical press in France, the coming of war in August 1914 was a double-edged blade. Popular literacy, periodical consumption, and freedom of expression in the press had undergone explosive growth in the second half of the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth. Between 1881, when the Third Republic had promulgated a new law declaring near total liberty of the press, and 1914, France had seen the proliferation of thousands of new titles, and market demand for periodicals of both general and special or technical interest had reached new heights.³³¹ On the other hand, war heralded a new set of hardships. The French Republic ordered general mobilization on the first of August, prompting newspapers to shutter abruptly. The following day, the government declared a state of siege, effectively suspending freedom of the press and free access of information, allowing for state censorship of all published materials. Another law promulgated on 5 August enumerated the conditions of state censorship. Explicitly proscribed was the publication of “any information or article concerning military or diplomatic operations that might favor the enemy and exercise a disagreeable influence on the minds of the army and the population.”³³²

Willing or not, the satirical press was also mobilized to fight the war. Those that did not shutter immediately issued belated and austere notices of closure, insisting on the “frivolity” of their vocation in light of the gravitas of war.³³³ Those that remained in operation rallied to the

³³¹ See, for example: Christian Delporte, “La société médiatique du XIXe siècle vue du XXe siècle,” in Jörg Requate, ed., *Das 19 Jahrhundert als Mediengesellschaft* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2009), 43-55, and Claude Bellanger et al., eds., *Histoire générale de la presse française*, Tome 3: de 1870 à 1940 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1972), . See also *La Civilisation du journal*, eds. Dominique Kalifa et al. (...)

³³² “Loi réprimant les indiscretions de la presse en temps de guerre,” *Journal officiel de la République française : Lois et décrets* 46, no. 213 (Thursday 6 August 1914), 7131.

³³³ See Jacques Lethève, *La Caricature et la presse sous la III^e République* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1961), 55-58.

cause with enthusiasm, abandoning their peacetime political principles for the sake of the nation. In a once saturated national marketplace for illustrated satirical journals, fewer than ten survived into wartime.³³⁴ Of those that did, *Le Rire* had been the most dominant in the prewar media landscape. It had long sustained anti-German revanchist polemics, caricatured the Balkan Wars with total impunity, and after the first of August 1914, it disappeared for four months.

Le Rire resumed publication in late November, reappearing under a slightly modified title chosen for wartime: *Le Rire Rouge*. The change did not infer a newfound socialist political conviction, but rather the furor of its wartime agenda. In this first issue, the editors sought to provide a statement of purpose for the functional value of graphic humor and laughter in wartime. In their notice to readers, they present laughter as an act of defiant patriotism rather than a distraction or expression of uncertainty and panic. Their epigraph, quoting Henri Lavedan, reads “the French soldier laughs at all times. It’s one of his mannerisms,” insisting on humor as an essential quality of French national strength and valor. Laughter, in their view, had a regenerative effect on the national spirit, and “far from being untimely, is on the contrary, necessary.”³³⁵

Le Rire’s wartime series ultimately ran for the duration of the conflict, a print run of 215 weekly issues between November 1914 and the end of December 1918, immediately reverting to its peacetime format in January 1919. *Le Rire Rouge* offered its readers a mirror to the experience of war at different levels of scale: international relations and high politics, public life, combat, soldiers’ living conditions, and civilian households. The journal served as a repository of wartime jokes as well as a visual record of how artists and readers alike internalized and made

³³⁴ Allen Douglas, *War, Memory, and the Politics of Humor: The Canard Enchaîné and World War I* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

³³⁵ *Le Rire Rouge* 1 (21 November 1914).

sense of wartime conditions. This chapter examines the wartime edition of *Le Rire* in order to understand the fundamental workings of graphic humor in its uses as war propaganda. For the entirety of its run, *Le Rire Rouge* rationalized its presence and circulation as an important aspect of ideological mobilization on the home front, an individual contribution to the wider national war effort. Part of a much larger trend within the French press (satirical and illustrated press included), *Le Rire* swiftly adopted an unflinching chauvinistic fervor in its support for the war, referred to by contemporaries and historians alike as *bourrage de crâne*, or “skull-stuffing.” The term, popularized by war correspondent Albert Londres, referred to the coordinated effort between military, state, and press to propagate a distorted narrative of the war that limited public knowledge of factual details and information, and instead emphasized the glorification of the French state and its soldiers, in battle or at home.³³⁶

Le Rire Rouge's wholesale transformation into an organ of war propaganda is the central problem underlying this chapter. What tools and narrative themes did *Le Rire Rouge* rely upon for visual propaganda and war representations? What conditions made graphic humor a necessary tool of wartime propaganda? How did *Le Rire Rouge* adapt to changing conditions—material, political, cultural, or otherwise—over the course of the war to maintain narrative continuity in its propaganda?

Despite its resolute chauvinism and enthusiastic support for the war, *Le Rire Rouge* ultimately related an ambivalent, complicated war story during its four-year existence. It lauded national leaders, military and civilian alike, and chastised antiwar opposition and peace activists at home. It glorified the image of the *poilu*, the archetypally rugged French infantry soldier, as

³³⁶ See Albert Londres, *Contre le bourrage de crâne* (Paris: Arléa, 2008), as well as Jean Yves Le Naour, *Dictionnaire de la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Larousse, 2008), 149-150.

national hero and icon, while reviling the enemy *Boche* with violent fanaticism. It accused the neutral powers of moral duplicity. In this way, *Le Rire* played an instrumental role as a satirical arm of the visual imaginary of what certain French historians have variously termed “war culture” or *consentement patriotique*: the collective effort to forge a coherent ideological unity, belonging, and civic duty in all echelons of French society in support of armed conflict. *Le Rire* ultimately played but a role in the wider tapestry of the French mediascape during the war, joining the ranks of scores of publications that cooperated with authorities to disseminate fictitious vagaries, misrepresentations, and outright falsehoods in their coverage of the war. The motivations for cooperating in the construction of French war culture, I maintain, were both economically and ideologically motivated, as *Le Rire* ultimately sought to preserve its survival in times of scarcity, hardship, and reduced profitability, while wholeheartedly rallying to the national war effort.³³⁷

Nevertheless, *Le Rire Rouge*'s war propaganda was not one-dimensional. Though its editors and contributing artists remained committed to the war effort until a victorious end, the journal painted an increasingly complex and emotionally honest representation of wartime conditions at home and on the frontlines alike as the conflict continued. Fatigue and doubt became increasingly obvious aspects of the war experience for those who lived it, regardless of their roles. Adjusting to the new conditions and daily rhythms of life at war was not an effortless transition, and despite the limitations of censorship, *Le Rire Rouge* found space to articulate

³³⁷ For a brief overview of the contentious historiographic debate concerning the notions of war culture and *consentement patriotique*, see: Leonard Smith, “The ‘*Culture de guerre*’ and French Historiography of the Great War of 1914-1918” in *History Compass* 5/6 (2007): 1967-1979. See also, and perhaps especially for the basis of this study, the works of the historians affiliated with the Centre international de recherche de l’Historial de la Grande Guerre in Péronne, most notably Jean-Jacques Becker, Annette Becker, and Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau: Jean-Jacques Becker et al., *Guerre et cultures, 1914-1918* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1994); Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18, retrouver la guerre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000). This chapter accepts, albeit not uncritically and with significant reservations about the concept’s explanatory limitations, the significance of the “war culture” thesis.

those discontents. As such, *Le Rire Rouge* was able to participate actively in the construction and perpetuation of French “war culture” at the same time as its propaganda increasingly laid bare the tensions and fissures underpinning its artifice.

The efficacy of *Le Rire Rouge*’s propaganda ultimately lay in its ability to navigate the complexities of war through reductive and simplistic representations: to convey broadly felt concerns while reinforcing the central aims of *bourrage de crâne*. It held a mirror to the multifarious and byzantine nature of the war without laying bare the extent of its destructive impact. This article examines the content of its entire print run both chronologically and thematically in order to chart the evolution of its war narrative. It first examines *Le Rire Rouge*’s most vociferous and enthusiastic propaganda in support of the war effort, focusing on two central themes of *bourrage de crâne*: the glorification of Allied soldiers and their lives, and the vilification of the enemy. While the early period of the war, between the journal’s reemergence in November 1914 and the end of 1915, saw the bulk of *Le Rire Rouge*’s most zealous expressions of hawkish patriotism, the journal maintained its hardline stance through the end of 1918.

Even so, it is possible to discern growing discontents and complications in the war narrative within the pages of *Le Rire Rouge* in 1917, at the zenith of the war’s destructiveness and human toll. Mounting tensions between civilians in the rear, *poilus* at the front, and *embusqués* in non-combat service were compounded by the enormous casualties sustained at Verdun and the Somme in 1916, as well as the ever-present pressures of scarcity. By summer 1917, those tensions had ballooned into mutinies within the Army, especially in the aftermath of Robert Nivelle’s costly failed offensive. The mutinies coincided with American entry into the war and the deployment of the American Expeditionary Force under John Pershing, as well as

revolution in Russia between March and November. Though the military administration ensured word of the mutinies never reached the press, *Le Rire Rouge* was nevertheless attentive to the underlying tensions that had strained relations between soldiers, officers, civilians, and the state and the erosion of public morale. The changing tenor of its propaganda uneasily conveyed that unrest.

Le Rire Rouge found a renewed sense of purpose after American entry into the war had been secured, despite continued costly stalemates and limited breakthroughs on the Western Front. It maintained that reinvigorated fervor through the Allied advance to the Meuse and the German capitulation at Compiègne in November 1918, and into the armistice that followed, agitating for unforgiving terms for German surrender. Even after its reversion to peacetime format, *Le Rire* elevated the memory and experience of war into a mythos of collective suffering, the moral center of gravity by which national politics was to be guided.

Through the example of *Le Rire*'s wartime experience, it becomes clear that graphic humor constitutes a significant, if oft overlooked, aspect of the home front and cultural life of World War I. Its study can reveal salient insights into how the reading public and the cartoonists who entertained them interpreted the constantly changing, uneasy conditions of their daily lives in the context of a totalizing war and what function comedy served, if any, to make sense of a historically transformative conflict. Though historians have examined and situated *Le Rire Rouge* in the wider context of Europe's wartime mediascape, its narrative complexity has been lost to scholars who read it solely as nationalist propaganda.³³⁸ As France's foremost satirical

³³⁸ Lesley Milne, *Laughter and War: Humorous-Satirical Magazines in Britain, France, Germany and Russia, 1914-1918* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2016). See also: Laurent Bihl, *La Grande Mascarade Parisienne*: (Paris: Thèse de doctorat, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, dir. Christophe Charle, 2010).

periodical, *Le Rire Rouge* opens perhaps the most illuminating window into how civilians and soldiers alike processed war through humor, and how humor itself became a weapon of war.

Adjusting to War

After a four-month absence, *Le Rire* resumed its normal publication schedule in November 1914 as *Le Rire Rouge*, the wartime edition of the best-selling satirical journal in France. *Le Rire* at war, however, had little in common with the peacetime edition. *Le Rire Rouge*'s first issue alone may recount in microcosm the history of daily life in wartime. Its pages abound with rich insights into the preoccupations, anxieties, and motivations of editors, artists, and readers, civilians and soldiers, men and women alike. Abel Faivre, the presiding officer of *Le Rire*'s affiliate association of cartoonists, the *Société des dessinateurs humoristiques*, and prolific illustrator of cartoons and poster art, drew the first cover illustration. The caricature is titled "In Ostend," in reference to the Belgian coastal town and port city that had recently fallen to German occupation, and had served as the German Imperial Navy's primary access point to the Atlantic Ocean and North Sea. The illustration caricatures Kaiser Wilhelm II as a roulette croupier with sagging jowls. The caption is a pun on the roulette cry, *rien ne va plus*, where its traditional meaning of "no more bets" also implies the ongoing German naval blockade of the Belgian coast. On the following page, a cartoon by Lucien Métivet venerates the young conscripts of the French Army. The illustration shows a young infantryman in a French kepi gleefully stomping a German Big Bertha howitzer shell, shown wearing the characteristic imperial German pickelhaube: "Ah, so you're the 420 [mm shells]? Well we're the [boys of] 1914!" Métivet dedicated the cartoon to Maurice Juven, the son of *Le Rire* director Félix.

The pages that follow offer a striking view into the changing realities of everyday life during wartime, both at home and at the front. On one hand, the war edition looked and felt

much the same as the standard peacetime edition: it preserved its standard 12-page tabloid format, continued the same series and columns, featured many of the same contributing artists and writers, and maintained the same typographic and formatting innovations that had contributed to its popularity and success, integrating images and texts in the same page space. The content of *Le Rire Rouge*, however, departs significantly in scope and tone from anything *Le Rire* had published before the war.

The first issue addresses the manifold disruptions to the lives of soldiers and civilians alike. It is easy to discern the artists' and editors' propagandistic enthusiasm for the war, though they do not entirely avail themselves of questioning or even criticizing wartime bureaucratic and administrative shortcomings. An editorial notice informs readers of technical difficulties in honoring subscriptions due to interruptions of commercial postal services and military censorship. The editors ask readers to reserve individual issues in advance at their places of sale, or mail payments in full directly to the editorial offices in Paris. Another notice, addressed to international readers, apologizes for delays in shipping. Directly below, a "retrospective revue" of the war, the first installment in a weekly series, reprints political cartoons of the war from the foreign press: Cleveland, Columbus, and Des Moines in the United States, as well as London, Milan, and even Vienna. A short fiction by Adrien Vély emulates the logbook of a German conscript, recounting his journey to Paris and his deep-seated hatred of the French, English, and Belgian peoples alike. An editors' note follows, informing readers of the suspension of longtime contributing writer Clément Vautel's weekly column, due to his deployment to the Western Front. His replacement's first contribution, written from a faraway country village "where life is absolutely normal" due to poor health, arrived at *Le Rire*'s offices three days late due to postal service disruptions. The editors apologize and promise a return to routine content in the weeks to

follow. A full-page comic strip by Fernand Fau, titled “Deutschland über Alles,” mocks stereotypical elements of German culture as crude and immature in matters of cuisine, fashion, diplomacy, humor, courtesy, and sexuality. A marching chant by Henri Fursy, titled “Wilhelm the Liar,” lampoons the Kaiser’s militarism and imperial ambitions. A handful of cartoons deride German military strategies. A letter received from cartoonist and *Le Rire* contributor Albert Guillaume, mobilized to the front in Belgium, jokes that he wants to inform readers that he bears no relation to the imperial family of Germany, but has the misfortune of sharing “an obnoxious likeness in name” with the Kaiser.

Among the most striking themes of *Le Rire Rouge*’s first issue is the proximity of home life to the frontlines. The issue’s content brings into focus the manifold hardships that civilians faced and their invisible ties to the lives of combat soldiers. The delineation between the worlds of the civilian rear and military front in *Le Rire Rouge*, as it was in reality, is blurry and frequently crossed. Soldiers return on leave, known as *permission*, for several days to enjoy the simple pleasures of home before resuming their usual duties at their posts in the trenches. Wounded soldiers tell flirtatious tales to young women of their injuries sustained while uncorking champagne bottles in Grenoble. A cartoon by Joseph Hemard lambasts the callousness of functionaries at the poor relief office, showing a bureaucrat berating a frail elderly woman for not having her documentation organized to his liking and denying her allowance. A cartoon by Fabien Fabiano balks nervously at the possibility of interracial romance between a white army nurse and a hospitalized black soldier, a rifleman of the colonial troops. Figuring most prominently in the issue, a full-page illustration by Charles Huart morbidly depicts the “jealousy” of elderly villagers watching a French aircraft pass overhead, disappointed their town is not a significant enough target to merit German aerial bombing. Despite the ostensibly

fictitiousness of the towns mentioned in the caption, Huart censors their names so as to avoid conflict with the censors.³³⁹

Censorship and Satire

Of all the wartime disruptions presented in *Le Rire Rouge*'s debut issue, the advent of press censorship presented perhaps the most pressing and immediate adjustment problem for the journal's editors and artists. Referred to since the nineteenth century as *Anastasie* or *les ciseaux d'Anastasie*, press censorship had been nonexistent in *Le Rire*'s lifetime, having been abolished with the promulgation of the Law on Freedom of the Press in 1881. Its implementation in August 1914 was remarkably welcomed by the national press as a severe but necessary measure of national security in wartime. For its part, *Le Rire Rouge*'s relationship to wartime censorship was complex. It readily and willingly cooperated with state dictates regarding propaganda and the restrictive dissemination of information from the front, adhering to the narrative tropes typical of *boufrage de crâne*. Though state propaganda utilized all available communications networks to enforce narrative unity and control morale, print media remained its essential focus.

Collaboration between state and press, the chief instrument of mass ideological mobilization, was of vital interest to the national war effort. Periodicals, books, postcards, placards, prints, posters, art, merchandise, and cinema were all potentially useful and powerful tools, and equally powerful and potentially disruptive weapons in a war of information.

Censorship's function was twofold: to implement preemptive guidelines for content suitable for publication in wartime; and to exercise total control over the flow of information within and beyond French borders. Nevertheless, its administrative organization was not a

³³⁹ All abovementioned references to be found in *Le Rire Rouge* 1 (21 November 1914).

straightforward task. Complicated by the government's retreat from Paris to Bordeaux between September and December 1914, the bureaucratic apparatus was slow to form and plagued by overlapping administrative responsibilities and jurisdictions between civilian and military offices, though it grew increasingly centralized over time.

Powers were divided between three separate government ministries. The Ministry of the Interior operated censorship commissions through the Prefecture of Paris Police, responsible for overseeing theatrical performances and musical acts, as well as municipal and departmental inspectors outside Paris. The Ministry of War had far-reaching powers over propaganda and censorship through the office of the General Staff (EMA), the General Headquarters (GQG) of the French Army, which directly oversaw censorship in zones under military occupation at the front, as well as the national Press Bureau beginning in 1915, responsible for censoring newspapers, periodicals, books, and telegrams. Between 1915 and 1918, the GQG also oversaw commissions for postal inspections within the ranks of the army to surveil soldier morale. Prime Minister Aristide Briand created the Maison de la Presse in January 1916 to integrate propaganda and censorship responsibilities under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, transforming the Press Bureau into the Department of Press Relations under Georges Clemenceau's initiative to mediate a cooling relationship between the government and national press agencies.³⁴⁰

Censorship subordinated the national press agencies to official communications, released at regular daily intervals, as their only source of new information. The process was centralized

³⁴⁰ See Olivier Forcade, *La censure en France pendant la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Fayard, 2016), *passim*, as well as Joëlle Beurier, "Press/Journalism (France)" in *1914-1918 Online: International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, eds. Ute Daniel et al. (Freie Universität Berlin, 2014). See also Jean-Noël Jeanneney, "Les Archives des Commissions de Contrôle postal aux Armées (1916-1918): une source précieuse pour l'histoire contemporaine de l'opinion et des mentalités," in *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 15, no. 1 (January-March 1968): 209-233.

through the Press Bureau in Paris, but also established regional press commissions for the 21 districts under military occupation and administration. Inside the military zones, the GQG held exclusive jurisdiction over press activity. Journalists and news agencies were subject to the rigorous controls of the military command's *section d'information*, which prepared deliberately terse and vague communiqués for release to the press three times daily: 11 am, 3 pm, and 10 pm. In the absence of substantially detailed information, journalists relied on fabrications and falsehoods that warped public perceptions of the war situation in their reports, which became the narrative basis for *bourrage de crâne*.

Le Rire Rouge willfully and readily engaged in this disinformation campaign, propagating from its debut a wholly distorted war narrative that afforded it a relatively permissive and comfortable relationship with censors. Olivier Forcade notes, for example, that in the entirety of 1915, for example, *Le Rire Rouge* was only censored twenty times, largely for reproductions of caricatures from enemy nations.³⁴¹ The journal's chauvinistic fervor, however, did not preclude contributors from directly engaging censors about the repressive nature of the practice. *Le Rire Rouge* consistently published written and illustrated commentaries addressed to censors throughout the war. Within the first issue, a column by Paul Birault instructs contributors on techniques of self-censorship. The column blurs the line between satire and fervent support for the new law, illustrating the ease with which writers may redact key information using blank spaces for place names and initials for persons. Birault employs the formula to comedic effect, but ultimately favors its use in *Le Rire Rouge*. On the following page, the *Rire à l'étranger* column, showing reproductions of cartoons published in the foreign press, includes two censored

³⁴¹ Forcade, *La censure politique en France pendant la Grande Guerre* (Thèse doctorale, Université de Paris X – Nanterre, 1999), 553.

plates from the Munich-based satirical journal *Simplicissimus*. In the following week's issue, an editorial note informs readers that two cartoons by Adolphe Willette had been censored from the debut issue for showing the corpses of civilians murdered by German soldiers:

The censors do not want corpses, nor indignation; one must not excite hatred against the butchers of women and killers of children. Consequently, an essential element, a satiric element, was lacking in our first issue, which as such did not give a complete sense of what *Le Rire Rouge* will be. Our readers will please excuse us of it.³⁴²

Le Rire Rouge's relationship with state censors, as well as the boundaries of permissible speech, was a longstanding gag. Its expression, however, was defanged of any meaningful subversive qualities. Lampooning censorship was, ultimately, an effective way to normalize it. The essential assumption of censorship was that it was a fundamentally unserious and easily worked-around formality. The visibility of censors' work became an object of typographic parody and wordplay: an article by Jean Bastia in June 1915, for example, instructs readers to "pronounce the word *blanc* every time you see an empty space redacted by the censors." The text that follows has every instance of the letters redacted, allowing readers to observe the absurdity of the process.³⁴³ Similarly, a cartoon by Hampol, showing "the war's contribution to history," plays with the visual and textual conventions of censorship. Showing two generals in conversation in the field, the likeness of the two figures is obscured by thick clouds. The caption reads, sardonically: "General X...commander of the...army, congratulating General Y..., commander of the...division in...on his great victory at...and the taking of...by the...infantry and the...chasseur battalion." An editorial note follows: "This cartoon was executed in accordance with censors."³⁴⁴

³⁴² *Le Rire Rouge* 2 (28 November 1914), 7.

³⁴³ *Le Rire Rouge* 29 (5 June 1915), 10.

³⁴⁴ *Le Rire Rouge* 53 (20 November 1915), 8.

Le Rire Rouge's many references to wartime censorship largely drew on the legacies of nineteenth-century caricature. André Gill's 1874 allegory of press censorship, *Madame Anastasie* and her scissors, had staying power in French media as a potent symbol of authoritarian repression during the early years of the Third Republic.³⁴⁵ Her wartime revival, alongside the ubiquitous blank spaces and redacted names characteristic of censors' alterations, provided a useful visual language for cartoonists to dialogue with censors obliquely, bemoaning the constraints of wartime censorship while supporting its



Figure 5.1: Auguste Roubille. "15 Avril : Sainte Anastasie" in *Le Rire Rouge* 75 (22 April 1916), 12.

fundamental purpose. A back-cover illustration by Auguste Roubille for 15 April 1916, for example, observed in the Catholic Church as the feast day of martyred saints Basilissa and Anastasia of Rome, is instead dedicated to Madame Anastasie, portrayed as an anthropomorphic peacock, and her scissors. The caption, punning the heraldic motto of the British Order of the Garter as well as an idiom for corruption and conflicts of interest, reads "Shamed be the man who thinks."³⁴⁶ (Figure 5.1)

Though *Le Rire Rouge* never hesitated to decry the tyranny of censorship, more often did it seek to normalize its presence in the everyday reality of war life. A May 1915 cartoon by

³⁴⁵ See Christian Delporte, "Anastasie : l'imaginaire de la censure dans le dessin satirique (XIXe-XXe siècles)" in *La Censure en France à l'ère démocratique*, Pascal Ory ed. (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 1997), 88-99.

³⁴⁶ *Le Rire Rouge* 75 (22 April 1916), 12. The text reads *honnî soit le mâle qui pense*, adapted from the original *honi soit qui mal y pense*, "Shamed be he who thinks evil of it."

Maurice Drouard, for example, depicts soldiers reading newspapers in the trenches. Drouard boasts of censorship's material benefits: a soldier is shown with a pair of scissors cutting out the large blank spaces left in the pages of his newspaper, excited that he has finally found an adequate amount of blank paper to write a letter home.³⁴⁷ By 1916, censorship had become such a banal aspect of life during war that *Le Rire Rouge* regularly ran fictional interactions and minutes of censorship committee meetings. To contrast the relative laxity of the French censorship apparatus, *Le Rire Rouge* reprinted a cartoon published in *Numero* in Turin titled "Censorship in Belgium." The cartoon simply showed German soldiers executing a newspaper publisher by firing squad.³⁴⁸

The seeming normality of censorship in the daily life of *Le Rire Rouge* was abundantly obvious by 1917. The subject became ever more infrequent as the war dragged on, though it occasionally appeared in reference to matters of serious strategic import to the French Army. After a revolutionary mutiny had occurred within the ranks of the Russian Expeditionary Forces at La Courtine in early April, Pierre Georges Jeannot alluded to the effective censorship of the news with a cartoon in *Le Rire Rouge*.³⁴⁹ When a woman attempts to order a Russian salad at a restaurant, the waiter interrupts her: "suppressed by the censors!" The next substantive mention of censorship appeared in Charles Genty's back cover on 8 December, showing townsfolk discussing the wealth of a local barber, outfitted with scissors: "You'd think he makes a pretty penny. He's worked for the censors for three years."³⁵⁰ Further mention of censorship for the remainder of the war was minimal.

³⁴⁷ *Le Rire Rouge* 25 (8 May 1915), 5.

³⁴⁸ *Le Rire Rouge* 61 (15 January 1916), 2.

³⁴⁹ See Remi Adam, *Histoire des soldats russes en France, 1915-1920. Les damnés de la guerre* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), 97-165.

³⁵⁰ Charles Genty, "Bénéfices de guerre" in *Le Rire Rouge* 160 (8 December 1917), 12.

Despite *Le Rire Rouge*'s protestations, longstanding historical consensus has established that state censors in wartime France were indeed largely permissive of the satirical press.³⁵¹ Most instances of state-mandated censorship materialized in the opening months of war, largely to suppress graphic images of the brutality of war violence. In contrast to the yoke that subjected journalists to the state's strict control of information, censorship in the illustrated satirical and comic press largely relied upon voluntary measures of self-censorship, appealing to cartoonists' and humorists' spirit of patriotic duty. *Le Rire Rouge* was quick to adapt such conditions into a running joke that simultaneously appeared to protest such restrictions while ably functioning to normalize them as necessities of war.

War Culture: Patriotic Laughter

The primary function of *Le Rire Rouge*'s caricatural *bourrage de crâne* was to sustain its readers' morale and support for the war. *Le Rire* rationalized its wartime presence as a matter of patriotic necessity: humor was a constituent force in the mobilization of *l'esprit national*, an existential imperative for French civilization. In its second issue of November 1914, in the weekly *Rire de la Semaine* column, La Ramée (Vautel's replacement, later revealed to be playwright Gaston Arman de Cavaillet) celebrates France's supposed victory at Ypres. He attributes the glory of victory in part to *Le Rire*'s mobilization as part of the French army's "sixth branch" after infantry, cavalry, artillery, engineers, and the aerial corps: *la gaiété française*.

³⁵¹ See Joëlle Beurrier, "Press/Journalism (France)" in *1914-1918 online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War* (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2014). See also Joëlle Beurrier, "Grandjouan et Steinlen: peut-on rester de gauche dans la Guerre ?" in Fabien Dumont ed., *Jules Grandjouan. Créateur de l'affiche politique illustrée en France* (Paris: Somogy, 2001), Olivier Forcade, "Voir et dire la guerre à l'heure de la censure. France, 1914-1918" in *Le Temps des médias* 1, vol. 4 (2005): 50-62 ; Laurent Bihl, "Sans Pardon (1914). Adolphe Willette ou la propagande par l'outrance" in *Sociétés et Représentations* 12 (October 2001): 45-62.

For *La Ramée*, laughter was the essence of the triumphal French spirit, the source of its morale and its military might, equally advantageous in the field as “courage, heroism, sacrifice, and charity.” Alongside these qualities, gaiety constituted a primary difference between the French and the humorless hordes of the *Boches*, the animating force of national defense and national unity: the French could find fun and humor in their civic duties of self-sacrifice and love of country, the hearts and minds of the people unified to such an extent as to “make the socialists jealous.” The call to arms concludes in recounting an anecdote of Bismarck attending a Parisian comedy several years after the Franco-Prussian War. He leaves the performance early in disgust, confiding in his aide-de-camp that he hated the humor of the show “because it was so terribly French. Those people have been beaten, [but] they are not defeated.”³⁵²

Initially, *Le Rire Rouge* intended for *bourrage de crâne* to dispel the anxieties and tensions of mobilization, attempting to bring comic relief to the grave issues of conscription, casualties, and the harsh living conditions of the front. The overall tone of *Le Rire Rouge*'s early issues in 1914 is emphatically non-satiric. Rather, its pages display ardent support for the war, its illustrations extolling the virtues of French soldiers' resolve and fearlessness in combat, their carefree and jovial spirits in downtime, praise for France's allies, and the curiosities of daily life during the new wartime conditions. The back-cover illustrations for the issues of 5 and 12 December pay homage to the armies of Russia, an established ally, and Britain, a more recent and slightly less comfortable comrade in arms.³⁵³ Derision, mockery, or scorn is employed uniquely in reference to the enemy.

³⁵² *Le Rire Rouge* 2 (28 November 1914), 3-4.

³⁵³ Back cover illustrations by Marcel Capy and Louis Vallet, respectively. See *Le Rire Rouge* 4 and 5 (December 1914).

Only seldom did *Le Rire Rouge* mention actual developments in the war's progress. Militantly supportive of censorship and self-censorship, *Le Rire Rouge* was deliberately vague in its representations of combat, violence, and destruction at the front. In December 1914, for example, *Le Rire Rouge* noted the commencement of the Artois and Champagne offensives under Joseph Joffre's command with a reverent caricature of the "silent" commander in chief of the French Army by Léandre. As Joffre peers over a knoll, infantrymen applaud him while the *coq gaulois* mauls the German imperial eagle in the background. Inside, a cartoon by Charles Huart strikingly shows the extent of artillery damage to civilian homes. The elderly homeowner asks his mayor defeatedly, "what do we do now?" The mayor replies simply, "Now, we rebuild." The same issue's back cover illustration by Métivet encourages self-censorship, rebuking "blabbermouth" deputies for speaking openly in public meetings and speeches.³⁵⁴

The continuous glorification of Allied leadership, both military and civilian, was *Le Rire Rouge*'s preferred and most prominent mode for reinforcing readers' confidence in the war effort. Militarism was of paramount importance, and commanding officers were revered as national saviors. Despite the inconclusive results and heavy casualties of the Battle of Artois in January 1915, Adolphe Willette's cover illustration observing the new year acclaimed Joseph Joffre as a national war hero for delivering victory to the Allies.³⁵⁵ Throughout 1915, Léandre produced similar tributes to the commanders of the Allied armies: Sir John French of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), Alexander of Serbia, Grand Duke Nicholas of Russia, and Luigi Cadorna of Italy. Léandre resumed the series in 1916 until the end of the war to reflect changes in Allied command: Sir Douglas Haig, who replaced French at the helm of the BEF; Admiral

³⁵⁴ Charles Huard, "Choses vues" in *Le Rire Rouge* 5 (19 December 1914), 7.

³⁵⁵ Adolphe Willette, "Les étrennes de Marianne" in *Le Rire Rouge* 7 (2 January 1915).

John Jellicoe, head of the Royal Navy; and John Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF). Léandre also noted and applauded changes in French military leadership personnel, penning caricatural tributes to generals Robert Nivelle, Charles Mangin, Philippe Pétain, and Ferdinand Foch. Léandre's caricatures demonstrate remarkable degrees of self-censorship, omitting any details of concrete actions or strategic planning. Omitted from his caricatures of French high command, for example, is any mention of the operations that had incurred high casualties at the Somme, Verdun, and in the Nivelle Offensive of 1917. Léandre deliberately delayed publication of such cartoons to avoid any mention of recent turnover or internal tensions within the command structure: Nivelle and Mangin, for example, were dismissed in the weeks following the publication of their respective caricatures in *Le Rire Rouge*. Léandre's tribute to Foch, on the other hand, appeared in August 1918, nearly five months after he had been appointed Commander in Chief of the Allied Armies, at Pétain's expense.³⁵⁶

Civilian leaders of foreign Allied powers received comparable praise from Léandre's pen. In December 1915, amidst the Gallipoli campaign in the Dardanelles, Léandre lauded the reorganization of the British War Office in the aftermath of the 1915 Shell Crisis, in which the British press attacked War Secretary Earl Kitchener for the shortage of artillery munitions on the Western Front. In response, Prime Minister H.H. Asquith created a centralized Ministry of Munitions, headed by David Lloyd George, to coordinate production and distribution of artillery shells to the front.³⁵⁷ Léandre commended the move as a new beginning for "the British Janus," showing the two ministers as the two faces of a victorious Britannia, while the Royal Navy

³⁵⁶ Charles Léandre, "Le généralissime Foch, Maréchal de France" in *Le Rire Rouge* 197 (24 August 1918), 1. Léandre's caricatural cover portraits of Allied officers and commanders appeared regularly during the war, most frequently in 1915 and during the unrest of 1917.

³⁵⁷ See Peter Fraser, "The British 'Shells Scandal' of 1915" in *Canadian Journal of History* 18, vol. 1 (1983): 69-86.

enters the Turkish straits at twilight in the background.³⁵⁸ A similar tribute to French War Minister Paul Painlevé appeared in August 1917 in advance of his appointment as president of the parliamentary council.³⁵⁹ Léandre's caricatural tributes to French civilian leadership also included Finance Minister Alexandre Ribot, Minister of Armaments Louis Loucheur, and War Minister and Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau. Léandre's portrayals of foreign leadership were fewer in number, but tributes to David Lloyd George and Alexander Kerensky appeared in 1917 to commemorate their appointments as heads of state in their respective countries, the latter being especially remarkable as a sympathetic representation of the Russian Revolution in a press atmosphere otherwise hostile to the ongoing regime change.³⁶⁰

Despite the flattering cartoons that Léandre penned, *Le Rire Rouge* never intended that political and military elites be the primary object of its patriotic affections. That prerogative was instead reserved for the enlisted infantry soldier at the front, the symbolic everyman who sacrificed his life and labor for love of country, the *poilu*. The allegorical value of the *poilu* figure has long been of interest to historians for its complexity and staying power after the war. The conceptualization of French infantry soldiers as rugged, hairy, virile, and fiercely independent servants of the Republic had a multifarious function both during wartime and afterwards. The *poilu* personified the collective agency, interests, and dispositions of the French

³⁵⁸ Charles Léandre, "Le Janus britannique" in *Le Rire Rouge* 55 (4 December 1915), 1.

³⁵⁹ Charles Léandre, "Painlevé et ses sous-nourrissons d'état" in *Le Rire Rouge* 144 (18 August 1917), 1.

³⁶⁰ See Michael Jabara Carley, *Silent Conflict: A Hidden History of Early Soviet-Western Relations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield), 1-28.

soldiers fighting the war. The poilu embodied the civic values of the Republic itself, virtue and vice alike. He was the apotheosis of French masculinity: like the biblical Samson, his unkempt facial and body hair were the essence of his virility and strength. Denied the intimacy of home and hearth, he persevered through the hardships of war by finding camaraderie amongst his brothers in arms. He was fiercely independently willed and, despite his courage, lacked the discipline befitting of a soldier. He prized his ration of *pinard*, the surplus red wine requisitioned for army provisions. An imperfect but intrepid defender of the nation, he was

bawdy and brave, but always saw his service to his country above his individual needs and desires.³⁶¹ He was instantly recognizable, only ever fitted in the standard issue active service uniform of the French infantry divisions: in the early months of the war, the traditional navy-blue coat, red trousers, and kepi; after 1915, the iconic *bleu-horizon* coat and trousers with steel-forged Adrian helmet. (Figure 5.2)

In this way, the image of the poilu was essential to the imaginary of French “war culture” and its cohesion. The glorification of the nameless, but iconic enlisted soldier provided a salient



Figure 5.2: Henri Gerbault. "Retour au front" in *Le Rire Rouge* 88 (22 July 1916), 12. The illustration depicts the significant change in military field dress between 1915 and 1916, as the *Bleu Horizon* and Adrian helmet replaced the traditional kepi.

³⁶¹ Albert Dauzat, *L'argot de la Guerre d'après une enquête auprès des officiers et soldats* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1919), 47-52. See also Gaston Esnault, *Le Poilu tel qu'il se parle* (Paris: Bossard, 1919), 427-430.

vessel for *bourrage de crâne* as well as popular expressions of patriotic support: the poilu was a composite symbol of French identity: the Republic, the nation, the people, and their values. The image provided a salient visual axis around which civilian mobilization and support rotated. The poilu pervaded media representations of the war, education, entertainment, and even liturgy as a sacrosanct figure of national defense.³⁶² (Figures 5.3 and 5.4)



Figures 5.3 and 5.4: (At left) Emmanuel Barcet. "La Saint-Poilu" in *Le Rire Rouge* 50 (30 October 1915), 12. (At right) Adolphe Willette. "L'anniversaire (1914-1916)" in *Le Rire Rouge* 91 (12 August 1916).

³⁶² A large body of research is dedicated to this subject, largely in light of the historiographic debate on *consentement politique* and *contrainte*, as mentioned above. See Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14-18, retrouver la guerre*, as well as François Cochet and Rémy Porte eds., *Dictionnaire de la Grande Guerre. 1914-1918* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2008), 841. See also Cochet, *Survivre au front 1914-1918. Les poilus entre contrainte et consentement* (Paris: Éditions 14-18). In *Le Rire Rouge*, the image of the poilu as a sacrosanct war hero may be seen in Adolphe Willette, "L'anniversaire (1914-1916)" in *Le Rire Rouge* 91;

Poilu-centered propaganda, comic or not, typically adhered to one of several tropes, all common forms of *bourrage de crâne*: the heroism, unyielding patriotism, and industriousness of French soldiers; the relative comfort of life in French trenches in comparison to the German lines; and the self-indulgent, lackadaisical tendencies of poilus as model Frenchmen. *Le Rire Rouge* followed this narrative trajectory faithfully. Poilus were the heirs to the historical *grogards* of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic armies.³⁶³ They were hardworking, but never to excess. They were combat-seasoned, but not cynical. They were disciplined, but not unquestioning. They embodied the platonic ideal of French masculinity and civic virtue, the model citizen dutifully defending the homeland. Their interests were effectively fused with those of the national community, largely defined in hierarchical contrast to those of civilians, politicians, and even *embusqués*, non-combat soldiers simultaneously reviled and envied for their comparatively comfortable posts, who were commonly shown as liabilities to the work of poilus at the front.³⁶⁴

Though *Le Rire Rouge* always focused on the lives of soldiers fighting the war, its first mention of the word poilu in reference to enlisted infantrymen appears in January 1915. A cover illustration by Henry Mirande, dated December 1914, shows two soldiers “lying in wait” to kill a lone German infantryman. Mirande drew the cartoon at the front near Ville-en-Woëvre in Lorraine. Inside, two cartoons honor the insouciance of French poilus. One “communiqué” shows an unkempt, “roughly washed and dirty-clothed” soldier in his trench. The other, more sardonically, shows a civilian bourgeois man strolling past a kiosk vendor selling toy cannons for sixty cents. In an empty gesture of solidarity with French soldiers, the passerby refuses the sixty-

³⁶³ *Le Rire Rouge* 130 (12 May 1917), 12.

³⁶⁴ The definitive work on representations of embusqués in French media remains Charles Ridet, *Les embusqués* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2007).

cent trinkets, insisting he only “wants a 75,” in reference to the iconic French 75-mm field gun.³⁶⁵ Successive references to poilus appeared in issues 12 and 13 the following February. A poem by Georges Maître entitled “Ballad for the poilus” provides a straightforward patriotic marching song. The following week, a satirical letter from the front, written by Albert Metzvil, mimics the perspective of a rescue dog serving in the “third section” of the medical corps. He closes the letter by signing “your faithful poilu.”³⁶⁶

Le Rire Rouge was particularly attentive to the livelihood of poilus from its own ranks. Countless artists and staffers had been mobilized in 1914, many of whom eventually fell casualty to the war in the coming months and years. To underscore its own human contribution to the national war effort, *Le Rire Rouge* routinely published dispatches from its contributors at the frontlines, careful to note their provenance. In four years of publication, *Le Rire Rouge* published hundreds of cartoons, comics, and texts from over fifty men deployed to various theaters of the war: most to various positions along the Western Front, but several submissions came from prisoners of war behind German lines, and one from Henri Gervèse, a naval officer deployed to the Dardanelles during the Gallipoli campaign.³⁶⁷

These dispatches from the front constitute *Le Rire Rouge*'s most meaningfully intimate and honest glimpses into the daily lives of soldiers. In contrast to the fervently hawkish *bourrage de crâne* coming from the rear, the submissions from *Le Rire Rouge*'s soldier-artists paint a significantly more complicated picture of the war and its soldiers. Most noticeably, the submissions of soldiers express a broader and more nuanced emotional range, articulating

³⁶⁵ *Le Rire Rouge* 9 (16 January 1915). Interior illustrations by Lucien Métivet and Huard, respectively.

³⁶⁶ Albert Metzvil, “Leurs Lettres” in *Le Rire Rouge* 13 (13 February 1915), 8. The letter is signed “César, chien sanitaire à la 3^e section des brancardiers.”

³⁶⁷ H. Gervèse, “Nouvelles des Dardanelles,” in *Le Rire Rouge* 46 (2 October 1915), 7. Cartoons and texts completed July 1915.



Figure 5.5: Lubin de Beauvais. "Choses vues" in *Le Rire Rouge* 9 (16 January 1915), 7. Illustration dated October 1914 by artist.

sentiments and experiences unknown to or censored from civilian view. In this way, *Le Rire Rouge* regularly provided a counternarrative that complicated the one-dimensional militarism of its own propaganda. For example, whereas military authorities had censored Willette's depiction of German atrocities against civilian women and children from *Le Rire Rouge*'s first issue, a field sketch by Lubin de Beauvais in January 1915 accentuates the brutality of German occupation. Simply titled

"Choses vues" and addressed "to neutrals," de Beauvais shows the road to "a village in the Marne" in the aftermath of Germans passing through. The road is littered with wine bottles and German *Pickelhaube* helmets. Foregrounded is the corpse of a young child impaled by a bayonet at the end of a German rifle. In the background, a wounded young mother gives birth in the dirt. Beyond her, the Reims cathedral burns.³⁶⁸ (Figure 5.5)

³⁶⁸ *Le Rire Rouge* 9 (16 January 1915), 7. The drawing, dated October 1914, is an austere example of Allied anti-German atrocity propaganda that proliferated in light of German occupation in Belgium and Northern France, addressed later in this chapter. The caption reads: "The Path of Glory." An editorial note states, "This illustration

The submissions to *Le Rire Rouge* from the front display the full range of emotional and material life of war and warfare, in combat or not. Artists emphasized, above all, the banality of their daily routines and the human dimension of the war, especially interactions with other soldiers, with command, with civilians, with the Republic, and with the enemy. In illustrator Jean-Jacques Roussau's first illustrated letter to Juven in January 1915, for example, he only has to report the sense of camaraderie in the ranks of his unit and the relative comforts afforded to them, despite the harsh weather. Similarly, Georges Delaw's back cover illustration in March 1915 shows infantrymen living and working harmoniously in foggy conditions, grateful to be under the watchful, "warm" cover of artillery troops.³⁶⁹

The carefree, patriotic optimism that pervaded these early depictions of the life of poilus served a practical function beyond its use as propaganda. The reports from artists at the front made it possible for *Le Rire Rouge*'s readers to make sense of the new realities of war through secondhand experience. They maintained a direct channel of communication that reinforced psychological and emotional unity between soldiers and the home front. Dispatches from the front sought to make the experience of war relatable, for both soldier and civilian alike. A back-cover illustration from Pierre Falké in May 1915, for example, sought to assuage the omnipresent fear of death or injury by relating combat wounds to everyday civilian life. A wounded soldier, covered in mud, is visibly delighted to be injured as medics carry him off the battlefield. When the medics ask him why he is laughing, he quips that he can only imagine the face of his building's superintendent if he were to arrive home and tread across the newly waxed floors and stairs in his condition.³⁷⁰ Falké published a similar back cover illustration in August, showing

was drawn by our contributor based on a natural sketch that he made on the edge of a village in the Marne, after the Germans passed through, in the month of October."

³⁶⁹ Georges Delaw, "À travers les camps," in *Le Rire Rouge* 16 (6 March 1915), 12.

³⁷⁰ Pierre Falké, "Le joyeux blessé" in *Le Rire Rouge* 25 (8 May 1915), 12.

French troops taking heavy fire in their trench on a clear summer day when a wind gust blows the képi off a young soldier's head to reveal his baldness. An older poilu asks him if he's afraid. The younger one replies: "yeah...of getting a sunburn."³⁷¹ In *Le Rire Rouge*'s 1915 Christmas issue, a comic strip by Georges Pavis details his "real" daily routine at the front as a *poilu* in six frames. Pavis avows his daily life in war is hardly different from his routine at home in Paris: he enjoys breakfast in bed in the trenches, rushes to get dressed and commute to work in the trenches, and goes to work at the factory in the trenches, where his "bad neighbor" constantly bothers him with machine gun fire.³⁷²

The nationalist fervor that characterized early depictions of poilus and their lives at the front was not, however, an enduring theme of wartime caricature. The emotional tenor of cartoonists' portrayals of life at the front changed markedly over the course of the war. War weariness and fluctuating morale increasingly permeated dispatches from the front. A July 1915 illustration by Claude Bils, that *Le Rire Rouge* published six months later in January 1916, features an early manifestation of enlisted soldiers' resentment and angst. Titled "Illusions," the cartoon shows two French poilus talking to a German POW. The German soldier reveals he has seen combat at Calais, Verdun, and Nancy. The poilus bemoan the German's experience fighting a mobile, offensive war while they have taken stationary, defensive positions: "meanwhile, we could have been kicking your ass..."³⁷³

Poilus' disillusionments became increasingly apparent over time. Tensions mounted between poilus and *embusqués*, poilus and civilians, poilus and their officers, and military and

³⁷¹ Pierre Falké, Untitled in *Le Rire Rouge* 40 (21 August 1915), 12. The illustration is dated June 1915 by the artist.

³⁷² Georges Pavis, "La vraie journée du poilu" in *Le Rire Rouge* 58 (25 December 1915), 6.

³⁷³ Claude Bils, "Illusions," in *Le Rire Rouge* 60 (8 January 1916), 12. The illustration is dated July 1915 by the artist.

civilian leaders, as material provisions dwindled, casualties climbed, and faith in the war effort steadily eroded. When the women workers of Paris went on strike in early 1917 demanding wage increases proportionate to the rising cost of living under war, *Le Rire Rouge* lambasted their demands as betraying the livelihoods of soldiers at the front. A cartoon by Nob on “the Poilu’s opinion of the strikes” decries the strikes as treacherous, abetting the German war effort, and flippantly suggests that workers and soldiers trade jobs.³⁷⁴ When Joseph Caillaux, parliamentary deputy and former Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, was charged with treason for treating with the enemy during the war, Nob suggested that instead of being tried before the High Court of the Senate, Caillaux be court-martialed: “the real High Court is the one that judges the Poilus.”³⁷⁵

Cartoons by Ricardo Florès, who specialized in naturalistic depictions of soldiers’ daily lives at war, also documented the escalating social tensions as the war continued into its fourth year.³⁷⁶ A cartoon published in December 1917 shows an exchange between “front and rear,” in which a poilu and a civilian man trade barbs. The civilian says to the soldier following the October Revolution, “Russia gave up on us, we need the poilus to hold out.” The poilu responds tersely, “of course, but the civilians need to know how to behave.”³⁷⁷ In contrast, a Florès cartoon from September 1918 expresses French soldiers’ affinities toward their British counterparts, the “Tommies” of the BEF. Titled “Unit of Bravery,” the cartoon shows several

³⁷⁴ Nob (Marcel Noblot), “L’opinion du poilu sur les grèves,” in *Le Rire Rouge* 115 (27 January 1917), 7.

³⁷⁵ Nob, “Cour martiale ou cour politique ?” in *Le Rire Rouge* 164 (5 January 1918), 7.

³⁷⁶ Florès himself served in the French Army’s 103 *régiment d’infanterie territoriale* as a volunteer from 1914 until his death from an infected combat wound in late 1918. While on duty, Florès drew poilus prolifically for *Le Rire Rouge* and other illustrated periodicals, before sustaining an injury in 1918 and ultimately succumbing to pneumonia in hospital shortly thereafter.

³⁷⁷ Ricardo Florès, “Le front et l’arrière,” in *Le Rire Rouge* 162 (22 December 1917), 7.

poilus reading the daily newspaper in awe: “Those Tommies really are impressive lads. They deserve to be honorary poilus.”³⁷⁸

Le Rire Rouge's unreserved support for poilus extended beyond the printed page. Throughout the war, the journal organized routine fundraisers, benefit sales drives, and events, the proceeds of which were donated to soldiers on active duty or on furlough, as well as their families. The first such instance came during Christmas 1914: *Le Rire* organized a seasonal benefit sale called *Les Voeux de la France à nos soldats*. For 1.20 francs, customers could purchase a limited-edition collection of twelve seasonal greeting cards featuring illustrations by *Le Rire* artists mobilized to fight in the war, postage paid. Customers would then send the cards to the artists at the front, as a gesture of emotional support in celebration of the holiday season.³⁷⁹ When *Le Rire*'s sister publication, *Fantasio*, reappeared the following spring from its wartime shutdown, it began a correspondence campaign called *Flirt sur le front*, to match despairing and lonely poilus at the front to civilian women pen pals, nicknamed *marraines de guerre*. In May, *Le Rire Rouge* issued a notice of the campaign's rapid success: soldiers' requests had inundated Félix Juven's offices. Despite the great number of women volunteering to “adopt” a poilu, the number of outstanding requests exceeded the number of *marraines* by over one thousand. *Le Rire Rouge* thus appealed to its female readers to adopt a poilu for moral and emotional support.³⁸⁰ Juven's offices would cover costs of postage and transport to the military administration at the front.

³⁷⁸ *Le Rire Rouge* 201 (21 September 1918), 7. The original caption reads, “Tout de même, c'est des rudes gars, les Tommies ; ils mériteraient qu'on les naturalise Poilus.”

³⁷⁹ The first promotion for the greeting card campaign appeared in *Le Rire Rouge* 3 (5 December 1914), and ran through the end of the year, appearing as a full-page advertisement in *Le Rire Rouge* 6 (26 December 1914).

³⁸⁰ *Fantasio* resumed publication in February 1915, and initiated the *Flirt sur le front* in May. *Le Rire Rouge* advertised both regularly. Its *appel aux lectrices* for female correspondents to male soldiers appeared in *Le Rire Rouge* 27 (22 May 1915), 5. More detail on correspondence between *marraines de guerre* and *filleuls*, as well as the role of the satirical press in organizing such exchanges, can be found in: Henriette de Vismes, *Histoire authentique*

Coinciding with Juven's pen pal campaign in *Fantasio*, the successor organizations to *Le Rire*'s Salon des Humoristes, the *Société des dessinateurs humoristes* and the *Société des artistes humoristes*, announced their reconciliation after a five-year rift. Composed largely of *Le Rire* affiliates and contributing artists, the two associations fused to organize a wartime exhibition for the benefit of enlisted "wounded artists and the families of the dead."³⁸¹ The event, titled *La Guerre et les Humoristes*, opened at the Galerie La Boëtie on the evening of Friday 21 May and ran through July. The price of admission was fixed at 1 franc, with free admission for wounded soldiers first on Mondays only, then at all times. Though the exhibition received relatively scant publicity, it was praised in the Parisian daily press as a resounding success for the entirety of its run.³⁸² Consequently, the presiding officers of the two associations, Jean-Louis Forain and Abel Faivre, reprised the exhibition annually during the war, with proceeds again donated to benefit injured members and their families. In 1916, after an initial show period in Paris during the summer, the exhibition went on tour across France, stopping in Niort, La Rochelle, Poitiers, Angers, and Bordeaux in two-week intervals between September and December. Organized in conjunction with a governmental committee chaired by the departmental prefect of Deux-Sèvres, the purpose of the tour was to "decentralize laughter" from Paris, in order to demonstrate that "beyond the boulevards, amidst the serious preoccupations of the present moment, France preserves all its *liberté d'esprit*, and that if she produces heroes when she must, she produces

et touchant des marraines et des filleuls de guerre (Paris: Perrin, 1918), as well as Éric Alary, *La Grande Guerre des civils* (Paris: Perrin, 2013), and Pierre Darmon, *Vivre à Paris pendant la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Fayard, 2002).

³⁸¹ *Le Rire Rouge* first advertised the salon on the occasion of its opening, in issue 27 (22 May 1915). However, the earliest announcements had appeared in the major Parisian daily newspapers several weeks prior, on 5 May. For more information concerning the schism between the two *sociétés des humoristes*, see Laurent Bihl, "La guerre des Humoristes" in *Papiers-Nickelés. La revue de l'image populaire* 35, vol. 4 (2012): 6-9.

³⁸² "La Guerre et les Humoristes" was widely reported in most major Parisian daily newspapers, including *Le Figaro*, *Le Gaulois*, *Le Journal*, *Le Matin*, *Le Petit Journal*, *La Presse*, and *Le Temps*. However, *Le Figaro* dedicated considerably more frequent and more detailed record of developments and programming, policy changes, and scheduling at the exhibition. Interested readers and historians should consult *Le Figaro* for the clearest and most comprehensive narrative of the salon's progress.

men of good humor at all times.”³⁸³ In both 1916 and 1917, President of the Republic Raymond Poincaré made a point to make a public visit to the exhibition, donating 300 francs to the salon’s aid fund each time.³⁸⁴ The exhibition was reprised in 1918 for its final year, to similar critical acclaim.

Le Rire Rouge’s efforts to provide material assistance to soldiers endured for the entirety of the war. In September 1916, the editorial board began a special subscription service for poilus on active duty. A notice appeared on 9 September, announcing that due to “occasional difficulties procuring *Le Rire* at the front” the editors had decided to accept three-month subscriptions at a discounted rate for soldiers. The notice additionally guaranteed delivery to every supply depot along the front, “to every trench along the frontline.”³⁸⁵ The offer continued until the end of the war.

War Culture: *Le Rire* against the *Boche*

Though chauvinistic militarism was *Le Rire Rouge*’s central focus, its comic propaganda ultimately served a dual function: glorification of the homeland, and the violent, incessant vilification of the enemy. For *Le Rire Rouge*, the identity of Germany—its people, its culture, its history, its military—was reduced to the inimical stereotype of the grotesque monstrosity known as *le Boche*. Though its etymological origins are ultimately uncertain, the idea of the Boche had been current since the Franco-Prussian War, borrowed from *caboches*, the Alsatian vernacular word for cabbage, and had persisted through the last decades of the nineteenth century as a token of Franco-German enmity in the aftermath of the war.³⁸⁶

³⁸³ Ch. Dauzats, “La décentralisation du rire” in *Le Figaro* (14 September 1916), 3.

³⁸⁴ *Le Figaro* (14 May 1916, and 2 June 1917), 3.

³⁸⁵ “Abonnements pour le front” in *Le Rire Rouge* 95 (9 September 1916), 4.

³⁸⁶ Gaston Esnault, *Le poilu tel qu’il se parle*, 36-38 and 86-90. See also Albert Dauzat, *L’argot de la guerre*, 52-59.

Germanophobia had been a galvanizing undercurrent of French politics, domestic and foreign, in the decades between the Franco-Prussian War and 1914. The crucible of 1870-1871 had given the German Empire and French Third Republic a common origin, despite their contrasting fates: the unification of the German states into a contiguous empire had come at French expense with the cession of Alsace and Lorraine. Revanchism, fixated obsessively on the restoration of the “lost provinces” to French sovereignty, had emerged as an orienting political force in the foundational years of the Third Republic and as France’s primary war aim come August 1914.³⁸⁷

Le Rire had traded prolifically in anti-German satire and caricature prior to the outbreak of war. Kaiser Wilhelm II had been a preferred target, especially in times of international and diplomatic tensions. The Kaiser’s likeness, owing to his distinctive appearance, provided a readily identifiable and powerful canvas for caricatural vitriol. His reckless imperial ambition, embodied in his aggressive *Weltpolitik*, coupled with his penchant for diplomatic blunder, had provided an abundant source of mockery for *Le Rire*’s artists. As discussed in Chapter 2, *Le Rire*’s special issue on the Kaiser’s visit to Ottoman Palestine generated considerable controversy when it was reported that the German embassy and the Ministry of the Interior had been in contact over the possible seizure of the issue and barring it from sale.³⁸⁸ Similar special issues appeared in 1905 and 1911, rehashing the same theme, on the occasions of diplomatic provocations in Morocco.³⁸⁹ In 1908, the Kaiser’s scandalous interview with the British

³⁸⁷ See Bertrand Joly, "La France et la Revanche (1871-1914)" in *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 46, no. 2: Exils (April-June 1999): 325-347.

³⁸⁸ See chapter two of this dissertation, on *Le Rire* and the Dreyfus Affair.

³⁸⁹ *Le Rire*’s special issue on Wilhelm’s visit to Sultan Abdelaziz of Morocco in March 1905, the precipitating event of the Tangier Crisis, appeared as “Le Voyage de Guillaume II,” *Le Rire* n.s. 115 (15 April 1905). Though *Le Rire* did not publish a special issue on the ongoing events of the Agadir Crisis of 1911, it was a frequent subject throughout the year, most notably featured in full-color inserts by Minartz and d’Ostoya on 26 August of that year.

newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* provided cartoonists ever more source material to disparage German foreign policy.³⁹⁰

With the outbreak of war in 1914, *Le Rire Rouge* directed its fullest attentions to the vilification of Germany. The function of laughing at the enemy was, symbolically, of paramount importance to the efficacy of war propaganda and *culture de guerre*. In the cultural front of a war framed as a Manichean clash of civilizations, laughter at the enemy's expense was an existential duty: German nationhood, identity, and *Kultur* represented the antithesis and negation of French republicanism and *Civilisation*, and the primary existential threat to its survival and being.³⁹¹

Hostile representations of Germany (and its Central Power allies) were multivalent: their most frequent targets were the Kaiser and imperial family, as well as the German army, civilians, and German culture. The stream of vitriol was incessant and began immediately, enduring through the armistice and into the immediate postwar period. The number of such images is immeasurable: seemingly every page bears at least one hateful reference to the *Boche*, of varying levels of nuance and technical sophistication. We may, however, taxonomize *Le Rire Rouge*'s repertory of anti-German images and texts into several distinct categories: representations of political and military leadership; representations of German soldiers; and representations of civilian life and national identity and *Kultur*.

³⁹⁰ See Thomas G. Otte, "'An altogether unfortunate affair': Great Britain and the *Daily Telegraph* Affair" in *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 5, no. 2 (1994): 296-333. The original interview with Wilhelm II was published as "The German Emperor and England: A Personal Interview" in the *Daily Telegraph* (28 October 1908).

³⁹¹ See Eberhard Demm, "Propaganda and Caricature in the First World War" in *Journal of Contemporary History* 28, no. 1 (1993): 163-192.

The ridicule of enemy leadership relied upon a resurgence of physiognomic caricatures, distorting and exaggerating physical appearances for comic effect. The trope of the Kaiser as a comic figure, alongside the imperial Hohenzollern family as a whole, continued into wartime. *Le Rire* repurposed Wilhelm's image, particularly his characteristic moustache, as a visual metonym to ridicule innumerable deficiencies and ineptitudes of the foreign enemy, whether in war, in diplomacy, or in civil society. German leaders, military and civilian, all bore his facial hair as a mark of their allegiance to the emperor and supreme enemy of the French people. Kronprinz Wilhelm, as well, was transformed



Figure 5.6: Henri Lanos, "Le roi bave ! – la dernière étape" ("The King drools! The final stage") in *Le Rire Rouge* 8 (9 January 1915), 12. The caption at bottom reads: Shh! Right now, he's playing with Leuven.



Figure 5.7: Adolphe Willette, "Jugé par l'Histoire" in *Le Rire Rouge* 18 (20 March 1915), 6-7. The caption at bottom reads: "All together – Hey bastard!"

seamlessly into his father's court jester as the "clown prince."³⁹² The Kaiser was variously depicted as both infantile and senile, insane, sickly, an incompetent and meddling military dilettante, syphilitic and developmentally stunted, as well as barbarous with an insatiable lust for bloodshed and brutality, working in concert with Satan himself.³⁹³ (Figure 5.6) Popular hatred of Wilhelm had attributed to him blame for countless historical, literary, and contemporary

³⁹² Georges d'Ostoya, "Les plaisirs de Berlin" in *Le Rire Rouge* 2 (28 November 1914), 12.

³⁹³ The exact number of caricatures or otherwise hostile images of the German Kaiser in *Le Rire Rouge* is immeasurable. A frequent target for ridicule was the Kaiser's health and medical condition, including his withered left arm, noticeably shorter than his right, that had caused him lifelong distress. See for example Adrien Barrère, "À Verdun" in *Le Rire Rouge* 75 (22 April 1916). However, one particular cartoon by Henri Lanos depicts an amalgam of all the abovementioned themes present in French caricatures of Wilhelm. See H. Lanos, "Le roi bave! – La dernière étape" in *Le Rire Rouge* 8 (9 January 1915), 12. The epigraph reads, quoting "Dr. Neipp, chief of medicine at the Insane Asylum of Geneva: Wilhelm II is weak-willed and excitable, whose diagnosis would, in all likelihood, be established as thus: tertiary syphilitic, nearing paralytic dementia that may develop into melancholy or mania."

villainies. A March 1915 cartoon by Adolphe Willette frames Wilhelm's legacy as a wickedness of unprecedented historical import, as various figures of historical and mythical significance join to collectively shame the Kaiser for the cruelty of his crimes. Among them, from left to right, are William the Conqueror, Peter the Great, Epaminondas, Hannibal Barca, the *Roi d'Yvetot*, Faustin Soulouque of Haiti, Henry IV, Alexander the Great, Julius Cesar, Attila, Horatio Nelson, Napoleon Bonaparte, Gustavus Adolphus, Louis II of Condé, and the Duke of Marlborough. (Figure 5.7)

Le Rire Rouge depicted both German and other Central Powers' command in similar fashion. Enemy officers and high command were portrayed as both ruthlessly brutal, capable of the most unfathomable monstrosities against soldier and civilian, and equally inept and cowardly.³⁹⁴ Heads of state, on the other hand, were cast as the buffoonish, but no less contemptible puppets of the Kaiser's imperialist designs. Artists rendered Ottoman Sultan Mehmed V variously as a failed emperor, a turkey acting under the Kaiser's coercive orders, and the ubiquitous image of the powerless "Sick Man of Europe," frail but desperate to preserve the remnants of Ottoman suzerainty across the Mediterranean.³⁹⁵ Franz-Joseph I of Austria, meanwhile, was targeted, on the basis of his old age, as a senile and low-functioning puppet of the Kaiser. *Le Rire Rouge* celebrated his death in late 1916 with an anonymous cover illustration mocking his last rites and papal blessing as meaningless and showing him being denied entry at the gates of heaven. When news reached the French public in 1918 that his successor, Karl I, had secretly sought negotiations for a separate peace with the Allies, *Le Rire Rouge* reprised its

³⁹⁴ See for example: Albert Robida, "La Croix de fer..." in *Le Rire Rouge* 30 (12 June 1915); Lucien Métivet, "Le mauvais charmeur," in *Le Rire Rouge* 117 (10 February 1917); Jeannot, "

³⁹⁵ See *Le Rire Rouge* 8 (9 January 1915), 2, as well as Nemoz, "Chez l'homme malade" in *Le Rire Rouge* 15 (27 February 1915), 12. The publication of Nemoz's drawing coincided with the commencement of French operations in the Dardanelles Gallipoli campaign.

delight at Franz-Joseph's death. A cover illustration by Auguste Roubille shows Franz-Joseph consorting with death in hell, expressing his disapproval of Karl's diplomatic blunders: "I never liked that young Karl, I was wrong. He's continuing the Habsburg tradition, but he needs to learn to lie better."³⁹⁶

In its nationalistic zeal, *Le Rire Rouge* equally framed neutral powers and non-state actors as *de facto* enemies of France, and attacked them with comparable vehemence. Owing to Benedict XV's declaration of the Holy See's official neutrality during the war, and the pontiff's own fruitless efforts to negotiate peace, *Le Rire* targeted the Vatican as a traitor to Catholic Europe. Willette cast the Pope as inured to the suffering of Belgium, whereas Francisque Poulbot censured his refusal to act. Remarkably, such cartoons—including several by Léandre,

Willette, and Grandjouan—also agitated for the pope to reassert temporal power through military



Figure 5.8: Charles Léandre. "Un pape qui n'a pas l'air très « catholique »" in *Le Rire Rouge* 179 (20 April 1918). The caption, both inset and at bottom, read: "Why would you expect that Benedict XV, having not excommunicated the Austro-Boches for the massacres in Belgium and Serbia, deportations, etc...would protest against the bombardment of a church?...especially while the Kaiser entertains him."

³⁹⁶ Auguste Roubille, "François-Joseph aux enfers" in *Le Rire Rouge* 181 (4 May 1918), 1.

action, attacking the pontiff as a coward and secret agent of the Kaiser, profiteering from the Vatican while the *Boche* burns and loots churches across occupied Belgium and France.³⁹⁷ One cover illustration by Léandre accuses Benedict XV of complicity in German war crimes, rejecting pontifical temporal power and the alms of St. Peter to join a German soldier in the slaughter of a mother and child, in the shadow of a ruined church edifice. (Figure 5.8)

The atrocity of German soldiers' war crimes and aggression against helpless innocents was an enduring theme of *Le Rire Rouge*'s wartime repertory that enabled their dehumanization. The image of the *Boche* effectively became a blank canvas on which to project inconsistent or outright contradictory hostilities. On one hand, *Le Rire Rouge* emphasized German soldiers' ineptitude and cowardice in battle: the *Boche* infantryman lacked discipline, valor, skill, and basic intelligence or environmental awareness in the field. On the other hand, the *Boche* was a barbaric monster, capable of inflicting unfathomable brutality and horror against civilians and *poilus*. Reports of German atrocities in occupied Belgium, emanating from the British press, buttressed the outrage and indignation of French propaganda. The "Rape of Belgium" narrative, symbolized in *Le Rire Rouge* most prominently by the destruction of Leuven, was a ubiquitous and enduring reminder of German barbarity and perversion: German soldiers delighted in the torture, sexual battery, mutilation, and murder of innocent women and children in rural villages fallen under occupation.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁷ The relationship between the French Republic and the Holy See had been especially strained since 1904, when a dispute between President Émile Loubet and Pope Pius X over a state visit to Italy resulted in the official rupture of diplomatic relations. In 1905, France promulgated the Law concerning the separation of Churches and State. For the cartoons referenced here, see: Adolphe Willette, "Au seuil du Vatican" in *Le Rire Rouge* 15 (27 February 1915). Adolphe Willette signed the cartoon "Adolphe Willette, Catholique"; Francisque Poulbot, Untitled cover illustration in *Le Rire Rouge* 47 (9 October 1915). Cartoons by Métivet and Grandjouan agitating for the papacy to reclaim temporal powers to intervene in the war appear in *Le Rire Rouge* 34 (10 July 1915), 5-8.

³⁹⁸ The body of research on both German war crimes in occupied Belgium and Allied propaganda concerning German atrocities is vast. For further information, see in particular John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), especially 175-212, and

French propagandists painted the image of the *Boche* as a grotesque monstrosity. In the visual language of war caricature, the German soldier became an invasive species at once savage, unruly, and vicious. In *Le Rire Rouge* the image of the monstrous *Boche* largely took shape throughout 1915, in cover illustrations by various artists: Léandre, Métivet, Adolphe Willette, Auguste Roubille, and Jeannot, among others. Lucien Métivet's cover for the March 20 issue depicts "the Kaiser's soldier" as a grotesque apelike hominid, gaunt and



Figure 5.9: Lucien Métivet. "Le soldat du Kaiser" in *Le Rire Rouge* 18 (20 March 1915).

lurching with a mouthful of sausages. The soldier is dragging a mother and child, their clothes in tatters, through the smoldering ruins of a Belgian village. The caption sarcastically describes the German soldier as "neat, tidy, stylish, composed, serious, chaste, and good-natured." An inset

Leanne Green, "Advertising war: Picturing Belgium in First World War publicity" in *Media, War & Conflict* 7, no. 3 (2014): 309-325. Reports of crimes of occupation in Belgium had appeared since the first days of German invasion, with major incidents of sexual brutalization, murder, and looting at Dinant, Tamines, and Leuven (Louvain). Historians agree, however, that the 1915 publication of the Bryce Report of the British government's Committee on Alleged German Outrages marked the institutional legitimization of sensationalized reports of German massacres in Allied propaganda and press. For *Le Rire Rouge*, the brutalization of Belgium was a constant focal point of propaganda for the duration of the war, though the largest numbers of references to German atrocities in Belgium appeared between 1914 and 1915. Belgium and Belgians were portrayed always as unfairly victimized, peace-loving, and an integral part of the Allied fighting force. See for example, "Le Rire à l'étranger : Revue rétrospective de la guerre – IV. La Belgique" in *Le Rire Rouge* 4 (12 December 1914), 2.

displays a quote from the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, claiming that “no other army in the world” observes the laws of war as rigorously as the Imperial German Army. (Figure 5.9) Charles Léandre employed similar themes the following week in his illustration of Prince Regent Alexander, “the little Serb,” slaying the “Germanic Hydra” of Wilhelm and Franz Joseph of Austria.³⁹⁹ Léandre reprised the same format on May 15 with a cover illustration of Grand Duke Nicholas, commander of the Imperial Russian Army, goring a hog with Wilhelm’s face.⁴⁰⁰

In paradoxical contrast to the image of the *Boche* as a savage brute, *bourrage de crâne* simultaneously cast German soldiers as cowardly, mutinous, and disloyal, eager to defect to the vastly more comfortable conditions in the Allied ranks. In such representations, in which German soldiers effectively undermined or impeded German war aims, they bore a separate identity: that of *Fritz*. A stereotypical name for the countless, faceless masses of enlisted German soldiers, the image of Fritz was considerably more nuanced than the bestial *Boche*. Rather, Fritz was young, naïve, inept, and fearful, with chronic bad luck. He was most often depicted as a prisoner of war, despairing at the prospect of Germany’s uncertain future, though he also appeared as a menial laborer in enemy service too, often at the mercy of a hardhearted and authoritarian superior. Occasionally, he appeared as an elderly German civilian.⁴⁰¹

The most notable contrast between the images of Fritz and the *Boche* is the narrative purpose each serves. The *Boche* is a one-dimensional monstrous enemy, uniformly evil. Fritz, on

³⁹⁹ Charles Léandre, “Le petit Serbe” in *Le Rire Rouge* 19 (27 March 1915).

⁴⁰⁰ Charles Léandre, “L’autre silencieux” in *Le Rire Rouge* 26 (15 May 1915).

⁴⁰¹ Though never with the same frequency as the more straightforwardly hostile *Boche*, *Le Rire Rouge* had employed “Fritz” since its first issue in reference to German soldiers’ ineptitude, ignorance, cowardice, and naiveté. Its first issues contain short fictions framed as the war diaries of two Fritzes, one a backwater rube named Fritz Schweinmaul, and the other a POW named Fritz Kruppenheim. Over time, *Le Rire Rouge* developed “Fritz” into the stereotypical enlisted German grunt soldier, apt to surrender to experience a better life in captivity in France. See for example, Charles Genty, “Inquiétude” in *Le Rire Rouge* 65 (12 February 1916), 12; Claude Bils, “Sur le front oriental,” in *Le Rire Rouge* 76 (29 April 1916), 12; Ricardo Florès, “Ce bon Fritz” in *Le Rire Rouge* 129 (5 May 1917).

the other hand, was employed as a tragicomic symbol that complicated perceptions of the enemy. Fritz's cowardice and hesitancy in battle, despair in surrender, and comfort in captivity called into question the nature of war guilt, as well as the purpose of anti-German animosity. Fritz was a relatable, if incompetent counterpart to the *poilu*, preserving his humanness in the face of inhuman acts, and thus absolved of his responsibility for causing and prolonging the war.

Le Rire Rouge's depictions of German civilians employed similar, sometimes contradictory, contrasts. The German people were reduced to grotesque and brutish caricatures, but were also portrayed as victims of a corrupt, incompetent, and heartless state's abuse and mismanagement.⁴⁰² German propaganda, both official and popular, had promoted a war narrative that married the nation's struggle for survival against a foreign war of extermination with the impassioned belief in the triumphal superiority of German *Kultur* over Western *Civilisation*.⁴⁰³ As such, authorities, intellectuals, and the press worked in tandem to aggressively malign foreign influences in cultural life, including dress, cuisine, and language. *Le Rire Rouge* responded to German *Augusterlebnis* in March 1915: Fabien Fabiano's back cover for the 20 March issue

⁴⁰² Representations of German civilians appeared considerably less frequently than other anti-German motifs, and largely as points of leverage to discredit the Kaiser's leadership. The earliest depictions appeared following the success of the British naval blockade of Germany in Spring 1915, with Fabiano's "La Mode KK" and Abel Faivre, "La Grande Vie à Berlin," in *Le Rire Rouge* 21 (10 April 1915). Throughout the war, however, countless illustrations depicted the hardships of the "Turnip Winter" of 1916-1917, in which poor harvests, a potato famine, and shortages sparked food riots across Germany. In *Le Rire Rouge*, Abel Faivre lampooned the famine regularly. See for example Abel Faivre, "Panem et circenses" in *Le Rire Rouge* 66 (19 February 1916); "En Bochie" in *Le Rire Rouge* 81 (3 June 1916); Hervé Baille, "Le peuple murmure" in *Le Rire Rouge* 67 (26 February 1916), 12;

⁴⁰³ The historiography of German propaganda and nationalism during the war, though largely eclipsed from view in this chapter, is equally developed and complex. Comparative analyses have long insisted on the oppositional forces of German and Western nationalisms, as well as the peculiarities of "German ideology." For sources in English, see: David Welch, *Germany, Propaganda, and Total War, 1914-1918* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), especially 8-40; Peter Jelavich, "German culture in the Great War," in Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites eds., *European culture in the Great War: The arts, entertainment, and propaganda, 1914-1918* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 32-57.

mocks the physiques of German civilians, ill-fitted to the French fashions they are wearing and swearing to boycott.⁴⁰⁴

French propaganda insisted that German *Kultur* did not, and indeed could not, exist in isolation apart from its neighbors. *Kultur* was the perversion of French *Civilisation*, and inherently stood in Manichean opposition to the civic virtues of French republicanism. Scholars of wartime propaganda have long examined the dichotomy between the two ideas as the driving narrative logic of the war. Eberhard Demm in particular has examined the ideological roots of *Kultur* in German caricature. In Demm's view, *Kultur* was a composite ideology invented to fuse the aesthetic principles for a newly unified German people, in contrast to the industrial and cosmopolitan modernity of *Civilisation* which inevitably begat cultural decline.⁴⁰⁵

Conversely, French propaganda cast German *Kultur* as primitive, unrefined, founded in barbaric violence. *Le Rire Rouge* incessantly disparaged German heritage, history, and traditions with stereotypes. The first issue, for example, includes a full-page illustration by Fernand Fau, titled "Deutschland über Alles," mocking the "superiority" of German cuisine, fashion, industry, diplomacy, and even sexuality.⁴⁰⁶ Following the release of the Bryce Committee's report in May 1915, *Kultur* became ironic shorthand for the German atrocities in Belgium. Henri Lanos's cover illustration for the May 29 issue of *Le Rire Rouge* depicts a German soldier as a monstrous reptilian "stinking beast," breathing sulfuric acid gas and pumping petroleum to fuel burning trench fires. The cartoon is titled "*Kultur*'s Latest Weapons." (Figure 5.10) In the issue of 20 January 1917, a short column by Gaston de Pawlowski quips that "a new benefit of *Kultur*"

⁴⁰⁴ Fabien Fabiano, "La Mode KK" in *Le Rire Rouge* 18 (20 March 1915), 12.

⁴⁰⁵ Eberhard Demm, "Propaganda and Caricature in the First World War," 175-177.

⁴⁰⁶ *Le Rire Rouge* 1 (21 November 1914), 6.



Figure 5.10: Henri Lanos. "Les dernières armes de la « Kultur »" in *Le Rire Rouge* 28 (29 May 1915).

included the Germans renaming the capital of Poland:

“beginning next month, Warsaw will be called *Rétrograd*.”⁴⁰⁷

Even after the armistice was declared in November 1918,

Léandre railed against the villainy of German identity: a

double-page feature in color shows a virginal Marianne

holding a mirror to her German counterpart Germania, shown

seated atop an anvil and

bloodied with a broken leg,

donning armor, a crown of oak

leaves, and the imperial crown

of the Holy Roman Empire. Her

reflection shows a hideous beast wearing the imperial *Pickelhaube*. Behind her, a path of

destruction and the dead bodies of German soldiers. More German soldiers attempt to subdue

Marianne, but are helpless to contain her revelation of an essential truth: “Know yourself at last!

You believe you are superb, but you are only monstrous!”⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁷ *Le Rire Rouge* 114 (20 January 1917), 5.

⁴⁰⁸ Charles Léandre, "Le véritable visage de l'Allemagne" in *Le Rire Rouge* 212 (7 December 1918), 8-9.

The import of continually dehumanizing and vilifying the enemy to the efficacy of war propaganda, and especially to caricature, cannot be overstated. For *Le Rire Rouge*, the enemy was not just the primary target of wartime ridicule and caricature, but its *raison d'être*, the antithesis and existential menace to France's national identity, being, and values. German *Kultur* was an eschatological menace to France. To laugh at it was, in essence, to participate in the cultural front of a war for survival.

War Culture: *Le Rire Anti-Rouge*: Satirizing Socialism, 1914-1918

Despite counting various prominent leftwing socialist and anarchist humorists among its ranks, *Le Rire Rouge* remained vociferously opposed to leftwing antimilitarism and internationalist solidarity for the duration of the war. Beginning with the assassination of noted antimilitarist and socialist opposition leader Jean Jaurès, which occurred during the culmination of the diplomatic crisis of July 1914, socialist support for the national war effort had been lukewarm and divisive in the best of times. Jaurès's death prompted the SFIO's entry into the national unity government and the collapse of the Second International and solidarity between the socialist parties of Europe. Nevertheless, socialist participation in and support for the national war effort was contentious: internal divisions persisted, and reluctance toward cooperation with the national coalition was met with severe backlash in the form of accusations of treason.⁴⁰⁹

Though nationalism largely oriented *Le Rire*'s hatred of socialists both French and foreign, especially the socialist parliamentary bloc, the criticisms and accusations it levied against the Left extended far beyond the political or civic arena. Charges of treason or conspiracy against the nation were incessant, but anti-socialist rhetoric was also subsumed into a broader

⁴⁰⁹ See Madeleine Rebérioux, "Le socialisme et la Première Guerre mondiale (1914-1918)" in Jacques Droz ed., *Histoire générale du socialisme T. 2 : De 1875 à 1918* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983), 585-645.

reaction against cultural changes in French society. Socialists were conflated not only with support for pro-German perfidy and Bolshevik sabotage, but also with the nefarious cultural influences of immigration, sexual deviance, and Judaism. As such, *Le Rire* framed the mockery of socialism as an attack on degeneracy and decadence, in perfect continuity from previous decades.

Le Rire Rouge consistently delighted in the socialists' political setbacks and misfortunes, especially relishing their ignored appeals to pacificism. In spring 1915, a cartoon by Métivet rebukes them for violating national unity: "the same obligations [of national defense] for all, including socialists." The following week, an editorial note mentions that two anonymous "brave socialists from Bourges who understood nothing about Métivet's cartoon" canceled their subscriptions to *Le Rire* over the insult. In response, *Le Rire* mocks their decision as misguided ideology: "poor guys, they call that liberty!!!"⁴¹⁰

Similar jokes persisted through 1915 and 1916. Though the International Socialist Bureau remained defunct, European socialists independently organized manifold international conferences, seeking to provide some channel of antiwar dialogue and ideological coherence to their movement. The parties of neutral countries met first: the Swiss and Italian parties at Lugano in September 1914, followed by the Scandinavian parties in Stockholm and Copenhagen. Allied parties met in London in February 1915, and the socialist parties of the Central Powers met in Vienna in April. In March, the Third International Socialist Women's Conference was held in Bern. Under stark condemnation from their national parties, some thirty delegates arrived from

⁴¹⁰ For the cartoon in question, see Lucien Métivet, "L'union sacrée" in *Le Rire Rouge* 16 (6 March 1915), 4. *Le Rire Rouge*'s response to their disgruntled readers appeared in *Le Rire Rouge* 18 (20 March 1915), 4.

combatant countries to denounce the war as a machination of imperialist foreign policy.⁴¹¹ As they met, *Le Rire Rouge* reprinted a cartoon from the Turin humor journal *Fischietto*, showing two “neutral and conscientious” socialists in conversation as they ignore their Belgian comrade’s cries for help as Germany stabs him with a dagger: “Hang in there! We’re going to vote on a new resolution condemning German imperialism!”⁴¹² In advance of another meeting at Keintal in April 1916, a cartoon by Nob suggested that principled socialists were homosexual, as they sought to oppose war by “staying home” together with their comrades.⁴¹³ In September that year, Nob further rebuked the SFIO’s minority antiwar faction, who sent a delegation to Kienthal. A cartoon titled “The Only Internationale” depicts Marianne bearing the standard of the French Republic and leading various Allied soldiers in a bayonet charge. The cartoon’s caption simply and sardonically quotes the lyrics of the eponymous anthem of the Second International: “C’est la lutte finale, groupons-nous et demain, L’Internationale...”⁴¹⁴

The tenor of *Le Rire Rouge*’s anti-socialist rhetoric grew more violently conspiratorial amidst the tumults of 1917. Between March and May, the overthrow of the Tsarist regime and its replacement with a tenuous provisional government in Russia had been compounded by leadership changes in the French cabinet, failed offensive operations under the command of Robert Nivelle, and American entry into the Allied war effort in response to German attacks on American shipping in the North Atlantic. Floundering morale in the ranks of the French army in the wake of the failed Nivelle Offensive, aggravated by the news of a delayed American

⁴¹¹ Olga Hess Gankin and Harold Henry Fisher, *The Bolsheviks and the World War: the origins of the Third International* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1940), 286-287.

⁴¹² *Le Rire Rouge* 23 (24 April 1915), 11.

⁴¹³ Nob’s cartoon depicts a socialist civilian imploring a soldier to abandon his post. The text reads, “If you were a good socialist, you’d be at home right now.” The soldier responds, “if you were a good socialist, you’d be at home with me.” See Nob, “Social-Demokrat” in *Le Rire Rouge* 72 (1 April 1916), 9.

⁴¹⁴ Nob, “La seule Internationale” in *Le Rire Rouge* 97 (23 September 1916), 12.

mobilization, precipitated a wave of mutinies and mass desertions from the front along the Aisne. As events in Russia turned toward Bolshevik seizure of power and the negotiation of a separate, unilateral peace with Germany, political unity in France grew tenuous as the war's course looked increasingly uncertain.⁴¹⁵

Press reactions to these developments reveal the real political, social, and interpersonal tensions underlying the costly, immobile war of attrition entrenched along the Western Front. The French GQG successfully withheld any information pertaining to the mutinies from both the press and German intelligence, but news of the Russian Revolution and American declaration of war against Germany reverberated even through the pages of satirical journals. American entry into the Allied war effort was met with unanimous jubilation in the press: *Le Rire Rouge* dedicated its 14 July issue, marking the occasion of the French Republic's national holiday, to the history of French-American friendship. Léandre's cover illustration depicts John Pershing, commanding general of the American Expeditionary Forces, receiving Marianne's adoring embrace for "bringing France the [same] support that Lafayette gave to the young United States" 140 years later.⁴¹⁶

On the other hand, *Le Rire Rouge* responded to developments in Russia with increasingly violent rhetoric of revolutionaries conspiring with Germany to sabotage the Allied war effort. Revolutionary unrest in Russia broke out during the observance of International Women's Day. Nicholas II announced his abdication a week thereafter, with a provisional government being

⁴¹⁵ There is a large body of scholarship on the French Army mutinies of 1917. See, for example, Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *The French Army and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), chapters 5 and 6, 170-220. Other works include Guy Pedroncini, *Les mutineries de 1917*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983), and Leonard V. Smith, "War and 'Politics': The French Army Mutinies of 1917" in *War and History* 2, no. 2 (July 1995): 180-201.

⁴¹⁶ Charles Léandre, "Cent quarante ans après" in *Le Rire Rouge* 139 (14 July 1917).

formed the following day. *Le Rire Rouge* expressed qualified and reserved support for the revolutionary upheaval, applauding the overthrow of the tsarist regime and the triumph of liberty while denouncing socialist interests as German subterfuge. Throughout the spring, cartoons by Métivet, Nob, and Ricardo Florès pled with Russian liberals to direct their revolutionary fervor towards a reinvigorated military campaign in the West. Léandre's 28 April cover illustration even accuses the pacifist socialist Jean Pierre Raffin-Dugens of treason for forcing the resignation of Aristide Briand's conservative Minister of War, Hubert Lyautey, in an open session of the Chamber of Deputies in March.⁴¹⁷ Lyautey's resignation would ultimately force the collapse of the Briand government in the wake of the failed Nivelle Offensive on the Aisne.⁴¹⁸ An October cover illustration by Jeannot rebukes French pacifists in the simplest of terms, showing repatriated German POWs scolding a pacifist civilian for his anti-war stupidity: "Your dog is even smarter than you."⁴¹⁹

When Social Revolutionary Alexander Kerensky, recently appointed Minister of War in the Russian provisional government, committed Russian forces to a renewed offensive against the Central Powers in June, the news reverberated as a sigh of relief in the French press. In *Le Rire Rouge*, Léandre penned a caricatural ode to Kerensky as the "soul of the Russian Revolution," in the style of the Marseillaise, carrying the Russian tricolor flag bearing revolutionary slogans.⁴²⁰ (Figure 5.11) Kerensky's assurance to the Western allies, however, was short lived, as the offensive collapsed within two weeks and Russian casualties soared as morale fell and soldiers, in open defiance of their superiors, fled in retreat. Civil unrest in Petrograd

⁴¹⁷ Charles Léandre, "Les grands mots sans remède" in *Le Rire Rouge* 128 (28 April 1917).

⁴¹⁸ Robert A. Doughty *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy and Operations in the Great War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 311-354.

⁴¹⁹ Pierre-Georges Jeannot, "La paix boche" in *Le Rire Rouge* 151 (6 October 1917).

⁴²⁰ Charles Léandre, "Aux armes, citoyens !" in *Le Rire Rouge* 137 (30 June 1917).

during the July days compounded the losses and eroded popular support for the provisional government as Bolshevik leadership was arrested or fled into exile, blamed for conspiring against the state. *Le Rire Rouge* ran a cover illustration the following week, showing a German man praying before a crucifix: “Thank you, God, for making the Russians so naïve.”⁴²¹

Le Rire Rouge continued to denounce international socialism, particularly the rapprochement between Russian revolutionaries and German parties, for the duration of 1917. In the

spring and summer, the primary focus lay with the movement of the Bern International to Stockholm in preparation for the final iteration of the Zimmerwald antiwar socialist congress. In *Le Rire Rouge*, Lucien Métivet framed the Russian delegation as surrendering to a wider German conspiracy to conquer Europe,⁴²² while Ricardo Florès menacingly invited the International Socialist Commission to parlay with poilus at Bordeaux.⁴²³ Socialist agitations against the German war effort, however, were met with admiration: Nob, for example, penned a sardonic ode to “the new phoenix, or the miracle of Sainte-Internationale” when social democrats burned



Figure 5.11: Charles Léandre: "Aux armes, citoyens!" in *Le Rire Rouge* 137 (30 June 1917).

⁴²¹ Edmond Blampied, "L'Action de grâces" in *Le Rire Rouge* 138 (7 July 1917).

⁴²² Lucien Métivet, "À Stockholm – des renforts pour le Kaiser" in *Le Rire Rouge* 135 (16 June 1917).

⁴²³ Ricardo Florès, "Après Bordeaux" in *Le Rire Rouge* 152 (13 October 1917), 7.

German flags before a statue of Otto von Bismarck in Berlin.⁴²⁴ At the same time, the editorial board of an antimilitarist socialist satirical daily, *Le Bonnet Rouge*, had been arrested and convicted of defeatism and entreating with the enemy, fueling nationalist agitations against the socialists.⁴²⁵

The events of the October Revolution and its aftermath in Russia exacerbated the violent tenor of anti-socialist sentiment in France. In early November,⁴²⁶ the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, under Bolshevik leadership, had seized control of major government institutions through armed insurrection. Kerensky fled the city, and the Second Congress of Soviets opened to Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionaries quitting in protest. State authority in Russia was formally transferred to the Congress of Soviets, who formed the Soviet of People's Commissars, an all-Bolshevik government under Lenin's leadership. That same day, the Congress issued a decree for the abolition of private property, and a decree on peace proposing withdrawal from the war.⁴²⁷

Le Rire Rouge treated the October Revolution as a total betrayal of the Franco-Russian Alliance. In the weeks that followed, manifold cartoons reviled the Bolshevik Revolution as an international conspiracy between Russian workers, German leadership, and Jews. On one hand, the Bolsheviks were allegedly collaborating with German military high command to undermine France. On the other, multiple cartoons alleged a Jewish conspiracy against the Allies. A cartoon by Jeannot, for example, denounced the Petrograd Soviet's decree on peace as an act of

⁴²⁴ Nob, "Le nouveau phénix ou le miracle de la Sainte Internationale" in *Le Rire Rouge* 135 (16 June 1917), 7.

⁴²⁵ For more on the *Bonnet Rouge* Affair, see Bruno Besnier, *L'affaire du Bonnet Rouge* (Mémoire de Master II d'Histoire: École Pratique des Hautes Études, 2006).

⁴²⁶ The October Revolution occurred on 25 and 26 October, according to the dating of the Julian calendar in official use at the time. According to the Gregorian calendar, events of the October Revolution took place between 7 and 8 November.

⁴²⁷ All information cited here pertaining to the chronology of the Russian Revolution was consulted in Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 4th ed. (Oxford University Press, 2017), 41-62.

aggression against France, a conspiracy negotiated between Kaiser Wilhelm and Bolshevik agents, depicted as Jewish stereotypes, to establish new communist militias under Bolshevik control to fight the Allies.⁴²⁸ Following the formalization of armistice and peace between Germany and the Soviet government at Brest-Litovsk, cartoonist Nob accused French socialist Jean Longuet, the grandson of Karl Marx, of fomenting a communist uprising by bringing “Petrograd to Paris” after expressing his support for an immediate peace in France. Several weeks later, Nob insisted that French Jews were working in concert with the Bolsheviks and Germans to undermine French war gains. A cartoon titled “Judas Bolshevik” shows Judas Iscariot’s dead body hanging from a tree in “potter’s field.”⁴²⁹

Despite their tacit support for the national war budget, the SFIO leadership was a frequent

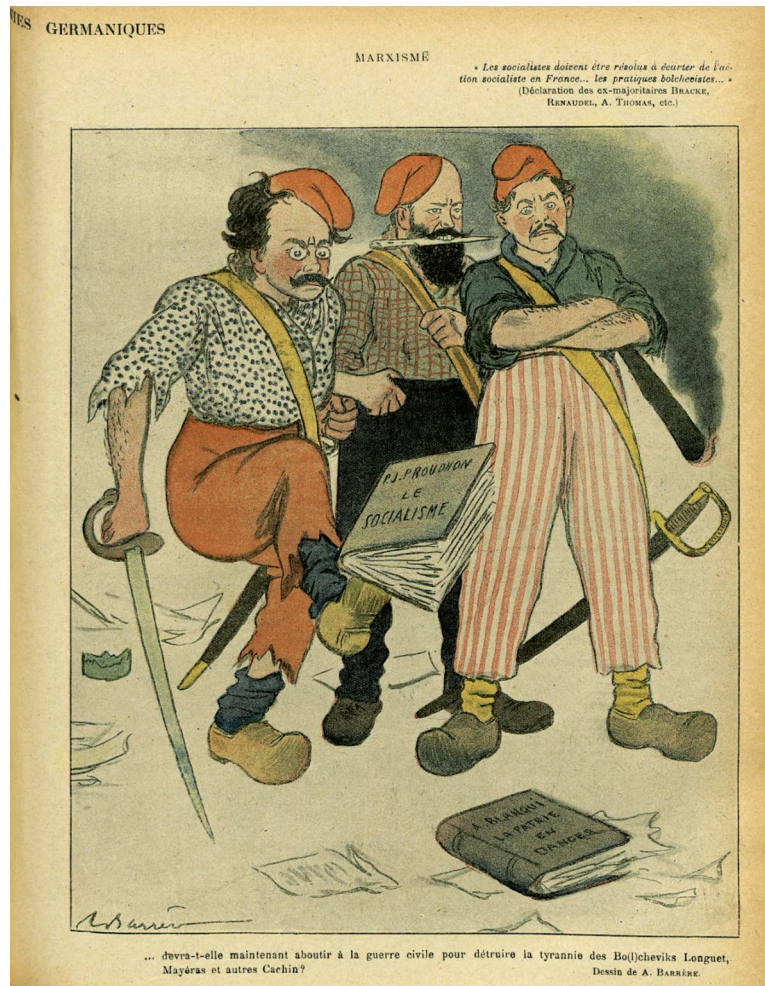


Figure 5.12: Adrien Barrère. "Deux tyrannies germaniques : Marxisme" in *Le Rire Rouge* 211 (30 November 1918), 9. The epigraph excerpts a speech of the former majority faction of the SFIO, reading “Socialists must resolutely dismiss Bolshevik methods from socialist action in France.”

⁴²⁸ Jeannot, “Les buts de paix du « Soviet »” in *Le Rire Rouge* 156 (10 November 1917), 7.

⁴²⁹ Nob, “Judas Bolchevik” in *Le Rire Rouge* 176 (30 March 1918), 7. The cartoon depicts a Jewish banker holding bags of German marks, contemplating Judas’ hanged body: “All this for betraying one man? What an idiot! I’ve betrayed millions!” The “potter’s field” referenced in the epigraph puns both the biblical Akeldama as well as an idiomatic expression for the mass graves of unidentified French soldiers.

target for *Le Rire Rouge* throughout 1918. Leadership elections at the party congress had brought Longuet's "minority" antimilitarist opposition faction to the helm. Longuet's familial connection to Karl Marx, a German, alongside his vocal criticisms of the war's disproportionate impact to workers and their families, made him a salient object of nationalist vitriol. *Le Rire Rouge* incessantly denounced him as a defeatist, traitor, and agent of the Kaiser who rejoiced in the murder of French soldiers.⁴³⁰ Even after the armistice was declared in November, cartoonist and anticommunist activist Adrien Barrère attacked Longuet and his colleagues Marcel Cachin and Barthélémy Mayéras as agents of Bolshevik Marxism, a "German tyranny," who had betrayed the spirit of French socialism, intent on driving the nation to the brink of civil war.⁴³¹ (Figure 5.12)

The End of the War

By October 1918, the Supreme Command of the German Imperial Army, fearing further Allied breakthroughs along German lines in the Hundred Days Offensive, began to sue for peace. In the first week of November, negotiations began in earnest. A German delegation arrived in France in the first week of November. Three days later, an armistice, signed in Marshall Ferdinand Foch's private rail carriage at Compiègne, effectively ended all hostilities between Allied and German forces on the Western Front. Naval mutinies, general strikes and insurrections, and the abdication of the Kaiser two days prior had plunged Germany into a revolutionary crisis.

⁴³⁰ See for example, Nob, "Pétrograd chez soi !" in *Le Rire Rouge* 172 (2 March 1918), 7; and Jeannot, "Après la victoire" in *Le Rire Rouge* 196 (17 August 1918), 7.

⁴³¹ Adrien Barrère, "Deux tyrannies germaniques: Marxisme" in *Le Rire Rouge* 211, 9.

When news of Germany's capitulation first reverberated throughout the French press, it was met with near incredulity. *Le Rire Rouge* ran a special theme issue on 2 November, its first since the war's beginning. At twenty pages and commanding a steep price of 40 centimes during a period of material shortages, *Le Rire Rouge*'s "Paix Allemande" issue represents the culmination of *Le Rire*'s wartime project, adjoining many disparate threads of nationalist chauvinism into a unified rebuke of a negotiated peace with the enemy. The issue's double-page centerpiece, illustrated in color by Charles Léandre, shows the allegorical figure of Germania, caricatured grotesquely, engorging herself at a dining table on the spoils of war as the enslaved people of Germany toil in labor beneath her. At top left, a caption reads: "Germany's war aim: stuffing her face." An epigraph at top right reads, "In German, there is an expression, *sich verfressen*, which means 'to eat like a pig until indigestion ensues.'" At bottom, another caption reads even more plainly: "German Peace: War, forever and always!"⁴³² Much of the issue alleges various German plots to sabotage the Allies during peacetime, owing to their history of brutality and deceit during war. The rear cover illustration by Pierre Laurens, titled "Paradise Lost," shows the family of a wounded poilu scolding a German for visiting a ruined French cemetery. The gravestone lists Germany's war crimes with an imperative for its readers to never forget the German occupation of Belgium and northern France: "The France you mutilated wishes to never see you again!"⁴³³ Inside the special issue, an editorial notice to readers announced an imminent return to *Le Rire*'s regular peacetime format at the recently raised price point of 40 centimes, owing to the soaring costs of printing and paper supplies during the war. To justify the price increase, *Le Rire* promises new content: satirical reporting; debuting new artists alongside

⁴³² Charles Léandre, "Le but de guerre de Germania : s'empiffrer" in *Le Rire Rouge: La paix allemande – numéro special*, 207 (2 November 1918), 10-11.

⁴³³ Pierre Laurens, "Le paradis perdu" in *Le Rire Rouge* 207, 20.

prolific masters of the craft; more color illustrations; more rebuses and reader submission contests; and more variety and surprise “to show that *Le Rire*, cleverer than our parliamentarians, knew how to organize the postwar and implement it before the peace.”⁴³⁴

The final issues of *Le Rire Rouge*, appearing in the last weeks of 1918, indeed provided innovative content to its readers in the immediate postwar period. These issues provide invaluable insights that capture the spirit and breadth of demobilization, as well as popular attitudes towards the war’s end both at the front and the rear. Two themes dominated the pages of *Le Rire Rouge* in November and December 1918: German war guilt and the necessity of punitive peace terms; and the bittersweet relief of victory for a war-weary France.

Le Rire delighted in the revolutionary unrest that had gripped Germany and brought it to the precipice of civil war. Mutinies in the ranks of the Imperial Navy had ballooned into general strikes and social disorder across Germany’s major cities in the last weeks of October and early November, culminating in the Kaiser’s flight and abdication. Having blamed Germany for instigating and abetting the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, *Le Rire* reveled in the collapse of the imperial order in Berlin. Caricatures by Léandre, Florès, and Willette especially indulged in celebrating the Kaiser’s abdication. Nevertheless, German war guilt was the central concern of such caricatures, framing unrest in Germany as poetic justice for a “half-century of...Germanic tyrannies.”⁴³⁵ Willette in particular continued to simmer his wartime passions, reissuing a cartoon that had been previously censored in August 1914. The illustration depicted death, dressed in traditional Bavarian costume, holding mugs of ale, and riding a casket “made in

⁴³⁴ « À nos lecteurs » in *Le Rire Rouge* 207, 16.

⁴³⁵ Adolphe Willette, "Militarisme" in *Le Rire Rouge* 211 (30 November 1918), 8. Willette’s epigraph quotes Georges Clemenceau.

Germania,” bringing “civilization” to her European neighbors. At center, an excerpt from the Berlin *National Zeitung* threatens France with the full might of Germany’s military fury.⁴³⁶

On the other hand, victory provided a sense of relief for a war-weary France. *Le Rire* progressively reoriented its attentions away from the enemy and towards the postwar status quo of demobilization. The lives of demobilized Allied soldiers, the return of POWs, and the celebration of expected territorial gains became focal points of *Le Rire*’s renewed postwar optimism. *Le Rire* lauded the news of Woodrow Wilson’s unprecedented visit to Paris, as well as the return of the Victory of Samothrace from the Louvre’s basement to exhibition, as the symbolic culmination of the Allied triumph.⁴³⁷ Equal cause for jubilation was the long anticipated return of Alsace and Lorraine to French sovereignty, France’s chief war aim on the eve of 1914. Full-page illustrations by Henri Zislin, an Alsatian from Mulhouse, and Willette rejoiced in the lost provinces’ “liberation.”⁴³⁸ (Figure 5.13) Nevertheless, overtures of jubilation were counterweighted against the starker realities of postwar alienation. The return of sickly and emaciated POWs, the isolation of soldiers readjusting to civilian life, the presence of American and British soldiers in Parisian music halls, overstaying their welcomes when flirting with Frenchwomen, all prompted *Le Rire* and its readers to confront the broader truth of the war’s

⁴³⁶ Adolphe Willette, "J'apporte la civilisation !" in *Le Rire Rouge* 210 (23 November 1918), 5.

⁴³⁷ See, respectively, Lucien Métivet, "À un « penseur »" in *Le Rire Rouge* 214 (21 December 1918), 12; and Nob, "La Victoire en chantant..." in *Le Rire Rouge* 211, 12.

⁴³⁸ See Henri Zislin, "En Alsace libérée : les joies du retour" in *Le Rire Rouge* 211, 11 ; and Adolphe Willette, "Chanson nouvelle sur un air ancien" in *Le Rire Rouge* 213 (14 December 1918), 8-9. The artist dedicates the illustration as an "homage to [patriotic Napoleonic illustrator Auguste] Raffet."

legacy in everyday life, including the loss of *Le Rire*'s own prolific wartime contributor, Ricardo Florès, in November.⁴³⁹



Figure 5.13: Adolphe Willette. "Chanson nouvelle sur un air ancien" in *Le Rire Rouge* 213 (14 December 1918), 8-9. The drawing is dedicated "in homage to [Auguste] Raffet." Caption at bottom reads, "Marshall Foch and his buglers: 'Here are your daughters I've brought back to you...'"

By the year's end, *Le Rire* had largely resumed much of its regular peacetime variety content. Beginning in November, the journal reintroduced a bi-weekly rebus and puzzle contest, as well as "reportages humoristiques" showcasing various aspects of the economic and cultural boom in postwar Paris: music halls, poster art, and even the repurposing of wartime materiel into consumer goods.⁴⁴⁰ As Wilson departed for Paris in December, *Le Rire* awaited his arrival with the hope of pushing him towards more punitive peace terms with Germany, at whose expense they celebrated the coming of Christmas and the New Year. The final issue of the year appeared

⁴³⁹ "N.D.L.R. [Note de la rédaction]" in *Le Rire Rouge* 209 (16 November 1918), 4.

⁴⁴⁰ The *reportages humoristiques* that appeared in the post-armistice issues of *Le Rire Rouge*, in chronological order, were: Chas Laborde, "Music-Halls...parisiens" in *Le Rire Rouge* 209, 7-9; Raoul Vion, "L'affichage" in two parts *Le Rire Rouge* 210 and 214, 7; Lucien Kern, "Points noirs dans l'aube de la paix" in *Le Rire Rouge* 212 (7 December 1918), 5; B. Hall, "Matériel de paix" in *Le Rire Rouge* 213, 5.

on 28 December. Abel Faivre's cover illustration showed the infant Jesus spurning Wilhelm II's adoration at the manger. The featured *reportage humoristique* inside, by René Préjelan, focused not on the holiday festivities, but instead on an air pilot's rosy memories of aviation and furlough, casting a victorious return to Paris as the sole, inevitable outcome of the French war effort. Jean-Jacques Roussau's back cover illustration, *Le Rire Rouge*'s final act, depicted a *souvenir de guerre* of a village in ruins. In the shadow of the village church, poilus and civilians crowd around to investigate an unexploded artillery shell. One quips, "Shame it's a little heavy, it'd make a great lighter as my kid's New Year's gift."⁴⁴¹

Le Rire returned to its peacetime series in January 1919. Seeking a new start, its numbering reset: issue 1 appeared on 4 January. Nevertheless, the anxieties of wartime endured, as the uneasy transition from war to peace moved forward. *Le Rire* continued to cover the conflict's aftermath throughout 1919, taking vociferous positions on peace negotiations. Curiously, the journal was eager not to dwell on memories of the war. The journal's own institutional record of *Le Rire Rouge* was seemingly expunged as a vestige of a long-ago past. Commemorating victory and disparaging France's enemies within and without, however, remained *Le Rire*'s momentary *raison d'être*. Wartime price increases to 40 centimes, implemented as temporary relief to material shortages, proved permanent alongside issue lengths growing from 12 to 16 pages. The editorial board's promises held true: graphic illustrations and sequential comics featured more prominently in 1919; new artists debuted; all issues featured full-page centerpieces in color, and *Le Rire* sought to make sense of the strange return to normalcy with lighthearted witticisms. At the end of August, in issue 35, a promotion appeared, advertising a limited-edition collection of *Le Rire Rouge*, comprising its 215 wartime issues.

⁴⁴¹ All abovementioned content found in *Le Rire Rouge* 215 (28 December 1918), 12.

Marketed as “a document of the most curious satirical and humorous histories of the war, whose interest shall only grow in time,” the anthology was sold at the cost of 50 francs for domestic orders and 60 francs for internationals.⁴⁴² A special issue, censuring the “stagnant waters” and “eternal ministers” of Parliament for its failure to support veteran *poilus* after the war’s end, appeared in September. Inside, Lucien Métivet appealed to readers to vote out their elected officials in favor of the conservative *Bloc National*, composed largely of former *poilus*, come November, calling the Palais Bourbon the “No Man’s Land” of the home front.⁴⁴³

Conclusion

The disruptive and transformative nature of World War I was wholly reproduced within the workings of the periodical press and print media across all of Europe, including the illustrated satirical and comic press. As France’s preeminent illustrated satirical journal, unparalleled in its success during peacetime, *Le Rire* was not spared such hardships, shuttering as France was plunged into general mobilization in hasty preparation for war with Germany. Even so, after just four months’ absence in the initial throes of fighting, *Le Rire* reappeared, primed to entertain its readers at home or at the front and to weather the course of the hostilities. After four years of fighting, *Le Rire* further emerged as one of the very few illustrated or satirical publications to survive the war into peacetime.

The wartime edition of *Le Rire*, however, represented a wholesale departure from its normative peacetime content and thus poses an altogether distinct historical puzzle. Though it had largely maintained editorial and artistic continuity despite its disrupted publication schedule

⁴⁴² *Le Rire* n.s. 35 (30 August 1919), 4.

⁴⁴³ Lucien Métivet, “Madame Diogène,” in *Le Rire. No Man’s Land – numéro spécial*, n.s. 39 (27 September 1919), 17.

and the conscription of its staff, the focus of its satire adapted to changing circumstances. *Le Rire Rouge* was, instead, an organ of hardline militarist and nationalist propaganda that sought to reinforce readers' morale and support for the war.

Historians have long debated the significance of such transformations, whether as a constituent aspect of "war cultures" peculiar to World War I, or simply as evidence of elites' ideological service to the state. This chapter has demonstrated that *Le Rire Rouge* indeed played an instrumental role in the production and visualization of a time-limited war culture between 1914 and 1918. However, *Le Rire Rouge*'s war propaganda was by no means a unanimous or coherent narrative: national chauvinism was its only unifying ideological thread.

Ascertaining *Le Rire Rouge*'s historical significance is, admittedly, a difficult task. The exact scope of its reach in French society in peacetime—let alone under the constraints of war—is uncertain, as quantitative evidence of the paper's circulation through sales or secondhand consumption are unavailable to historians. Nevertheless, its content in wartime, as in peacetime, strove to reflect widely held and deeply entrenched ideas, prejudices, and beliefs among the general public on the eve of the war's outbreak. Consequently, despite its best efforts at direct and aggressive propagandizing, *Le Rire Rouge* related a deceptively complex war narrative to readers past and present that underscored longstanding tensions and clear lack of a mythical wartime consensus in French politics, culture, and society.

The formation of a national unity government in 1914 was quickly beset by internal divisions, and the impact of the war—whether economic, material, psychological, or otherwise—took its toll over time. Though *Le Rire Rouge* was certain to respond to such pressures with violent, fanatical chauvinism, denouncing internal dissent as treacherous to national morale and

the integrity of the war effort, it ultimately related those tensions and complexities to a broad reading public, situating their own propaganda in a fuller, more ambivalent war narrative.

The tensions foregrounded in *Le Rire Rouge*'s cartoon propaganda, comic or not, underscore the journal's utility to historians. The humor journal foremost provides a window and wealth of insights into the multivalent reality of life and laughter in wartime France. *Le Rire Rouge* neither blunted nor exacerbated the uneasy adaptation to wartime conditions. Instead, it sought to rationalize war within the ideological frameworks of militarism and nationalism, and the humor it related to its readers integrated the novelties of the war into that longstanding narrative. The objects of laughter in wartime, in turn, reveal the ideological engines of both the armed conflict and the home front, as well as their underlying tensions.

CONCLUSION

Despite having adapted to and survived World War I, *Le Rire* was fundamentally transformed by and never fully recovered from its wartime experience. It reverted back to its normal peacetime format and content with the turn of the New Year in January 1919, starting afresh with a new series that ran for 1,071 issues until the beginning of June 1940, closing shop with the coming of the Nazi occupation of France. Postwar inflation prompted drastic price increases: in August 1919, the price per issue rose to 50 centimes. The following July, it rose to 60. Come September 1920, it rose again to 75. By 1930, a single issue cost 1 franc 50, and by the eve of war in 1939, it had risen to 2 francs 50, with special issues priced between 3 francs 50 and 5 francs. All the while it moved shop several times: to the Place de la Madeleine, the Boulevard de Clichy, and Rue Saint-Denis, where it resided until the collapse of the Republic in 1940. With the outbreak of war with Germany again in September 1939, the journal switched to a twice-monthly format to conserve materials for the war effort.

Still, the damage of the war on *Le Rire*'s fortunes was deeply felt after 1919. The staggering loss of life had translated to a contracted readership with fewer resources and more pressing concerns than the relative frivolities of caricature, not to mention a real loss of talent among the pool of *Le Rire*'s contributing artists who had died in the conflict. Alongside these broader socioeconomic effects, the journal had to contend with the changing nature of both the satirical press in France and bigger structural changes in mass media as newer technologies became increasingly accessible to consumer markets. The advent of commercial radio and household consumption of radio broadcasts posed the most immediate threat, as did the mounting sophistication and artistic merit of film. With the founding of *Le Canard Enchaîné* in 1915, *Le Rire* had ceded ground in its political reporting to a more explicitly subversive and

high-minded publication, which had quickly established itself as Juven's fiercest competitor.⁴⁴⁴ In this diversifying landscape of mass media, *Le Rire* adapted as best it could, striving to maintain its niche of continuity as a relic of prewar mass culture, while meeting demands for artistic novelty. The journal increased the frequency of special issues,⁴⁴⁵ more widely and boldly used color throughout its pages, experimented with form and typographic designs typical of emerging trends in modern art, and constantly debuted new artists alongside its established names. A new cohort of younger artists included the likes of Jean-Louis Chancel, Chas-Laborde, Charles Genty, Paul Ordner, Georges Pavis, Roger Roy, Sennep (Jean Pennès), Armand Vallée, and Gilbert Viardot, among scores of others. Stalwarts like Adolphe Willette and Charles Léandre continued to publish in *Le Rire* until the moment of their respective deaths—Willette in February 1926, and Léandre in May 1934.

In January 1930, Juven announced the financial reorganization of *Le Rire* and *Fantasio*, merging them into a single holding company, as well as his departure from the active management of both titles after 36 years. He promised readers that a younger, more innovative and dynamic editorial team would follow in his footsteps and live up to the journal's name. Under the holding company *Société anonyme d'éditions périodiques* or SADEP, *Le Rire* maintained much of its formal and artistic integrity, even as the political and economic situation in Europe grew increasingly tense and volatile.

The ordeal of the interwar period both in France and on the whole of the European continent brought the concept of crisis to the fore of *Le Rire*'s attention. The polarization and

⁴⁴⁴ See Allen Douglas, *War, Memory, and the Politics of Humor*, 2, as well as Lethève, *La Caricature et la presse sous la IIIe République*,

⁴⁴⁵ Following the resumption of the new series in 1919, only one special issue appeared that year, followed by 2 in 1920 and 1921, and 3 in 1922. Following Juven's 1930 departure from his editorial position, the frequency of special issues increased dramatically, reaching an all-time high most notably in 1938 and 1939, with 9 and 8 special issues appearing in those respective years, even as economic crisis and material shortages on the eve of war plagued the journal.

breakdown of French politics, global economic collapse, and tensions over corruption, unemployment, crime, and demographics all became issues of unrelenting concern. Special issues by the likes of Jean Sennep, Henri-Paul Gaussier (noted socialist and cofounder of *Le Canard Enchaîné*), the pseudonymous Ben, and Roger Roy caricatured, in hotly polemical terms, the political volatility in parliament. Compounded by economic crisis, *Le Rire* also sought to valorize faltering French industries: a special issue dedicated to French wines, in support of a nascent effort to protect regional terroirs, appeared in November 1930. Tensions with Germany typified the following decade, especially in light of Adolf Hitler's ascent to power. Seemingly bolstered by the political spectacle of rising tensions on the continent and instability at home, the exigencies of economic crisis brought about the collapse of *Le Rire*'s bottom line as its readership dwindled. Even as it fought to survive in an ever-changing media landscape, in competition with novel consumer technologies, the situation was untenable once France descended into war with Germany come September 1939.

For the first twenty years of its life, *Le Rire* used the capabilities of modern printing to captivate and entertain a mass readership in turn-of-the-century France. The apogee of its success corresponded almost directly to what war-weary Parisians remembered, or misremembered, as the *Belle Époque*. Though it arrived late to the medium of print and graphic satire, which had flourished for over a half century at the time of its emergence in 1894, *Le Rire* renewed the vigor, quality, and reach of the medium, and helped shape a mass audience and taste for comic illustration and sequential graphic art. The very moment of its arrival proved fortuitous as its enduring fame and reputation for mordant political satire were forged in the crucible of the Dreyfus Affair and survived a World War.

However, this dissertation is not content to dismiss *Le Rire* as lighthearted frivolity that typified the *Belle Époque*. Rather than reading *Le Rire* through the rose-tinted lenses of postwar nostalgia for bygone exuberances, this dissertation takes seriously the complexities of humor and laughter as objects worthy of historical consideration in their own right. The enduring popularity of a humor periodical from the Dreyfus Affair through the experience of World War I was not accidental. It was a function of larger structural and cultural transformations that made comedy, and comic illustrations as art objects, desirable for public consumption. In this way, *Le Rire*'s command of the satirical press between 1894 and 1914 helps nuance the way historians think about and understand that same period as one of immense transitions in manifold, if not nearly all, aspects of life. A true conduit of mass culture, *Le Rire* integrated its readership, in Paris and beyond, to the happenings of daily life and forces of change, through the kaleidoscopic view of caricature and ridicule. Its unserious relationship to its time ultimately illuminates how its artists and readers responded to such fundamental changes.

Governing this study and underpinning every chapter is the question of *Le Rire*'s relationship with the political institutions of the French Republic, which birthed a new regime of free expression in the press, and effectively allowed mass media to flourish in its borders. *Le Rire* expressly sought to be a neutral platform for its contributors, imparting no editorial or ideological bias and affirming that it would allow the works it published to speak for themselves. Nominally, it therefore upheld the fundamentally liberal principles of republicanism and participated in its civic project. Nevertheless, *Le Rire*'s relationship with the Third Republic, its institutions, its statesmen, its values, and its customs, was always more ambivalent and tenuous in nature. From its very first issue, *Le Rire* ridiculed and questioned the efficacy and moral rectitude of parliamentary republicanism. In its nascent years, *Le Rire* on several occasions ran

afoul of government censors, being twice seized for obscenity and outrages against public morals. *Le Rire* vociferously protested such charges, and ultimately the proceedings never materialized to adjudication, but in its infancy, *Le Rire* walked a fine line to maintain its artistic and satiric liberty.

Owing to the timing of its initial release in late 1894, *Le Rire* had immediately seized on tensions effervescing with the breaking news of the Dreyfus Affair, the initial army investigation, and the implication of a Jewish officer as a predetermined culprit of treason against the nation. Though it insisted on its own editorial neutrality, *Le Rire* willfully propagated and profited from the publication of far-right nationalist polemics. Though it was not a major player in the Affair and never expressly advocated the downfall of the parliamentary republican regime, *Le Rire* made an outsized contribution to the visual record of the scandal and published the illustrations of infamous anti-Dreyfusards, largely for the commercial exploitation of their popularity and value.

Indeed, the commercial expediency and profitability of political ideas and positions constituted an orienting force of what *Le Rire* ultimately decided to print. To call it a rightwing publication shrouded in the veiled language of free expression or neutrality is to miss the larger picture and the bottom line: *Le Rire's* profitability sprang forth from the blurring of politics, commerce, and entertainment within its pages. It is thus more apt to say that *Le Rire* reflected the more general historical reality that the press, especially the illustrated comic press, of which *Le Rire* was France's most prominent ambassador, had become a profitable vehicle for mass politics and mass political movements. That *Le Rire* trafficked in extremist nationalist and antisemitic ideology during the course of the Dreyfus Affair was neither happenstance nor unique, nor was it a reflection of any views that its editors harbored. It was simply what sold. When the utility of

anti-republican and nationalist sentiments waned in the public mind, so too did *Le Rire*'s interest in them.

The Exposition Universelle of 1900 represented just how ephemeral *Le Rire*'s political interests actually were. From virtually nonstop commentary on the Dreyfus Affair and the cultural politics of Jewish assimilation, corruption, and vice of the republican regime, *Le Rire* almost instantaneously became a cultural ambassador of France on the world stage in miniature. The opening of the Maison du Rire in the Rue de Paris pavilion represented both the commercial aspirations of *Le Rire* to diversify its brand and expand its reputation, as well as a more conciliatory gesture towards republican institutions in the denouement of the Dreyfus Affair. Whatever internal divisions had persisted in French society up to the turn of the twentieth century, the 1900 Exposition Universelle symbolized at least the pretenses of unity before an international audience. For *Le Rire*, and especially Juven, the Exposition marked a fortuitous occasion to grow *Le Rire* away from the constraints of print and into the world of comic performance and entertainment. Though the immediate venture proved a financial loss and setback, as poor weather, planning, and incidental forces plagued attendance and admissions, Juven was undeterred by the experience, and renewed his efforts to make *Le Rire* more than a humor journal. The Exposition had also underscored the significance of self-promotion and publicity, and the need for *Le Rire* to be adaptable if it was to endure as the preeminent name in graphic humor and satire.

The explosive growth of *Le Rire* as part of Félix Juven's publishing empire in the first decade of the twentieth century reflected the lessons of the Maison du Rire, and more broadly, the commercial potential of comedy as a multimedia enterprise. From the momentary promotional tool of the 1900 Exposition Universelle, Juven's ambitions grew beyond the limits

of *Le Rire* itself. While Juven had maintained a broader portfolio of periodicals and general interest trade titles before the Exposition, the event served as a useful launching pad for greater investment in publicity and promotion of *Le Rire* on one hand and the anchoring of the periodical as Juven's flagship product in a much larger publishing apparatus on the other. The accelerated rate of growth Juven saw in the decade after 1900, as his publishing business swelled to incorporate a vast catalogue of general interest and specialty trade titles, educational texts, illustrated albums, and branded tie-in collectible merchandise, reinvigorated *Le Rire* as well. The journal became the sponsor of a new professional association for satirical illustrators, cartoonists, and writers under the name *les Humoristes*, and *Le Rire* hosted the annual salon exhibiting their works for sale. Though this period of immense growth endured a decade, the enterprise reached its inertia in 1912 as Juven suddenly dissolved his proprietary holding company and sold off his publishing catalogue, sheltering only *Le Rire* and its young sister periodical *Fantasio* from liquidation.

The ascendancy of the Maison Juven in the first decade of the twentieth century, its collapse, and the coming of World War I underscored the real consumer demand for laughter, and its commercial viability in the modern economy of *Belle Époque* France. Despite the age of the medium of the illustrated press, Juven had gone to great lengths to ensure the continuous innovation of form within the pages of *Le Rire*. The technical capabilities of the print medium and interplay between image, text, and color were at the center of what made *Le Rire*'s popularity so enduring, even in times of material hardship and national distress. The coming of World War I effectively ended the so-called Golden Age of the *Belle Époque* press, but it did not bring about *Le Rire*'s demise. Rather, the occasion presented yet another commercial opportunity for reinvention: propaganda. Amidst a wartime regime of total censorship and dogmatic

patriotism, *Le Rire* reconciled itself wholesale to the Republic, temporarily suspending publication to reemerge in November 1914 as a wartime outlet for comic propaganda. Nevertheless, *Le Rire Rouge* related a decidedly nuanced and multifaceted war narrative that highlighted the internal tensions underpinning the French war effort. As its own artists and readers alike had been mobilized to fight, *Le Rire Rouge* became an instrument for fighting the war of morale, connecting its readers on the war front and home front intimately through the medium of comic illustration. When the war concluded, so too did *Le Rire*'s commitment to the *union sacrée*, and it reverted to its standard peacetime format and content.

The ultimate significance of *Le Rire*'s place in the cultural and political landscape of Paris between 1894 and the end of World War I, and the manifold transformations it underwent in that time, derive from the changing significance of humor in the fabric of daily life itself. The technological possibilities and shifting political realities of *Le Rire*'s own time reflected broader uses for humor in public life—not only as a mode of expression and social relations, but also as a commodity and object of intrinsic artistic interest and value; a signifier of socio-economic status and defined interests among the urban middle classes; and as a salient and useful register for political comment. Despite its late arrival to the medium of the illustrated satirical press, *Le Rire* made graphic humor profitable in a time of mass readership, and made satirical illustration and sequential comic art a product of mass commercial appeal, in France and abroad. In doing so, it typified the spirit of its time.

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