

# 'Ubusing' Culture

Alfred Jarry's Subversive Poetics in the Almanachs du Père Ubu

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RIJKSUNIVERSITEIT GRONINGEN

**'UBUSING' CULTURE**

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# Foreword

When I was sixteen a fire destroyed the public library in Emmen. Emmen is a town in the North-East of the Netherlands with a surprisingly large population of exotic animals. I should add that most of those animals live in the town's zoo. That is with the exception of two monkeys who managed to escape several years ago and are now believed to be living a quiet life in the suburbs. Anyway, back to the library fire. It was a tragic event, especially since the library was, together with the zoo, one of the town's only two places where I would willingly spend an entire day. However, as the cliché goes, something positive came out of this disastrous event, namely this dissertation.

'Hang on', I hear you thinking, 'what does all this have to do with this thesis? I want to get to the part where she thanks me.' Patience, just wait a few more sentences and all will become clear. Well, all, except for the part about the monkeys. That was completely irrelevant.

In the aftermath of the fire, the library staff organized a sale of the books they had managed to save, but were too damaged to be borrowed again. Of course, being a book-loving but financially challenged teenager, I was keen to help raise cash to rebuild the library, in other words to get great books for as little money possible. I ended up buying only one book for one guilders fifty, about 50 Euro cents. It was the Dutch translation of a French novel entitled *Superman*, written by someone named Alfred Jarry back in 1902. There you go, there is the missing link. And no, I am not talking about monkeys again. Since the description and the picture of a young, bohemian Jarry with long hair appealed to my inner grunge, Kurt Cobain-like self (don't judge me I was only sixteen), I felt irresistibly drawn to it. I read the book and thought it was one of the most bizarre and funniest things I had ever come across. Little did I know then that I would go on to study French literature, for I still had dreams of joining a punk rock band. So when years later I was looking for a subject for my master thesis, I remembered that odd little book. And when, yet another few years later, the opportunity of a PhD position presented itself, I happily dived into Jarry's work again. Besides in French Studies, studying Jarry is probably the closest you can get to being in a punk rock band anyway. You see, it all comes full circle.

Of course, this thesis did cost a little more than just 50 Euro cents and a library. It took several psychological and physical hurdles to get to this stage, including the typical symptoms of the PhD student: doubt, insecurity, frustration and repetitive strain injury. But the upside was a huge amount of freedom and actually getting paid for something I loved doing. Obviously, it would be in really bad taste to thank whatever or whoever caused the fire at the library all those years ago. So instead I will thank the people who helped make this dissertation possible.

First I would like to thank my supervisors Liesbeth Korthals Altes and Els Jongeneel. Sometimes it took five minutes, sometimes an hour, sometimes a whole year to get me back on track, but without your valuable comments and insights this book would never have seen the light of day.

I would like to thank the Faculty of Arts of the University of Groningen, the ICOG and the Graduate School for facilitating this research both financially and practically. Part of the research for this dissertation was done in Paris and was made possible by a grant from the Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (NWO). This book also owes a lot to the people and resources of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and the Librairie Municipale de Laval, and to the knowledge and publications of the Collège de 'Pataphysique and the Société des Amis d'Alfred Jarry. A special mention goes out to Henri Béhar and Jean-Paul Morel. Your knowledge of Jarry and our collective commentary of the first Almanac proved extremely useful in the last stages. I would also like to thank Patrick Besnier, Ralf Grüttemeijer and Hub Hermans for having the patience to read through my text. In addition, I take this opportunity to thank everyone who has ever read my work and given valuable feedback throughout the years.

I thank my fellow PhD's, especially Joke Corporaal, Femke Hemelaar and Stefan Couperus. Academic discussions are great, but not without the necessary amount of coffee, alcohol, pasta and talking nonsense. Thanks to Wokje Abrahamse and Geertje Schuitema for becoming my back-up colleagues over the years and Matthijs Dicke-Ogenia who helped design the cover. Irene Nannenbergh, thank you for accompanying me to the door of my interview dressed in your 'bear suit' back in the 'Summer of 2003'. Chris Dickenson, you deserve a special mention as my roommate and co-director of our Alice in Wonderland Museum. Without your friendship my years as a PhD would have been a lot lonelier, less musical and a lot more serious. Marte van Dijk, you know me longer than I care to remember. Thanks for being there when I need it and for your down to earth honesty even when I do not need it. Judith de Groot, thank you for keeping me (relatively) sane and for being one of the few people who is never fooled by my superhero exterior. Bonny and Harry Dubbelboer, you have always given me unconditional support and you gave me some pocket money at sixteen. Without that I would have not been able to buy Jarry's book in the first place.

Now that I have mentioned Jarry again, I would like to add one last thing. Considering the fact that Jarry's self invented but universally recognized science of pataphysics focuses on studying the exceptional and the coincidental, it is utterly logical that a coincidental event triggered this study. Since Jarry did not shy away from grand gestures, I think he would have appreciated the fact that an entire library needed to be destroyed in order for me to write this book about him.

Marieke Dubbelboer

# Introduction

## Alfred Jarry (1873-1907)

- 'Quel est ce pierrot? demanda-t-elle à Passavant, qui l'avait fait asseoir et s'était assis auprès d'elle
- C'est Alfred Jarry, l'auteur d'*Ubu Roi*. *Les Argonautes* lui confèrent du génie, parce que le public vient de siffler sa pièce. C'est tout de même ce qu'on a donné de plus curieux au théâtre depuis longtemps
- J'aime beaucoup *Ubu Roi*, dit Sarah, et je suis très contente de rencontrer Jarry. On m'avait dit qu'il était toujours ivre.<sup>1</sup>

In André Gide's novel *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* (1925), Alfred Jarry suddenly appears among fictional characters at a literary banquet. He is the subject of the above conversation between Sarah, newcomer to the literary *milieu*, and the Comte de Passavant, fashionable writer and dandy. While the first views Jarry as a sort of curiosity, the latter is cynical about Jarry's merits as a writer. Their words are in fact quite typical of the way some tended to view Alfred Jarry in real life: a drunken clown and creator of one infamous play, *Ubu Roi* (1896).

Jarry's brief career, despite the notoriety of *Ubu Roi*, was problematic due to his often difficult personality and the non-conformity of his writing. Lack of success and income combined with his destructive behaviour eventually led to his early death at the age of 34. Jarry made his literary debut at the height of the Symbolist and Decadent movement and was a contemporary of writers such as Gide, Valéry, Claudel and Proust. Jarry's work could however never be easily classified amongst that of writers or literary movements of his day. Furthermore, anecdotes about Jarry's bohemian life have often overshadowed the merits of his writing. With the exception of *Ubu Roi*, his texts have remained known primarily by a handful of scholars, amateurs and artists.

Posthumously Jarry has been hailed by scholars, writers and artists as the embodiment of avant-garde experiment and artistic innovation. His work has often been compared to that of other singular authors such as Lautréamont, and labelled as an influence on a new generation of twentieth century writers and artists, including Apollinaire or Picasso, and avant-garde movements, such as Dada or Surrealism. Jarry's self-invented (anti-) science of pataphysics led to the creation of the Collège de Pataphysique in 1948, which included writers and artists such as Max Ernst, Raymond Queneau, Jacques Prévert, Eugène Ionesco, Boris Vian, Joan Miró and Marcel Duchamp. Branches of the original 'Collège' are now found in several countries, including England and the Netherlands. Other evidence of Jarry's continuing legacy is the fact that an important contemporary website for experimental media and poetry is named after Père Ubu.<sup>2</sup> The surprisingly

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<sup>1</sup>André Gide, *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), p. 336.

<sup>2</sup> Ubu Web, [www.ubu.com](http://www.ubu.com).

vivid after-life of pataphysics and of the character Ubu in literature and art, as well as in comics and pop culture, shows that Jarry's work and ideas found their way into the twentieth century and remain influential up until today.

### **The *Almanachs du Père Ubu***

However, whereas many writers, artists and scholars have claimed him as the spiritual ancestor of several avant-garde movements, few, I feel, have sufficiently explained what exactly made Jarry's work so singular in his own time and so inspirational for later generations. Studying Jarry I became intrigued by two texts which had escaped scholarly attention up until now; the *Almanachs du Père Ubu*, published in 1898 and 1901. They occupy a rather odd position in Jarry's oeuvre, as they do not fit a specific label or genre, not even within the eclectic corpus that is Jarry's literary work. I wondered if maybe the answer to the question how Jarry's poetics challenged contemporary artistic norms could be found in these *Almanachs*, which even among Jarry's own texts, seemed to defy labelling or literary norms. Could they perhaps provide keys to Jarry's poetics and help explain Jarry's place in literary and artistic history?

#### *The Almanacs in print*

The initial *Almanach du Père Ubu, illustré* was literally forgotten for a long time. The first ever edition of Jarry's complete works published in 1948 left it out entirely. Despite its eight volumes, the edition was not as complete as its title suggested.<sup>3</sup> For decades the first Almanac was only available in the original first edition preserved in libraries or in private collections.<sup>4</sup> Over sixty years after its original publication in 1898 the first Almanac was finally reprinted, together with the second Almanac and the rest of the Ubu texts in the collection *Tout Ubu* in 1962.<sup>5</sup> They were also included in the first volume of the Pléiade edition of Jarry's collected works, published in 1972.<sup>6</sup> Since then both Almanacs have appeared in re-editions of *Tout Ubu* as well as in the Bouquin edition, which contains a selection of Jarry's works.<sup>7</sup> Only very recently, a first critical edition of the initial Almanac, compiled by Henri Béhar, Jean-Paul Morel and myself, has been published, together with a facsimile.<sup>8</sup>

The second Almanac has received slightly more attention throughout the years. It was included in the 'complete works' from 1948 mentioned previously.<sup>9</sup> It was also reprinted separately in a facsimile edition in 1949.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Alfred Jarry, *Œuvres Complètes*, préface de René Massat ; souvenirs par le Docteur Jean Saltas et Charlotte Jarry, tomes I-VIII (Lausanne : Éditions du Grand-Chêne, 1948).

<sup>4</sup> The Collège de Patahysique for example held the copy that had belonged to Henri de Régner, .Noel Arnaud, *Alfred Jarry. D'Ubu Roi au docteur Faustroll* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1974), p. 430.

<sup>5</sup> Alfred Jarry, *Tout Ubu*, édition établie par Maurice SAILLET (Paris : Librairie Générale Française, 1962).

<sup>6</sup> Alfred Jarry, *Œuvres Complètes I* (Paris : Gallimard, 1972).

<sup>7</sup> Alfred Jarry, *Œuvres* (Paris : Robert Laffont, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Béhar, Henri, Marieke Dubbelboer, et Jean-Paul Morel (éd.), *Commentaires pour servir à la lecture de l'Almanach du Père Ubu illustré 1899* (Laval/Tusson, SAAJ/Du Lérot, 2009). Accompagné du facsimile de l'*Almanach du Père Ubu* de Jarry

<sup>9</sup> Alfred Jarry, *Œuvres Complètes*, VIII (Lausanne : Éditions du Grand-Chêne, 1948).

<sup>10</sup> Alfred Jarry, *Almanach illustré du Père Ubu (XXe Siècle), illustrations de Pierre Bonnard* (Lausanne : Éditions du Grand-Chêne, 1948).

Morel incorporated parts of the second Almanac in his edition of Ambroise Vollard's Ubu works.<sup>11</sup> More recently, in 2006, the second Almanac was published in a facsimile edition by Le Castor Astral.<sup>12</sup>

### *The Almanacs in research*

On the whole, scholarly attention for the Almanacs has been marginal. Even in publications by the Collège de Pataphysique, which have provided valuable context for Jarry's work, the two works have rarely been discussed. Although in 1962 it was remarked, concerning the lack of critical commentary in the *Tout Ubu* edition, that someday someone would have to write a dissertation about the Almanacs.<sup>13</sup>

Except for the recent annotated edition of the first Almanac, critical commentary of the two works has remained limited to a few scattered remarks. In 1974 Noël Arnaud praised the first small almanac, in particular its 'étonnante série de dessins de Bonnard' and mentioned some of its themes.<sup>14</sup> Béhar is the only Jarry scholar to have devoted a small article to an aspect of Ubu's Almanac, but his remarks on the Almanacs are part of his more general observations on Jarry's use of popular culture.<sup>15</sup>

Jarry scholars such as Arnaud or Béhar showed a more or less positive or at least neutral approach to the Almanacs. Others have sometimes expressed uneasiness towards the two works. It is telling that in the preface to the 1948 edition of Jarry's work, René Massat grouped the second Almanac together with Jarry's 'divertissements'.<sup>16</sup> Some scholars dismiss the two works altogether or view them, like Massat, as pure entertainment. Discussing the figure of Ubu, Elke Krumm wrote that, compared to the other Ubu works, 'the absurdities dominate' and that 'both Almanacs merely aim to entertain'.<sup>17</sup> But even a Jarry scholar such as Keith Beaumont, who wrote a thorough study of Jarry's work, is mostly dismissive. He labels some parts of the Almanacs as 'mildly amusing', while most of the satire and nonsense falls, according to him, 'rather flat.' Ubu is only staged as a 'would be wit and entertainer.' Beaumont's harsh verdict is that for these and other reasons (although he fails to mention which ones) the two Almanacs must 'rate as relatively minor works.'<sup>18</sup>

Some have felt the need to explain that the Almanacs were written for mere amusement or financial purposes. Cutshall wrote for example: 'Why

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<sup>11</sup> Ambroise Vollard, *Tout Ubu Colonial et autres textes*, ed. Jean-Paul Morel (Paris: Musée Léon Dierx/Séguier, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> Alfred Jarry, *Almanach illustré du Père Ubu (XXe Siècle)*, présentée par Patrick Besnier (Le Castor Astral, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> 'Le Tout Ubu ne pouvait pas être une édition critique, mais un jour viendra certainement où un candidat au doctorat ès lettres, ayant choisi l'œuvre de Jarry pour sujet de thèse, éclaircira toutes les allusions qui comportent les deux Almanachs', *Dossiers acénonètes du Collège de Pataphysique*, 1962, 20, p.72.

<sup>14</sup> Arnaud, *Alfred Jarry. D'Ubu Roi au docteur Faustroll*, pp. 430-34.

<sup>15</sup> Henri Béhar, "Jarry, l'almanach et le fleuve oral," *L'Étoile-Absinthe* 19/20 (1983): 31-39.

<sup>16</sup> 'Ce dernier tome, avec les chansons composées sur les airs de Claude Terrasse, rassemble les divertissements d'un des plus importants et des plus originaux écrivains français', René Massat in Jarry, *Œuvres Complètes*, tome VIII, 1948, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Elke Krumm, "Die Gestalt des Ubu im Werk Alfred Jarrys" (Inaugurat-Dissertation, Köln, 1976), p. 141.

<sup>18</sup> Keith Beaumont, *Alfred Jarry. A Critical and Biographical Study* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1984), pp. 144/45.

Jarry should have composed this work is not immediately clear, but it probably arose partly as a much needed money-making exercise and partly as a nod to Rabelais.<sup>19</sup> François Caradec, discussing Jarry's journalism, described the Almanacs as a form of popular journalism and remarks, almost surprised, that Jarry appeared to take them quite seriously.<sup>20</sup> In what little has been said about the Almanacs, scholars have mainly pointed to some of their obvious themes, such as the political satire.<sup>21</sup> Ben Fisher linked the Rabelaisian spirit of Ubu's Almanacs to the novel *Gestes et Opinions du Docteur Faustroll*.<sup>22</sup> As for the works in general, they are often considered as humorous nonsense, absurd entertainment, 'made up of stock jokes'<sup>23</sup> and not taken very seriously.

Positive evaluations of the Almanacs are scarce. In his biography of Jarry from 2005, Besnier calls the first Almanac an 'atypical publication', which would have escaped attention of the conventional press'.<sup>24</sup> Besnier does not comment on their 'atypical' nature any further, but in the recent facsimile edition he labels the second Almanac as a peculiar, collective work, defying contemporary aesthetics.<sup>25</sup> He also, rightly so I believe, remarks its playful subversion of the almanac genre and the liberty of its lay-out and typography.

The most far-reaching appraisal of the Almanacs however can be found in an article by Mary Shaw. She briefly discusses the Almanacs as literary representatives of Montmartre's humorist cabaret culture. Contrary to most scholars, she considers the Almanacs to be 'in certain respects the most radical and avant-garde of Jarry's productions'.<sup>26</sup> Shaw believes that the use of Montmartre humorist strategies in the Almanacs result in a marginal and rebellious statement, similar to the goals of the cabarets. Shaw's comments remain quite general as Jarry is not the focus of her article. However her remarks, together with Besnier's observation that the Almanacs defied contemporary artistic norms, in my opinion, are a call for a closer look at these 'atypical' and 'rebellious' works.

### **Aims of this study**

In this thesis I hypothesize that the Almanacs are indeed two of Jarry's most radical works in which his subversive poetics came to full expression. Furthermore I hypothesize that with the Almanacs a breaking point occurred

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<sup>19</sup>J. A. Cutshall, "Celui qui Dreyfuse: Alfred Jarry and the Dreyfus Case," *Symposium* 43, no. 1 (1989): 26.

<sup>20</sup> 'Jarry semble l'avoir pris très au sérieux', François Caradec, "Alfred Jarry, témoin de son temps," in *Jarry. Colloques de Cerisy*, ed. Henri Bordillon (Paris: Belfond, 1985), p. 162.

<sup>21</sup> Christine van Schoonbeek views the Almanacs as portraying the more 'satirical, classical' side of Ubu, Christine van Schoonbeek, *Les portraits d'Ubu* (Paris: Séguier, 1997), p. 21.

<sup>22</sup> 'Rabelais appears most prominently in the *Almanachs du Père Ubu*, whose creation of comic almanacs derives from the Pantagrueline Prognostication, and Rabelais also comes to the fore in the narrative structure of *Faustroll*', Ben Fisher, *The Pataphysicians Library. An exploration of Alfred Jarry's livres pairs* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), p. 95.

<sup>23</sup> Cutshall, "Celui qui Dreyfuse: Alfred Jarry and the Dreyfus Case," p.26.

<sup>24</sup> 'Cette publication atypique ne pouvait guère obtenir de comptes-rendus dans la presse conventionnelle', Patrick Besnier, *Alfred Jarry* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), p. 379.

<sup>25</sup> Alfred Jarry, *Almanach illustré du Père Ubu (XXe Siècle)*, 2006, pp. 59-64.

<sup>26</sup> Mary Shaw, 'All or Nothing? The Literature of Montmartre', in: Philip Dennis & Mary Shaw Cate, ed., *The Spirit of Montmartre. Cabarets, Humor, and the Avant-Garde, 1875-1905* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), pp. 150-52.

in Jarry's oeuvre. I argue that the poetics expressed in these two works represented a departure from the Symbolism of his earlier works and a transition to a more singular and more 'modern' aesthetic, possessing many of the features that foreshadow literary and artistic innovations of the twentieth century.

A discussion of the Almanacs and Jarry's poetics contributes to a broader understanding of literary and artistic changes in this period. By relating the Almanacs to their cultural historical context I will show how the aesthetics of the texts reflected contemporary culture. A rapid succession of new inventions and phenomena took place around 1900, such as the advent of faster means of transportation, press and advertising on a large scale, new ways of communication, cinematography etc. As a result, a new set of literary strategies responding to modern, everyday life seemed to surface in the Almanacs. In this book I will demonstrate how, in the Almanacs, this context affected concepts of authorship, the advent of a collage aesthetic, art's relationship to everyday life and literature's commitment to contemporary issues. More broadly it illustrates how literary works respond to cultural and social changes of their time, not only in content but also through form.

With this thesis I particularly aim to provide more insight in Jarry's innovative poetics, of which the Almanacs are in many ways exemplary. Scholars have generally seemed wary when it comes to interpreting Jarry's writing, considered hermetic and complex. Fisher for example, in the conclusion to his book on *Faustroll*, writes that it is often difficult to approach this 'apparently unapproachable writer'.<sup>27</sup> But one wonders what makes Jarry's work so 'unapproachable'. I will therefore discuss some key characteristics of Jarry's writing and thinking through an analysis of the Almanacs. Furthermore, a study of the two Almanacs, about which very little has been written, reconsiders their importance and place in Jarry's oeuvre and thus contributes to existing and ongoing research on Jarry. It will show the significance of the Almanacs for understanding Jarry's work and ideas.

The title of this book, *Ubusing Culture*, is above all a reference to Jarry's own love for wordplay, but it also relates to the argument I make. I will show that in the Almanacs Jarry made use of genres, forms, discourses and themes from a variety of cultural spheres. By combining these elements with his self-created Ubu universe Jarry, in the Almanacs, puts forward new concepts of genre, textual structure, language and authorship, as well as an off-beat, subversive perspective on contemporary society. Furthermore, because the Almanacs are representative of several crucial developments in art and literature around 1900 and later in the century, a discussion of these two works thus gains a broader cultural-historical significance. In short, by discussing the Almanacs, I intend to offer more insight in Jarry's work and a better understanding of the place he and his work occupy in cultural history.

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<sup>27</sup>Fisher, *The Pataphysicians Library. An exploration of Alfred Jarry's livres pairs*, p. 207.

## **Approach and outline of the book**

Considering these aims, I combine a textual analysis of the two Almanacs with a cultural historical perspective. The Almanacs are embedded in their time and without knowledge of their context, important keys to understanding Jarry's texts are lost. Furthermore, since I argue that Jarry's poetics in the Almanacs are representative of certain paradigmatic changes in art around 1900, linking the analysis to historical developments is vital. The two Almanacs make up the primary corpus for the textual analysis but whenever I make general statements about Jarry's work and poetics I will refer to examples from his other writings as well. The theoretical and methodological choices are entirely pragmatic, depending on the questions under scrutiny in the analysis. Whenever a theoretical concept is introduced I will define and address it there and then in the chapter, such as for example the question of 'authorship' in chapter three or 'collage' in chapter four. I employ a range of methodological tools, drawing for example from textual analysis, semiotics or discourse analysis. While this might be understood as 'anything goes' an interpretation of Jarry's heterogeneous and collagist work is in my opinion best served by an equally 'collagist' methodological approach.

The book is divided into two parts. The first three chapters mainly deal with the contexts and cultural spheres that influenced Jarry and in particular the Almanacs. They contain the necessary cultural historical background information for understanding Jarry's poetics and his texts. In the other chapters I focus on an analysis of the texts in the Almanacs, moving from a discussion of their textual structure and form to a discussion of the narrative strategies and main themes.

Chapter one is an introductory chapter on Jarry's life and work and a preliminary introduction to some important features in his poetics; the polysemic and heterogeneous text, genre crossing, the revaluation of contemporary (Symbolist) concepts of authorship and beauty. I also briefly introduce Ubu and pataphysics. This introduction will help situate the Almanacs in Jarry's oeuvre at a time when, as I argue, he had moved away from the Symbolist aesthetics of his earlier works.

In chapter two I outline two other important contexts that helped shape the two Almanacs, namely Montmartre's cabaret counter-culture and the popular tradition of the almanac genre. Cabaret culture appeared to have inspired Jarry to incorporate popular and non-literary genres in his work, and to choose the almanac genre. The characteristics of these contexts (e.g. mixing artistic media, appropriation of popular forms, heterogeneity) also helped pave the way for the collage aesthetic in the two Almanacs.

Chapter three is a historical reconstruction of how the Almanacs were created as a collective work. In this chapter I show which artists, and through them which cultural spheres influenced Jarry and the Almanacs. I also discuss how this collaborative creation defied contemporary concepts of (singular) authorship and originality. I argue that, in the Almanacs, Jarry puts forward a concept of collective authorship and a new concept of originality.

In chapter four I analyze the textual structure of the Almanacs and argue that Jarry makes use of a collage aesthetic *avant la lettre* in the texts. Apart

from the structure, I also discuss the textual and visual sources (such as newspaper or encyclopaedic texts) incorporated in the texts, the mixing of artistic media (text/image) and how this collage aesthetic of fragmentation and heterogeneity affects the narrative and the interpretation of the texts.

In chapter five I discuss how Jarry, in the Almanacs, engages with news and newspapers, within the context of the close bonds between writers and journalism in this period. Through examples from the Almanacs as well as from Jarry's own 'speculative' journalism, I show how the boundaries between literature and journalism became blurred. Jarry's texts appear to linger between fiction and non-fiction and this affects both the aesthetics of the literary work as well as the representation of events. In the Almanacs this also results in a satirical reflection on the media, on writers' ties to journalism and on contemporary society.

The collage practice, the incorporation of non-literary, popular forms and journalistic texts in the literary work leads to a more general issue as well. In chapter six I therefore reflect on the new bonds that surfaced between art and mass culture around this time, and how the Almanacs are exemplary of those new, often ambiguous bonds (involving an embrace of the aesthetics, but a rejection of the uniformity of mass culture) which would also become characteristic of the later avant-garde movements.

In the last chapter, chapter seven, I focus on the way Jarry reflects on contemporary current events in the Almanacs, in particular the Dreyfus Affair in the first Almanac and colonial politics in the second. I will show that in the Almanacs and through *Ubu*, Jarry provides an original but complex, paradoxical and critical perspective on contemporary society. I argue that Jarry was a more committed writer than has previously been acknowledged, but that this commitment to contemporary issues was played out mainly in his text through his evasive, ironic style.

On a practical note: quotations from Jarry's texts are all provided in the original French and taken predominantly from the three volume Pléiade edition of Jarry's complete works (1978, 1987 and 1988). These are referred to in the footnotes as OC (*Œuvres Complètes*) followed by the volume and page numbers. Whenever references are made to manuscripts or other editions (such as the original editions of the Almanacs) this is indicated in the footnotes. The appendix contains the long list with names of contemporary cultural figures from the first Almanac, but is too long to include in the text. I have completed this list of contemporary cultural figures with a short biography of each person.

# Chapter 1

## Symbolism and Beyond. An Introduction to Jarry's Life, Work and Poetics.

### *Introduction*

One of the arguments I make in this book is that the Almanacs were written at a time when Jarry had moved away from the Symbolism of his earlier works. In this introductory chapter I will briefly outline Jarry's life and work in order to situate the Almanacs in the context of his career and oeuvre. In the first part I focus on Jarry's life and work to show how Jarry matured as a writer in the Symbolist circles of the late nineteenth century, while later becoming familiar with representatives of a new generation of avant-garde artists. In the second part of this chapter I will introduce several key aspects of Jarry's poetics through a discussion of 'Linteau' (1894), a crucial early text in which Jarry comments on his work. I argue that Jarry already showed signs of ambivalence towards contemporary (Symbolist) aesthetics and a need to find new means of literary expression early on in his career. Jarry outlined aspects of his poetics in 'Linteau', but he really put these into practice in the Almanacs a few years later.

### **1.1 Life and work**

There was a constant dichotomy in Jarry's short-lived literary career. Jarry wanted to publish his work and gain success, but categorically refused to compromise on anything to do with his texts. His biography reveals an author who was well immersed in the *fin de siècle* cultural world, but whose increasingly difficult behaviour met with resistance and whose works were often barely understood by his literary contemporaries.

#### **1.1.1 Early years**

Alfred Jarry (Alfred-Henry Jarry) was born on the 8th of September, 1873, in Laval, Brittany, as the youngest child of Anselme Jarry (1837-1895), a salesman, and Caroline Quernest (1842-1893). Jarry's older sister, Charlotte, was born in 1865. After Jarry's parents separated due to the bankruptcy of Anselme Jarry's business, the family moved to Saint-Brieuc. Here, at the age of twelve, Jarry began writing stories, plays and poetry which he later collected under the title of *Ontogénie*. By no means works of genius they did contain groundwork for texts he would write as an adult.

As is well known, a decisive period in Jarry's life and career began in 1888, when the family moved to the city of Rennes. At the Lycée de Rennes Jarry encountered physics teacher Félix Hébert. Nicknamed Père Heb, Eb or Ébé, he was the much plagued subject of mockery among his pupils. Jarry also became friends with classmate Henri Morin. Henri's older brother

Charles Morin had written a play about Père Hébert's adventures as king of Poland, *Les Polonais*. In December 1888 the three schoolboys staged marionette performances of *Les Polonais* at the house of the Morin family and at Jarry's house. The character of Père Ubu, modelled after the unfortunate physics professor, was born and so was the Ubu cycle.<sup>1</sup> Charles Morin's play became the basis of Jarry's *Ubu Roi* and *Ubu Cocu*. Since Charles Morin's original manuscript of *Les Polonais* is lost, the precise input of Charles Morin and Jarry to the final version of *Ubu Roi* still remains speculation. In 1921 this would cause controversy, when Charles Chassé, relying on Henri and Charles Morin's recollections, questioned Jarry's authorship and the play's originality.<sup>2</sup> However, Jarry himself, took pride in Père Ubu's collective, schoolboy origins. In chapter three, I will address the issue of authorship and Jarry's interpretation of this concept further.

### 1.1.2 Literary debut; Symbolism

The next important phase in Jarry's life began when he moved to Paris. In 1891 Jarry became a pupil at the Lycée Henri-IV in Paris, a prestigious preparatory school, renowned for its humanities education and a breeding ground for writers, philosophers and politicians. Here, Jarry also met writer Léon-Paul Fargue, who introduced him to the literary circles of Paris. On April 28, 1893 Jarry's short text 'Guignol' won a prize for best prose and was published in *l'Écho de Paris littéraire illustré*. Unfortunately, the start of Jarry's literary career at the age of twenty had tragically coincided with the loss of his mother on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April of that same year.

Jarry's debut and new acquaintances guaranteed his entrance into the contemporary literary avant-garde movement of Symbolism. Symbolism, inspired by Romantic aesthetics and by Baudelaire, had evolved out of the writers who had labelled themselves as Decadents in the early 1880's. The Decadents, the Symbolists formed an eclectic group of artists and writers. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of September 1886 the rather unknown poet Jean Moréas had published his 'manifeste du symbolisme' in *Le Figaro*, explaining some of the movement's aims. Symbolism aspired towards a subjective, individualistic, idealistic, sometimes mystical poetic expression, counter-acting bourgeois rational culture in general, and the more dominant literary movements of realism and naturalism. Symbolist writers gathered at the café Voltaire on Mondays, at Stéphane Mallarmé's house on Tuesdays, and around new magazines such as *La Plume* (1889), *Le Mercure de France* (1890) and *La Revue Blanche* (1891). All three magazines would play important roles in Jarry's career, but Jarry became particularly involved with the writers of magazine *Le Mercure de France*.

Many of Jarry's letters from this period are addressed to the people who mattered in literary (Symbolist) circles.<sup>3</sup> In one of his first letters in 1894 to Alfred Vallette, editor of *Le Mercure de France*, Jarry tries to persuade him to publish one of his works, asking him with exaggerated humility: 'Quel est

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<sup>1</sup> The school's mathematics professor M. Périer was transformed into the character Achras who appears in several Ubu texts.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Chassé, *Sous le masque d'Alfred Jarry. Les sources d'Ubu Roi* (Paris: H. Floury, 1921). Later re-edited in *Dans les coulisses de la gloire. D'Ubu Roi au douanier Rousseau*. Nouvelle Revue Critique, 1947.

<sup>3</sup> Jarry's letters between 1894-1899, OC I, pp. 1035-1078.

pourtant le poète jeune qui ne rêve d'écrire un jour au *Mercure*?<sup>4</sup> This flattering tone is typical of many of Jarry's letters from this period. In April 1894 Jarry, still in possession of some family money, purchased four shares in the *Mercure* at one hundred francs each. He literally bought himself a place in the magazine and apparently saw no problem in mixing his literary aspirations with 'phynance'. Jarry, like many young writers of his generation, greatly admired Mallarmé and visited his salon. In return Mallarmé expressed his admiration for Jarry's work.<sup>5</sup>

Despite his later reputation as eccentric outsider, Jarry was well immersed in the literary world of Paris. He worked hard to get published and gain recognition from his (Symbolist) literary peers and his efforts paid off. The prose poem 'Haldernablou', inspired by Jarry's relationship with Fargue, was published by the *Mercure de France's* publishing house in July 1894. In October it also published Jarry's first book, *Les Minutes du Sable Mémorial*, a collection of early prose and poetry. Furthermore Jarry collaborated with Remy de Gourmont to publish the magazine *L'Ymagier*, in which they showcased popular images alongside the work of contemporary artists. Jarry, himself an artist, was quite familiar with the world of the visual arts. For example in 1894 Jarry travelled to Pont-Aven and Le Pouldu, where he stayed at the pension Gloanec, which had been home to Gauguin. There he met several artists of the Pont-Aven group, such as Filiger, Séguin and O'Connor, whose work was inspired by Gauguin. Jarry wrote reviews of their paintings and asked them to contribute to *l'Ymagier*.<sup>6</sup>

Jarry's literary career was interrupted at the end of 1894, when he was, much to his dismay, called into military service at Laval. Fortunately for him, he was soon discharged from the army on grounds of a 'chronic gallstones'. Back in Paris Jarry resumed his activities.

### 1.1.3 Ubu claims the stage

For a long while Jarry had wanted to get *Ubu Roi* published and have it staged by a proper theatre. In June 1896 the play was finally published in its entirety by the *Mercure de France*. Having been in negotiations with the independent Théâtre de l'Œuvre for a while, Jarry had also managed to convince its director Aurélien Lugné-Poe to produce his play.

On December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1896 Père Ubu claimed the stage in what by now has become a legendary opening night.<sup>7</sup> Jarry introduced the play, explaining his

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<sup>4</sup> OC I, p. 1036.

<sup>5</sup> On 27 October 1896 Mallarmé writes Jarry after the book publication of *Ubu Roi*: 'Mon cher Jarry. Tout simplement pour admirer *Ubu Roi* et vous presser la main [...] Vous avez mis debout, avec une glaise rare et durable aux doigts, un personnage prodigieux et les siens, cela, mon cher ami, en sobre et sûr sculpteur dramatique. Il entre dans le répertoire de haut goût et me hante ; merci. À vous. Stéphane Mallarmé'. Valvins, par Avon Seine-et-Marne Mardi [27 ou mercredi] 28 Octobre [1896], in : Stéphane Mallarmé, *Correspondance X Novembre 1897-Septembre 1898*, ed. Henri and Lloyd James Austin Mondor (Paris: Gallimard, 1984) pp. 190/91.

<sup>6</sup> Jarry would also write three poems inspired by Gauguin's works. He scribbled them in the guest book of the pension signed by Alfred Henry Jarry.

<sup>7</sup> For more details of the legendary premiere in its literary and theatrical context, see, among many others: Henri Béhar, *La dramaturgie d'Alfred Jarry* (Paris: Champion, 2003), *Cahiers du Collège de Pataphysique*, vol. 3/4 (1952), Gérard Damerval, *Ubu Roi. La bombe comique de 1896* (Paris: Nizet, 1984), Frantisek Deak, *Symbolist Theater. The Formation of an Avant-garde*. ( Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), Jacques Robichez, *Le Symbolisme au théâtre. Lugné-Poe et les débuts*

theatrical ideas, with his face painted white. With a mixture of provocation and irony he compared his play to Shakespeare. The play had one backdrop showing seemingly random scenes, wooden cartons indicated scene changes, whereas the actors wore masks, speaking and acting mechanically. The grotesque Ubu, the opening word 'merdre' and other obscenities, the utter disrespect for theatrical conventions, the lack of plot and real characters left the majority of the audience and critics baffled if not outraged. *Le Petit Parisien* called the production a 'scatological piece of insanity', and the critic of *L'Événement* needed a shower after the premiere.<sup>8</sup> Some conservative critics, like Francisque Sarcey of *Le Temps* and *Le Figaro's* Henri Fouquier, perceived the play as a form of anarchist terror. Others, like *Le Matin's* Henry Céard, were simply amused.<sup>9</sup> Only a handful of critics were supportive, including Henry Bauër, Romain Coolus and Catulle Mendès, all of whom had backed Jarry since his debut in *l'Écho de Paris*. Former schoolmate Charles Morin wrote an indignant letter to Bauër, claiming that he and his brother were the real authors of the play; a prelude to the later authorship controversy in the 1920's. Not even the progressive Théâtre de l'Œuvre seemed ready for this and Lugné-Poe cancelled the play. Nevertheless its *succès à scandale* turned both Jarry and his character Ubu into notorious figures.<sup>10</sup> To the *Mercur* crowd, Jarry had already read excerpts from *Ubu Roi* and 'performed' as Ubu.<sup>11</sup> These public identifications with his literary creation would, after the premiere, only become more frequent.

Jarry had gained notoriety, but not financial security. During 1897 Jarry's debts increased and his financial problems led to him being evicted from his apartment.<sup>12</sup> In November Jarry found new, smaller lodgings; an apartment on the 'second and half floor' at 7 rue Cassette. The floors had been divided in half by the landlord and even Jarry, only 1.61 meters tall according to his military file, could barely stand up straight. This peculiar apartment is mentioned in the first Almanac.

Jarry continued to work hard and published his semi-autobiographical novel *Les Jours et les Nuits*, about his time in military service, in 1897. In January 1898 *Ubu Roi* was performed again as a marionette play at the Théâtre des Pantins, situated at the home of friend and composer Claude Terrasse. The novel *L'Amour en visites* was published and an excerpt of another novel Jarry was working on, *Gestes et Opinions du Docteur Faustroll*,

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*de l'Œuvre*. (Paris: L'Arche, 1957). Noel Arnaud's and Henri Bordillon's notes and introduction are also very useful, see Alfred Jarry, *Ubu, Folio* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978).

<sup>8</sup> 'Cette insanité scatophile' (*Le Petit Parisien*, 11 December 1896), 'Malgré l'heure tardive, je viens de prendre une douche. Mesure préventive indispensable quand on sort d'un pareil spectacle.' (*L'Événement*, 11 December 1896), quoted in: Beaumont, *Alfred Jarry. A Critical and Biographical Study*, p. 101.

<sup>9</sup> OC I, XXXVI.

<sup>10</sup> *Ubu Roi* was not staged again until February 1908, only a few months after Jarry's death, this time produced by actor Firmin Gémier, who played Père Ubu in the premiere.

<sup>11</sup> Writer Jean de Tinan, also a frequent visitor of Rachilde's Tuesday salon, recalled one of these readings in a letter to Jarry: 'Il m'a semblé vous l'entendre lire une fois de plus – avec accompagnement du rire de Rachilde, du rire de Moréno, du rire de Fanny, du rire de Vallette, du rire de Schwob, du rire de Hérold et du rire de tout le monde – selon les belles sonorités de l'admirable voix du maître de phynances.' *Le Divan*, avril-mai-juin 1924, pp. 258-259 and reprinted in *L'Étoile-Absinthe*, 111-112, 2006, p. 188.

<sup>12</sup> Before the premiere in November 1896 Jarry had bought an expensive racing bicycle on credit for 525 francs. He was haunted by bills from the dealer from Laval. Instead of paying the bills, Jarry just bought more accessories.

appeared in the *Mercure de France*.<sup>13</sup> The novel itself would not be published until 1911 by Eugène Fasquelle, four years after Jarry's death. Furthermore, it was also in 1898 that Jarry wrote the first *Almanach du Père Ubu*.

#### 1.1.4 Symbolism left behind; career changes and Ubu's Almanacs

In fact, both Almanacs were written at the time of an important turning point in Jarry's literary career. In 1898 Jarry had sent his texts to another notorious literary figure, Oscar Wilde. Without commenting on his work, Wilde sarcastically wrote to a friend that Jarry was the 'rising light of the Quartier Latin' adding that he looked like an attractive male prostitute.<sup>14</sup> This anecdote illustrates that, even though Jarry enjoyed some fame, his literary works remained largely ignored. His efforts to gain success were not helped by the fact that he could be very demanding. Lugué-Poe called Jarry's demands for the staging of *Ubu Roi* tiresome and difficult.<sup>15</sup> Having gained access to Symbolist circles in the 1890's after active self-promotion and flattering letters to the right people, Jarry, as letters from this period show, now seemed to make increasingly higher demands when it came to his texts.<sup>16</sup> His refusal to compromise interfered with the publication of his work. In January 1899 Alfred Vallette had warned Jarry not to write too difficult if he wanted to be published.<sup>17</sup> Jarry made it clear to Vallette that he was not willing to change his work, even if it would remain unsold:

Compagnon.

J'ai oublié de vous dire hier au sujet de mon in-18 et ce matin je me suis levé beaucoup trop tard pour venir vous en informer, qu'il est bien entendu que même s'il paraît invendable au Mercure, je n'y change rien du tout dans l'ordre des chapitres ni en rien.<sup>18</sup>

Alfred Vallette refused to publish *L'Amour absolu* and told Jarry that he would stop publishing his novels altogether.

Although he would remain close to Vallette and the *Mercure* crowd, Jarry found a more welcoming climate among people who would prove to be important for twentieth century avant-garde movements. *La Revue Blanche* and its publishing house took over publication of Jarry's work. This was partly due to editor Félix Fénéon, an admirer of Jarry. In 1900 the Éditions de la Revue Blanche published *Ubu enchaîné* together with *Ubu Roi*. *La Revue Blanche*, rooted in Symbolism, but favourable to all new ideas, also employed Jarry, who had been free-lancing for the magazine since 1896, as a

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<sup>13</sup> *Mercure de France* May, 1898, no. 101, p. 407-408.

<sup>14</sup> 'Alfred Jarry has sent me a complete collection of his works...Jarry is now the rising light of the Quartier Latin. In person he is most attractive. He looks just like a very nice renter.' Wilde to Reginald Turner, 25 May 1898, Merlin Holland, Rupert Hart-Davis, ed., *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), p. 1075.

<sup>15</sup> Aurélien Lugué-Poe, *Acrobaties. Souvenirs et impressions de théâtre (1894-1902)*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1931), pp. 159-95.

<sup>16</sup> See Jarry's correspondence letters from 1900 until his death in 1907, OC III, pp. 594/595. Many of these letters illustrate his (often difficult) negotiations with publishers and editors.

<sup>17</sup> Vallette would only publish his work 'à la condition que le père Ubu consente à être clair.' Letter Vallette to Jarry, 9 January 1899, published in *Cahiers du Collège de Pataphysique*, 1956, 26/27, p. 68.

<sup>18</sup> OC I, p. 1075.

regular chronicler and critic. This provided him with a much needed regular source of income over the next few years. *La Revue Blanche* also published the novels *Messaline* (1901), set in ancient Rome, and *Le Surmâle* (1902), set in the nearby future of 1920. Around the same time the second Almanac (1901) was issued as well and *Ubu Roi* was performed as a marionette play at the cabaret 'Les Quat'z Arts' in Montmartre.

The changes in publishers and platforms also signalled a change in Jarry's writing. The Almanacs, as I argue in the following chapters, exemplify these changes. Leaving behind the Symbolism of the 1890's, his work took on a new direction set in motion since *Ubu Roi*. In these years Jarry also became acquainted with a 'younger' generation of avant-garde writers and artists, who would lay the foundations of the first 20th century avant-garde movements. Jarry befriended Guillaume Apollinaire.<sup>19</sup> In bars and cabarets he socialized (and drank) with André Salmon, Max Jacob and the bohemian crowd surrounding them including Picasso and the Bateau Lavoir circle.<sup>20</sup> Jarry also met the future founder of Futurism, F.T. Marinetti, in this period. Poet André Salmon later recalled the literary banquets organized by *La Plume*, where the 'older' Symbolist writers would mingle with young members of the future avant-garde. Jarry presided one of these banquets, performing as Ubu and mockingly recited some of his early Symbolist poetry. Salmon writes how he witnessed:

'...Alfred Jarry dirigeant la cérémonie à la manière du Père Ubu, pas mécontent néanmoins de renifler un peu de l'air du temps où il se voulait poète symboliste..<sup>21</sup>

Jarry was certainly not alone in his mockery of Symbolism. Both Symbolists and Decadents had parodied their own peers and work.<sup>22</sup> There had been heated debates about the Symbolist aesthetic among Symbolist writers and in their journals.<sup>23</sup> Jean Moréas had declared the death of the movement as early as 1891. Verlaine, uncomfortable with his mentor status, had despised the term Symbolism altogether.<sup>24</sup> In his interview with Jules Huret in 1891,

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<sup>19</sup> Michel Décaudin, *La crise des valeurs symbolistes. Vingt ans de poésie française* (Toulouse: Privat, 1960), pp. 249-54.

<sup>20</sup> Picasso's girlfriend Fernande Olivier recalled how she met Jarry shortly before his death and how he and his long-time friend Arthur Cremona would 'often go out drinking together, collecting bottles throughout the course of the evening, which Jarry would take back to his house.' Fernande Olivier, *Loving Picasso. The private journal of Fernande Olivier* (New York: Abrams, 2001), p. 202. Jarry knew Cremona from his days at *l'Art Littéraire* in 1893.

<sup>21</sup> André Salmon, *Souvenirs sans fin 1903-1940* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), p.152.

<sup>22</sup> In 1885 for example Henri Beauclair and Gabriel Vicaire had published a parody on decadent verse under the name of Adoré Floupette, *Les déliquescences*, published by a certain Lion Vanné in Byzance. The fact that Decadents parodied their own work confused the established press, who already considered the Decadents as *fumistes*.

<sup>23</sup> Pamela A. Genova, *Symbolist Journals. A Culture of Correspondence, Studies in European Cultural Transition* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002). Genova clearly shows the debates, paradoxes and eclecticism of the Symbolist movement.

<sup>24</sup> Dutch Nabi painter Jan Verkade recalled seeing Verlaine at one of the Symbolist soirées: 'Usually he immediately started to argue with one of the representatives of Symbolism. He hated that expression; it was too vague, too mystifying for him. 'What does that mean exactly "Symbolism, Symbolism?"' one heard him ask time and time again. "Nothing, absolutely nothing!...I am a Decadent, at least that word has a clear meaning...I am a Decadent!' (translation mine), Dom Willibrord (Jan Verkade) Verkade,

he jokingly referred to the Symbolists as 'cymbalistes' and their 'ridiculous manifestations.'<sup>25</sup>

The generation of writers from the 1890's was therefore an eclectic and diverse one. Representatives of both old and new generations often met and gathered in the same places, exchanging ideas, influencing each other.<sup>26</sup> However, the representatives of the future avant-garde, like Apollinaire, Salmon or Picasso, all expressed a greater appreciation of Jarry's work than many of his early literary friends had.<sup>27</sup> In any case Jarry became an important example for these young artists who sought to challenge artistic traditions and look for new forms.

The turn of the century had marked new acquaintances and opportunities, but in the next few years Jarry, both professionally and personally, struggled more and more. *La Revue Blanche* ceased to exist in 1903 and the little financial stability Jarry had enjoyed now disappeared completely. His behaviour evolved from eccentric to destructive. After a dinner in the spring of 1905, Jarry fired his revolver twice on the unsuspecting young sculptor Manolo. The other guests, among whom Apollinaire took Jarry's gun and dragged him away, while Jarry shouted: 'But wasn't that great literature?' It has become a well-known, colourful anecdote, but it signalled Jarry's increasingly erratic behaviour, caused predominantly by his drinking habit. At the end of 1905 he fell seriously ill with influenza.

Financial crises and health problems dominated the last two years of Jarry's life. His health deteriorated quickly, due to a combination of alcoholism, bad nourishment and poor living conditions. Influential friends, like publishers Eugène Fasquelle and Edward Sansot, still tried to come to Jarry's aid. In 1906 Sansot published *Par la taille*, an operetta Jarry had written 1900, as well as *Ubu sur la Butte*. Long-time friends Vallette and Fénéon called upon people to pre-subscribe to *Le Moutardier du Pape*, a musical comedy, but without success. Thadée and Alfred Natanson, founders of *La Revue Blanche*, helped pay some of Jarry's rent. In 1906 Jarry, seriously ill, returned to Laval. He made up his will and dictated plans for his last novel, *La Dragonne*, to his sister. At the end of the year he managed to return to Paris, although still in poor health. Jarry's deplorable state at the beginning of 1907 is painfully illustrated by Paul Léautaud in his journal:

'Hier mardi, au Mercure, j'ai vu Jarry qui s'en va une seconde fois se retirer dans sa province, chez sa sœur, à Laval. J'ai parlé de lui avec Vallette. Fini, bien fini,

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*Van ongebondenheid en heilige banden. Herinneringen van een schilder-monnik* ('s Hertogenbosch: Teulings Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1926), p. 68.

<sup>25</sup> 'Ils m'embêtent, à la fin, les cymbalistes ! eux et leurs manifestations ridicules !' Verlaine to Jules Huret in 1891. Jules Huret, *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire (notes et préface par Daniel Grojnowski)* (Vanves: Les Éditions THOT, 1982) p. 82.

<sup>26</sup> See for example Décaudin, *La crise des valeurs symbolistes. Vingt ans de poésie française*.

<sup>27</sup> On this context see for example Guillaume Apollinaire, *Flâneur des deux rives suivi de contemporains pittoresques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), Guillaume Apollinaire, *Journal Intime*, ed. Michel Décaudin (Éditions du Limon, 1991), John Richardson, *A Life of Picasso. Volume 1 1881-1906* (New York: Random House, 1991), Salmon, *Souvenirs sans fin 1903-1940*, Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years. The origins of the avant-garde in France 1885 to World War I*. Alfred Jarry, Henri Rousseau, Erik Satie, Guillaume Apollinaire. (New York: Random House, 1968).

ce pauvre Jarry. Malade, détraqué par les privations, l'alcoolisme et la masturbation, incapable de gagner sa vie en aucune façon, ni avec un emploi, ni par une collaboration quelconque à un journal. On l'avait fait entrer il y a deux ou trois ans au *Figaro*. Il ne faisait rien, ou ce qu'il faisait était illisible. Couvert de dettes et déjà un peu fou, il y a un an on avait organisé au Mercure la publication, à tirage restreint et très cher, d'un mince ouvrage de lui.<sup>28</sup> Cela lui avait fourni, toutes ses dettes payées, environ un billet de huit cents à mille francs. Il a tout mangé à boire, à courir les cafés, si bien qu'aujourd'hui, fourbu et fichu, il se résigne à repartir chez sa sœur. "Le mieux serait qu'il ne revienne jamais, me disait Vallette. Il est fichu. Pas même capable de faire une course."<sup>29</sup>

Léautaud's portrayal of Jarry, of a drunk and debauched figure who writes unreadable works, was characteristic of how many people, including life-long friends, viewed him towards the end of his life.<sup>30</sup>

On the 29th of October a concerned Alfred Vallette and Jean Saltas visited Jarry's apartment where they found him half unconscious and paralysed. Jarry was rushed to the Hopital de la Charité, but died on the first of November 1907, aged 34. The official cause of death was meningitis. On the third of November Jarry was buried after a short service at Saint-Sulpice. Only a small group of people was present, most notably old friends such as Alfred Vallette, Rachilde, Octave Mirbeau, Paul Valéry, Paul Léautaud, Félicien Fagus and Thadée Natanson.

## 1.2 Jarry's poetics

Jarry matured as a writer in Symbolist circles and possessed a sincere admiration for many Symbolist artists and writers.<sup>31</sup> But from very early on Jarry had also challenged contemporary literary norms. In 'Linteau', written at the beginning of his career, Jarry outlined some of his poetic ideas and expressed an ironic ambiguity towards Symbolism. Several crucial aspects of Jarry's poetics that become very evident in Ubu's Almanacs were already announced in this text.

### 1.2.1 'Linteau' (*Les Minutes de sable mémorial*, 1894); first outline of a subversive poetics.

The text 'Linteau' is the prologue to *Les Minutes de sable mémorial*, an eclectic collection of prose, essay and poetry. It was Jarry's first book and some of its texts had already been published elsewhere, such as the prize-winning 'Guignol' in *L'Écho de Paris*. In 'Linteau', Jarry explains to his readers how to read the texts. *Les Minutes* is representative of Jarry's work at a time when it was still in the midst of Symbolism and in it one can spot the influences of for example Remy de Gourmont or Mallarmé. The style and tone of Jarry's texts are reminiscent of those of his Symbolist

<sup>28</sup> Referring to the luxury edition of *Le Moutardier du Pape* which appeared in 1906.

<sup>29</sup> Wednesday, January 23, 1907, Paul Léautaud, *Journal littéraire*, vol. I (Paris: Mercure de France, 1986), pp. 375/76. After Jarry's death Léautaud cynically wrote: 'maintenant qu'il est mort on lui trouve du génie', p. 427.

<sup>30</sup> Writer Jehan Rictus, for example, wrote in his journal after Jarry's death that he had been a 'victime de ses propres fumisteries'. Quoted in *L'Étoile-Absinthe*, 1986, 31/32, p. 22.

<sup>31</sup> As Patrick Besnier's recent biography of Jarry also clearly shows. Besnier, *Alfred Jarry*. Jarry's debt to Symbolist circles is also made clear by Fisher, *The Pataphysicians Library. An exploration of Alfred Jarry's livres pairs*. In his discussion of Faustroll's library Fisher clearly shows how Jarry's literary tastes were rooted in Symbolism.

contemporaries. In fact 'Linteau' could be read as a 'Symbolist manifesto.'<sup>32</sup> However, the irony expressed throughout the 'manifesto' also prevents readers from taking Jarry's statements too literally and understanding them as univocally Symbolist.

The word *linteau*, or *lintel* in English, literally signifies 'a supporting beam, a piece of wood or brick placed horizontally above the opening of a door or window'. The title thus suggests a sort of literary-theoretical 'supporting beam' for the texts that follow; a guide for how to read the work, which at first seems to mystify more than it clarifies. Nevertheless, this address to the readers does, however ironically and ambiguously, convey four key features of Jarry's poetics, which are put forward more explicitly in the Almanacs: 1. Semiotic polyvalence of language, 2. Genre-crossing and heterogeneity, 3. The ambiguous relationship of the author to his readers and 4. Leaving in what is 'weak and bad'.

### 1.2.1.1 *Semiotic polyvalence*

The first feature addressed in 'Linteau', that of polyvalence, illustrates Jarry's poetic conception of language, rooted in Symbolism. Jarry writes that the literary text should:

'suggérer au lieu de dire, faire dans la route des phrases un carrefour de tous les mots.'<sup>33</sup>

The high-strung tone and content of this phrase are obviously inspired by Mallarmé. Three years before Jarry's text, in Jules Huret's *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire* (1891), a collection of interviews with contemporary writers, Mallarmé made his famous declaration that:

'Nommer un objet, c'est supprimer les trois quarts de la jouissance du poème qui est faite du bonheur de deviner peu à peu, mais le suggérer, voilà le rêve.'<sup>34</sup>

A word should evoke a multitude of meanings instead of unambiguously referring to one object; a poem should be suggestive and ambiguous. Jarry pays his debt to Mallarmé's conception of poetry in 'Linteau', as he proceeds to refer to words as 'polyèdres d'idées.'<sup>35</sup> The word 'polyèdre', literally a 'solid object with multiple surfaces', functions here a metaphor for Jarry's ideal of semiotic polyvalence.<sup>36</sup> Jarry emphasizes the polyvalence and the associative

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<sup>32</sup>As Henri Dorra has also labeled it in: Henri Dorra, *Symbolist Art Theories. A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 306. Dorra, who remarks the text's debt to Mallarmé, fails, in my opinion, to underline some of the nuances and irony in Jarry's 'Symbolist manifesto.'

<sup>33</sup> OC I, p. 171

<sup>34</sup> Huret, Jules, *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire*. Paris, 1891, p. 60.

<sup>35</sup> OC I, p. 173.

<sup>36</sup> This aspect of Jarry's use of language has of course long been recognized. See for example Michel Arrivé's psycholinguistic analyses of Jarry's 'semiotic obsession'. Michel Arrivé, *Les langages de Jarry* (Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1973), Michel Arrivé, *Lire Jarry* (Bruxelles: Editions Complexe, 1976).

possibilities of language as he writes that 'le rapport de la phrase verbale à tout sens qu'on y puisse trouver est [...] indéfiniment varié.'<sup>37</sup>

This was of course an essential feature of Symbolist aesthetics, both in literature and art. In his Symbolist manifesto Jean Moréas stated that 'idealism' was central in Symbolism. This meant that a concrete, visible form (symbol) in the work of art should transmit an abstract idea.<sup>38</sup> Albert Aurier, art critic for the *Mercure de France*, declared in his article on Symbolist painting that Symbolism should express an Idea, through simplicity of form (symbolism), and that an object was never an object, but always transmits a subjective idea.<sup>39</sup> As Remy de Gourmont had explained in the preface to *Le Latin mystique* (1892), Symbolist expression was above all subjective and individual, with forms and symbols conveying a symbolic, personal imagination.

Symbolist 'art for art's sake' poetics meant that the work of art did not have to provide an interpretation of or a comment upon the everyday world. A word or a symbol could stand on its own, referring to an inner, symbolic rather than an external reality. It stemmed from Baudelaire's concept of synthesis: taking sensorial experiences from the real world or from other art forms to produce a separate, different, and certainly self-sufficient reality, a universe of (personal) associations.<sup>40</sup> This implied the notion that art existed alongside reality rather than in the midst of it. Jarry expresses a similar tendency towards polyvalence and ambiguity in 'Linteau' and he appears to adhere to a Symbolist ideal of creating a polysemic, associative and autonomous linguistic universe.

For Jarry, the ideal of semiotic polyvalence was also closely tied to another important concept, that of 'simultaneity'. In a speech he delivered at the Salon des Indépendants in 1902, entitled 'Le temps dans l'art', Jarry said that the visual arts had one big advantage over literature's inherent linearity; its capacity to show different objects simultaneously:

'C'est que la littérature est obligée de les faire défiler successivement et un à un les objets qu'elle décrit... [...] Au contraire dans un tableau, le spectateur embrasse d'un coup d'œil un assez grand nombre d'objets, simultanés, qu'il a plu au peintre d'en rassembler. Ainsi donc le tableau ou la statue saisit et fixe un moment de la durée.'<sup>41</sup>

In Jarry's view, the work of art could do without the notion of time.<sup>42</sup> He expressed a similar idea in his writings on the theatre, in his letters to Lugné-Poe, in the essays 'De l'inutilité du théâtre au théâtre', 'Paralipomènes d'Ubu' and in the preliminary conference he held at the premiere.<sup>43</sup> Ideally in the production of *Ubu Roi* all the props and backdrops would be

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<sup>37</sup> OC I, p. 172.

<sup>38</sup> Published in *Le Figaro* in 1888, see Genova, *Symbolist Journals. A Culture of Correspondence*, pp. 104-21.

<sup>39</sup> G.A. Aurier, "Le symbolisme en peinture", in: *Mercure de France*, 59, 1891, pp. 155-165.

<sup>40</sup> 'Baudelaire and Symbolist Aesthetics', Dorra, *Symbolist Art Theories. A Critical Anthology*, pp. 1-8. Edward Lucie-Smith, *Symbolist Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), p. 55.

<sup>41</sup> 'Le temps dans l'art', 8 April 1902, OC II, p. 637.

<sup>42</sup> 'L'œuvre d'art se passe assez bien du notion du temps', OC II, p. 641.

<sup>43</sup> OC I, p. 405. See especially two letters to Lugné-Poe from 1896, OC I, p.1042 and p.1052, in which Jarry discusses the art direction of the play in great detail.

constantly present on stage. The representation could then convey simultaneous places, times and meanings and become timeless, less referential.<sup>44</sup> Jarry's poetics of simultaneity extended from visual art and theatre to literature. His visual concept of language implied that linear narrative and univocal realistic representation in literature should, ideally, be replaced by non-linear simultaneity and ambiguous polyvalence. In *Ubu's Almanacs* these ideas partially account for the collage aesthetic, which I discuss in chapter four.

Besides simultaneity, semiotic polyvalence also enabled incongruous associations. In many of his texts, including the *Almanacs*, this takes on the form of wordplay and humorist puns. Jarry would emphasize the importance of wordplay and humour in general in his article 'Ceux pour qui il n'y eut point de Babel' (15 May 1903), published in *La Plume*. Humour, Jarry writes, is not just, as his teacher Henri Bergson said, defined by the feeling of surprise; it is the revelation of the truth through humour that surprises the most.<sup>45</sup> Talking about the poem 'Escargot' by his friend Franc-Nohain, Jarry comments on word association and reveals his own love for puns.<sup>46</sup> It is a passage worth citing in its entirety, for the insight it provides into Jarry's ideas about wordplay and humour:

Les allitérations, les rimes, les assonances et les rythmes révèlent des parentés profondes entre les mots [...]

Franc-Nohain sait, à merveille, déterrer les racines des mots. Quand il écrit : « Escargot, Escarguerite », il le déduit logiquement de « Margot, Marguerite ». Si d'aucuns contestent que Marguerite soit le féminin de Margot et n'y reconnaissent que le diminutif ? sinon nos femmes seraient trop grandes !

Nous écrivons dans la préface de notre premier livre (*Les Minutes*, 1894), que si l'auteur a su déterminer deux points en corrélation absolue (encoche, point de mire), tous les autres, sans nouvel effort de sa part, seront sur la trajectoire. Aussi admirons-nous, comme on admire un but prévu et atteint, que M. Franc-Nohain continue, dans sa déclaration d'Escargot à Escarguerite : « Escarguerite de Bourgogne. »

On retrouve la vérité à tous les détours. Et puis ô poètes « sérieux », avez-vous jamais imaginé, et de mieux rythmé, que ce rythme d'un « humoriste » qui se dit modestement « amorphe ».<sup>47</sup>

Despite Jarry's ironic tone, he implicitly shares some of his ideas with his readers. Jarry refers back to the seminal text of *Les Minutes*, copying a phrase from that text ('si l'auteur a su déterminer..'), in which the author finds all sorts of words on his path simply by relating two objects and through association. Defending Franc-Nohain's 'humorist' poetry (and indirectly his own poetics) Jarry states that through such humorous wordplay and association one would find the truth at every detour ('On retrouve la vérité à tous les détours'); or at least a more truthful

<sup>44</sup> OC I, p. 405.

<sup>45</sup> 'Le rire n'est pas, croyons-nous, seulement ce que l'a défini notre excellent professeur de philosophie au lycée Henri IV, M. Bergson : le sentiment de la surprise. Nous estimons qu'il faudrait ajouter : l'impression de la vérité révélée – qui surprend, comme toute découverte inopinée.' OC II, p. 442.

<sup>46</sup> Franc-Nohain's poem 'Les Escargots' was published in *Le Journal* that year. See OC II, p. 895, note 1 to page 443. Franc-Nohain is mentioned in the first *Almanac's* list of names, see the Appendix.

<sup>47</sup> OC II, p. 443. In the preface to his collection of poetry *Flûtes* (*La Revue Blanche*, 1898), Franc-Nohain referred to himself as 'poète amorphe'. See OC II, p. 895, note 2 to page 443.

representation of the world than the one provided by so-called 'serious' poets. Later, in his unfinished novel *La Dragonne* Jarry would again underline that word games were not a game ('les jeux de mots ne sont pas un jeu').<sup>48</sup> Humorist wordplay could therefore achieve a more accurate, truthful representation of the world, but Jarry does not appear to put forward the symbolic, alternate reality Symbolism propagated.

However, I argue that in the Almanacs Jarry's ideal of semiotic polyvalence, resulting from humorist wordplay often provides a complex, but painfully accurate account of reality and current events. The texts in the Almanac partially appear to counteract the non-referential text sought after by Jarry's Symbolist contemporaries.

#### 1.2.1.2 *Generic hybridity and material heterogeneity*

One way to achieve semiotic polyvalence and unexpected associations in the literary work was through genre-crossing and material heterogeneity. Generic hybridity is the second important feature of Jarry's poetics addressed in 'Linteau'. In *Linteau* the ideal literary work is described by Jarry as an 'oeuvre unique faite de toutes les oeuvres possibles.'<sup>49</sup> *Les Minutes du Sable Mémemorial* itself was an example of this practice, as it is comprised of an eclectic collection of literary genres.

Like *Les Minutes*, many of Jarry's works defy and transgress genre boundaries. *César Antéchrist* for example combines a play (a first version of scenes from *Ubu Roi*), Symbolist hermetic prose and medieval images. The plays from the Ubu-cycle are cross-overs between various performance genres mixing elements from classical tragedy, marionette theatre, musical theatre, farce and cabaret. The novel *Messaline* poses simultaneously as a historical novel and an erotic 'roman à scandale', while *Le Surmâle* (1902) contains elements from gothic and decadent novels, science-fiction, sports reportage and scientific treaties. In *Gestes et Opinions du docteur Faustroll, roman néo-scientifique* the reader is confronted with a variety of discursive genres, such as encyclopaedic texts, letters, scientific treaties, poetry, pastiches, lists, travel accounts, philosophical texts. The result is an eclectic, heterogeneous assemblage of texts, which bears little resemblance to any contemporary novel. This feature of Jarry's poetics might also have sparked his interest in the almanac genre, a traditionally heterogeneous genre.

#### 1.2.1.3 *The author figure and his readers*

'Linteau' features a third important aspect of Jarry's poetics: the complicated and paradoxical figure of the author and his relationship to his readers. In 'Linteau' a variety of contemporary author positions are negotiated and questioned.

Jarry starts off by giving out a warning to his audience, stating that 'most people will probably not notice that the following is very beautiful.'<sup>50</sup> The tone comes across as ironic, defiant, but also as defensive, aimed perhaps at possible critics. Both mainstream critics, as well as representatives of other

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<sup>48</sup> OC III, p.496.

<sup>49</sup> OC I, p.172

<sup>50</sup> OC I, p.171, 'Il est vraisemblable que beaucoup ne s'apercevront point que ce qui va suivre soit très beau...'

literary movements (naturalists, Parnassians) at the time labelled Symbolists as mere 'fumistes', jokers, considering them as nihilistic rebels mocking the establishment.<sup>51</sup> Even Symbolists themselves often expressed an ironic resistance towards their movement which, together with their constant need to redefine Symbolist aesthetics in journals and manifests, confused and aggravated both critics and audiences. Symbolists appeared to unite not only in a common search for new forms of expression but also in fighting mutual enemies. Jarry's defensive tone might also be read in this light.<sup>52</sup>

Jarry continues to address the reader in this slightly hostile manner when he provides four reasons why the readers' understanding of the text is always inferior to that of the author:

« (DILEMME) De par ceci qu'on écrit l'œuvre, active supériorité sur l'audition passive. Tous les sens qu'y trouvera le lecteur sont prévus, et jamais il ne les trouvera tous ; et l'auteur lui en peut indiquer, colin-maillard cérébral, d'inattendus, postérieurs et contradictoires.

Mais 2<sup>ème</sup> Cas. Lecteur infiniment supérieur par l'intelligence à celui qui écrit. – N'ayant point écrit l'œuvre, il ne la néanmoins pénètre point, reste parallèle, sinon égal, au lecteur du 1<sup>er</sup> Cas.

3<sup>ème</sup> Si impossible il s'identifie à l'auteur, l'auteur au moins dans le passé le surpassa écrivant l'œuvre, moment unique où il vit TOUT (et n'eut, comme ci-dessus, garde de le dire. C'eût été (cf. *Pataph.*) association d'idées animalement passive, dédain (ou manque) du libre-arbitre ou de l'intelligence choisissante, et sincérité, anti-esthétique et méprisable).

4<sup>ème</sup> Si passé ce moment unique l'auteur oublie (et l'oubli est indispensable – *timeo hominemi*...-pour retourner le stile en sa cervelle et y buriner l'œuvre nouvelle), la constance du rapport précité lui est jalon pour retrouver TOUT. Et ceci n'est qu'accessoire de cette réciproque : quand même il n'eût point su toutes choses y afférentes en écrivant l'œuvre, il lui suffit de deux jalons placés (encoche, point de mire) – par l'intuition, si l'on veut un mot – pour TOUT décrire (dirait le tire-ligne au compas) et découvrir. Et Descartes est bien petit d'ambition, qui n'a voulu qu'édifier sur un Album un système (Rien de Stuart Mill, méthode des résidus).<sup>53</sup>

The general conclusion is that the reader will never fully comprehend the author's work, at least not in the way the author does. However one gets the impression that this exaggerated emphasis on the reader's incapability to grasp the text and on the work's deliberate hermetic inaccessibility is also a spoof of Symbolist discourse itself. The quasi-scientific references and the heavy-handed tone (capitalising 'tout' for example) mimic Symbolist texts, but in such an overstated manner that it also debunks its own seriousness. Furthermore this dialogue with the reader reveals several ambiguous positions when it comes to contemporary (Symbolist) conceptions of the author. First of all Jarry refers to the still prevalent idea (in the wake of the Romantic period) of the author as a genius, the divinely inspired poet. Under point III he claims that the author was 'writing the work at a unique moment

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<sup>51</sup> Conservative theatre critic Jules Lemaître, Parnassian poet Leconte de Lisle, as well as realist writer Zola for example all considered the Symbolists as 'fumistes'. Genova, *Symbolist Journals. A Culture of Correspondence*, pp. 1-20.

<sup>52</sup> Genova, studying Symbolist journals, also notices a particular defensive, personal, sometimes vindictive tone in their articles. Ibid. p. 22, note 41.

<sup>53</sup> OC I, p.172.

when he saw everything', referring further on, under point IV, to a mysterious 'intuition' which allows the author to discover everything. In a letter from this period to Édouard Julia, Jarry describes a similar writing process, talking about *César-Antechrist*:

'Et le premier acte s'élabore dans ma cervelle. J'attends par paresse ou habitude qu'il soit fait tout seul. Je n'ai encore vu que les personnages du 1<sup>er</sup> acte. Je sais qu'ils seront tous doubles et que tout y sera par blason.'<sup>54</sup>

Here, Jarry makes it sound as if the text simply develops in his brain without him having any control and he can just 'lazily' wait until it is finished. 'Je n'ai encore vu' implies an image of the visionary poet who receives inspiration for his text from a mysterious outward source, albeit in a somewhat demystifying style.

However, under point I Jarry also writes that all meanings will have been foreseen by the author and that he can randomly point out contradictory meanings to the reader if he pleases. Whereas the words themselves generate a certain meaning, it is the author who, at one point, saw their true meaning. This complies with the image of a visionary poet ('foreseen'). Although he is hardly aware of where his imagination comes from, he has nevertheless, for that very reason, a privileged position over the reader who never shared his vision. In this text Jarry reveals a highly self-aware author, who might not always be aware where his words come from, but who is at the same time in control of his writing, and at least superior to the reader.

Some years later Jarry would describe Sengle's writing method in his auto-biographical novel *Les Jours et les Nuits* (1897) as follows:

'Sengle construisait ses littératures, curieusement et précisément équilibrées, par des sommeils d'une quinzaine de bonnes heures, après manger et boire ; et éjaculait en une écriture de quelque méchante demi-heure le résultat. Lequel on pouvait anatomiser et atomiser indéfiniment, chaque molécule étant cristallisée selon le système de la masse, avec des hiérarchies vitalisantes, comme les cellules d'un corps. Des professeurs de philosophie chantent que cette similitude aux productions naturelles est du Chef d'œuvre.'<sup>55</sup>

On one hand the text points to a similar involuntary, subconscious process of creation, during sleep. The high-strung tone and heavy-handed emphasis on 'Chef d'oeuvre', comparing writing to natural creation also suggests, like 'Linteau' and Jarry's letter to Julia, a certain irony or at least a self-awareness regarding the 'mysterious' process of creation and how it had often been described since Romanticism. On the other hand this fragment also implies a more conscious construction of texts ('construisait ses littératures'), with exact precision (précisément équilibrées). The use of scientific discourse ('anatomisait', 'atomiser', 'molécule', 'système', 'cellules') emphasizes this idea of a methodological, scientific conception of literary composition. A similar use of a scholarly style and scientific discourse also characterized 'Linteau', in particular the four points addressing the author.

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<sup>54</sup>Letter to Édouard Julia, September 8, 1894, OC I, p. 1310.

<sup>55</sup> OC I, p. 794.

This discourse, emphasizing Jarry's statements on literature's 'constructed' nature, clashes of course with certain 'romantic' ideas of poetic creation.

So what sort of author figure is the reader dealing with here? Jarry's previously discussed ideal of suggestive language, of words as 'polyèdres', mirrored the poetic ideals of Mallarmé and many Symbolist poets. In Mallarmé's poetics this central focus on language involved suppressing the author in the interests of writing.<sup>56</sup> Or, as Mallarmé wrote himself in his famous essay *Crise de Vers* (1886): 'The pure work implies the disappearance of the poet-speaker[...].The structure of a book of verse must arise throughout from internal necessity – in this way both chance and the author will be excluded'.<sup>57</sup> Mallarmé foresaw an aesthetic of anonymous creation in which the author was no longer visible in the text. While Jarry's previous emphasis on the power of language itself as a catalyst for meaning closely follows Mallarmé's 'disappearance of the poet-speaker', he also focuses very much on the author when it comes to creating meaning ('all meanings will have been foreseen'). Another contemporary, Paul Valéry, would, somewhat later, argue in favour of a 'disinterested genius', placing meaning of the text in the hands of the reader.

However, Jarry does not completely adhere to contemporary text-centred or reader-centred views of authorship. For Jarry meaning lies not, as in Mallarmé's case, solely in the text itself, and also not, as Valéry saw it, in the hands of the reader. The author is superior, as Jarry defiantly states. Even if the author no longer remembers why he chose a certain word or phrase, they were his original creative choice. Therefore, although he previously praised language's inherent polysemy, Jarry leaves little room for the reader to freely interpret his text. He appears to favour a more author-centred concept of the literary text. Such apparently contradictory statements are hardly uncommon in Jarry's work. In the speech he gave before the premiere of *Ubu Roi*, he first stated that it was superfluous and ridiculous for an author to talk about his own work – only to continue lecturing about the meaning of his play.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, such paradoxical employ of various author concepts, through which Jarry constantly undermines his own words, does emphasize his (need for) authorial control over the text. As I will argue, a similar ironic and complex use of author figure(s) is visible in the Almanacs.

#### 1.2.1.4 Incorporating 'everything weak and bad'

In 'Linteau' Jarry also pleads for a literary work in which 'weak and bad' material is not omitted. This is the fourth and last feature, which furthers Jarry's ideal of polyvalence and heterogeneity. Jarry apologizes to his readers who could see his work as sloppy and mediocre. In *Les Minutes*, readers will find 'des idées entrebâillées, non brodées de leurs usuelles accompagnatrices, et s'étonneront du manque de maintes citations

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<sup>56</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' (1967), in Seán Burke, *Authorship. From Plato to the Postmodern. A reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p. 126.

<sup>57</sup> Stéphane Mallarmé, from 'Crisis in Verse', quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>58</sup> 'Il serait superflu – outre le quelque ridicule que l'auteur parle de sa propre pièce- que je vienne ici précéder de peu de mots la réalisation d'*Ubu Roi*...', Jarry's speech before the premiere of *Ubu Roi*, 10 December 1896, OC I, p. 399.

congrues...<sup>59</sup> He explains to the reader why he has not edited out the weak and bad elements of his text:

*Avant de lire ce qui ne vaut rien* : Et il y a divers vers et proses que nous trouvons très mauvais et que nous avons laissés pourtant, retranchant beaucoup, parce que pour un motif qui nous échappe aujourd'hui, ils nous ont donc intéressé un instant puisque nous les avons écrits ; l'œuvre est plus complète quand on n'en retranche point tout le faible et le mauvais, échantillons laissés qui expliquent par similitude ou différence leurs pareils ou leurs contraires...<sup>60</sup>

Jarry's defence of his choices sounds apologetic, but, like the opening statement of 'Linteau', it reads more as an ironic comment on how most contemporary readers and critics would understand his text, or misunderstand it. Jarry's so-called 'weak and bad' elements are nevertheless conscious decisions made by the author.

This is closely connected to Jarry's ideal of generic and material heterogeneity. He preferred to incorporate elements from all cultural levels and disciplines, whether literary or non-literary. In 1903, in his article *Barnum*, about the American circus touring France, written for *Le Canard Sauvage*. Jarry also addressed this. Impressed by the performances he wondered why, outside of the circus, the human mind received so much more attention than physical activities:

C'est une étrange partialité que de consacrer dans les journaux et revues un grand nombre de pages, voire toutes les pages, à enregistrer, critiquer ou glorifier les manifestations de l'esprit humain : cela équivaut à ne tenir compte que de l'activité d'un organe arbitrairement choisi entre tous les organes, le cerveau. Il n'y a pas de raison pour ne point étudier aussi copieusement le fonctionnement de l'estomac ou du pancréas, par exemple, ou les gestes de n'importe quel membre.<sup>61</sup>

Jarry's observation concerning the circus is then extended to a more general idea:

Sous le titre "Gestes" on trouvera désormais dans cette Revue, par nos soins, des commentaires sur toute espèce de spectacles plastiques. Ceux-ci sont si variés qu'il serait long d'en limiter le programme. Bon nombre ont été énumérés, mieux que nous ne saurions, ici même par M. Thadée Natanson au sujet de Toulouse-Lautrec :

'Perfection des muscles, des nerfs, de l'entraînement, de l'adresse, d'un métier, d'une technique : ...les luttes à main plate, les courses de chevaux, les vélodromes, le patinage, la conduite des voitures, la toilette féminine, l'opération conduite par un grand chirurgien,...une taverne, un bal public,...un ivrogne connaisseur en boisson, ...un explorateur qui a mangé de l'homme,...un produit d'une chatte et d'un écureuil, ...un voilier vous emportant sous le vent,...une rixe entre buveurs, ...l'enterrement du pape...'

Tous ces gestes et même tous les gestes, sont à un degré égal esthétiques, et nous y attacherons une même importance. Une dernière au Nouveau Cirque réalise autant de beauté qu'une première à la Comédie-Française.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> OC I, p. 171.

<sup>60</sup> OC I, p. 173

<sup>61</sup> OC II, p. 331

<sup>62</sup> OC II, p. 332.

Jarry concludes that all gestures are equally aesthetic, no matter how strange, cliché or ugly they might be. Jarry's valorisation of the marginal, of popular culture and the 'everyday' does not only lead to new sources of inspiration. Their genres and forms should also be incorporated in the work. Using materials from an eclectic range of sources, or the 'weak and bad' in 'Linteau', could lead to new and incongruous associations. A similar concept of the literary work as a polysemic assemblage is also illustrated by Jarry's definition of the 'monster', in the second issue of *I'Ymagier* from 1895. In between (archaic) images of bizarre monsters and half-human creatures, Jarry writes:

Il est d'usage d'appeler MONSTRE l'accord inaccoutumé d'éléments dissonants : le Centaure, la Chimère se définissent ainsi pour qui ne comprend. J'appelle monstre toute originale inépuisable beauté.<sup>63</sup>

In Jarry's perception the 'monster', made up of dissonant elements should not merely be considered 'monstrous' or ugly, but could offer the possibility of original beauty.<sup>64</sup>

In the first sentence of 'Linteau' Jarry had already ironically 'apologized' for his work's apparent lack of beauty. However, Jarry intended to make his work deliberately *not* beautiful, at least according to contemporary standards. The quote on the 'monster' illustrates this idea. By including everyday 'bad' materials, the reader is left with the impression of an unpolished, 'unfinished' work, instead of a homogenous, finished work. This feature, combined with the previous discussed idea of the author as a *bricoleur* carefully constructing his text, as well as with Jarry's ideal of polyvalence and incongruous associations, paves the way for a collage aesthetic *avant la lettre* which, as I will discuss in chapter four, is put into practice in the Almanacs.

The style and tone of 'Linteau' represent Jarry when he was still immersed in Symbolism. Then again, the ironic manner in which Jarry presents his (Symbolist) aesthetics to the reader already revealed a questioning of contemporary norms of beauty, the literary text and authorship. The four aspects announced in the 'Linteau' text will, as I will show, feature very prominently in the Almanacs.

In Jarry's first work *Les Minutes* two other important components of Jarry's work are also introduced; the ominous figure of Père Ubu and the 'science' of pataphysics. Both the figure of Ubu and pataphysics started out as the products of a schoolboy's mockery of the educational system, but ended up being central in Jarry's work. Pataphysics and Ubu are important for understanding Jarry's poetics, which is why they call for a brief introduction.

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<sup>63</sup> OC I, p. 972.

<sup>64</sup>Eruli saw this image of the 'monster' as a metaphor for the collage aesthetic she remarks in Jarry's illustrations and in *I'Ymagier* in Brunella Eruli, "Le monstre, la colle, la plume," *Revue des Sciences Humaines* 203, no. 3 (1986): pp. 51-66.

### 1.2.2 Introducing Père Ubu

Although Père Ubu has become generally known through *Ubu Roi* (1896) he originated, as said, as a grotesque caricature of physics teacher Hébert, 'la déformation par un potache d'un de ses professeurs qui représentait pour lui tout le grotesque qui fût au monde', as Jarry wrote.<sup>65</sup> Somewhere along the way the name of physics teacher Hébert was transformed from père Hébé, Ébé and P.H. into Père Ubu. The Morin brothers made posthumous claims to ownership of Ubu, but since the original manuscript of Charles Morin is lost, it is hard to say which changes Jarry did or did not make to this character.<sup>66</sup> However, in the end Ubu's name no longer referred to its original source of inspiration and it was Jarry who turned the character into a well-known literary and symbolic figure.

Ubu re-appeared for the first time in the text 'Guignol', his prize-winning literary debut which Jarry would later integrate into both *Les Minutes de sable mémorial* and *Ubu cocu*. Ubu's introduction as a character thus coincided with Jarry's entrance into the literary world. Jarry constantly rewrote the Ubu material and this is illustrated by the complex intertextual cycle of the Ubu text. *César-Antechrist* (1895) for example, already contained entire scenes of *Ubu Roi* (1896). In the first issue of his short-lived magazine *Perhindérion*, Jarry even announced the preparation of a work entitled *Petits Crayons des gestes les plus notoires de M. Ubu, maître des phynances*, but, like other projects, it seems never to have been realized. Père Ubu of course dominates the works of the actual 'Ubu cycle' (the Ubu plays and the two Almanacs).<sup>67</sup> In *Ubu Roi* Ubu, as is well-known, takes over the throne of Poland, but is beaten and driven back to France in the end. In the 'sequel' *Ubu enchaîné* (1900) we find Ubu enslaved on a galley. In an imaginary nation populated by people with ridiculously grandiose and obscene titles, Ubu's version of France, everyone sets out to be equal, hence masters. Ubu, refusing 'de faire comme tout le monde', becomes a voluntary slave in order to be free. *Ubu Cocu* is the third play starring Ubu. It is also the most unstable and unfinished text. It contains writings from the Lycée de Rennes, extracts from *Les Minutes* and other previously written fragments.<sup>68</sup> There were two manuscript versions of the play. The first publication of this play in its entirety was in 1944. Even though *Ubu Cocu* was published later, its genesis precedes the two *Almanachs du Père Ubu* (1899, 1901). The Almanacs contain many references to the Ubu plays. The last appearance of Ubu during Jarry's life was in *Ubu sur la Butte*, an adapted and abbreviated version of *Ubu Roi*, performed as a puppet play at cabaret Les Quat'z Arts in Montmartre in 1901.

Ubu proved to be a powerful, symbolic figure for both Jarry and others. He has been interpreted or cast as the incarnation of tyranny, of the

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<sup>65</sup> OC I, p. 399.

<sup>66</sup> See the letters of Charles and Henri Morin around the 'Ubu Affair' collected by Noël Arnaud and Henri Bordillon in Jarry, *Ubu*, pp. 438-444.

<sup>67</sup> I borrow this term from Jarry scholars who have generally referred to these works as the Ubu cycle. See also the introduction to the first volume of Jarry's complete works. OC I, XXII-XXVI

<sup>68</sup> For more detailed background information on the creation of the Ubu cycle, consult the elaborate 'Notices et notes' in Jarry, *Ubu*, pp. 444-528, as well as the introduction and notes to the works in OC I. The *Cahiers du Collège de Pataphysique* of course have written extensively on Ubu and the history of the texts.

bourgeoisie, of the grotesque and the vulgar; even as a forecast of twentieth century dictators or a symbol of the Apartheid regime in South Africa.<sup>69</sup> He would be seen as the embodiment of black humour by André Breton and the Surrealists, the incarnation of Freudian unconscious desires, or as a frontrunner of absurdist theatre.<sup>70</sup> The variety of interpretations Ubu has received over the years, show, if anything, his strength as a character. The character continues to inspire writers and artists to this day, whether in works of art, children's plays or comic books.<sup>71</sup>

How did Jarry present his character? Ubu's first appearance on paper in 'Guignol' deserves some consideration, for it is as memorable as the character was to become. In addition, Jarry's ironic attitude towards Symbolist aesthetics seems to be played out symbolically in the opening of this one act play, which follows after the 'Linteau' text in *Les Minutes*. In the first lines the dark and refined environment of Monsieur Achras is described in a decadent manner and symbolist style:

'Et de l'ombre inférieure surgit, des genoux au sommet du gibus, très respectable et digne, M. Achras, vaquant aux soins anodins d'un collectionneur gâtisme. Des cristaux rangés par ordre s'étalent sur les rayons de ses bahuts...'<sup>72</sup>

Achras is a collector of 'polyèdres'. This time this word signifies actual diamonds, precious objects, the concrete form of the refined 'mots polyèdres' of the Linteau text and the Symbolist ideal of language. Ubu's entrance in the scene rudely disturbs Achras' refined surroundings:

Un larbin, *entrant*: Monsieur, y a z'un bonhomme qui veut parler à Monsieur. Il a arraché la sonnette à force de tirer dessus, il a cassé trois chaises en voulant s'asseoir.

*Il lui remet une carte*

Achras : Qu'est-ce que c'est que ça ? M. Ubu, ancien roi de Pologne et d'Aragon, docteur en pataphysique...Ça n'est point compris du tout. Qu'est-ce que c'est que ça, la pataphysique ? N'y a point de polyèdres qui s'appellent comme ça. Enfin c'est égal, ça doit être quelqu'un de distingué.<sup>73</sup>

Ubu's memorable entrance, breaking the doorbell and three chairs upon entering Achras' house, not only announces his presence in this scene, but also his entrance in Jarry's literary work and into the mind of the readers. When Achras apologizes saying that he 'had not expected the visit of such an enormous character...otherwise I would have had the door enlarged', this

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<sup>69</sup> Such as Jane Taylor, *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998).

<sup>70</sup> André Breton, *Anthologie de l'humour noir, Livre de Poche (Biblio)* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1966), pp. 272/73.

<sup>71</sup> For an iconographic history of Ubu in art see Schoonbeek, *Les portraits d'Ubu, Ubu. Cent ans de règne (catalogue)*, (Musée Galerie de la Seita, 1989). For some examples of Ubu in contemporary comic books see Barbara Pascarel, "Du docteur Festus à Homoblicus. Jarry en bandes dessinées," in *Alfred Jarry et les Arts*, ed. Henri & Schuh Béhar, Julien, *l'Étoile-Absinthe* (SAAJ & Du Lérot, 2007), pp. 172-96.

<sup>72</sup> OC I, p. 180.

<sup>73</sup> OC I, p. 181.

does not solely refer to Ubu's obesity but also to his symbolic stature as a character.<sup>74</sup> In this scene the grotesque Ubu is clearly opposed to Achras and his precious 'polyèdres'. The style and register also change to a cruder down to earth language the moment Ubu enters the scene. Considering the importance of the word 'polyèdres' in 'Linteau' the two characters appear to symbolize the opposition between Symbolist aesthetics and Jarry's own poetics. This is also mirrored in other texts of *Les Minutes*. Ubu's introduction and the texts in which he appears differ in tone and style from the other texts in *Les Minutes*, which are essentially Symbolist in nature. The eventual assassination of Achras and his 'polyèdres' by Ubu could be seen as a symbolic assassination of Decadent and Symbolist aesthetics, replacing the refined Achras and his objects (or words) of beauty ('polyèdres') by the unsophisticated figure of Ubu and his anything but refined use of language. Ubu is both a literal and symbolic sledge hammer breaking through both Achras door and with contemporary Symbolist aesthetics. Through this character Jarry's own ambivalent attitude towards Symbolism seems to be played out.

Jarry also commented on the 'meaning' and interpretations of his character in *Les Paralipomènes d'Ubu*, an article published in *La Revue Blanche* December 1 1896, a few days before the premiere of *Ubu Roi*:

*Ce n'est pas exactement Monsieur Thiers, ni le bourgeois, ni le muflé : ce serait plutôt l'anarchiste parfait, avec ceci qui empêche que nous devenions jamais l'anarchiste parfait, que c'est un homme, d'où couardise, saleté, laideur, etc.*

Jarry is careful not to reduce the Ubu character to a mere symbol of a violent *raison d'État* or the bourgeoisie.<sup>75</sup> Ubu seems to incarnate all negative human traits (egotism, cowardice, cruelty, ignorance), as Jarry himself also emphasized when he stated that Ubu could represent all the grotesque of the world.

However Ubu is a marionette-like character, a blank page which can be filled in to suit the needs of the author or the narrative. He is not in touch with any emotions or ideas of his own. This is illustrated by the fact that Ubu carries his Conscience (who appears as a separate character) in a suitcase (in *Ubu Cocu*) or in his bedside table (in the second Almanac). The Ubu character can embody paradoxical positions; tyrannical king in one play, slave and victim in the other. It was too simple for Jarry to reduce Ubu to a singular meaning. As Jarry explained to the audience attending *Ubu Roi*, 'you are free to see in Ubu as many references as you wish.'<sup>76</sup> Ubu, in this sense, adheres to the ideals of semiotic polyvalence and ambiguity we saw in

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<sup>74</sup> 'Achras: Ô, mais c'est que, excusez : je ne m'attendais point à recevoir la visite d'un aussi gros personnage... Sans ça, soyez sûr qu'on aurait fait élargir la porte.' OC I, p. 181.

<sup>75</sup> Louis-Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877) was French prime minister twice and the first president of the Republic from 1871 until 1873. He suppressed the Paris Commune in 1871 and he was generally held responsible for the bloody massacre, known as the Semaine Sanglante, in which around 20.000 people were killed and many others were jailed.

<sup>76</sup> 'C'est pourquoi vous serez libres de voir en M. Ubu les multiples allusions que vous voudrez, ou un simple fantôme, la déformation par un potache d'un de ses professeurs qui représentait pour lui tout le grotesque qui fût au monde.' Speech held by Jarry at the premiere of *Ubu Roi*, published in *Le Mercure de France*, January 1, 1897, OC I, p. 399.

'Linteau'. However, keeping in mind Jarry's ironic disdain for his readers, one could nevertheless wonder if the reader is actually as free to interpret Ubu in every possible way as Jarry suggests.

In fact, Jarry makes it clear that Ubu was not just a grotesque parody of human failure but also functioned as an artistic provocation. After the failure of the play's premiere and the audience's misunderstanding of it, the necessity of such a metaphorical sledge hammer seemed even greater. In *Questions de théâtre*, published on 1 January 1897 in *La Revue Blanche*, Jarry writes:

L'art et la compréhension de la foule étant si incompatibles, nous aurions si l'on veut eu tort d'attaquer directement la foule dans *Ubu Roi*, elle s'est fâchée parce qu'elle a trop bien compris, quoi qu'elle en dise. [...] C'est parce que la foule est une masse inerte et incompréhensive et passive qu'il la faut frapper de temps en temps, pour qu'on connaisse à ses grognements d'ours où elle est – et où elle en est.<sup>77</sup>

The tone of Jarry's address to the 'masses' is both superior and slightly frustrated. He rejects his audience while aiming to connect with it as well and recalls Ubu's function as a necessary mirror and provocative wake-up call the incomprehensive masses (even if the project failed miserably). A similar uneasy and ambiguous dialogue between Ubu and the public can also be discerned in the Almanacs.

Ubu has been object of study for many scholars, studies which have focused mostly on the plays but never, however, on the Almanacs, which have been considered minor works by most scholars. If commented on at all, Ubu's role in the Almanacs has often been limited to a strictly satirical one.<sup>78</sup> Beaumont labels Ubu in the Almanacs as a wannabe wit and entertainer, a tool of parody and utter nonsense.<sup>79</sup> Ubu's function in the Almanacs as narrator and character will be addressed in more detail in the following chapters. Ubu's satirical qualities certainly play an important role in the Almanacs. However, I also argue that in these two works Ubu embodies a poetics more in touch with the everyday reality of contemporary society; a break with ivory tower (Symbolist) aestheticism.

### 1.2.3 Introducing Pataphysics.

In 'Guignol' Achras reads on Ubu's business card that he is a 'docteur en pataphysique'. Ubu originated as a caricature of Hébert and pataphysics started out a parody of physics, the subject taught by Hébert. However, over the years pataphysics also acquired an important place in Jarry's work and poetics.

References to pataphysics pop up in many of Jarry's works. In *Les Minutes du Sable memorial* there is an announcement for a book in preparation called *Eléments de pataphysique*. Jarry never achieved it, but it seems to have been one of his lifelong projects, lingering on through his texts

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<sup>77</sup> OC I, p. 417.

<sup>78</sup> Schoonbeek, *Les portraits d'Ubu*, p. 21.

<sup>79</sup> Beaumont, *Alfred Jarry. A Critical and Biographical Study*, p. 145.

as an 'imaginary work of reference.'<sup>80</sup> Pataphysics is also mentioned in *César-Antechrist* and in the novel *Les Jours et les Nuits* where one of the chapters is entitled 'Pataphysique'. Parts of the never-realized project of *Éléments de pataphysique* were rewritten into 'livre II' in *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll* and many of these texts were probably conceived around the time of *Les Minutes*.<sup>81</sup>

Jarry could probably not have imagined the impact of his self-invented 'science'. Pataphysics has continued to inspire writers, artists and thinkers alike. The most well known example of its legacy is of course the Collège de Pataphysique, founded in Paris in May 1948 at Adrienne Monnier's bookshop 'Amis des Livres' by Irénée-Louis Sandomir and other Jarry admirers Maurice Saillet, Jean-Hugues Sainmont and Mélanie Le Plumet.<sup>82</sup> The Collège soon reunited similar minded artists, some of whom I mentioned in the introduction, who were inspired by the philosophy of pataphysics. Many of them were drawn to the absurdist, irreverent and independent attitude it implied. Several philosophers have considered the implications of pataphysics for (post)modern philosophy.<sup>83</sup> Others have discussed its influence on modern literature and poetry.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless clear definitions or a thorough study of pataphysics still appear to be lacking.<sup>85</sup> Apart from some brief references to Ubu's 'degree' in pataphysics, this 'science' is not really addressed in the Almanacs. An extensive discussion of the meaning and implications of pataphysics exceeds the scope of this book, but it does play an important role in Jarry's thinking and therefore deserves some consideration in relation to Ubu's Almanacs as well.

When it comes to Jarry's work, scholars have generally considered pataphysics as part of Jarry's rebellion against literary and cultural norms. This view is largely based on Jarry's own, well-known definition of pataphysics in *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll*:

Un épiphénomène est ce qui se surajoute à un phénomène.  
La pataphysique dont l'étymologie doit s'écrire 'επι μετά τὰ φυσικά et l'orthographe réelle '*pataphysique*, précédé d'un apostrophe, afin d'éviter un facile calembour, est la science de ce qui se surajoute à la métaphysique, soit en elle-même, soit hors d'elle-même, s'étendant aussi loin au-delà de celle-ci que celle-ci au-delà de la physique.  
Et l'épiphénomène étant souvent l'accident, la pataphysique sera surtout la

<sup>80</sup> Jean-Louis Cornille, "l'Oeuvre possible d'Alfred Jarry," *Revue des Sciences Humaines* 266/267 (2002): p. 87.

<sup>81</sup> Noël Arnaud, "Jarry à son ombre même," *Revue des Sciences Humaines* 203, no. 3 (1986): p. 122.

<sup>82</sup> For an introduction to the Collège, see Ruy Launoir, *Clefs pour la 'pataphysique* (Paris: L'Hexaèdre, 2005). Launoir, a member of the Collège, sticks to the ironic style of Jarry's hermetic writings on pataphysics. Most 'keys' promised by him in the title unfortunately mystify more than they clarify.

<sup>83</sup> Like Gilles Deleuze, who, in his *Critique et Clinique*, considered Jarry and pataphysics as predecessors of Heidegger's existentialist philosophy, or Jean Baudrillard, who often refers to pataphysics in the context of postmodern philosophy; see for example Jean Baudrillard, *Pataphysique* (Paris: Sens&Tonka, 2002).

<sup>84</sup> Such as Christian Bök, who emphasizes pataphysics' important influence on radical modern poetics (for Futurists and OULIPO), on postmodern thinking and on the relationship between science and poetry. Christian Bök, *Pataphysics. The Poetics of an Imaginary Science* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2002), p. 27.

<sup>85</sup> Some scholars believe that explaining pataphysics contradicts its very essence. For example Ruy Launoir, who writes: 'Prétendre qu'on peut expliquer (i.e. réduire) la 'Pataphysique par des méthodes qui ne soient pas pataphysique, c'est un peu, et même beaucoup, pataphysique.' Launoir, *Clefs pour la 'pataphysique*, p.7.

science du particulier, quoiqu'on dise qu'il n'y a de science que du général. Elle étudiera les lois qui régissent les exceptions et expliquera l'univers supplémentaire à celui-ci; ou moins ambitieusement décrira un univers que l'on peut voir et que peut-être l'on doit voir à la place du traditionnel, les lois que l'on a cru découvrir de l'univers traditionnel étant des corrélations d'exceptions aussi, quoique plus fréquentes, en tous cas de faits accidentels qui, se réduisant à des exceptions peu exceptionnelles, n'ont même pas l'attrait de la singularité. DÉFINITION: *La pataphysique est la science des solutions imaginaires, qui accorde symboliquement aux linéaments les propriétés des objets décrits par leur virtualité.*<sup>86</sup>

The fragment is an obvious parody of science and its discourse and Jarry opposes the 'imaginary solutions' of pataphysics to the supposedly real solutions offered by science. Whereas conventional science seeks laws, pataphysics focuses on the exceptional and the singular, on accidental phenomena which escape the attention of traditional scientists only interested in causal relations and generalizations. This could indeed be read as a philosophy of contradiction, a means to question any system claiming absolute truth or knowledge.<sup>87</sup> How might this then translate to Jarry's poetics?

In 'Linteau', Jarry establishes his ideas on language by making quasi-scientific references to pataphysics. He writes that a literary text should be a 'simplicité condensée, diamante du chabon, oeuvre unique faite de toutes les oeuvres possibles...'<sup>88</sup> In the footnote reference inserted after the word 'simplicité', one then reads that 'la simplicité n'a pas besoin d'être simple, mais du complexe resserré et synthétisé (cf. *Pataph.*).'<sup>89</sup> A similar pseudo-scholarly reference to pataphysics is inserted again when Jarry discusses the association of ideas in the next paragraph. Jarry thus validates his poetical 'theory' by adopting a quasi-scientific tone and jargon. But the references to the non-science of pataphysics simultaneously undermine the seriousness of Jarry's own statements. Pataphysics thus appears here as an ironic derision of scientific discourse, as in *Faustroll*, but also of the hermetic and scholarly tone often employed in contemporary Symbolist literary theories, including Jarry's own text. Interestingly, the chapter in *Les Jours et les Nuits* in which Sengle explained his method of writing is entitled 'Pataphysique'. Pataphysics thus appears to be one of Jarry's tools to question the high-strung ideas on literature and authorship of contemporaries. Furthermore, through pataphysics, Jarry appears to plea for a literary work not restricted by contemporary conventions of genre, form and content.

It is poignant in this respect that the first public appearance of pataphysics coincided with Ubu's unsophisticated entrance in 'Guignol'. Reading Ubu's business card Achras wonders: 'Qu'est-ce que c'est que ça, la pataphysique? N'y a point de polyèdres qui s'appellent comme ça.'<sup>90</sup> Ubu and

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<sup>86</sup> OC I, p. 668/669.

<sup>87</sup> For example Jill Fell, in her recent study of Jarry, considers pataphysics as an exponent of Nonsense practice, as a philosophy or system of contradiction. Jill Fell, *Alfred Jarry. An Imagination in Revolt* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005), p. 106. Cultural historian Richard Sonn, for example, views pataphysics as a result of Jarry's literary anarchism, rebelling against literary and cultural norms. Richard Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin de Siècle France* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), pp. 76-78.

<sup>88</sup> OC I, p. 172.

<sup>89</sup> OC I, p. 172.

<sup>90</sup> *La Revue Blanche*, OC I, p. 181.

his pataphysics are immediately opposed to Achras and his cherished 'polyèdres'. Further on Achras politely apologizes to Ubu for not having a bigger door, saying 'mais vous excuserez l'embarras d'un vieux collectionneur, qui est en meme temps, j'ose le dire, un grand savant.' Ubu quickly sets him straight by replying 'Ceci vous plait à dire, monsieur, mais vous parlez à un grand pataphysicien.'<sup>91</sup> Continuing the analogy I made in the previous paragraph, Ubu's pataphysics is the anti-thesis to Symbolist aesthetics personified by Achras and his 'polyèdres.' The refined politeness of Achras, an 'old collector', is no match for Ubu's pataphysical crudeness. Ubu explains to Achras that 'la pataphysique est une science que nous avons inventée, et dont le besoin se faisait généralement sentir'. Besides the obvious comedy and the aplomb of Ubu's non-explanations, pataphysics is nevertheless presented as a much needed invention. Ubu's 'science' of pataphysics, like Ubu himself, functions here as a provocation to the Symbolist sensibilities embodied in Achras. Whereas Achras is literally enclosed in his fin-de-siècle ivory tower together with his precious collectibles, Ubu and his pataphysics literally break through the door, disrupting Achras' world. I would suggest that, with the Almanacs, pataphysics was, like Ubu and the previously mentioned features, part of Jarry's shift from Symbolism to a poetics more connected with everyday life and modernity.

Although pataphysics is not specifically addressed in the Almanacs, pataphysics does play a role in these works, as part of Jarry's thinking. In an advert for the second Almanac, Jarry in fact emphasized the importance of Ubu's 'pataphysical' knowledge, neglected up until then:

Un trait de la silhouette de ce pantin est mis en lumière ici, qui n'avait point servi dans Ubu Roi ni sa contrepartie Ubu enchaîné : nous parlons de la ...'pataphysique' du personnage, plus simplement son assurance à dissenter de omni re scibili, tantôt avec compétence, aussi volontiers avec absurdité, mais dans ce dernier cas suivant une logique d'autant plus irréfutable que celle du fou ou du gâteux.<sup>92</sup>

This is not merely nonsense, as some have labelled the role of pataphysics in relation to Ubu's Almanacs.<sup>93</sup> The advertisement suggests that pataphysics, through its absurdist logic, allows the character of Ubu to reflect on any subject, and more generally to reflect on the world around him. As I will show in the following chapters, the most trivial, ridiculous details are used in the Almanacs to describe and interpret the 'course of the year' and current events. I would argue that the emphasis on these details and the constant contradictions in the Almanacs clearly convey the 'madman's logic' that is crucial to pataphysics, and that this is a clue that these two works are indeed essential for understanding Jarry's poetics and his way of thinking.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> OC I, p. 1211.

<sup>93</sup> After a rather superficial reading of the Almanacs, Elke Krumm concludes for example 'dass die Pataphysik die von Jarry in anderem Zusammenhang als durchaus ernstgemeintes Medium betrachtet wird (...) hier unter dem Aspekt einer nicht ernstzunehmenden Absurdität zu sehen ist.' Krumm, "Die Gestalt des Ubu im Werk Alfred Jarrys", p.141.

### *Conclusion*

Symbolism provided an inspirational and experimental environment for Jarry in the 1890's and it helped shape his ideas on literature. Jarry's poetics were for a considerable part rooted in Symbolist aesthetics, but from early on he played with those aesthetics as well. Jarry would elaborate on some Symbolist ideas, others he would reject and replace by his own. Combined they would result in a new poetics, that would find full expression in Ubu's Almanacs.

In the following chapters I argue that, with the Almanacs, a shift occurs in Jarry's work. They entail a transition from contemporary (Symbolist and Decadent) 'ivory tower' poetics to a singular, innovative poetics announcing twentieth century modernity. In these two works, one can distinguish a poetics more in touch with the realities of everyday life and the modern world, one which re-evaluates art's relationship to life. More specifically, I aim to demonstrate in the following chapters that, with the Almanacs, Jarry challenged and reinvented contemporary concepts of genre, authorship and textual structure, prefiguring several important features of twentieth century avant-garde art and movements.

# Chapter 2

## Situating Ubu's Almanacs.

### Artistic Counter-Culture and Popular Tradition

#### *Introduction*

In this chapter I introduce two important sources of inspiration for Ubu's Almanacs; Montmartre cabaret-culture and the popular tradition of the almanac genre. The two are in fact connected, because one important characteristic of the artistic cabarets in the late nineteenth century was their recycling of older traditions and popular forms. As said in the introduction, Shaw already considered the Almanacs as literary examples of the humorist and dynamic cabaret culture of Montmartre. She concluded that the use of Montmartre humorist strategies in the Almanacs resulted in a similar anti-bourgeois, deliberately marginal and rebellious statement.<sup>1</sup> However, cabaret culture not only provided a source of anti-bourgeois rebellion, although this was no doubt a welcome side-effect for Jarry. It also provided a source of inspiration and offered new aesthetics, which suited Jarry's vision of literature. In the first part of this chapter I sketch the context of Montmartre cabaret culture and in the second part I discuss the history and characteristics of the popular genre of the almanac. Jarry's choice for a popular genre such as the almanac could have sprung from the aesthetics of cabaret culture. Several traditional features of the popular almanac genre equally suited Jarry's poetics. Combined they appear to have provided Jarry with new genres and forms he incorporated in his Almanacs.

#### **2.1 *Ubu sur la butte: Jarry, the Almanacs and Montmartre***

##### **2.1.1 Humorist groups and artistic cabarets**

Around 1900 Montmartre had become a place where art and literature met popular entertainment.<sup>2</sup> Historically the home of revolutionaries, anarchists, criminals and other marginal folk, Montmartre was left relatively undisturbed by the Paris municipality and the censors, as long as it did not cause too many problems.<sup>3</sup> In the cabarets of Montmartre popular

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Shaw, 'All or Nothing? The Literature of Montmartre', in Cate, ed., *The Spirit of Montmartre. Cabarets, Humor, and the Avant-Garde, 1875-1905*, pp. 150-52.

<sup>2</sup> See also Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club. Popular music and the avant-garde*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), Charles Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Epoque. Entertainment and Festivity in Turn of the Century France* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1985), Gabriel P. Weisberg, ed., *Montmartre and the making of mass culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> The 1871 Commune originated in Montmartre and this revolutionary, anarchist and anti-establishment spirit continued to characterize the Butte in the years to follow. On the turbulent

entertainment and commercialism were combined with a bohemian counter-culture of rebellion and artistic experiment.<sup>4</sup> Hence the dual position the cabaret occupied in fin de siècle cultural life as the 'bastard son of popular culture and literature.'<sup>5</sup>

Artistic cabarets had evolved from humorist artistic groups which had surfaced in the last decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> In 1878 writer Émile Goudeau and some friends founded the *Hydropathes*, an eclectic club of artists, writers, actors, musicians, singers and students, who gathered together in the bars on the Left Bank. Famous fin-de-siècle humorists like Charles Gros, Alphonse Allais, Aristide Bruant, Sapeck (pseudonym of Eugène Bataille), but also established writers like Maupassant, Anatole France, Catulle Mendès, Jean Moréas and celebrated actress Sarah Bernhardt were among the more known members of this eclectic club. During the 1880's a number of these groups or clubs emerged, although their existence was often short-lived. The *Hydropathes* lasted six years. In 1881 the group the *Hirsutes* was formed by some *Hydropathes* members, followed by similar groups with equally provocative names, such as the *Zutistes* (founded by Charles Gros in 1883), the *Incohérents* (1882), the *Jemenfoutistes* (1884). Most of these groups published their own periodicals. In 1879 the first issue of the journal *L'Hydropathe* was published. The *Album zutique* had illustrious contributors such as Rimbaud and Verlaine. In 1882 there was even an exhibition of 'Les Arts Incohérents', showing 'incoherent' works and parodies of famous artists. These humorist groups reacted against the seriousness of their naturalist and Parnassian predecessors. They also reflected the other side of a general pessimism felt at the end of the nineteenth century, not in the least by fellow Decadent and Symbolist writers.

The Decadent and Symbolist movements of the 1880's and 1890's were rooted in these groups. In his book *Aux commencements du rire moderne*, Grojnowski has in fact argued that humour was just as important to these literary movements as their decadent pessimism.<sup>7</sup> He claims that humorists and writers like Charles Gros, Alphonse Allais, Félix Fénéon and Jarry are equally representative of *fin de siècle* literature than Lorrain, Moréas, Samain, or Henri de Regnier.<sup>8</sup> Humour was in any case central to Jarry's work and to the Almanacs and no doubt partly inspired by the works of these humorist literary groups.

In 1881 Goudeau joined forces with singer Rodolphe Salis to open the cabaret *Le Chat Noir* in Montmartre which became an instant success. Salis organised poetry readings in the cabaret as well as performances with songs and monologues. The cabaret also featured temporary exhibitions and in general provided a platform for artists to meet and work together. It boasted

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political history of Montmartre see, among others, Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin de Siècle France*, Weisberg, ed., *Montmartre and the making of mass culture*.

<sup>4</sup> Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris. Culture, Politics and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life 1830-1930*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 215-41.

<sup>5</sup> Elisabeth Pillet, "Café-concerts et cabarets," *Romantisme*, no. 75 (1992): p. 50.

<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed overview of these groups consult Daniel Grojnowski, Bernard Sarrazin, *L'Esprit fumiste et les Rires fin de siècle. Anthologie* (Paris: Corti, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Grojnowski, *Aux commencements du rire moderne. L'esprit fumiste* (Paris: Corti, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Grojnowski, "Laforgue fumiste : l'esprit de cabaret," *Romantisme* 64, no. 2 (1989): p. 5.

its own journal with the same name, first published in 1882. Directed by Goudeau and with Alphonse Allais as one of the editors, it served as a forum and publicity channel for the cabarets' artists and writers. The journal contained satirical articles and cartoons aimed at the Third Republic's political, social, economical and artistic establishment, as well as serious art criticism, literary contributions and poetry, among others by Verlaine. Salis' personality was the centre of the cabaret's program. He introduced the performances, held long monologues, promoting the cabaret, its artists and its journal, while insulting the audience in the process. Salis would address his audience with 'mon cochon' or 'tas de salauds'.<sup>9</sup> Performer and singer Aristide Bruant, immortalized by Toulouse-Lautrec's poster, would later do the same at cabaret Le Mirliton, where he mixed French slang with sexual innuendo, and spoke about subjects deemed vulgar by contemporary tastes.<sup>10</sup> Ubu's provocative potty mouth certainly had its counterpart in the cabarets.

Other artistic cabarets followed, inspired by Le Chat Noir's success. In 1893 François Trombert opened cabaret *Les Quat'z'Arts* on the Boulevard de Clichy, which continued the bohemian tradition of Salis and his Chat Noir into the twentieth century. It became a favourite hang-out for the younger avant-garde like Jarry, but also for Picasso and Apollinaire in later years. The cabaret's name was a pun on the four disciplines of the École des Beaux Arts, but it also reflected the artistic collaboration between musicians, performers, writers and artists. The cabaret's interdisciplinary mix of arts resulted in 'multi-media' collaborative performances.<sup>11</sup> One of the cabaret's most innovative creations was a wall journal called *Le Mur*, to which all visitors could contribute newspaper clippings, illustrations, writings, anything. It was a true democratic platform for (artistic) expression. A similar spirit of artistic collaboration characterizes the genesis of Ubu's Almanacs.

As is in the Chat Noir, the walls were used by artists and illustrators to exhibit their work. The eclectic nature of the cabaret's performances was also reflected in its interior design. The Chat Noir had created a pseudo-sixteenth-century Rabelaisian atmosphere and took inspiration from bohemian poets from French literary history. One of its rooms was thus named after poet François Villon, whose fifteenth century poetry about low life filled with slang and lewd jokes was an example for the cabaret's performances. The Quat'z'Arts was decorated in a pseudo-Renaissance and gothic fashion. The cabaret's interior was enriched with wood and bronze figures as well as illustrations celebrating the work of Rabelais. The artistic cabarets used the works of these older writers, popular imagery and medieval and renaissance decorations as tools in their bohemian and counter-cultural program. Their quite special vision of fifteenth and sixteenth century culture and its poets for them counteracted rational, bourgeois French Third Republic. That the 'subversive' cabaret eventually became a successful guilty pleasure for the same bourgeoisie it said to

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<sup>9</sup> Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Epoque. Entertainment and Festivity in Turn of the Century France*, p. 46.

<sup>10</sup> Weisberg, ed., *Montmartre and the making of mass culture*, pp. 192-97.

<sup>11</sup> See Cate, ed., *The Spirit of Montmartre. Cabarets, Humor, and the Avant-Garde, 1875-1905*.

despise, was of course an ironic twist of fate. However, the cabarets saw themselves as the cultural heirs of Rabelais or Villon, who, in their own time, had not conformed to contemporary cultural tastes and values.

### 2.1.2 Jarry, Ubu's Almanacs and the cabaret

Recycling older literary and popular traditions in order to counteract present-day artistic norms is also part of Jarry's poetics, certainly in Ubu's Almanacs. As a visitor of Le Chat Noir in the 1890's and later of Les Quat'z Arts, Jarry was familiar with the bohemian counter-culture of Montmartre. Arnaud notes that Jarry was seen several times at Le Chat Noir in the company of Lord Alfred Douglas in 1896, although details remain unclear.<sup>12</sup> In any case Lugné-Poe also recalls Jarry and Douglas, whom Lugné Poe disliked because of the scandal attached to him, visiting the office of the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre; this office was situated 22 rue Turgot and virtually next door to Le Chat Noir. The artistic crowd of *La Revue Blanche* and *Le Mercure de France*, a lot of whom participated or had participated in cabaret culture, had probably introduced Jarry to Montmartre's cultural life. Friends like Gustave Kahn, Félix Fénéon and Albert Samain had all contributed to the 'fumiste' groups and cabaret culture. Claude Terrasse's house and the Théâtre des Pantins were located in Montmartre. Terrasse had composed cabaret music and songs. Poet Franc-Nohain, who was involved with the Théâtre des Pantins, had also written for Le Chat Noir's journal. Both Terrasse and Nohain were involved with the making of Ubu's Almanacs as I discuss in the following chapter.

Jarry was in fact familiar enough with the area to suggest to Lugné-Poe that the role of Bougrellas in *Ubu Roi* should be played by a thirteen year old boy he knew from Montmartre, 'who is very beautiful, with stunning eyes and long curly brown hair.' This, Jarry writes, would excite the old ladies, scandalize some, in any case attract attention, and it would be innovative.<sup>13</sup> Lugné-Poe, not so keen on Jarry's dubious choice, did not take up his suggestion, but this anecdote shows that Jarry saw the provocative value of incorporating some Montmartre street culture in his play. In any case Jarry shared with Montmartre's counter-culture a similar spirit of provocation.

Jarry's connection to cabaret culture is also illustrated by *Ubu Roi*. Louise France, who played the role of Mère Ubu began her career as a cabaret singer and performer and her appearance in *Ubu Roi* as Mère Ubu brought a slice of cabaret culture to the stage. Furthermore, in a letter from November 1896 to Armand Sylvestre, Jarry wrote he was considering the clown Footit in the role of Bordure. He also spoke of the 'Achras scene' being performed at

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<sup>12</sup> Arnaud, *Alfred Jarry. D'Ubu Roi au docteur Faustroll*, p. 191. Lord Alfred Douglas often stayed in Paris at the time to escape the scandal of the Wilde trial. Douglas knew Jarry, probably through their mutual friend Ernest la Jeunesse (see Appendix I); he also figures as the character Bondroit in a passage from Jarry's novel *Les Jours et les Nuits* (OC I, 750/51) together with a group of mutual (homosexual) friends, including La Jeunesse, Maurice Cremnitz, painter Léonard Sarluis, Jarry himself and actress Fanny Zaessinger. See also Besnier, *Alfred Jarry*, p. 170 & p. 231.

<sup>13</sup> 'Voici pourquoi j'ai confiance dans cette idée d'un gosse dans le rôle de Bougrellas ; j'en connais un à Montmartre qui est très beau, avec des yeux étonnants et des cheveux bruns bouclés jusqu'aux reins. Il a treize ans et est assez intelligent pourvue qu'on s'en occupe. Ce serait peut-être un clou pour *Ubu*, exciterait des vieilles dames et ferait crier au scandale certains ; en tout cas, ça ferait faire attention à des gens ; et puis ça ne s'est jamais vu et je crois qu'il faut que l'"Œuvre" monopolise toutes les innovations', OC I, p. 1050.

Le Chat Noir, although this event apparently never took place.<sup>14</sup> With the opening word 'merdre', the crude language, the lewd subjects and songs, elements of cabaret culture entered into the setting of serious artistic theatre. On the 27th of November 1901 an abbreviated version of *Ubu Roi* premiered as a marionette play at the cabaret Les Quat'z'Arts in Montmartre. This rewritten version contained both traditional features of puppet theatre and of cabaret performances, including songs and monologues on current affairs. The cabaret version of *Ubu Roi* would later be published as *Ubu sur la Butte* (1906) and its premiere was followed by no less than sixty-three other performances.

The cabaret's mixture of artistic experiment, popular entertainment and publicity brought new aesthetic possibilities. Elements of the cabarets' aesthetics and its provocative and subversive humour certainly resonate in Jarry's work in general and in particular in the Almanacs, as I will argue. This includes for example the multi-mediality of the Almanacs as a result of the artistic collaboration, which resulted in a heterogeneous, collagist work (chapter four). The cabaret's dialogue with newspapers, their use of publicity and commercial promotion is reflected in the dialectic of the Almanacs with newspapers and advertising (chapter five and six). Furthermore the cabaret's (crude) jokes and social-political satire echo in the reflection on current events (chapter seven).

The aesthetics of cabaret culture fitted Jarry's vision of literature and his need to reinvent contemporary literary traditions. Most writers and artists participated in this culture alongside their 'serious' work, with the exception of people like Allais, Cros or Fénéon, but they were considered humorists or journalists. However, Jarry incorporated elements from this culture in his theatre and in his other literary works. Whereas the cabarets occupied a special place in the margins of cultural life, Jarry thus blurred the boundaries between this counter-culture and literature, in particular in the Almanacs.

## 2.2 The popular tradition of the almanac genre

Jarry's choice for the popular almanac genre seems a logical extension of the cabaret's practice to borrow from older and popular traditions. It also reflects Jarry's joy in finding new artistic forms or renovating older ones. The almanac genre was also rooted in a longstanding, popular tradition and this tradition equally offered features which Jarry recycled in his own Almanac. Furthermore, although most traditional, popular almanacs have virtually disappeared in our time, they were still widely published at the end of the nineteenth century. In fact, I will show in chapter four how some of elements in Ubu's Almanacs were directly borrowed from or modelled after older (astrological and satirical) almanacs as well as contemporary ones (like the Almanach Hachette).

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<sup>14</sup> 'J'ai pensé au Footit dans Bordure car la scène se passant en Pologne, il est urgent qu'il ait l'accent anglais.[...] La scène que vous avez bien voulu citer d'Achras sera jouée au Chat Noir', letter ('petit blue') Jarry to Armand Sylvestre, 17 November 1896, published in: *L'Étoile-Absinthe*, vol. 63/64 (1995), pp. 6/7.

### 2.2.1 Definition

In the *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe Siècle*, a work of reference often consulted by Jarry, Pierre Larousse provides the following definition of an almanac: 'petit ouvrage publié chaque année et contenant, outre le calendrier, qui n'est devenu qu'un accessoire, des indications sur différents sujets, des anecdotes, des chansons, surtout des prédictions météorologiques.'<sup>15</sup> The *Nouveau Larousse illustré*, published at the turn of the twentieth century, gives a similar definition of the almanac.<sup>16</sup> The *Grande Encyclopédie* of those years does not offer an exact definition, but provides a detailed history of the popular almanac and its origins instead.<sup>17</sup> The contemporary *Petit Larousse* (2005) defines the almanac as a 'calendrier, souvent illustré, comportant des indications astronomiques, météorologiques, ainsi que des renseignements d'ordre varié (médecine, cuisine, astrologie, etc.).' An almanac can therefore be described as a small illustrated work, published annually, containing a calendar, indicating the seasons, as well as meteorological and astronomical predictions. In addition, it contained a diverse range of texts and material, such as anecdotes, practical information or songs, and a variety of themes (history, current events, medicine, cooking, or astrology).

### 2.2.2 A heterogeneous genre

The almanac is therefore a fundamentally heterogeneous genre. The first almanacs date back to ancient civilizations and cultures. Some claim that the word almanac comes from the Arabic *al-manach*, 'to count'; others believe it stems from the Saxon word *almonaght*, meaning 'the observation of all the moons.'<sup>18</sup> Regardless of its exact etymological origins, the word *almanac* in Europe originally designated a *calendar* indicating the days, the months, and from the 5th century onwards Christian holidays. These religious calendars, illustrated with handmade miniatures, were essentially visual works, containing typographical and astrological signs and figures, meant for those unable to read. At the end of the 15th century the illustrated religious calendars made way for the popular almanacs. These almanacs functioned as early newspapers, providing news, practical information and trivia. One of the most well-known popular almanacs was the *Compost et Calendrier des Berger*, originally a farmer's almanac and first published in 1491. The religious and saint's calendar was complemented by the indication of seasons and astrological predictions. A very successful type of almanac was the astrological almanac. A famous example of these astrological almanacs is *Nostradamus' Almanac*, known as *Les prophéties de Nostradamus*, which originated around 1550. These almanacs always

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<sup>15</sup> Pierre Athanase Larousse, *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Larousse et Boyer, 1866-1890).

<sup>16</sup> Claude Augé, ed., *Nouveau Larousse illustré: dictionnaire universel encyclopédique*, 7 vols. (Paris: Larousse, 1897-1902).

<sup>17</sup> André Berthelot, *La Grande Encyclopédie: inventaire raisonné des sciences, des lettres et des arts*, 31 vols. (Paris: Larousse, 1885-1902).

<sup>18</sup> Geneviève Bollème, *Les almanachs populaires aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles. Essai d'histoire sociale* (Paris/La Haye: Mouton & Co, 1969), p. 11. See also "History of Almanacs," *Science* 4, no. 95 (1884): pp. 492-96.

centred on an astronomer and contained astrological predictions about the weather and possible events.

Lüsebrink argues that the traditional popular almanac was generally divided into four main parts:

- A pragmatic part, containing information about the weather, fairs, religious dates
- A calendar part, divided into months, indicating days, saint's names and astrological signs
- A historic part, referring to events of the past year in the form of narratives and anecdotes
- A 'varieties' section, containing proverbs, advice, riddles, fables.<sup>19</sup>

In chapter four we will see that Jarry, especially with the first Almanac, appears to respect this traditional division.

### 2.2.3 Audience

The almanac developed rapidly after the invention of book print in the 15th century. A multitude of different texts were added to the calendar. In the early print culture of the Renaissance, almanacs were cheap and readily available, sold by travelling vendors (*colporteurs*). They continued for over three centuries to be the only publications 'read by multitudes who read nothing else.'<sup>20</sup> Illustrations and codified information in the form of simple, conventional signs allowed the almanacs to reach a broad, virtually illiterate audience. Therefore the almanac, in rural, pre-modern society, was the only non-religious publication printed on a large scale and a source of information available to everyone. It aimed at being an encyclopaedia of the world, and a practical handbook. It provided useful knowledge; health tips, insight in nature and agriculture, weather forecasts, dates of fairs and markets, important historical events, schemes for calculation (of important dates and days), but also advice in moral matters, education and behaviour. Most almanacs centred on an important real or mythical persona; they were often supposedly written by the person in question or by 'anonymous' scribes transmitting their words.

The almanac's capability to reach large audiences made it a potentially subversive tool. The popularity of astrological almanacs in particular bothered the Church and the State, who considered them a danger to the cultural status quo. Writers and scholars considered them as examples of idiotic superstitions. Between 1533 and 1550 Rabelais, for instance, wrote his satirical almanacs, *Les Pantagruelines prognostications*, intended to parody people's blind belief in astrology. But satirical or more politically oriented almanacs were also considered dangerous. In 1682 Louis XIV therefore prohibited both astrological and satirical almanacs.

However, the popularity of almanacs remained unchanged. The astrological *Almanach Matthieu Laensberg* or *Almanach de Liège*, for example, first published in the seventeenth century, was very much en vogue among all classes, including the nobility and intellectuals. In the

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<sup>19</sup> Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, "La littérature des almanachs: réflexions sur l'anthropologie du fait littéraire," *Études françaises* 36, no. 3 (2000): pp. 48/49.

<sup>20</sup> Writer Isaac Bickerstaff describing his *Bickerstaff's Boston Almanack*, quoted in: Ruth B. Tolman, "Proverbs and Sayings in Eighteenth-Century Almanacs," *Western Folklore* 21, no. 1 (1962): p. 35.

seventeenth century another famous almanac, *Le Messager boîteux*, was published in Switzerland. Appearing in both French and German (*Hinkende Bote*), this annual chronicle of events is still published today.

#### 2.2.4 Information, education and propaganda

Whether religious, astrological, political or satirical, almanacs catered to all layers of society. Witnessing the reach and impact of the almanac, governments soon realized their worth as instruments of propaganda. As such, the French royals issued their own almanacs. During the seventeenth and eighteenth century lusciously illustrated historical almanacs were commissioned by the state, glorifying the king and France, while ridiculing their enemies.<sup>21</sup> Later, the French revolutionary government also understood the almanac's potential. The *Almanach du Père Gérard* was the result of a competition issued in September 1791 by the 'Société des Amis de la Constitution' for a publication that would popularize and vulgarize the constitutional principles adopted by the 'Constituante' that same month. Written by Collot d'Herbois in the form of a dialogue between peasant representative Gérard and village inhabitants, this almanac was an instant best-seller. The Royalists quickly responded with their own anti-revolutionary *Almanach de l'abbé Maury ou Réfutation de l'almanach de Père Gérard, couronnée par la Société des amis de la monarchie*. The almanac thus proved a perfect medium for political propaganda.

Popular almanacs continued to exist throughout the nineteenth century. In the 18th and early 19th century the almanacs of *Matthieu Laensberg* were still the most wide-spread popular almanacs in the north of France.<sup>22</sup> The colportage tradition however slowly disappeared and made way for new forms of printing and distribution. By 1900, the almanac's informative function was largely replaced by newspapers.

#### 2.2.5 Popular almanacs at the end of the nineteenth century

Nevertheless there were still a large number of almanacs at the end of the nineteenth century. The *Catalogue de la librairie française* lists 175 almanacs which were issued between 1891 and 1899.<sup>23</sup> Between 1900 and 1905 the number of published almanacs was 179.

Some almanacs still retained a political and propagandistic value. As such, writer and left-wing anarchist Émile Pouget published the *Almanach du Père Peinard, hebdomadaire anarchiste* from 1889 until 1902. Its title is reminiscent of the French revolutionary almanac. It contained radical texts, cartoons and pamphlets, addressing French workers in an aggressive language full of argot. Another example was the conservative *Almanach populaire*, which was catholic and nationalist.<sup>24</sup> It was an educational almanac, anti-reformist, emphasizing traditional values and warning its readers against socialists and anarchists. Thus the propagandistic and educational function of the traditional almanac was still used to reach

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<sup>21</sup> For a history of these almanacs see Bollème, *Les almanachs populaires aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles. Essai d'histoire sociale*.

<sup>22</sup> Lüsebrink, "La littérature des almanachs: réflexions sur l'anthropologie du fait littéraire," p. 50.

<sup>23</sup> *Catalogue générale de la librairie française 1891-1899*, (1900).

<sup>24</sup> *Almanach populaire 1899*, (Paris/Lille: Desclée, De Brouwer et Cie (Société St-Augustin), 1898).

specific groups in society, in particular rural populations and the working class.

But there were also more light-hearted alternatives. The *Almanach Hachette*, which sported the subtitle 'petite encyclopédie de la vie pratique' provided all sorts of news and facts related to the arts, sports, as well as practical information and advertisements. There were humorist almanacs, like the *Almanach humoristique et illustré du Messenger de Seine-et-Marne*, or highly specialized ones such as the *Almanach des fleurs*, the touristy *Almanach de Paris*, the *Almanach des colonies françaises* or the *Almanach du cultivateur et de l'industriel de Maine et Loire*.<sup>25</sup> Even *Le Mercure de France* had published its own almanac; the *Almanach des poètes pour 1899*, only one year before Ubu's first Almanac. This brief overview shows that Jarry did not just have to turn to an older, popular tradition for inspiration. He could have found enough contemporary and inspirational models for his Almanacs.

### 2.2.6 Ubu's Almanacs

Jarry shared a fascination for popular texts and images with many of his (Symbolist) contemporaries. One reason for Jarry to write the Almanacs was therefore probably simply his curiosity for this popular genre. He was known to spend quite some time in the Bibliothèque Nationale, flicking through old manuscripts, scholarly works or works of reference. His encyclopaedic desire for knowledge led him to surprising sources of inspiration and might have equally kindled his interest in the genre. At the library he would not only have stumbled upon almanacs, but also upon works discussing almanacs. In fact, the *Lorenz catalogue de la librairie française* lists several books *about* almanacs, twenty-eight in the years between 1891 and 1899. Judging from these studies there seems to have been a general, scholarly interest in popular culture, including almanacs.<sup>26</sup>

Jarry's fascination for popular culture had also partly motivated the founding of magazine *L'Ymagier* in 1894 together with Remy de Gourmont. *L'Ymagier* was entirely devoted to images, combining popular imagery (such as cliché *Épinal* images or anonymous medieval woodcuts) with modern works by contemporary (Symbolist) artists. After his fall out with De Gourmont in 1895, Jarry published two issues of another magazine, *Perhindérion*. Both *L'Ymagier* and *Perhindérion* had a sort of catalogue function, assembling images from contemporary art as well as from popular traditions. To some extent, Ubu's Almanacs can certainly be regarded as a continuation of Jarry's fascination for popular forms.

Since almanacs traditionally targeted a mass audience, Jarry might have also thought that the almanac's broad appeal would popularize the Ubu

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<sup>25</sup> Titles taken from the *Catalogue de la librairie française*. I also consulted several of these contemporary almanacs at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, including: *Almanach du cultivateur et de l'industriel de Maine et Loire: 1899*, (Angers: Germain et Grassin, 1899), *Almanach humoristique et illustré du Messenger de Seine-et-Marne 1900*, (Melun: 1900), *Almanach populaire 1901*, (Paris/Lille: Desclée, De Brouwer et Cie (Société St-Augustin), 1900).

<sup>26</sup> Some examples of these studies are: Henri Welschinger, *Les Almanachs de la Révolution*. Paris: Librairie des bibliophiles, 1884, Victor Champier, *Les Anciens Almanachs illustrés*. Paris, L. Frinzine et Cie, 1886, Savigny de Moncorps, *Bibliographie de quelques almanachs illustrés du XVIIIe siècle (1759-1790)*, Châteaudun, 1891, John Grand-Carteret, *Les Almanachs français 1600-1895*, Paris, J. Alisie et Cie, 1896, Louis Morin, « L'Almanach des bergers, *Revue des arts et traditions populaires*, 1890, 'Almanach de Troyes », *Ibid.* 9<sup>e</sup> année, 1894 et avril 1895.

character and bring him much-needed success. Lüsebrink provides an interesting account of French-Canadian writers who in the late nineteenth century (from 1870 onwards) used the almanacs (and their mass distribution) to diffuse their manuscripts, even before they were published as books. They hoped to achieve a bigger profit than they would get from regular publication or publication in newspapers.<sup>27</sup> Jarry's work was of course largely unsuccessful and certainly not profitable. He might have hoped that writing an almanac would finally land him a best-seller. However, his unwillingness to comply with contemporary literary conventions, let alone with commercial demands, made such success highly unlikely. It therefore seems more likely that artistic motives, rather than just commercial ones, motivated Jarry to write the Almanacs, even though a bit of commercialism certainly characterizes both works, as I will also argue in chapter six.

Jarry appears to have been particularly inspired by some features of the popular almanac. The traditional 'anonymity' of the almanac genre is reflected for example in the collective, 'anonymous' writing of both Almanacs, as I will discuss in chapter three. The traditional almanac's inherent heterogeneity facilitated the collage aesthetic (chapter four). The almanac's function of newspaper *avant la lettre* relate to Ubu's Almanacs dialogue with the contemporary press (chapter five). This status of a popular and semi-fictional genre also affects the complex relationship between literature and everyday life in Ubu's Almanacs (chapter six). Furthermore the socio-political function of the almanac genre is mirrored in the 'politics' of Ubu's Almanacs and its treatment of current affairs (chapter seven).

### *Conclusion*

The main advantage of the almanac genre for Jarry was probably that it did not adhere to contemporary literary genres or models of writing. Mixing genres and artistic media was also part of the aesthetics of the cabaret and must have equally appealed to Jarry. The cabarets represented the artistic counter-culture of the day, whereas the popular almanac did not fit any particular artistic context. As a result, Ubu's Almanacs also seem to linger on the boundaries of literature, artistic counter-culture and popular tradition. The status of both almanacs and artistic cabarets, residing in the margins of mainstream literature and art, gave Jarry tools to play with prevailing notions of art and literature. Both elements from Montmartre's cabaret culture as well as from the popular genre of the almanac provided Jarry with new forms and genres which, as I will show, helped shaped the aesthetics of the two Almanacs.

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<sup>27</sup> Lüsebrink, "La littérature des almanachs: réflexions sur l'anthropologie du fait littéraire," p. 62.

# Chapter 3

## Collaboration and Anonymity.

### The Making of Ubu's Almanacs

#### *Introduction*

Ubu's Almanacs were the result of an artistic collaboration, but also deliberately published without the name of Jarry or those of the other artists, featuring instead Ubu's name as the (fictitious) author. In this chapter I will show which artists, and through them which cultural spheres influenced Jarry and the texts of the Almanacs. I will also examine the implications of this collective writing for the issue of authorship. In the 1894 'Linteau' text one could distinguish a writer aware of contemporary author concepts, presenting the reader with a variety of apparently paradoxical author figures and notions of authorship. In the Almanacs Jarry's play with prevailing notions of authorship is even more explicit. I argue that, with these two works, Jarry puts forward two distinctive forms of authorship, collaboration and anonymity, in order to challenge contemporary concepts of (singular) authorship and originality.

### **3.1 The making of the 'small Almanac' (1898)**

#### **3.1.1 The literary community of the Phalanstère.**

The first Almanac was written somewhere during the second half of 1898. Jarry spent most of his time in Corbeil where, in the spring of that same year, together with his *Mercure* friends Rachilde, Alfred Vallette, Pierre Quillard, André-Ferdinand Hérold and Marcel Collière, he had rented a summer house on the banks of the Seine.

Rachilde, a successful author, was married to Alfred Vallette, editor of the *Mercure de France*. Rachilde also hosted a weekly literary Tuesday salon at the office of the *Mercure*.<sup>1</sup> Pierre Quillard was a Symbolist poet, playwright, and a politically active journalist.<sup>2</sup> André-Ferdinand Hérold, writer and critic, had collaborated with Jarry in the Théâtre des Pantins. Marcel Collière was an erudite historian, poet and journalist. They were all members of the editorial board of the *Mercure de France* in 1898. Rachilde was in charge of the section 'novels', Quillard did poetry, Collière tackled history and sociology and Hérold was responsible for the theatre reviews.

The group of friends had mockingly dubbed the house *Phalanstère*. On a photograph from this period, one can also see an alternate spelling,

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<sup>1</sup> Rachilde, Vallette and Hérold also appear in the first Almanac's list of names, see appendix.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Quillard (1864-1912) called himself an anarchist (in thought at least) and was an outspoken *dreyfusard*. After having traveled to the Ottoman Empire, he became an ardent defender of the Armenian cause, founding the magazine *Pro Armenia*. Quillard also makes a notable appearance in the first Almanac, see chapter four.

*Falanstère de Corbeil*.<sup>3</sup> The word referred to the socialist utopian theories of Charles Fourier. Although the *Phalanstère* at Corbeil did not aspire to any such utopian ideal, it did indicate a shared love of freedom and communality.<sup>4</sup> The group came together to eat, drink, discuss and participate in sportive activities, such as fishing, canoeing and cycling. They also had their own little rituals and vocabulary. They would, for example, refer to each other as *trolls* and *trollesses*.<sup>5</sup> In several letters, Jarry also addressed his fellow occupants, in communal style, as '*compagnon*', comrade.<sup>6</sup> Rachilde and the others would simply refer to Jarry as Ubu.<sup>7</sup> Jarry enjoyed these quiet retreats to the countryside. He spent the larger part of 1898 here, cycling back and forth between Corbeil and his apartment in Paris.

It was probably during Jarry's stays at the *Phalanstère* that most of the first Almanac was written. Not surprisingly, the texts, as we will see, contain many personal references to the house, its surroundings, the group's activities, their humour and vocabulary. Some of the text originated directly from the exchanges between these writers.<sup>8</sup> In a letter, the only one referring to the first Almanac's text, Jarry asks Quillard for a Latin quotation he heard from Collière:

'Serait-il indiscret de vous demander de nous faire parvenir rue Ballu la reconstitution d'un texte saphique, cité anonymement dans l'almanach, et dont nous ne nous souvenons, d'après le compagnon Collière, que du fragment approximatif : ...*docet matrona pinguis nos circumlambere linguis*'<sup>9</sup>

Quillard wrote back the following day with the original quotation.<sup>10</sup> The corrected fragment was published in the Almanac. The *Phalanstère* thus provided a working environment, context and material for many of the texts in the first Almanac.

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<sup>3</sup> Philippe Régibier, *Ubu sur la berge. Alfred Jarry à Corbeil (1898-1907)* (Paris: Les Presses du Management, 1999), p. 195.

<sup>4</sup> The 'Phalanstère' was not the only place of artistic communality in Corbeil-Essonnes at the time. Neighbour and writer Eugène Demolder (see appendix), with whom Jarry wrote several librettos for Claude Terrasse, had, together with his wife, dubbed their home the 'Demi-Lune' and made it into a similar location for social gathering and artistic exchange.

<sup>5</sup> Rachilde, writing to Quillard and Hérold, about buying a bed for the house, twice underlined the final phrase: 'je ne veux pas avoir le même lit que les autres trolls du phal.' Letter quoted in: Besnier, *Alfred Jarry*, p. 45. In similar fashion Jarry wrote: 'Nous vous écrivons aujourd'hui, Madame, deuxième jour de Mai, pour vous apprendre que nous avons bien tué toutes ces sales bêtes de rossignols qui nous empêchaient de dormir en notre phalanstère enfin vidé de ses trolls et trollesses (prononcez à l'allemande, s.v.p.)', OC I, p. 1064.

<sup>6</sup> See Jarry's letters to Vallette and Quillard between the spring of 1898 and the beginning of 1899, OC I, pp. 1063-1075

<sup>7</sup> Rachilde, for example, added commentaries to photos taken at the Phalanstère in her photo album. Some show Jarry, Vallette and Quillard carrying a canoe and Rachilde wrote: 'Rentrée des As (Quillard et Ubu)', 'Rentrée des As Suite (Quillard, Vallette, Ubu)'. Régibier, *Ubu sur la berge. Alfred Jarry à Corbeil (1898-1907)*, p. 71.

<sup>8</sup> Also remarked by Besnier, *Alfred Jarry*, p. 379.

<sup>9</sup> Jarry to Quillard, 6 December 1898, OC I, p. 1073.

<sup>10</sup> 'Père Ubu, voici la strophe, saphique seulement par la pensée : Amor ardores extinguis ! Doceat matrona pinguis. Vos circumlambere linguis. *Le saule, Le saule*. Si c'est le texte intégral que vous désirez, prévenez-m'en au plus vite : car je vais m'absenter pour quelques jours...' Pierre Quillard to Jarry, 7 December 1898, OC I, p. 1297.

### 3.1.2 Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947)

However the main and most visible collaborator for the first Almanac, was not a *Phalanstère* member. Painter and illustrator Pierre Bonnard belonged to a group of young painters who half jokingly referred to themselves as *Nabis*, Hebrew for 'prophets'. The group counted about twelve: Bonnard, Denis, Ibels, Lacombe, Maillol, Ranson, Rippl-Ronnai, Roussel, Sérusier, Vallotton, Verkade, Vuillard. They were occasionally joined by musicians (such as Terrasse) or elders like Redon and Gauguin. During the time Bonnard collaborated with Jarry on the Almanac, he had become known for his posters, screens and illustrations. Like fellow Nabis, Vallotton and Vuillard, he also worked as an illustrator for *La Revue Blanche*. In 1891 Bonnard had shared a studio with Vuillard, Denis and Lugné-Poe, who remembered Bonnard as the 'humorist among us, with a satirical element in his pictures.'<sup>11</sup> Bonnard was launched at 'l'Exposition des Dix' at Vollard's gallery in 1897. Bonnard had also been employed by the Théâtre de l'Œuvre and its director Lugné-Poe probably introduced Bonnard to Jarry around the time of *Ubu Roi*. Bonnard helped design the backdrop for the play's premiere in 1896. Together with Jarry, Claude Terrasse, A.F. Hérold, poet Franc-Nohain and other Nabi painters, Bonnard collaborated in the Théâtre des Pantins, the puppet theatre where *Ubu Roi* was staged in 1897. Bonnard decorated the backdrops, helped make the marionettes and designed lithographs for the theatre's productions. The Almanac owes a lot to the artistic collaboration of the Théâtre des Pantins.

Bonnard made 20 ink drawings for the first Almanac.<sup>12</sup> Considering what we know about the genesis of the second Almanac (see below), it seems quite likely that Bonnard contributed more than just the illustrations. Another reason to assume this is the fact that the visual arts are, as we will see, an important theme in the Almanac. References are made to Bonnard's work and the Almanac's list of names features the names of Bonnard and many other Nabis.<sup>13</sup> Bonnard also appears in another text written by Jarry around this time. In *Gestes et Opinions du Docteur Faustroll* chapter XXXII, entitled 'Comment on se procura de la toile', is dedicated to Bonnard and one of his posters is hanging on the wall of Faustroll's house.

Jarry and Bonnard would continue to work together on occasion. In 1901 Bonnard drew eleven sketches, in pen and pencil, for the *Revue Blanche*. Some of them accompanied Jarry's journalist articles or adverts for Jarry's books. Bonnard made a drawing of Messaline, the leading character of Jarry's novel with the same name, and he would also execute a portrait for *Le Surmâle*. Pierre Bonnard's love for the character of Ubu remained. In 1917 and 1918 he contributed illustrations to Vollard's *Le Père Ubu à l'hôpital* and *Le père Ubu à l'aviation*. Years later Bonnard would name his dog Ubu.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> 'P. Bonnard était parmi nous l'humoriste ; sa nonchalance gaieté, son humour s'affirmaient dans ses productions dont l'esprit décoratif gardait toujours je ne sais quoi de satirique ...', Aurélien Lugné-Poe, *La Parade, t.I, Le sot du tremplin* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard/Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1930), p. 195.

<sup>12</sup> Bonnard also made some preparatory sketches, as pointed out by Antoine Terrasse, *Bonnard illustrateur* (Paris: Biro, 1988), p. 56.

<sup>13</sup> See appendix.

<sup>14</sup> Timothy Hyman, *Bonnard* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), p. 40.

### 3.1.3 Claude Terrasse (1867-1923)

Whereas Bonnard brought the context of the visual arts to the Almanac, composer Claude Terrasse brought with him the world of music. Terrasse had been classically schooled at the École Niedermeyer. Like many musicians of his generation, he worked as an organist for a living. He was appointed at the Trinité church in Montmartre in 1895. But besides composing religious masses and motets he also wrote operettas and cabaret music.<sup>15</sup> Terrasse participated in Montmartre's cabaret culture, working with writers Alphonse Allais and Franc-Nohain. For his librettos he relied on playwrights such as Courteline and Tristan Bernard, but he also teamed up with boulevard writers Robert de Flers and Gaston Armand de Caillavet. Together with them Terrasse successfully revived the tradition of the *opéra bouffe*, satirical spoofs of mythological, historical or literary subjects. Terrasse's involvement in popular entertainment and his talent for comedy partly explains his involvement with the Théâtre des Pantins and the Almanacs.

Terrasse and Bonnard knew each other well and Terrasse was married to Bonnard's sister Andrée. Bonnard had illustrated Terrasse's musical scores, among which *Petit solfège* (1893) and *Petites scènes familiales* (1895) and the music for the Théâtre des Pantins.<sup>16</sup> It was probably also Bonnard who introduced Terrasse to both Lugué-Poe and Jarry. Terrasse himself apparently proposed to write music for *Ubu Roi*.<sup>17</sup> In the end he did compose it, among which the famous 'Chanson du décervelage'. Terrasse, Bonnard and Jarry would soon join forces again in the already mentioned Théâtre des Pantins. The little theatre at Terrasse's house in Montmartre became a meeting place for the literary and artistic avant-garde. Like Bonnard, Terrasse also received a mention in *Faustroll*, in chapter XXIII, appropriately entitled 'De l'Île Sonnante'.<sup>18</sup>

We know that Terrasse worked closely together with Jarry and Bonnard on the texts for the second Almanac (see below), but there are several reasons to believe he also contributed to the first. Indeed the three men had already worked closely together for *Ubu Roi* and for the Théâtre des Pantins. Jarry and Terrasse were also busy working on the operetta *Pantagruel*, a life-long project which Jarry would never see finished.<sup>19</sup> *Pantagruel* is announced in one of the Almanac's advertisements. Furthermore the name of Terrasse is mentioned in announcement of the Almanac in *La Revue Blanche* quoted below. Jarry, in the letter to Quillard cited above, also refers to the Rue Ballu, which seems to indicate he was working on the Almanac at

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<sup>15</sup> For more on Terrasse, see Philippe Cathé, *Claude Terrasse* (Paris: Éditions l'Hexaèdre, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> Such collaborations with artists and composers were not uncommon. At this time Bonnard was, together with Toulouse-Lautrec, one of the most prolific illustrators of printed music. See James J Fuld, Frances Barulich, "Harmonizing the Arts. Original Graphic Designs for Printed Music by World-Famous Artists," *Notes* 43, no. 2 (1986).

<sup>17</sup> According to André-Ferdinand Hérold, cited in Cathé, *Claude Terrasse*, p. 44.

<sup>18</sup> The title obviously refers to Terrasse's music, but, as the entire structure in *Faustroll* is based on Rabelais' work, it also refers to part of the fifth book by Rabelais, entitled l'Isle Sonante. This text by Rabelais was posthumously published although its authenticity is uncertain. Jarry and Terrasse had started working on their *Pantagruel* project around this time, which also accounts for the reference to Rabelais.

<sup>19</sup> Jarry wrote the libretto to Terrasse's music. *Pantagruel* was finally performed in 1911 at the Opera of Lyon, but never made it to Paris.

Terrasse's house, and perhaps with him. We can only speculate on the extent of Terrasse's contribution to this first Almanac, but the list of names contains a number of references to musicians and composers from Terrasse's circle, some of whom he knew from the École Niedermeyer and the Trinité church.<sup>20</sup>

Above all, these historical details make clear that the first Almanac was created within a rich artistic context. The writers and artists of the *Mercure de France* and *La Revue Blanche*, but Bonnard and Terrasse in particular, brought influences of the contemporary literary, artistic and musical avant-garde to Jarry's work. This, as we will see in the following chapters, is clearly reflected in the texts and images.

### 3.2 The publication of the first Almanac (December 1898)

The first Almanac was published in December 1898. Its full title was: *Almanach du Père Ubu, illustré. janvier, février, mars 1899*. It contained 92 pages, with 20 ink drawings by Bonnard and was published in a very small format (in-8o, 9, 5 x 11 cm.). It is indicated that the printer was Charles Renaudie, 56, rue de Seine.

Jarry only referred once to its publication, writing to *compagnon* Pierre Quillard, in the letter quoted above. In it Jarry describes Claude Terrasse as 'celui qui Terrasse', in the manner he will also use for the list of names in the Almanacs.<sup>21</sup> 'Celui qui Renaude' is the printer Renaudie.<sup>22</sup> Jarry explains how he cannot return to the Phalanstère because the printing of the Almanac has been delayed or, as Jarry puts it, due to the printer's 'typographical slowness':

Compagnon,  
Nous sommes convoqué [*sic*] par un télégramme de celui qui Terrasse et vos tonneaux ne sont point encore expédiés. La faute en est à l'Almanach (lequel s'imprime) où vous êtes glorifié. Je ne pourrai guère revenir au Phalanstère avant une semaine, vu la lenteur typographique de celui qui renaude.<sup>23</sup>

The mention 'Janvier-Février-Mars 1899' on the cover suggests that the almanac was intended to be a quarterly publication. This is reinforced by the fact that on the cover the price for an annual subscription is indicated: 1 franc 50. One issue cost 50 centimes. However the almanac did not have an immediate follow-up, most likely due to its utter lack of success.

There was no indication of the number of prints, but the number must have been small. There was some interest for them nonetheless and Jarry did send copies around to his literary friends.<sup>24</sup> In 1902 Jarry responded to a

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<sup>20</sup> See appendix.

<sup>21</sup> See appendix.

<sup>22</sup> Renaudie had printed several of Jarry's works before, such as *Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial* (1894), *César-Antéchrist* (1895), *Ubu roi* (1896), *L'Ymagier* and *Perhinderion*.

<sup>23</sup> Jarry to Quillard, 6 December, 1898, OC I, p. 1073.

<sup>24</sup> In 1899 Jarry sent a copy to writer Gustave Kahn and his wife, with the dedication: 'Hommage respectueux du Père Ubu en personne à Madame Gustave Kahn. Cet exemplaire est valable en tant que diplôme de grande dame de l'ordre de la Gidouille. Ubu.' Quoted in Besnier, *Alfred Jarry*, p. 236. The Collège de Pataphysique held Henri de Regnier's copy, with a similar dedication from Père Ubu ('Omaje du Père Ubu'), see Arnaud, *Alfred Jarry. D'Ubu Roi au docteur Faustroll*, p. 430.

letter from poet André Fontainas who had received a request for the almanac from a certain professor Lévi. In his reply to Fontainas, Jarry testified to his stock of left-over Almanacs:

J'ai retrouvé des tas d'*Almanachs*: je vous en transmets un pour votre ami en pur don ; et si vous en voulez d'autres, il y en a encore !<sup>25</sup>

In a letter to Terrasse from that same year, Jarry tells him about the professor's request for an Almanac:

Le palotin Sylvain Lévi, professeur au Collège de France, s'est adressé à moi pour se procurer le 1<sup>er</sup> petit almanach: je lui en ai fait parvenir un en pur don, et ainsi n'en ai plus que sept cent quatrevingt-dix neuf...et quelques. <sup>26</sup>

One should perhaps take Jarry's number of left-over Almanacs with a grain of salt, but fact was that a lot remained unsold.

Nowhere in the Almanacs is there any mention of the editor or publisher. The wholesale address is indicated in the Almanac as 3, rue Corneille. Although the cover says 'en vente partout', it seems unlikely that this was the case. It is indicated that the 'gérant' of the Almanac, the sales representative, was Charles Bonnard, brother of Pierre Bonnard. Terrasse and Bonnard kept the Almanac in the family, so it seems. However a pink paper slip in which the final publication was wrapped indicates that the manager had apparently changed and was now Adolphe Thuillier-Chauvin, a bookseller located at 14, rue Lacépède.<sup>27</sup> The bookbinder was a certain Monsieur Guyot, whose shop was next to that of the printer.<sup>28</sup>

The first Almanac was advertised in *La Revue Blanche* (see below) and in the *Mercure de France's* recent publications section, together with the *Almanac Hachette* under the heading 'Divers':<sup>29</sup>

**DIVERS. — *Almanach Hachette pour 1899*; 1.50. — *Almanach du Père Ubu pour le premier trimestre 1899*, illustré; 0 fr. 50.**

**MERCURE.**

Writer and journalist Émile Strauss, admirer of Jarry, published an endorsement for the first Almanac in the magazine *La Critique* (20 January 1899). This journal had also published favourable reviews of *Ubu Roi*. In his advert Strauss copies the pseudo-archaic Rabelaisian tone of Ubu's Almanac:

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<sup>25</sup> Jarry to Fontainas, February 1902, OC III, p. 559.

<sup>26</sup> Jarry to Terrasse, February 12 1902, OC I, p. 1076/77.

<sup>27</sup> Jarry, always in need of money, frequently turned to this bookseller to resell books and magazines he had received for reviews. See OC I, p. 1206 and OC III, p. 932.

<sup>28</sup> 'Mon cher ami, L'adresse du brocheur du 1er Almanach est : Guyot, 54, rue de Seine, mais comme c'est un grand brocheur il est souvent très occupé et peu exact.' Jarry to Claude Terrasse, 12 February 1902, OC I, p. 1076.

<sup>29</sup> *Le Mercure de France*, t. 29, janvier-mars 1899, p. 286.

'Achetez, vous y trouverez une matière concrète et compendieuse, idoine à la dilection de votre jéjunum mental ; de plus, recettes de cuisine pour préparer coca, cacao, racacahout et l'amer. Y a de quoi bibiter et élender. Ouvrage sapientissime approuvé par S.S. Mgr François Coppée, archevêque in fistu-libus de Lapoire-de-Boncrétien et S.E. le cardinal Basile Brunetière, évêque apostolique des deux mappemondes et autres lieux saints [...].'<sup>30</sup>

The publication of Ubu's first Almanac did therefore not go completely unnoticed, but was only mentioned in the more avant-garde literary reviews; by people who all belonged to Jarry's inner circle.

### 3.3 Anonymity

When the Almanac was published neither Jarry's name nor that of Bonnard or any other author was mentioned on the cover or the title page, merely the name of the fictional Père Ubu. There was also no mention of any editor. In literature, anonymity can be simply and very broadly defined as the absence of reference to the legal name of the writer on the title page.<sup>31</sup> The Almanac therefore appeared to be an anonymous publication.

Anonymity can be a strategy to avoid legal responsibility over a text. In fact, the anonymity of the Almanacs might in part have been a tactic to evade censorship. The printer for example would not risk putting his name on the work, as Vollard remarked, due to the scandalous content 'we had invented'.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, the Almanacs are hardly truly anonymous, since Ubu figures proudly on the cover of as the 'author'. People would suspect Jarry to be author, if only for Ubu's name. Furthermore, Jarry did own copyright over the text and the contributors to the Almanacs were hardly unknown. In fact, they were explicitly named in an announcement in *La Revue Blanche* of January 1899. In the section 'Books', Ubu's Almanac is classified under the new sub-section of 'Almanachs':

Les Almanachs

*Almanach du Père Ubu, illustré (janvier, février, mars 1899)*

Œuvre, évidemment, de MM. Jarry et Bonnard (et de M. Terrasse, s'il eût contenu des notes), grâce à cet almanach on vivra avec délices les trois premiers mois de 1899, l'an 8375 du règne d'Ubu. Une tristesse pourtant : l'éclipse, partielle, de ce monarque et de ce père, les 29, 30 et 31 février. Mais on pourra, et d'après les recettes du seigneur Alexis, Piémontais, se teindre les cheveux en vert, se faire choir les dents, affiner l'or avec les salamandres. On s'émouvra à une pièce en trois actes et plusieurs tableaux, *L'Île du Diable*, où se voient Ubu, Mme France, le commandant Malsain-Athalie-Afrique, le palotin Clam et ce capitaine Bordure, condamné pour avoir vendu le plan, sur papier pelure, de la citadelle de Thorn et qui ne cesse de crier son innocence. Puis ce sont des prophéties : « Sera représenté pour l'exposition de 1900, *Pantagruel*, pièce nationale en cinq actes et un prologue, que viennent de terminer Alfred Jarry et Claude Terrasse » ; et des annonces : « Commerçants, bistros, propriétaires, ivrognes, pour bien clarifier vos vins, demandez la Poudre de Sang inodore de Charles Bonnard, en vente au laboratoire général de Bercy, 7, rue Soulages ».<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in *L'Étoile-Absinthe*, 1983, 17/18, p. 23. On Strauss and *La Critique*, see appendix.

<sup>31</sup> Robert J. Griffin, "Anonymity and Authorship," *New Literary History* 30, no. 4 (1999): p. 882.

<sup>32</sup> Ambroise Vollard, *Souvenirs d'un marchand de tableaux* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1948), p. 364.

<sup>33</sup> Deak, *Symbolist Theater. The Formation of an Avant-garde*. *La Revue Blanche*, vol. XVIII janvier-février-mars-avril 1899 (Genève: Slatkine reprints, 1968), Deak, *Symbolist Theater. The Formation of an*

In this advert Terrasse is included as one of the authors, 'if only there had been music', but it nevertheless suggests that Terrasse was involved. Since it was evident who the authors were, the not naming of any author on the cover becomes rather conspicuous. This explicit absence of the author's name on the cover and title page of course bears a resemblance to its traditional counterpart. Traditionally, the almanac was often anonymous, or written under a pseudonym. Early popular almanacs frequently featured the name of an astrologer, an authority or fictional character as the author. Ubu's Almanacs continue this tradition.

However, apart from perhaps reviving a 'lost' tradition of writing, or avoiding censorship, the more pertinent question is what made Jarry chose this anonymous form in the context of his own time. The pseudo-anonymity of the Almanacs, paradoxically, emphasizes the author, exactly because anonymity had become an uncommon literary practice in Jarry's age. In the nineteenth century, anonymity had long become a thing of the past. Sociologists have argued that economic factors helped shaped the modern notion of individual authorship, particularly with the advent of copyright in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, as the author now held ownership over his text, being able to sell it to whichever publisher. The demise of the patronage system together with the rise of the bourgeoisie provided new commercial and financial opportunities.<sup>34</sup> Chartier for example argues that this change from a patronage to a commercial system was founded on an 'ideology of the creative, disinterested genius' that guaranteed the originality of the work as well its success.<sup>35</sup> Consumers were more inclined to buy a book based on the name of an author and publishers started to sell 'authors', not books, hence the increased attention for the individual author.<sup>36</sup> Attention thus became very much focused on the singular author. Since then, Foucault stated, 'we cannot tolerate literary anonymity.'<sup>37</sup> In this light it seems more likely that the Almanac's anonymity is part of Jarry's play with contemporary literary conventions, not an actual desire to revive the anonymous almanac tradition. We already saw examples of Jarry's preoccupation with author concepts in 'Linteau'. Set in Jarry's time, the Almanac's (pseudo-) anonymity appears to be a deliberate tactic which, while seemingly confusing readers, only arouses more interest in the author and puts emphasis exactly on authorship, as Bennett has pointed out with regards to 18<sup>th</sup> century use of pseudonyms.<sup>38</sup> In *I'Ymagier* for example Jarry had written under the pseudonym of Alain Jans; a pseudonym which was easily recognizable as it shared Jarry's initials.

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*Avant-garde*.p. 160. This announcement has gone unnoticed in previous discussions of the first Almanac. Deak, *Symbolist Theater. The Formation of an Avant-garde*.

<sup>34</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Palo Alto: 1994).

<sup>35</sup> Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, p. 32.

<sup>36</sup>Marysa Demoor, ed., *Marketing the Author. Authorial Personae, Narrative Selves and Self-Fashioning 1880-1930* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> Andrew Bennett, *The Author* (London/New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 53.

Another section of the almanac further supports this idea of anonymity as an intentional strategy. In an advert in the first Almanac, entitled 'conseils aux capitalistes et perds-de-famille', there is a list of twenty-two publications. They refer to Claude Terrasse's music, texts by Franc-Nohain and Jarry's own texts and were all performed at the Théâtre des Pantins. However the author's names are not mentioned, only the titles of their works. A similar advertisement appears in the second Almanac where again the authors' names are not mentioned. Why leave out the names of the authors, when Père Ubu obviously referred to Jarry, when Jarry and his collaborators were mentioned in the announcement of the Almanac and everyone in Jarry's inner circle knew perfectly well who its authors were, both of the Almanacs and of the other works advertised? The (pseudo-)anonymity of these publicities is again so conspicuous that it strongly suggests a deliberate strategy, not so much to fool the reader, but to trigger an interest in the author. A similar tactic was repeated two years later for the second Almanac, also published 'anonymously'.

### **3.4 The making of the second Almanac**

#### **3.4.1 The 'Cellar' at the art gallery of Ambroise Vollard(1866-1939)**

There are more details on the collaboration for the second Almanac, thanks to testimonies by Vollard, Fagus, Terrasse and Apollinaire. The second Almanac was written in another artistic setting; that of Ambroise Vollard's art gallery. Surprisingly little has been written about Jarry's acquaintance with Vollard, even though this friendship and Vollard's role in the creation of the Almanac places Jarry's Almanac firmly in the context of the early artistic avant-garde of the twentieth century. Vollard played an important role in exhibiting contemporary artists, such as Van Gogh, Cézanne, the post-impressionists and the Nabis, and later, Picasso and the Cubists.

Ambroise Vollard, part Creole, grew up in the French colonies on the island of Réunion. In Paris he became part of the artistic circles in Montmartre. In 1893 he opened his first gallery in the Rue Laffitte. He organized a Van Gogh exhibition at a time when there was still little interest in the work of this painter. Vollard was also the first to exhibit Picasso's work in 1901. His gallery was famous for its cellar, dubbed the 'Cave de Vollard.'<sup>39</sup> This cellar served as a kitchen and dining room, where Vollard would invite writers and artists to eat, drink and discuss.<sup>40</sup> Apollinaire, himself a frequent guest, described the basement's ambiance and guests, including in the first place some pretty female company and secondly the artists, among whom Jarry:

Carrelée, les murs tout blancs, la cave ressemblait à un petit réfectoire monacal. La cuisine y était simple, mais savoureuse; mets préparés suivant les principes de la vieille cuisine française, encore en vigueur dans les colonies, des plats cuits longtemps, à petit feu, et relevés par des assaisonnements exotiques. On peut citer

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<sup>39</sup> Maurice Denis' well-known painting *Hommage à Cézanne* (1900) portrays Vollard and 'his' artists in the gallery.

<sup>40</sup> Vollard, *Souvenirs d'un marchand de tableaux*, pp. 105-20.

parmi les convives de ces agapes souterraines, tout d'abord un grand nombre de jolies femmes, puis M.Léon Dierx, prince des poètes, le prince des dessinateurs, M. Forain; Alfred Jarry, Odilon Redon, Maurice Denis, Maurice de Vlaminck, Count Kessler, José Maria Sert, Vuillard, Bonnard, K.-X, Roussel, Aristide Maillol, Picasso, Emile Bernard, Derain, Marius-Ary Leblond, Claude Terrasse, etc., etc.<sup>41</sup>

Jarry seems to have been a frequent visitor of Vollard's gallery and Vollard admired Jarry. He wrote in his memoirs that there was no 'nobler man of letters than him' and described Jarry as a 'humaniste de première force'.<sup>42</sup> Vollard also recalls how Jarry once cycled from Corbeil to Paris to return the sum of one franc fifty to someone who had, judging by the amount, subscribed to the first Almanac.<sup>43</sup> Jarry had probably first visited Vollard's gallery around the time it opened in 1893, in the company of Léon-Paul Fargue. Jarry mentioned Vollard in an early art review from 1894, discussing a painting by Pissarro he had seen at his gallery.<sup>44</sup> Like the other Nabis painters, Bonnard was often commissioned by Vollard to provide illustrations for the gallery's publications. Vollard was therefore closely connected to Jarry's literary and artistic circle. The office of *La Revue Blanche*, for example, was also situated right next door the gallery.

In Vollard's version of events, the second Almanac was written at his cellar in no more than three days. According to him the work resulted from a true collaborative effort between Jarry, Vollard, Terrasse, Bonnard, Fagus and even several, unknown, others:

Ce fut dans une des réunions de la Cave – cette Cave dont j'ai raconté l'histoire – que naquit l'idée d'un *Almanach du Père Ubu*. Il faisait suite à l'almanach de poche que Jarry avait fait paraître après les représentations d'*Ubu Roi*. Le nouvel Almanach devait être, d'abord, exclusivement colonial. L'idée en était venue à Jarry en m'entendant raconter les histoires nègres de mon pays. Mais, au fur et à mesure que le texte s'élaborait, d'autres éléments s'y ajoutèrent par les apports de Jarry, Fagus, Claude Terrasse et quelques autres collaborateurs occasionnels. Il suffit de trois jours aux auteurs et à l'illustrateur Pierre Bonnard pour établir cet éphéméride qui s'imposait, en raison du nombre si restreint des almanachs utiles et, surtout, de leurs regrettables omissions.<sup>45</sup>

All collaborators added elements to the text. Although Vollard emphasizes the collective writing and speaks of authors instead of one author, he attributes the creative idea for the Almanacs entirely to Jarry. In his memoirs and in a letter quoted further below Vollard claimed to have been in charge of the section 'Ubu colonial'. Vollard's Creole origins and childhood in

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<sup>41</sup> Apollinaire, *Flâneur des deux rives suivi de contemporains pittoresques*, pp. 75/76.

<sup>42</sup> Vollard, *Souvenirs d'un marchand de tableaux*, pp. 122/23.

<sup>43</sup> 'I remember meeting him one day on his way to a subscriber to a little review that he edited, to restore the sum of one franc fifty that he had overpaid. To do this he had come all the way from Corbeil on his bicycle.' Ambroise Vollard, *Recollections of a Picture Dealer* (New York: Dover Publications, 1978), p. 100. The English version of Vollard's memoirs was published in the US in 1936. The French augmented version was published later in 1937 and contains more information on the origins of Ubu's Almanac.

<sup>44</sup> OC I, p. 1018.

<sup>45</sup> Vollard, *Souvenirs d'un marchand de tableaux*, p. 357.

the colonies apparently inspired Jarry to include a 'colonial theme' in the Almanac.<sup>46</sup>

Apollinaire also testified to Vollard's contribution and named him as the writer of the text of the song Tatane. In *Le flâneur des deux rives* he wrote about the second Almanac:

C'est dans la cave de la Rue Laffitte que fut composé le *Grand Almanach illustré*. Tout le monde sait que les auteurs en sont Alfred Jarry pour le texte, Bonnard pour les illustrations et Claude Terrasse pour la musique. Quant à la chanson, elle est de M. Ambroise Vollard. Tout le monde sait cela et cependant personne ne semble avoir remarqué que le *Grand Almanach illustré* a été publié sans noms d'auteurs ni d'éditeur.<sup>47</sup>

Apollinaire explicitly emphasizes the work's collective nature and points out that, although everyone knew the authors, it was published anonymously.

Vollard already suggested in his memoirs that more people were involved. In his journal (quoted below) Terrasse also noted the presence of painters Ranson and Redon at the diners during which the Almanac was conceived. This could have been the case, but there is no further evidence on their possible input. Vollard's vague mention of several other mysterious collaborators can, whether true or not, perhaps also be read as a humorist mystification. It appears anyway that the collaborators of the Almanac enjoyed enveloping the exact origins and authorship of the texts in a cloud of mystery.

Jean-Paul Morel has suggested that Vollard was also involved in the first Almanac.<sup>48</sup> For not just the second Almanac included a publicity for Vollard's gallery, the first one had also advertised Vollard's works. This advertisement has been left out of later re-editions of the Almanacs. The advert mentions three titles of upcoming lithographic albums by Vollard.<sup>49</sup> Vollard's name also appears in the list of names and in the section 'Lettres et Arts' of the first Almanac. However, whether or not he was actually involved as a collaborator of the first Almanac remains uncertain.

What is certain is that Vollard continued the Almanac tradition after Jarry's death by publishing a series of satirical Ubu works in which Ubu tackles contemporary issues; the already mentioned *Père Ubu à l'hôpital* (1917) and *Père Ubu à l'aviation* (1918), but also *La politique coloniale d'Ubu* (1919), *Père Ubu à la guerre* (1920), *Père Ubu aux pays des Soviets* (1924), and *Réincarnations du Père Ubu* (1925).

### 3.4.2 Claude Terrasse's account of the collaboration

Apollinaire wrote that Claude Terrasse was responsible for the music of the song 'Tatane' in the Almanac. From Terrasse's personal papers we learn that he was also closely involved in other details of the text. He wrote in his journal about the Almanac which 'Pierre illustrated and which I helped Jarry

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 360

<sup>47</sup> Apollinaire, *Flâneur des deux rives suivi de contemporains pittoresques*, p. 78/79.

<sup>48</sup> Jean-Paul Morel, "Ambroise Vollard: How & where I met Père Ubu," in *Alfred Jarry. De los nabis a la patafysica* (Valencia: IVAM-Centro Julio Gonzalez, 2000), p. 213.

<sup>49</sup> *Almanach du Père Ubu, illustré. janvier, février, mars 1899*, original first edition, number 90633, Bibliothèque Municipale de Laval, p. 91.

to write.<sup>50</sup> In fact it was Terrasse who seems to have taken the initiative to make a second Almanac together with Vollard and Bonnard. On 10 December 1900 he wrote in his journal:

Jarry vient de la campagne sur la demande que je lui fais de reprendre *l'almanach du Père Ubu* pour le compte de Vollard avec illustrations de Bonnard. Nous déjeunons chez Bonnard. Jarry est en train, il raconte mille péripéties du Père Ubu qui est lui, et de son entourage à la campagne.<sup>51</sup>

In his diary of this period Terrasse also noted several appointments with Jarry. On December 11th he had scheduled a dinner at Vollard's with Jarry, Bonnard and fellow Nabi painter Ranson.<sup>52</sup> Terrasse's diary and journal entries are the most detailed evidence of the the collective writing in Vollard's cellar. On the fourteenth of December, Terrasse writes how they are working on the Almanac's Saints calendar:

Travaillons à l'almanach dans le sous-sol de Vollard rue Laffitte. Faisons la liste des saints du calendrier.<sup>53</sup>

Terrasse made a list of sixty Saints' names in his diary and several of them ended up in the final version of the calendar.<sup>54</sup>

Another section of the Almanac, the imaginary list of nominees for Père Ubu's 'Ordre de la Gidouille', was conceived in a similar manner. According to Terrasse's journal on the 15<sup>th</sup>, it was based on the real-life honourees of the Légion d'Honneur:

Dîner chez Vollard avec Redon Odilon, Jarry, Bonnard. *Le Temps* publie la liste des décorés. Bonnat Gd Croix, Massenet Gd officier etc. et parmi les architectes le père de Redon est fait officier. Comme nous procédons à une liste fantaisiste de la gde Gidouille nous sommes tout à coup gênés par le nom du Père de Redon.[...] Jarry est très en train. Trop même, il en est fatigant, mais c'est certainement et de beaucoup un des rares hommes vivant exclusivement pour la littérature.<sup>55</sup>

On December 17th Terrasse had lunch with Jarry and Bonnard at Vollard's again.

Terrasse's chronological journal entries make clear how often the collaborators met and how closely they worked together to write the Almanac. The total time they spent on it could not have been more than ten days, considering the first meeting (on the 10<sup>th</sup>) and the fact that Terrasse

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<sup>50</sup> 'l'*Almanach du Père Ubu* que Pierre a illustré et à la rédaction duquel j'ai aidé Jarry.' Philippe Cathé, "Jarry-Terrasse au travail. Le grand Almanach illustré du Père Ubu d'après des documents inédits," *Viridis Candela (Carnets trimestriels du Collège de Pataphysique)* 3 (2001): p. 76.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.: p. 73.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.: p. 74. Terrasse noted in his diary: 'Dimanche 9 décembre : « minuit trouvé lettre [...]Jarry ; lundi 10 : « Matinée[...] Jarry », mardi 11 : « Dîner Vollard [avec] Jarry » In his journal of the same day: "Dîner chez Vollard avec Jarry, Pierre et Ranson".

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.: p. 75/76.

and Bonnard left Paris on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December to spend Christmas with their family. Jarry and Vollard were left to finish the work between Christmas and New Year, with Jarry doing the editing and Vollard in charge of the practical details of the publication. Since it seems unlikely that the men were working on the Almanac every single day, Vollard's mention of three days might not have been that far-fetched. In any case, the time between the first idea for the project (December 10<sup>th</sup> 1898) and its publication (January 1<sup>st</sup> 1901) was remarkably short.

### 3.4.3 Félicien Fagus (22 January 1872-8 November 1933)

The fourth and least well-known collaborator was poet Félicien Fagus. Fagus, pseudonym of Georges Faillet, was born in Brussels as the son of an ex-Communard who had fled to Belgium. Anarchist in his younger years, Fagus would turn Catholic and Royalist in later life. He was a close friend and drinking buddy of Jarry. Poet André Salmon described Fagus as a 'short, a sort of blondish Mallarmé, with a goatee and dressed in a hooded cloak' with a reputation as a 'strong drinker and a good poet.'<sup>56</sup> Despite his bohemian appearance, Fagus had quite a prosaic day job, working as a civil servant for the Préfecture de la Seine, at the birth registration office.

Around the time of the second Almanac, Fagus was an art critic for *La Revue Blanche*. Fagus often reviewed the exhibitions at Vollard's gallery and had a keen eye for new and innovative artists. He has been remembered in history as the only critic to review Picasso's first exhibition at Vollard's gallery. In his column 'Gazette d'Art' of July 15 1901, entitled 'L'invasion espagnole: Picasso', Fagus labelled him as a 'brilliant newcomer.'<sup>57</sup> That same year, Jarry started to write his 'Spéculations' for *La Revue Blanche*.

Fagus also admired Jarry's work. In May 1896 Jarry sent Fagus a copy of *Ubu Roi*. Fagus thanked him in a letter addressed to 'Alfred Jarry, en la machine à décerveler de la rue de l'Échaudé.' In the letter Fagus mimics Jarry's style, punning on his own name:

A Jarry, Fagus: vieille branche – ne saurait dire que merci = mais à Ubu, et son paquet de substantifique m...ouèldre, PHAGUS ne peut répondre que : Mange. (C'est tout à fait spirituel, j'en suis étonné moi-même).<sup>58</sup>

The admiration was mutual. In 1903 Jarry would write a favourable review of Fagus' poem *IXion* in *La Revue Blanche*, as well as a 'spéculation' in *La Plume*, inspired by Fagus and the same poem, entitled 'La mécanique d'IXion'.<sup>59</sup> Throughout his life Fagus remained an ardent admirer and defender of Jarry's work. In 1921, after Charles Chassé had basically accused Jarry of stealing *Ubu Roi*, Fagus came to Jarry's defence in a letter

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<sup>56</sup> Salmon, *Souvenirs sans fin 1903-1940*, p. 82.

<sup>57</sup> 'Chez Picasso, par exemple, ce brillant dernier venu. Lui est peintre, absolument peintre, et bellement.' *La Revue Blanche*, vol. XXV mai-juin-juillet-août 1901 (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1968), pp. 29/30.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Arnaud, *Alfred Jarry. D'Ubu Roi au docteur Faustroll*, p. 207. The office of the *Mercure de France* was located in the Rue de l'Échaudé.

<sup>59</sup> 'Nous disons, dans *La Revue Blanche* qui paraît en même temps que cette chronique, tout le bien que nous pensons d'*IXion*, le poème publié en un volume, à *La Plume*, par M. Félicien Fagus.' *La Plume*, 15 mars 1903, cited in OC II, p. 405.

from 1922 which he signed with 'Fagus, critique intuitif et homme du Moyen-Âge.' He apparently used this self-description more often.<sup>60</sup> A portrait of Fagus depicts him as a pseudo-medieval poet, long hair, beard and cloak, which coincides with Salmon's description.<sup>61</sup> After Jarry's death, Fagus wrote 'Le noyé récalcitrant', a eulogy first published in *l'Occident* in November 1907. A more elaborate version was later republished in *Les Marges* in January 1922.

In a letter written shortly before his death, Fagus recalled his cheap dinners with Jarry, their stimulating conversations and his 'discreet' contribution to the second Almanac:

Je l'ai bien connu, lui, eus même l'honneur d'être son collabo discret pour son second Calendrier du Père Ubu ; nous dînâmes ensemble au Tonneau de la rue de Buci, au coin de la rue Grégoire-de-Tours, aux temps où une soupe aux légumes y coûtait 4 sous, un haricots rouges, 6 sous, et le vin 4 ou 6 sous la chopine. Cet autre être de genie : rien qu'à converser avec lui ou plutôt l'écouter, vous enivrait sans avoir bu.<sup>62</sup>

In 'Le noyé récalcitrant' Fagus also mentioned his input. He referred to '...les deux *Almanachs du Père Ubu* (auxquels nous sommes glorieux d'avoir contribué)...'<sup>63</sup> Contrary to what Fagus wrote in his later letter, he seems to suggest here that he also contributed to the first Almanac, although there is no further evidence for this. What we do know, from Vollard's memoirs, is that Fagus, thanks to his work as a civil servant, provided the list of official names for the second Almanac's Saints calendar; names which (by law) could be officially registered at the birth registration office:

La tâche nous fut grandement facilitée par le regretté Fagus qui était alors attaché dans une mairie au bureau des déclarations de naissances. A ce titre, il détenait la liste administrative des prénoms autorisés par la loi. Cette nomenclature officielle nous offrait toute garantie. Nous pouvions dès lors y puiser, en toute sûreté, pour composer notre phalange des patrons célestes.<sup>64</sup>

Although Fagus provided this list of names, each of the other collaborators contributed their own names to the calendar as well, as Terrasse's notes and Vollard's memoirs already showed.<sup>65</sup>

Fagus and Jarry frequented the same literary and artistic circles. Not only did Fagus work for *La Revue Blanche*, he had also been a guest at Rachilde's Tuesday *Mercur*e salons.<sup>66</sup> In the years following the creation of the

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<sup>60</sup> In fact 1926 he still referred to himself as 'Fagus, homme du moyen-âge'. See letter Fagus to Mme Dussane, 24 February, 1926, Fagus, *Le Divan. 50 lettres de Fagus*, vol. 26, No. 189, octobre-novembre, 1934, p. 272.

<sup>61</sup> See the portrait of Fagus by Frédéric Front, in *Ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 324/25.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Besnier, *Alfred Jarry*, p. 686.

<sup>64</sup> Vollard, *Souvenirs d'un marchand de tableaux*, p. 358.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 359.

<sup>66</sup> Where he recalled meeting Valéry. 'Voici quelque vingt ans, chez Mme Rachilde, au *Mercur*e de la rue de l'Échaudé, quelqu'un m'insinua, en effet, mystérieusement : C'est Paul Valéry, c'est le fils spirituel de Mallarmé.' Letter to Pierre Lièvre, 10 July, 1924, Fagus, *Le Divan. 50 lettres de Fagus*, p. 255.

Almanacs, both Fagus and Jarry became regular guests at the literary banquets and poetic soirées re-launched by the magazine *La Plume* in April 1903 at the Caveau du Soleil d'Or, a grand café on the Place Saint-Michel. At the first banquet organized by *La Plume* Jarry also met Apollinaire; they played billiard until three in the morning.<sup>67</sup> A small group was formed together with André Salmon, Fagus and poet Paul Fort. Jarry, Fagus and Fort were the 'aînés pittoresques' embraced by Apollinaire and Salmon, even though Jarry was only thirty himself at the time.<sup>68</sup> In any case, they became a sort of mentors for the 'younger' artists. In 1898 Fagus had written a collection of anarchist poetry, *Testament de ma vie première*.<sup>69</sup> Picasso, who probably had not forgotten Fagus' positive review of his work, kept a copy of Fagus' work in his atelier at the Bateau Lavoir which he later gave to André Salmon.<sup>70</sup> In a letter from this period Apollinaire also wrote that Fagus and Jarry really liked him and that their friendship meant a lot.<sup>71</sup> Jarry contributed to the second issue of Apollinaire's magazine *Festin d'Ésope* in October 1903. Fagus and Jarry therefore served as a bridge between the Symbolist generation and the new avant-garde forming around Apollinaire's magazine. The second Almanac benefited again from the artistic, musical and literary input of Jarry's contemporaries and friends, Bonnard, Terrasse and Fagus. In addition, it was created at a time when Jarry's circle expanded to include representatives of a new generation of artists who knew and appreciated Jarry's work.

#### 3.4.4 The publication of the second Almanac (January 1901)

On December 22 1900 Jarry wrote that he had an appointment with Vollard.<sup>72</sup> This fits the dates in Terrasse's journal entries. Jarry and Vollard were left to put the finishing touches on the work after Bonnard and Terrasse left on the 21<sup>st</sup>. The second Almanac was officially published on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1901. On that same day Terrasse noted in his journal that he and Bonnard were waiting for the Almanac to arrive.<sup>73</sup>

No longer intended to be a quarterly publication, the second almanac with its indications 'XXe siècle' covered not just the year 1901, but the entire new century. It was larger in size than the first one (In-4o, 200 x 285 mm) and contained 79 lithographs in red en blue. According to Vollard's memoirs a thousand copies were printed, but his memory might not be so reliable. An

<sup>67</sup> Apollinaire, *Flâneur des deux rives suivi de contemporains pittoresques*, pp. 88-96. Apollinaire, *Journal Intime*, pp. 127/28.

<sup>68</sup> Décaudin, *La crise des valeurs symbolistes. Vingt ans de poésie française*, p. 249.

<sup>69</sup> Salmon recalled one particular *La Plume* banquet when an intoxicated Fagus sat behind his piano and sang an anarchist hymn with the chorus: 'Hardi les gars! C'est Germinal qui fera lever les semailles!' Salmon, *Souvenirs sans fin 1903-1940*, p. 83.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>71</sup> 'On m'aime assez je crois. Mais ceux qui m'aiment le plus sont : Fagus, Alfred Jarry, Charles-Henry Hirsch. Les deux derniers qui sont exquis sont mes amis littéraires les plus sincères.' Letter from Apollinaire to James Onimus, July 1903, *L'Etoile-Absinthe*, 75-76, p. 11.

<sup>72</sup> Letter Jarry to Jehan Rictus, 22 December 1901, OC III, p. 546.

<sup>73</sup> 'Rien au courrier, qui vient apporter une modeste carte de visite, alors que nous attendions tous des lettres. Pierre et moi, l'*Almanach du Père Ubu* que Pierre a illustré et à la rédaction duquel j'ai aidé Jarry.' Cathé, "Jarry-Terrasse au travail. Le grand Almanach illustré du Père Ubu d'après des documents inédits," p. 76.

entry in the *Catalogue générale de la librairie française* indicates that only two-hundred copies were issued :

Almanach illustré du Père Ubu, pour le XXe siècle. In-4o. Vollard. 2 fr. Tiré à 200 exemplaires.<sup>74</sup>

Whereas the first Almanac had been overlooked, the second Almanac at least received a mention in the catalogue in the section 'Almanacs'. Although his name was not on the actual publication, the entry also reveals Vollard as the publisher. The book binder for the second Almanac was located close to the house of Terrasse.<sup>75</sup>

The original price of the second Almanac was two francs, considerably more expensive than the first one. It did not, like the first Almanac, resemble its traditional, popular counterpart, but showed more resemblances to other luxurious illustrated art books published by Vollard at that time. Twenty-five copies were printed on 'japon impérial', numbered from 1 till 25. Twenty-five copies were printed on Dutch Van Gelder paper, numbered 26 till 50. Copies 1 until 25 also contained a separate print, in black, on 'japon', of all the illustrations. Even after the price had been reduced by Vollard (he eventually tried to sell it as an 'occasion'), it did not sell well. On some copies there is the mention 'second edition', but this was fictitious. There had been only one edition.<sup>76</sup> Equally fictitious was the mention 'on sale everywhere'. Vollard recalled that only one Flammarion bookshop on the Boulevard des Italiens was willing to buy five copies.<sup>77</sup> Vollard kept a few at his gallery, but most copies remained at the printer's. Years later, after a bookshop had asked for some copies of the Almanac, Vollard went to the printer only to find out that his stock of Almanacs, 'some idiotic thing written by someone called Père Ubu' according to the printer', had been destroyed.<sup>78</sup>

There was again no mention of Jarry or any of the other contributors on the cover or the title page. However, two of them are revealed in an announcement Jarry wrote for *La Revue Blanche* in January 1901:

*Almanach du Père Ubu pour le XXe siècle* (en vente partout)

Revue des plus récents événements politiques, littéraires, artistiques, coloniaux, par-devant le Père Ubu. Un trait de la silhouette de ce pantin est mis en lumière ici, qui n'avait point servi dans Ubu Roi ni sa contre-partie Ubu enchaîné : nous parlons de la... « pataphysique » du personnage, plus simplement son assurance à disserter de omni re scibili, tantôt avec compétence, aussi volontiers avec absurdité, mais dans ce dernier cas cuisant une logique d'autant plus irréfutable que celle du fou ou du gâteux : « Il y a deux sortes de rats, professe-t-il, par exemple, le rat de ville et le rat des champs ; oser dire que nous ne sommes pas un grand entomologiste ! Le rat des champs est plus prolifique parce qu'il a plus

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<sup>74</sup> See *Catalogue générale de la librairie française, 1900-1905*, (1906).

<sup>75</sup> OC I, p. 1076

<sup>76</sup> A dedication in one copy of the Almanac makes this perfectly clear. It reads: 'À Charles Guérin, hommage du Père Ubu, en lui certifiant que cette seconde édition de l'Almanach en est la première', OC. I, p. 1211.

<sup>77</sup> 'Seul, le Flammarion du Boulevard des Italiens se hasarda à prendre « ferme » cinq exemplaires. Les autres libraires ne consentirent même pas à le recevoir « à condition ».Vollard, *Souvenirs d'un marchand de tableaux*, p. 364.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 365.

de place pour élever sa progéniture... » L'almanach est illustré de très synthétiques dessins de Pierre Bonnard et accompagné de musique nouvelle de Claude Terrasse.

Alfred Jarry<sup>79</sup>

Not only are Bonnard and Terrasse explicitly mentioned as collaborators, Jarry also signed the advert. This publicity also supports the idea of pseudo-anonymity as a deliberate tactic. Jarry promotes Ubu's second Almanac, without directly referring to himself as the author. Vollard and Fagus' contributions are not mentioned at all. Of course no one in literary and artistic circles, certainly not in Jarry's in-crowd, would have questioned who the author was, but this mystifying strategy did seem to work on others. At least the printer had apparently been fooled by the absence of the author's names, convinced that 'some idiot named Père Ubu' was indeed the author of the Almanac.

The second Almanac was also announced in the *Mercure de France*, in which it was mentioned that the *Almanach du Ubu illustré* for the 20th century had just appeared and was 'on sale everywhere.'<sup>80</sup> Phalanstère comrade Pierre Quillard would, a year later, also refer to the second Almanac in 1902 in a review of Jarry's novel *Le Surmâle*. Quillard praises Jarry's innovative use of language and begins his review by referring to the Almanac:

Dans le mémorable dialogue entre le Père Ubu et sa Conscience que chacun peut lire en achetant l'*Almanach illustré du Père Ubu*, on n'a pas assez remarqué de très importantes paroles ...<sup>81</sup>

Quillard's review is accompanied by one of Bonnard's drawings for the first Almanac; that of Père Ubu walking in the rain holding his umbrella. The second Almanac was therefore known and even appreciated in Jarry's artistic circle. However, despite the efforts of Jarry and his friends, the work was a commercial failure and did not receive any reviews in the mainstream press.

### 3.5 Rethinking authorship

By retracing the historical details of this collective artistic effort I intended to introduce the principal collaborators and, through them, illustrate the rich artistic contexts in which both Almanacs were written. Although the exact details of the collaboration will probably remain unclear, I wanted to show that both Almanacs were indeed the result of a conscious, artistic collaboration. So what are the implications of this multiple authorship?

The collective authorship and pseudo-anonymity of the Almanacs could be interpreted as a deliberate mystification on the part of the

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<sup>79</sup> *La Revue Blanche*, vol. XXIV janvier-février-mars-avril 1901 (Genève, Slatkine Reprints, 1968), p. 78.

<sup>80</sup> 'L'*Almanach du Père Ubu illustré*, pour le XXe siècle vient de paraître sur sept feuilles in-8 carré. En vente partout,' *Le Mercure de France*, janvier 1901, « Échos », p. 287.

<sup>81</sup> Pierre Quillard, "De l'imagination et de l'expression chez M. Alfred Jarry," *La Revue Blanche*, July 1902, p. 198.

collaborators.<sup>82</sup> The popular genre of the almanac, in which collaboration and anonymity were common practices, was a perfect tool for such a mystification. However, it seems plausible to suspect there is more to this play with authorship than just an inside joke. On the one hand the anonymity adds force to the idea of collaboration. With Ubu as the symbolic, fictitious author, the Almanacs appear to be written by no one and everyone at the same time. On the other hand the collaborative, pseudo-anonymous authorship places the emphasis on authorship rather than mystifying it. This is supported by indirect references to the authors in the Almanacs (e.g. in the advertisements) and the explicit mentions of the collaborators in announcements of the works published in magazines. Therefore anonymity and collaboration can also be read as creative strategies intended to re-evaluate contemporary concepts of authorship and of writing.

### 3.5.1 The legacy of the Almanacs. Ubu as collective artistic property

These strategies also reveal an awareness that the Ubu had become somewhat of a collective figure, no longer just the property of Jarry alone. Collective authorship had of course already marked the birth of the Ubu character and the origins of the Ubu cycle. In *Les paralipomènes d'Ubu*, Jarry had explained the schoolboy origins behind his character and seemed to take pride in Ubu's mythical and collective origins. Charles Chassé, although he had accused Jarry of not having invented Ubu in 1921, later labelled him, more mildly, as the 'père adoptif d'Ubu Roi'.<sup>83</sup> Jarry would probably have agreed with him.

In Jarry's own time Ubu had already acquired a modest legendary status. Bonnard, Terrasse, Vollard and Fagus all loved the character of Ubu. And so did others. Gauguin for example wrote in 1899 how impressed he was by this 'dirty bug' that personified every human being who was also a 'dirty bug':

'Ubu Roi is a dirty bug who goes to war after his subjects, always suffering from strange colic. I won't say the play was a success; it was a scandal, because one does not like to see one's own race ridiculed and degraded to such a degree. However a new type had just been created. Any politician who shows himself in a cowardly or base light is now called an Ubu. Any individual who wipes away from his snout the spittle aimed at him and whose trousers are a urinal for anything that raises a leg to piss is an Ubu. From now on, Ubu belongs to the dictionary of the Academy; it will designate human bodies with the soul of a bug. Let us give thanks to Alfred Jarry.'<sup>84</sup>

Writer and friend of Jarry Georges Bans made use of Ubu's satirical qualities in his magazine *Omnibus de Corinthe*.<sup>85</sup> Even an unlikely writer like Gyp drew the figure of Ubu in her work *En balade* of 1897. Another contemporary

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<sup>82</sup> Which is one important function of anonymous authorship according to Griffin, "Anonymity and Authorship," p. 885.

<sup>83</sup> Charles Chassé, *Les Nabis et leur temps* (Paris/Lausanne: La Bibliothèque des Arts, 1960), p. 97.

<sup>84</sup> Published in *Sourire* in Tahiti in 1899, quoted in Morel, "Ambroise Vollard: How & where I met Père Ubu," p. 217.

<sup>85</sup> See chapter seven, see also appendix for Georges Bans.

example comes from a group of Belgian artists and industrials who met in Brussels around 1900 and called themselves 'les Ubus'. Among them was decorator and architect Henry van de Velde, renaming himself as Henry van Ubuvelde.<sup>86</sup>

When Vollard wanted to publish his first *Ubu* work, he was accused by Fasquelle, the publisher of *Ubu Roi*, of copyright infringement, and of acting against the wishes of Jarry's next of kin. Vollard replied that he used Ubu quite 'naturally, since I collaborated with M. Alfred Jarry in an almanac [...] in which I was in charge of the colonial part.'<sup>87</sup> In the end Vollard managed to convince the editor of his good intentions; he paid him off. In 1918 Apollinaire defended Vollard's use of Ubu, saying that Vollard, who 'was a friend of Jarry and who printed the second Almanach du Père Ubu' chose Ubu to 'pay homage to Jarry's genius'.<sup>88</sup> Apollinaire had admired both Almanacs and owned a copy of the first small Almanac.<sup>89</sup> When Futurist painters Soffici, Papini and others published their *L'Almanacco purgativo* in 1914, a yearbook that accompanied the first Futurist exhibition, Apollinaire believed they had taken Jarry's Almanacs as models. He stated that 'Alfred Jarry eut discerné aux auteurs le grand cordon de l'ordre de la Gidouille.' According to him, they had Jarry to thank for Futurism and that they should publicly acknowledge this.<sup>90</sup> Apollinaire's exaggerated perhaps, but the Futurists did not deny that Jarry had inspired them.<sup>91</sup> In any case, it illustrates contemporary appreciation of Jarry's work. Apollinaire also labelled Ubu's Almanac as an 'œuvre digne de Rabelais'.<sup>92</sup> Apollinaire blamed Fasquelle for overly protecting the 'interests of an always welcome new edition of *Ubu Roi*.' Vollard's book, Apollinaire writes, would merely 'help popularize the name of a character that is to become as proverbial as Gargantua, Panurge, Pantagruel, Gulliver or Robinson Crusoe'.<sup>93</sup> Other contemporary writers shared this idea. Poet Laurent Tailhade, a long-time supporter of Jarry, wrote in 1918, in his unedited preface to one of Vollard's works, that Ubu 'une fois inventé, il n'appartient plus à son auteur, mais bien à la littérature universelle. Comme Faust, comme Pierrot, comme Don Quichotte, il est entré dans l'Humanité. Son nom devient commun'.<sup>94</sup>

Thus Ubu had become a literary archetype. However, the collaborative and 'anonymous' authorship of the Almanacs has further implications apart

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<sup>86</sup> Schoonbeek, *Les portraits d'Ubu*, p. 72.

<sup>87</sup> Vollard to Fasquelle, 6 April 1917, quoted in Morel, "Ambroise Vollard: How & where I met Père Ubu," p. 214.

<sup>88</sup> Apollinaire, 27 April 1914, *Europe Nouvelle*, quoted in: Apollinaire, *Chroniques d'art 1902-1918, Collection Folio essais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 541/42. Translation from Apollinaire, *Apollinaire on art. Essays and reviews 1902-1918*, ed. Leroy C. Breunig, trans. Susan Suleiman (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), p. 462/63.

<sup>89</sup> Apollinaire's copy of the first Almanac can be found in the Bibliothèque Municipale de Laval, catalogue number 90633.

<sup>90</sup> Quoted in: Franco Vazzoler, "Marinetti et Jarry," in *Présence de F.T. Marinetti*, ed. Jean-Claude Marcadé (Lausanne: L'Age d'homme, 1982), p.134.

<sup>91</sup> Painter Soffici responded to Apollinaire that a certain flair for mockery and wordplay was certainly inspired by Jarry. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>92</sup> Apollinaire, *Flâneur des deux rives suivi de contemporains pittoresques*, p. 79.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 462.

<sup>94</sup> Préface inédite de Laurent Tailhade aux *Réincarnations du Père Ubu*, cited in Vollard, *Tout Ubu Colonial et autres textes*, p. 55.

from allowing its character to become a collective figure or lead 'an independent literary life'.<sup>95</sup>

### 3.5.2 Multiple authorship versus the 'genius author'?

Above all the collective authorship of Ubu's Almanacs challenged the existing paradigm of individual, solitary authorship and of the genius author.<sup>96</sup> Bennett argues that 'collaboration seems only to need its own word, once the Romantic conception of authorship, with its emphasis on expression, originality and autonomy, emerges as the dominant 'ideology' of composition.'<sup>97</sup> The Romantic Movement had prompted an image of an author who was independent, autonomous, creative and original. Through different literary movements this Romantic concept of an individual and singular author persisted during the nineteenth century.

The collaborative creation of both Almanacs challenges this concept and the 'dominant ideology of composition'. It puts forward new concepts of authorship and composition. The almanac was traditionally a heterogeneous genre. Texts were frequently recycled and an almanac could therefore have multiple and often unknown 'authors.' Collective authorship was therefore inherent to the genre. That Jarry chose to collaborate with other artists in his Almanacs makes sense in the light of Jarry's poetics, in particular considering his ideal heterogeneous work in which various types of texts and artistic media were combined. The artistic collaboration thus contributes to the collagist structure of both works. The fact that the texts did not all originate from one author challenged contemporary concepts of originality, defined by the uniqueness of the textual material, sprung from the mind of an individual author.

With Ubu's Almanacs the contemporary distinction made between singular authorship and collaboration becomes blurry. This, if anything, puzzles the reader, since it conflicts with the dominant idea of the individual author. This can even be remarked in what little has been written by scholars about authorship and the Almanacs. Some downplay the collaborative effort. This is illustrated for example by Michel Arrivé's notes to the Pléiade edition. He remarked that Fagus and Vollard claimed to have contributed, 'even though it is impossible to precisely determine of this, in any case minimal, collaboration.' Charles Grivel, in his notes to a renewed edition of *Tout Ubu* in 2000, also added that Fagus and Vollard contributed to the text 'dans une faible mesure.'<sup>98</sup> Despite the lack of evidence, the

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<sup>95</sup>Or what Ilse Pollack remarks as a 'literarisches Eigenleben' with regard to Vollard's use of Ubu, Ilse Pollack, *Pataphysik, Symbolismus und Anarchismus bei Jarry* (Wien, Köln, Graz: Böhlau, 1984), p. 130.

<sup>96</sup>Argument also made by Jack Stillinger, *Multiple authorship and the myth of the solitary genius* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). Stillinger's conception of collaboration includes a range of very different things like intertextuality, editing, even such a common thing as influence. It strikes me as much too broad. Thomas Inge has a similar broad understanding of collaboration as 'anytime another hand enters into an effort', in: M Thomas Inge, "Collaboration and Concepts of Authorship," *PMLA* 116, no. 3 (2001). Obviously any work is the result of numerous influences and no literary work stands alone, but that is an entirely different matter altogether. Certainly not every work is the product of collaboration. Collaboration implies first and foremost a conscious act of two or more writers or artists working together to create a work, as was the case with Ubu's Almanac.

<sup>97</sup> Bennett, *The Author*, p. 94.

<sup>98</sup> Jarry, Alfred, *Tout Ubu*, édition établie par Maurice Saillet ; préface, commentaires et notes de Charles Grivel (Le Livre de Poche, 2000), p. 358.

contributions by the others are reduced to a minimum, as if otherwise they would harm Jarry's authorship. Others try to unravel the mysteries of the collaboration. Jean-Paul Morel, in the 'avertissement' to his re-edition of Vollard's Ubu works, has tried to 'attribute to each author the part that actually corresponded to him, without of course wanting to deny Jarry's paternity over the text.'<sup>99</sup> He suggests that the collaboration, including Vollard's authorial role, has deliberately been downplayed, even by its collaborators, in order to guard 'Jarry's merit' as an author.<sup>100</sup> In other instances the aesthetic worth of the Almanacs has been questioned altogether.<sup>101</sup> As said in the introduction to this book, the Almanacs have been called a spoof, a little play between friends, a minor work, a bizarre work, or mildly amusing works made solely out of financial reasons.

Scholars seem to want to either defend the author Jarry or minimize the importance of the collaboration; either they 'reinstate' the other authors or diminish the value of the Almanacs within Jarry's oeuvre. However the idea that this collaboration, as well as the (sometimes mystifying) testimonies of its collaborators, combined with the pseudo-anonymity of the Almanacs, might also have been a deliberate strategy to achieve precisely these reactions, has not yet been suggested.

The interest of the collaboration lies not in attributing various texts to various authors (however rewarding it might be, this reflects our intrinsic need for an author), it lies in the fact that it plays with reader's wishes to find an author. Collaboration undermines and puts into question a specific (Romantic) author concept of the solitary genius and the concept of the author as the autonomous and unique creator of his material.

### *Conclusion*

The Almanacs were created within a rich artistic context. Jarry and his collaborators brought with them various cultural spheres and artistic media which helped shaped the content, form and structure of the two works. The pseudo-anonymous, collaborative authorship enabled the heterogeneous collage aesthetic, discussed in the next chapter, which characterizes the two works.

The conspicuous play with notions of authorship in the Almanacs calls attention to the issue of authorship. If anything, the deliberate 'anonymity' of the works and its collaborative writing underline the omnipresent hand of a self-aware author. Jarry's authorship over the text, or that of the others, or the extent to which they contributed to the texts is, however interesting it might be, not the most relevant issue. Neither Jarry's legal nor his creative ownership of the texts is disputed, as he was in charge of the final editing and held copyright over the texts. Even among the collaborators there was ambivalence towards authorship and the idea of a singular author was never completely abandoned. Jarry remained in control of the writing process and

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<sup>99</sup> Vollard, *Tout Ubu Colonial et autres textes*, p.82.

<sup>100</sup> Morel, "Ambroise Vollard: How & where I met Père Ubu," p. 213. Morel in fact tries to save Vollard from a bad reputation which, Morel feels, has been bestowed upon him by some of 'Jarry's defenders' who treated Vollard as an 'usurper' (p. 215).

<sup>101</sup> Bennett, in his discussion of collaborative authorship, also argues that collaboration is often thought to diminish a work's artistic value, since a work's artistic value is so intrinsically tied to the concept of a genius author. Bennett, *The Author*, pp. 94-106.

the other authors still labelled him as the main author. However, the role of the author was nevertheless re-interpreted. He was no longer a 'solitary' genius author, who worked autonomously, but a supervisor and editor of the text, ordering the images and texts provided by him and by others.

# Chapter 4

## Recycling and fragmentation. Collage in the Almanacs

-Père Ubu, vous n'indiquez pas les foires dans votre Almanach ?  
-Eh ! de par ma chandelle verte, mon Almanach la donne  
aux lecteurs à force de rire. Encore une économie de médecin.<sup>1</sup>

### *Introduction*

Traditionally, an important task of the popular almanac was to indicate all the fairs of the month.<sup>2</sup> Ubu's first Almanac does not really live up to this practical function, for the section 'Foire' consists solely of the brief dialogue cited above. 'Foire' was in fact a favourite word in Jarry's vocabulary, due to its obvious connotations (meaning both fair/market and diarrhoea).<sup>3</sup> Despite the characteristic joke, the word 'foire' can also be considered as a metaphor, albeit a rather unsavoury one, for the way the texts are constructed in the Almanacs. The bits and pieces of texts are recycled and scattered all over the pages; a collage of texts and images.

Although the term collage was never used by Jarry, I argue in this chapter that its technique and its aesthetic principles are clearly noticeable in both Almanacs. After defining what I understand as collage in literature, I will discuss the three aspects that contribute to the collage structure of Ubu's Almanacs; generic hybridity, the insertion of (pseudo-) ready-made material and the mixing of media. Through a close reading of several fragments from the Almanacs I will show in more detail how the collage works, how the material is selected and combined together and what effects they have on the text, the narrative and representation.

### **4.1 Collage in literature**

The term collage I use here must be defined first, as it is not usually associated with literature. Collage made its first public and official appearance in the visual arts with the Cubist 'papiers collés' made by Picasso and Braque in the years just before the First World War. Picasso and Braque stuck newspaper fragments, wallpaper and other pre-existent materials into their compositions as 'representatives of the tactile reality'.<sup>4</sup> Cubist formal analysis tended to destroy.<sup>4</sup> Their collages tended to break with the flat plane of a painting and with the unity of composition. The Petit Robert defines collage by its original meaning as an 'action de coller' or an 'assemblage par adhésion', and by its artistic meaning as a 'composition faite d'éléments hétérogènes collés sur la toile, éventuellement intégrés à la

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<sup>1</sup> OC I, p. 537.

<sup>2</sup> Bollème, *Les almanachs populaires aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles. Essai d'histoire sociale* p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Sitting next to Colette once at a dinner party, who asked him what was the matter with him, since he could not sit still, Jarry replied loudly: 'Madame, j'ai la foire!'. Arnaud, *Alfred Jarry. D'Ubu Roi au docteur Faustroll*, p. 431.

<sup>4</sup> Following the definition of collage in the *Thames and Hudson Dictionary of Art Terms* (New Edition, 2003).

peinture.' From the early historical avant-garde movements and throughout the twentieth century, collage became a much used technique and principle in all the arts.<sup>5</sup>

However, a literary collage is obviously different from a collage painting and its definition therefore deserves some further consideration. Some scholars closely follow the visual arts, defining literary collage as the use of pre-existent, heterogeneous material, texts or images, in a new text.<sup>6</sup> This also includes pseudo ready-made material, made to look as pre-existent. This is an important aspect of any collage, but such a definition of literary collage is not completely satisfactory. In painting the collage is always visually heterogeneous; the inserted materials are easily identifiable. However, the heterogeneity of collage in literature does not just take place on a graphic level. A literary text can be visually heterogeneous, juxtaposing texts and image for example, but it can also be stylistically or grammatically heterogeneous. Jean-Pierre Morel argued that a rupture in style or grammar can also indicate the presence of a heterogeneous element in a literary work.<sup>7</sup> It seems therefore more useful to define literary collage not solely by the actual act of cutting and pasting, but also by the effect it has on the text.

Collage in literature is often connected to or even confused with the common practice of quotation.<sup>8</sup> Like collage, quotation relies on the insertion of an existing text in a receiving text. It is double coded, meaning that it is both part of a strange, outside context and part of a new context.<sup>9</sup> However, collage suggests more than the mere practice of citing existing texts or images and quotation is only one aspect of a collage work. A collage can include many quotations, but the emphasis in collage is always placed on the singularity of the inserted material or quotation and not on its integration in the new context (as is in principle the case with quotation).<sup>10</sup> In literature, as in the original Cubist paintings, it has a disrupting effect on the composition, unity and coherence of the work. As part of the collage, quotation is used as a means to achieve that effect.

The term collage is also often intertwined with that of montage. I prefer to use the term collage over montage with respect to Ubu's Almanacs mainly because the term collage suggests the insertion of pre-existent, non-literary material or non literary media (image, music) in the text, whereas the broader term montage refers to composition, to the internal arrangement of a

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<sup>5</sup> For an illustrated overview of the collage in modern art see, among others, Hanno Möbius, *Montage und Collage. Literatur, bildende Künste, Film, Fotografie, Musik, Theater bis 1933* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2000), Brandon Taylor, *Collage. The making of modern art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), Herta Wescher, *Die Collage. Geschichte eines künstlerischen Ausdrucksmittels*. (Köln: M.DuMont Schauberg, 1968).

<sup>6</sup> Franz-Josef Albersmeier, "Collage und Montage im surrealistischen Roman," *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 12, no. 46 (1982): p. 62.

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Pierre Morel argues that the heterogeneity of collage in literary works is not always strictly visual, but can also be stylistic or grammatical. A rupture in style or grammar indicates that the element has not been completely integrated. Jean Pierre Morel, "Collages, montage et roman chez Döblin et Dos Passos," *Revue d'Esthétique*, no. 3/4 (1978): p. 216.

<sup>8</sup> Recently Gilles Dumoulin, in his master thesis, discussed the transition from the (Symbolist) practice of quotation to an aesthetic of collage in the novel *Faustroll*. Gilles Dumoulin, "Jarry-Faustroll. De la citation au collage: le docteur Faustroll d'Alfred Jarry" (Mémoire de Master 2, 2005). A clear distinction between quotation and collage is however lacking.

<sup>9</sup> Möbius, *Montage und Collage*, p. 51

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

work.<sup>11</sup> I also prefer 'collage' because the word itself, more than the term montage, suggests that the glue is still visible and emphasizes the fact that the fragment is not fully integrated in the work.<sup>12</sup> I understand literary collage primarily as a provocative strategy intended to disrupt a work's coherence.<sup>13</sup> The technique of collage itself was not in itself new or revolutionary, but it was picked up by twentieth century artists and writers as a subversive aesthetic principle and a very 'conscious act' to rethink pictorial and narrative conventions and modes of representation.<sup>14</sup>

Contrary to conventions of illusionist aesthetics, a literary collage does not hide its constructed nature; most of the fragments are still recognizable, despite their new arrangement. Sometimes there is more tension between the various fragments than at other times in the collage work, but the 'glue' remains visible. A literary collage can appear heterogeneous not only on a graphic level but also on the level of coherence. Certainly in Jarry's time this challenged the concept of the literary work as a coherent and organic whole.<sup>15</sup> For the contemporary reader, used to a finished, harmonious work, the collage's incoherence and fragmentation could thus produce an effect of estrangement. At the same time however the collage work would force the reader to take up an active role in its interpretation.

I therefore understand literary collage as: *an intentional, provocative strategy, which involves the incorporation of various pre-existent or pseudo pre-existent materials (texts, image) in the text, resulting in a heterogeneous and fragmented work, including a disrupting effect on the unity and coherence of the narrative.* In Ubu's Almanacs three aspects in particular contribute to

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<sup>11</sup> I am well aware of the debates on and various definitions of terms 'collage' and 'montage' in critical literature. Some scholars distinguish strictly between them; others see the terms as synonyms or derived from one another. A detailed discussion of the debates on these terms exceeds the scope of this book, but their definitions greatly depend on critical traditions, artistic discipline and language domains. In French and English tradition preference is given to the word 'collage' when describing a work of art that cuts and pastes heterogeneous materials, whereas montage is often limited (in English especially) to photography, film, or more generally to the technical, industrial process of assembling and less specifically to a text. In the *Thames & Hudson Dictionary of Art Terms* (2003) for example, montage is therefore much more generally defined as 'a design, not necessarily intended as a work of art, made by sticking one material over another or the process of creating such a design. In German on the other hand, the word montage is used more often; its meaning is extended to include collage. See Möbius, *Montage und Collage*, p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> Möbius considers collage as a subcategory of the broader term montage. He makes a distinction between a 'demonstrative (open, irritating)' montage strategy and an 'integrating (hidden)' montage whereby the first form has become characteristic for many works of the historical avant-garde. The provocative montage is an attack on conventions of the organic work, whereas the integrating montage confirms a work's unity and is a way of arranging the material to achieve a suggestion of authenticity, not provocation. However collage, in avant-garde art, already suggests such a provocative strategy, disruptive to the work's coherence. Möbius, *Montage und Collage*, p. 28/9.

<sup>13</sup>As is also argued in Denis Bablet, ed., *Collage et montage au théâtre et dans les autres arts durant les années vingt*. (Paris: L'Âge d'homme, 1978), Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), Marjorie Perloff, "The Portrait of the Artist As Collage-Text: Pound's *Gaudier-Brzeska* And the "Italic" Texts Of John Cage," *The American Poetry Review* 1982.

<sup>14</sup> Louis Aragon, author of the collage novel *Le Paysan de Paris*, also emphasized this when stating that the essence of modern literary collage for him was this 'acte conscient', a 'démarche décidée'. Collage, he says, is a form of quotation, but the primary aim of collage is to question and scrutinize the conventions of literature and art. Louis Aragon, *Les collages* (Paris: Hermann, 1980), pp. 125-35.

<sup>15</sup> As other scholars have also argued with regard to avant-garde literary collage works, such as Holger Lund, *Angriff auf die erzählerische Ordnung. Die Collagenromane Max Ernsts*. (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2000), Perloff, *The Futurist Moment*, p. 246. Throughout her book Adamowicz also argues that such a creative and subversive strategy is central to Surrealist collage texts. See Elza Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

their collage aesthetic. These aspects of Jarry's poetics were already announced in 'Linteau'. First of all there is generic hybridity. Secondly ready-made or (pseudo-) ready-made elements are inserted in the texts, a vital aspect of any collage work. The third aspect is the combining of artistic media (although still textual material), in particular the juxtaposition of text and image. I will discuss these three aspects in this order for each Almanac and combine that discussion with a close reading of several fragments for a better understanding of the effects of the collage.

## 4.2 Collage in the first almanac

### 4.2.1 Generic hybridity

Jarry's œuvre was described by Béhar as a 'cultural kaleidoscope', but it could just as easily be labelled a kaleidoscope of genres.<sup>16</sup> In chapter two I already addressed the appeal the almanac genre must have had on Jarry. Traditionally, the popular almanac was comprised of an eclectic range of textual genres. In Ubu's first Almanac we find a similar variety of genres (see the outline of its content in Fig. 1).<sup>17</sup> The titles of the texts and the structure appear to conform to those of a regular popular almanac. The small format, the cheap paper, the mixture of archaic-looking fonts equally complied with the characteristics of the genre. The seemingly original mentions on the cover of the title page, such as 'on sale everywhere' and 'second edition' were, as said, fictional. However they do suggest that much was done by the authors to keep up the appearance of a regular almanac, giving the impression of a successful and widespread publication.

Judging from the titles, the first Almanac seems to concur with Lüsebrink's division of the traditional popular almanac: a pragmatic part, a calendar part, a historic/current events part and a 'various' section. Titles such as 'connaissances utiles', 'calendrier', 'éphémérides actuelles' and 'variétés', could easily convince the reader that each section will deliver what their title promises. However, most either seem to parody their title or do not cover the content at all. The 'useful knowledge' section for example has Ubu triumphantly announcing his latest 'inventions', umbrellas, gloves and slippers. Obviously the information is neither new nor very practical. The section 'L'Agronome Citadin' contains horoscope-like predictions and recommendations for the months of January, February and March. February starts with 'Under the sign of Pisces' and March with the phrase 'Good this month are'. The January text however is a very hermetic, poetic text about rain, floriculture and opera, the February text is a story narrated in the first person plural by Ubu and March is a seemingly incoherent list of things and people. Whereas these texts seem to conform to the pragmatic function of an almanac at first, their content, as I will show later on in more detail, does not. The title of the following section, 'Éphémérides actuelles', suggests that this is the traditional current events section. However, the subtitle 'Île du Diable' (pièce secrète en 3 ans et plusieurs tableaux) reveals that it is in fact

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<sup>16</sup> Henri Béhar, *Les cultures de Jarry* (Paris: PUF, 1988), p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> The outline of the content is based on the original editions, manuscript numbers 90633 (first Almanac) and 17251(second Almanac), Bibliothèque Municipale de Laval. The reason for relying on the original editions is the fact that later in re-editions of the Almanacs the last pages, which contained the advertisements and the table of contents, were omitted.

also a play, starring the protagonists from *Ubu Roi*. So at first glance Ubu's Almanac remains faithful to the sections traditionally found in a popular almanac, but in most instances they hardly abide by the conventions of the genre in question.

*Almanach du Père Ubu, illustré (Janvier-Février-Mars 1899) – En vente partout. Prix : 50 centimes. Abonnement d'un an (4 numéros) 1 fr. 50.*

**Articles principaux de l'annuaire pour l'année 1899**

**Comput ecclésiastique et séculier**

**Fêtes mobiles et immobile de cet hiver**

**Quatre-temps, Saisons, Éclipses du Soleil et de la Lune, Éclipses du Père Ubu, Tableau des grandes marées en 1899**

**Calendrier et Saints, Janvier, Février, Mars**

**Connaissances utiles**

**Pour teindre les cheveux en vert, Pour faire tomber et choir les dents, À faire que vin vienne en dégoût à quelque ivrogne, Pour affiner l'or avec les salamandres**

**Variétés-Exhortation au lecteur**

**L'agronome citadin**

**Foires, Janvier, Février, Mars**

**Traité de Probité**

**Éphémérides actuelles- L'Île du Diable (pièce secrète en 3 ans et plusieurs tableaux)**

**Lettres et Arts- La fête automobile**

**Nécrologie – Stéphane Mallarmé**

**Conseils aux capitalistes et perd-de-famille**

**Grand ordre de la Gilouille- Statuts**

**Prophéties-Sera représenté pour l'Exposition de 1900 :Pantagruel**

**Annonces : Volland, L'Instar et Les Poires (Franc-Nohain, Terrasse), Poudre de Sang de Charles Bonnard, Éditions Mercure de France, Éditions Revue Blanche (Flûtes par Franc-Nohain), La Critique (Georges Bans), l'Argus de la Presse**

**Table**

**Figure 1: Outline of the first Almanac**

A certain degree of generic hybridity was characteristic of traditional almanacs. It partly resulted from their adherence to short and simple forms. Destined for a wide audience, texts in traditional almanacs hardly ever exceeded three pages. The brevity and simplicity of the texts (in the form of proverbs or small poems for example) were supposed to inspire the reader to repetitive reading, to reflection and to memorisation. As Lüsebrink describes, the fragmentary nature of the texts was meant to prompt the reader to make multiples connections and associations within the almanac.<sup>18</sup> In the light of Jarry's ideas on literature, this fragmentary, associative quality must have appealed to him, but no doubt for a different reason. It seems more likely that these traditional characteristics allowed Jarry and his collaborators to mix various types of texts in their own almanac, perhaps to satirize popular almanacs, but mainly to challenge contemporary ideas on literary genre and

<sup>18</sup> Lüsebrink, "La littérature des almanachs: réflexions sur l'anthropologie du fait littéraire," p. 59.

composition. In fact, such genre crossing would become characteristic of many literary collage works. In later collage novels, such as Aragon's *Le paysan de Paris* (1926) or Breton's *Nadja* (1928), the juxtaposition of genres helps achieve an effect of heterogeneity and fragmentation. With the Almanacs, the generic hybridity also seems to facilitate the ideal heterogeneous, collagist work Jarry had already alluded to in 'Linteau'.

#### 4.2.1.1 Lists in the first Almanac

The effect of generic hybridity and its role in the collage is perhaps best illustrated by a closer look at a very specific genre that appears in Ubu's Almanac; the list. Lists, in particular lists of names, are a striking feature in the work; even visually they stand out in the text, isolated or interspersed in between the texts and disrupting an ongoing narrative.

The most conspicuous list in the first Almanac is the Saint's Calendar covering the first three months of the year, spread out on six pages in the original edition. The official holy days of the Roman Catholic Church are respected in this calendar and so are the Saints. The calendar appears to have been copied from the *Almanach Hachette*.<sup>19</sup> Although the names are simply duplicated and although the Saints' calendar is a necessary part of any almanac, it does reveal Jarry's general fascination for lists of all sorts. The other lists in the Almanac also reflect that fascination, but they also reveal a more important aspect of Jarry's writing.

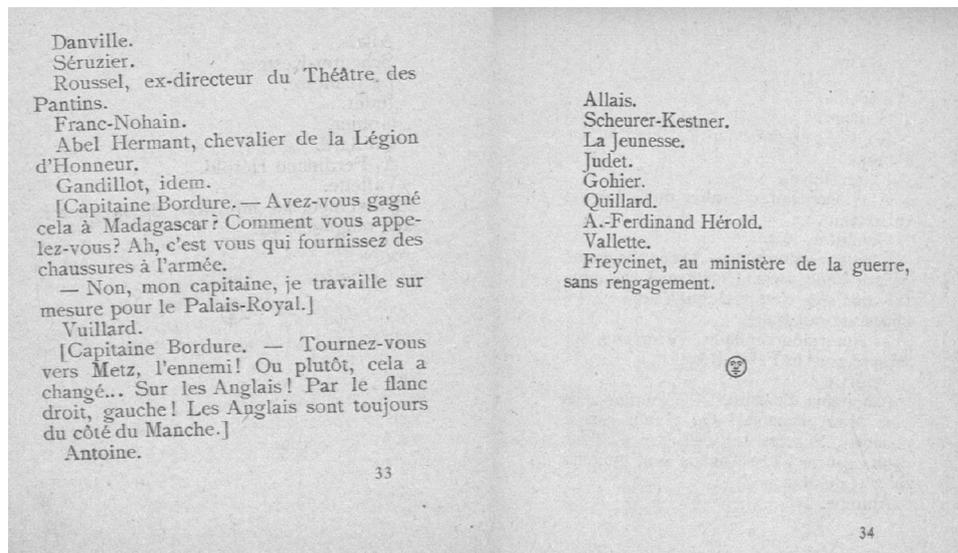


Figure 2: List of names at the end of 'Agronome Citadin. Mars', first Almanac.

The second list appears at the end of the section 'L'Agronome Citadin'. It sums up seventeen contemporary politicians, journalists, artists and writers (Fig.2). They are introduced in a Rabelaisian manner as 'de joyeux civils nos bons amis et sujets, gens notables de Paris'. Several names refer to

<sup>19</sup> See Béhar, Dubbelboer, Morel, 'Commentaires pour servir à la lecture de l'Almanach du Père Ubu illustré', 2009.

intellectuals who were prominent during the Dreyfus Affair and some of them reappear at the end of the mini-play *Île du Diable*.<sup>20</sup>

The insertion and meaning of this list can only be explained if we look at the entire text. In the section 'L'Agronome citadin' two functions of the traditional almanac are kept intact. First of all the popular almanac provided tips and information to readers related to the seasons and the calendar. Secondly its task was to provide an interpretation of the world and of the relationship man has with the world through the calendar and zodiac. These features of the traditional almanac enable Jarry to refer to contemporary culture and politics by means of the associations made in the text with each calendar month and its zodiac sign. It also reflects an essential aspect of pataphysics in which apparently absurd and trivial details are used to reflect upon the world and interpret events. Thus the section March (with the title *Mars* above the section) contains an inventory prompted by associations with the month of March:

'Sont bons tout ce mois tous animaux, ustensiles et végétaux cornus, béliers (signe zodiacal du mois), taureaux, escargots, diables, lièvres, fourches, fourchettes, la lettre Y et les racines de crocus.'<sup>21</sup>

The zodiac sign of Aries (ram) that dominates the month of March guides this associative enumeration. The ram of course has horns and the common symbol for this zodiac sign is the letter 'Y'.<sup>22</sup> Every animal, utensil or plant with horns, a corn ('cornu' meaning both), or in the shape of Y is therefore considered suitable for this month in this fragment. Some are listed because of their semantic association with 'cornus', such as bulls, devils (with horns), snails (for their horned shell). Others share a visual resemblance with the shape of Y; hares, forks, the letter Y itself and the roots of a crocus. A similar procedure is applied in the sections of January (Aquarius) and February (Pisces). Here we see the semiotic polyvalence Jarry addressed in 'Linteau' in action. The irony is obvious, since the items mentioned are hardly useful, in a way one would expect from an almanac. They are 'bons' only because their presence is justified by their connection to the sign Mars. While they might have looked rather random at first glance, each item has been selected on the basis of their associations with this 'sign' of the zodiac. The (semiotic) sign, its referents and associative potential are here explored to the fullest.

In fact this way of writing is not only characteristic for the Almanacs, but for most of Jarry's work and it is more reminiscent of poetry than of prose writing. The 'trigger' for the narrative is a word, a sign, an image. Jarry then explores all possible synonyms, as well as a word's homonyms and antonyms. He associates on the level of sound, on the level of their resemblance or opposition between words, on the level of their meaning (s), but even on a visual level, as in the case with the Y shape. This associative way of writing impedes a conventional narrative reading and interpretation of the texts. Essential and striking in Jarry's use of collage is this play with

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<sup>20</sup> In chapter seven I will discuss the theme of the Dreyfus Affair in greater detail.

<sup>21</sup> OC I, p. 541.

<sup>22</sup> These zodiac symbols could also be found in old almanacs and calendars. They helped to indicate the months and signs to people who could not read.

literal/figurative meanings and phonetic punning. This play is the primary trigger for the writing. However these associations are not gratuitous or devoid of meaning if we look at the remainder of this section.

The associations with the sign 'Mars' continue in another list also introduced by a similar verb-subject construction ('Sont bons tout ce mois et peuvent rendre de bons service tous soldats, militaires, pompiers, vidangeurs, plongeurs de vaisselle, sergents de ville').<sup>23</sup> This time 'Mars' is understood as the god Mars and this triggers a list of people associated with war, violence, repression and authoritative figures in general; loyal guardians and defenders of the French Republic. From a list of rather trivial objects, plants and animals, the text now evolves into a record of names which refer to contemporary figures, cultural life and political events.

It is here that we find the list of names introduced in the Rabelaisian manner. Ubu lists his joyous citizens, his good friends, subjects and notables of Paris. The names refer to well-known personalities; artists and writers, some personal friends of Jarry, or journalists/politicians playing some active role in contemporary political and cultural life. The first person listed is Gaston Danville, a writer/journalist, who was also a friend of Jarry and who co-edited *Faustroll* in 1911.

Every now and then the list is interrupted by short fragments of dialogue uttered by Captain Bordure, one of Ubu's 'bons sujets' in *Ubu Roi*. His unexpected appearance here is justified by his status as Ubu's military accomplice. While the narrator Ubu sums up the names, one can picture the image of Bordure standing next to him, asking questions and handing out orders to his 'soldiers' standing in line. Bordure's comments all refer to contemporary French army politics and further develop the association between Mars and everything military.

The fact that the wordplay is never random in Jarry's texts is nicely illustrated by the name of Gandillot for example. His title as 'chevalier' in the Légion d'Honneur connects him to the military 'theme' of this list. This prompts a dialogue intermezzo, in which Bordure asks if Gandillot was awarded this title in Madagascar. Bordure continues by saying that, judging by Gandillot's name, he must have been delivering shoes for the army (see also Fig. 2 for this dialogue). The word 'Godillot', argot for shoes, might explain why Gandillot is thought to deliver this particular, but far from heroic service to the army. His name is apparently confounded with that of Alexis Godillot (1816-1896), official shoe supplier for the army. Gandillot does not just remain a name, but suddenly comes to live as an active participant in the dialogue, as he replies to Bordure: 'Non, mon capitaine, je travaille sur mesure pour le Palais-Royal'.<sup>24</sup> There are several references in this few sentences. First of all Bordure's remark refers to French military and colonial exploits in Madagascar, which had been made a French colony in 1896. Secondly Léon Gandillot was a highly successful playwright at the time. The phrase 'fournir sur mesure' might not just refer to his alleged imaginative shoe business, but seems to comment implicitly on his success as a writer as well. It suggests that he delivers neatly measured plays for the

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<sup>23</sup> OC I, p. 541.

<sup>24</sup> OC I, p. 542.

Palais-Royal. It also connects his success as a playwright to the French military 'successes' in Madagascar.

In the second dialogue intermezzo Bordure gives the order: 'Tournez-vous vers Metz, l'ennemi! OÙ plutôt cela a changé... Sur les Anglais. Par le flanc droit, gauche! Les Anglais sont toujours du côté du Manche.'<sup>25</sup> There are references to two traumatic defeats for France in these sentences. Metz of course refers to the surrendering of this city during the Franco-German war of 1870. In more recent years England had become a colonial adversary ('du côté du Manche' an expression meaning 'on the right', but Manche also evokes the Channel, la Manche) due to the 'Fachoda crisis' in 1898.<sup>26</sup>

The list of names is a careful selection of people from Jarry's inner circle (Roussel, Franc-Nohain), celebrated authors (Hermant, Gandillot) and some movers and shakers of *fin de siècle* political life (Scheurer-Kestner, Judet, Freycinet). They form an imaginary queue of (cultural and political) soldiers, with Bordure walking up and down along the formation, giving out orders. The sudden dialogue draws the attention of the reader. These snippets of dialogue bring the narrative to life. Through this sudden change in register, the reader's attention is pointed to these references to contemporary politics. Every time dialogue is inserted, this small text becomes more referential, at least for the informed reader. The dialogues read as a transcription of something overheard, fragments of conversation. Like the names of actual people, real cultural symbols, these dialogues appear as life-like and fleeting fragments of reality. This also creates the impression of simultaneity, a central aspect to collage and in Jarry's poetics. The simultaneity could here be seen as a response to the fleeting and hectic reality of everyday life. Modern, everyday life could only be experienced in a fragmented way by our visual and reading capacities and the collage aesthetic seems best capable to capture this in the work of art.<sup>27</sup> The fragments (names, snippets of dialogue) in this list therefore convey an impression of reality as collage-like and fragmentary.

Through the sudden changes in register (from list to dialogue) the reader is also made aware of the artificial construction of the text. The author guides the narrative and the reader, by associative, but carefully selected words. Here we see the sort of author figure Jarry also hinted at in 'Linteau'; one who does not place the meaning solely in his text or in the hands of his reader, but who visibly and cautiously constructs his texts. In this text the author steers the reader through the arrangements of words, or by sudden switches to dialogue. From the start the word Mars is foregrounded and provides a clue for understanding the text. Other hints in the text ('signe zodiacal', 'bélier', 'la lettre Y') equally point to the importance of the 'sign' Mars. The list of names ends with 'Freycinet, au ministère de la Guerre, sans

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<sup>25</sup> OC I, p. 542.

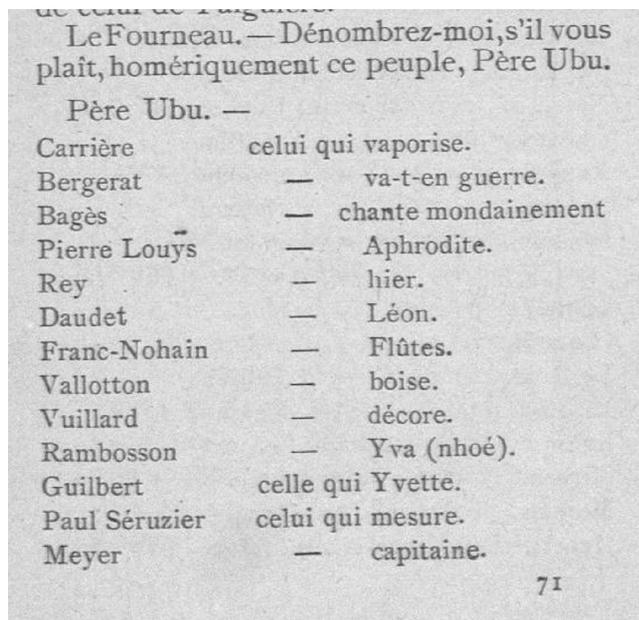
<sup>26</sup> Both France and England sought control of the Sudan region in Central Africa, when Lord Kitchener forced French general Marchand to retreat.

<sup>27</sup> Möbius also ties collage and montage to experiences of modern life and of the modern city. Since the nineteenth century the city had been associated with new concepts of time and space by artists and writers. Möbius, *Montage und Collage. Literatur, bildende Künste, Film, Fotografie, Musik, Theater bis 1933*, pp. 43-44.

renegement.<sup>28</sup> Freycinet had been one of the principal accusers of Dreyfus and he returns several times as a character in the first Almanac.<sup>29</sup> He had resigned in May 1895 but returned to the post of minister in November 1898. In the Almanac, Freycinet ('sans renegement') is not reinstated. Moreover, the capitalization of the last word 'Guerre' connects it directly to the word Mars from the beginning and the text comes full circle.

The list of names also has another effect. The cultural canon is re-arranged by explicitly naming the artists and writers of Jarry's circle alongside more established ones. By mixing up artists and politicians, the worlds of arts and politics are united in an equally militaristic atmosphere, the (avant-garde) artists fighting against the cultural establishment, whereas the political/cultural establishment are fighting their own battles. Thus the collage text, however abstract, through the list of names and the puns, appears to implicitly comment on both cultural politics and military politics of French society, favouring certain artists, writers, while mocking the establishment (whether artistic or political).

In many of the texts of the Almanacs there is a similar entanglement of various semantic threads, in which meaning is created primarily through associations made between words and signs. On the one hand the collage is heterogeneous and the narrative is incoherent, but on the other hand various layers of meaning do surface when one looks closer at the words, their associations and arrangement.



**Figure 3: Start of the list of 136 names, first Almanac.**

The third and most visible list in the first Almanac is the list of 136 names which covers no less than eight pages in the original edition. The list concludes the section 'Lettres et Arts-La fête automobile', in which Père Ubu and his companion Fourneau walk through Paris while discussing current

<sup>28</sup> OC I, p. 542.

<sup>29</sup> See also appendix, 'Freycinet, celui qui guerroye.'

events. At the end of their stroll, they stumble upon a crowd gathered together around Rodin's latest work, a statue of Balzac. Rodin was commissioned by Zola, president of the Société des Gens de Lettres in 1891, to make this sculpture. However, after it was revealed on 29 April 1898, it was refused by that same Société and criticised in the (conservative) press. A support rally for Rodin was launched, dividing the cultural world in two sides, hence this odd *mélange* of *people* gathering around Balzac's controversial work. Fourneau asks Ubu to 'list them in Homeric fashion' to which Ubu replies with this epic enumeration of names. It is a true 'who's who of the Belle Époque', listing people who mattered in the worlds of politics, art, music and literature at the time.

Each name is followed by a description starting with the formula 'celui/celle qui', 'he/ she who' followed most of the times by a verb derived from a noun or adjective associated with the person's activities or with a pun on their name. Although there are 136 names, they correspond to 135 individuals; the two Natanson brothers appear under one name, writer Henri-Gauthier Villars appears under his two pseudonyms (Willy and L'Ouvreuse) and composer Bourgault-Ducoudray also has two entries as both Bourgault and Ducoudray. As for its structure, the list is in non-alphabetical order and seems to be fabricated *ad hoc*. However, the order of the names seems also partially guided by association. The name of actress Louise France for example, who played Mère Ubu in 1896, precedes (and seems to trigger) the name of writer Anatole France. Their shared last name provides an excellent tool for wordplay. Elsewhere in the Almanac Anatole France appears as the son of Mère Ubu (Louise France). A similar imaginative exploration of names, punning on their phonetic and semantic possibilities, is characteristic of this entire list (see appendix).

The list includes writers, artists, composers, politicians and actors. Patrick Besnier has remarked that the names do not always refer to a personal relationship, but reflect Jarry's diverse roles as journalist, writer and playwright.<sup>30</sup> However it also seems plausible that this mix of artists, musicians, writers and politicians reflects the input of Bonnard and Terrasse. Most of the musicians listed were acquaintances of Terrasse and not of Jarry. Bonnard was familiar with most of the painters and artists mentioned in this list. Considering what we know about the collaborative composition for the 1901 Saint's Calendar and for the Grand Ordre de la Gidouille (see previous chapter), it is not unthinkable that this list was constructed in a similar way.

More important however is the fact that the list replaces the ongoing narrative. The section Arts and Letters consists of a discussion of current events, but the dialogue between Ubu and Fourneau ends in this seemingly endless inventory of names. Representation is no longer poured into a conventional narrative form, but substituted by this encyclopaedic list, as if the conventional narrative no longer suffices. The same effect also applies to the use of (pseudo-)ready-made text and materials in the Almanacs.

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<sup>30</sup> Patrick Besnier, "Dénombrement du peuple. Jarry et les écrivains de son temps," *Europe: revue littéraire mensuelle* 59, no. 623/624 (1981): p. 9.

#### 4.2.2 Ready-made and pseudo ready-made elements

The insertion of heterogeneous pre-existent material is, as mentioned in the introduction, an important aspect of any collage work. In the Almanac one can discern between pre-existent *ready-made* elements, copied and pasted, either unaltered or manipulated, and *pseudo ready-made* elements, which give the impression of being pre-existent and authentic, but which are created by the author(s). The use of these elements reveals first of all a new conception of literary creation and a re-evaluation of what is deemed 'worthy' to be integrated into a work of art. Furthermore the insertion of these 'foreign' fragments helps trigger incongruous associations and is a source for wordplay. The integration of ready-made material also allows the author to create an alternative version of that reality by bringing (pseudo-)fragments from that reality straight into the literary work, altering them and alienating them from their original context. They remain tied to their original context, but they also receive meaning in their new context. Through their strangeness in the new context and the separation (or alteration) from their original context, the reader is actively made to think about their significance.

##### 4.2.2.1 Calendars, dates and numbers

The use of pre-existent material is already visible in the first pages of Ubu's first Almanac, where we find the 'pragmatic section' which includes calculations for holidays, important dates and a Saint's calendar. Most of the components in this section appear to have been literally copied from a popular almanac, most likely the contemporary *Almanach Hachette*. The *Almanac Hachette*, '*petite encyclopédie de la vie pratique*', was a recently introduced (1894) and successful popular and practical almanac. The first Ubu Almanac was announced in the *Mercure de France* together with only one other almanac, the *Almanach Hachette*. But the typography of the first Almanac also resembles that of the contemporary Catholic *Almanach populaire* for example.

The section begins with a list of six different dating systems. Many popular almanacs contained a segment indicating the different calendars used throughout history. The *Almanach Hachette* listed no less than twenty-seven, but only the following six are mentioned in Ubu's Almanac.<sup>31</sup>

##### *Articles principaux de l'annuaire pour l'année 1899*<sup>32</sup>

Année de la période Julienne	6611
Depuis la première Olympiade d'Iphitus(juillet)	2674
De la fondation de Rome selon Varron (mars)	2651
De l'époque de Nabonassar depuis février	2645
De la naissance de Jésus-Christ	1899
Du règne du Père Ubu	8374

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<sup>31</sup> For more details on these calendars as well as on the other numbers and calculations in this section of the Almanac, see Béhar, Dubbelboer, Morel, '*Commentaires pour servir à la lecture de l'Almanach du Père Ubu illustré*', 2009.

<sup>32</sup> OC I, p. 527.

The Julian calendar was introduced by the humanist Scaliger. It counted back from 4713 BC and it was thought then that this covered the whole of human history. According to legend, Iphitos, king of Elis organized the Olympic Games after consulting the oracle of Delphi to achieve peace with Sparta. Ancient sources record the first Olympic game at 776 BC, but the exact date remains speculation. The date of the founding of Rome was set in the year 753 BC by Roman scholar Marcus Terentius Varro. The start of the reign of King Nabonassar of Babylon (in 747 BC) served as a point of departure for a calendar proposed by Greek astronomer Claudius Ptolemeus. The birth of Jesus Christ speaks for itself, as it is the basis for our Gregorian calendar; it became official in France in 1806. The Saint's calendar of Ubu's Almanac also indicates the dates of the Revolutionary calendar in use before (for the month of January: '1er janvier, 12 nivôse an 106; le 20, 1er pluviôse').<sup>33</sup>

Although Ubu's Almanac is intended to cover the year 1899, the numbers all concur with the year 1898 (for the year 1899 it should have been 6612, 2675, 2652 and 2646). Only the birth of Jesus Christ complies with 1899. This might be a 'correction' on the part of the Jarry, since astronomers argued that the birth of Christ should be situated in the year zero. The calendar should therefore not, as the Catholic Church had decided, start with the year one.<sup>34</sup>

The care with which all these 'facts' have been copied, assembled and even 'corrected', shows how carefully constructed each section is. This is also emphasized by the insertion of a completely new, obviously 'pseudo' calendar, that starts with of the 'reign of Père Ubu'. This dates back a staggering 8374 years, as it sets the beginning of Ubu's reign in the year 6475 B.C. Apparently Père Ubu's existence outdates and overshadows that of all the others; his calendar is by far the oldest.

A similar procedure of mixing up pre-existent elements and pseudo pre-existent elements also applies to the numbers and calculations in the rest of this calendar section. The 'comput ecclésiastique et séculier' are traditional elements in a calendar, containing the numbers (such as 'épacte') necessary to calculate the dates of Christian holy days. Moveable and non moveable feasts are indicated as well as the start of the seasons, the eclipses of moon and sun and a table indicating the exact hours and minutes of the tides for 1899.<sup>35</sup> Ubu's Almanac even issues warnings for 'several disasters' caused by the high tides.<sup>36</sup> The maritime information seems to have been literally

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<sup>33</sup> The Republican calendar was based on a system proposed by poet and anti-religious propagandist Pierre-Sylvain Maréchal in his *Almanach des honnêtes gens*. The calendar started on September 22, 1792, the day after the establishment of the Republic. The calendar divided the year into 12 months of 30 days and each month included three, 10-day weeks called *décades*. The names of the months were based on nature and natural phenomena associated with each particular period, like Nivôse (snow), Floréal (blossom) or Messidor (harvest). Five days (six days in leap years) were added to the end of the year, named after festivals and holidays in honor of Republican traits: Virtue; Genius; Labor; Opinion; and Rewards. The sixth day added during leap years was dedicated to the Revolution. This Republican calendar was the official French calendar from 22 September 1792 (1<sup>er</sup> vendémiaire an I) until 1 January 1806 (11 nivôse an XIV).

<sup>34</sup> See also Béhar, Dubbelboer, Morel, *Commentaires pour servir à la lecture de l'Almanach du Père Ubu illustré*, 2009.

<sup>35</sup> The table in Ubu's Almanac is exactly similar to the one in *Almanach populaire 1899*, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> 'Ces marées, surtout celles des 11 février et 13 mars, pourraient occasionner quelques désastres, si elles étaient favorisées par les vents', OC I, p. 528.

copied as well, as the phrasing from Ubu's Almanac is similar (although slightly revised) to that of a popular almanac. Thus in a random edition of the almanac of *Matthieu Laensberg* one can read 'on aura remarqué que' whereas Ubu's Almanac says 'on a remarqué', and 'par le tableau ci-contre' instead of 'par ce tableau'.<sup>37</sup> Such information was usually recycled from one almanac to another and Jarry and his collaborators have made the dates and tables fit Ubu's Almanac. This collage of 'facts' suggests that Ubu's Almanac sticks to its 'practical' function. The solar and lunar eclipses for example comply with those announced in regular almanacs.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless this section also contains some highly unpractical information including false dates and calculations. As such the reader learns that a very unique eclipse is taking place in the upcoming year:

*Éclipse du Père Ubu*  
Éclipse partielle du Père Ubu, les 29, 30 et 31 février<sup>39</sup>

Ubu partially eclipses on these dates in February. Since the 29<sup>th</sup> only occurs every four years and the other two dates not at all, it comes as no surprise that Ubu can barely be seen on these days. Entries like these show the care with which the 'authentic' details of the almanac were emulated or manipulated, mixing up real features and pseudo-original elements.

But what is the effect of this collage of real and imaginary dates and numbers? Obviously it satirizes the 'practical info' section of a popular almanac or calendar. In history many dating systems coincided and the standardization of the calendar in the Western World was only relatively recent. By listing Ubu's 'calendar' among the real ones the collage questions the objectivity of these numbers and calculations. It mocks the arbitrariness of these calendars and man's need to control time and emphasizes instead the subjectivity of man's conception of time. One can spot the influence of Jarry's teacher Bergson and his ideas on (the relativity of) time and space here. In fact one can situate this re-evaluation of time within a general rethinking of 'objective' knowledge around 1900 in favour of subjective perception. In line with these contemporary ideas Jarry would write in 1903: 'la vérité actuelle est celle-ci: l'espace et le temps ne sont que des formes'.<sup>40</sup> The fact that time is a mere constructed form is well illustrated in Ubu's Almanac. The collage of real and imaginary dates and numbers thus has a parodist function.

On the other hand the sheer fascination for time revealed in the use of dates and numbers might also suggest a desire to manipulate if not master time. Jarry's preoccupation with time is revealed in many of his writings. He had emphasized art's capacity to transcend time in 'Le temps dans l'art'. Art

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<sup>37</sup> See *Almanach liégeois pour 1848 par Matthieu Laensberg contenant jour par jour le lever et le coucher du Soleil et de la Lune ; des Prédications pour chaque mois ; des Anecdotes intéressantes, Le Tableau des Foires, etc.* Rouen, imprimerie Mégarde, rue du Petit Puits, 21 et Grand' Rue, 156. See also Béhar, Dubbelboer, Morel, 'Commentaires pour servir à la lecture de l'Almanach du Père Ubu illustré.'

<sup>38</sup> 'Il y aura en 1899 trois éclipses de soleil et deux éclipses de lune. Éclipse partielle du soleil, le 11 janvier 1899, invisible à Paris', Ubu's Almanac 1899, OC I, p. 528. The exact same phrases can be found in the *Almanach populaire 1899*, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> OC I, p. 528.

<sup>40</sup> 'Livres d'étrennes : Le calendrier du facteur', *La Plume*, no. 330, 15 January, 1903, pp. 141/2.

could capture a fleeting moment of history in order to put it on hold for eternity.<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, this was also an important feature of the traditional popular almanac, which through its heterogeneous, encyclopaedic collection of knowledge, sought to master time and nature. Popular almanacs were considered timeless and worthy to be preserved and their readers were often explicitly advised to do so.<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, besides satirizing man's fascination with time, the collage of dates and calendars also seems to have the advantage of eternalizing the fragmentary and the fugitive, by fixating a moment in time and manipulating it. The collage aesthetic and its fragmentary simultaneity appear to be the right artistic means to achieve these seemingly contradictory aims

#### 4.2.2.2 Recipes

A similar procedure of cutting and pasting selective practical 'information' can be found in the section 'Connaissances utiles'. This section contains four 'useful' recipes; one to paint one's hair green, one for pulling teeth, one for curing alcoholism and one alchemist recipe to make gold out of salamanders.

Such recipes were a common feature of almanacs and passed on from one almanac to another. Three of these recipes are in fact cut and pasted from an outside source and Jarry does not hide this fact. The subtitle of this section (Fig. 4) clearly states : 'recueillies par le Père Ubu, spécialement pour l'année 1899, d'après les Secrets de son savant ami *le révérend seigneur Alexis, Piémontais*'. The recipes are taken from a popular book of recipes of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, written by Alexis Piémontais, a pseudonym of Girolamo Ruscelli, entitled '*Les Secrets du seigneur Alexis Piémontais*', which appeared in various versions and sometimes augmented by other authors. Girolamo Ruscelli was an Italian doctor and alchemist whose pseudo-scientific pragmatic recipes were translated into other languages from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards and copied over and over again in Almanacs and other popular publications.<sup>43</sup> They appeared in a French translation under the pseudonym of Alexis Piémontais. In Jarry's time the Bibliothèque Nationale possessed 13 versions of the book published between 1591 and 1691. The phrase 'le révérend seigneur Alexis, Piémontais' appears to be an exact copy of the phrase from Ruscelli's book of recipes, if we look at the first page from an edition of 1564 (Fig. 4).<sup>44</sup> The recipes are all inserted with only an occasional small alteration. Sometimes the spelling and the punctuation have been modernized. Compare for example the last recipe in

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<sup>41</sup> In the article quoted above Jarry also remarked : 'l'homme pourrait-il vivre sans les secours des dates ?' (*La Plume*, no. 330, 1903, p. 142.) Another example is the essay 'Visions futures et actuelles' (*l'Art littéraire*, May 1894, OC I, p. 337/9) and of course 'Commentaire pour servir à la construction pratique de la machine à explorer le temps' (*Le Mercure de France*, n° 110, February 1899, pp. 387-96). Signed by Dr Faustroll, Jarry's manual for how to build a time machine was inspired by the recent French translation of H.-G. Wells' *The Time Machine* by Henry D. Davray, Société du Mercure de France, 1898.

<sup>42</sup> Lüsebrink, "La littérature des almanachs: réflexions sur l'anthropologie du fait littéraire," p. 48.

<sup>43</sup> Béhar, *Les cultures de Jarry*, p. 129. Alexis Piémontais was known in Italian as Alessio Piemontese and in Latin as Alexius Pedemontanus.

<sup>44</sup> I consulted Girolamo Ruscelli, *Les Secrets du seigneur Alexis Piémontais, divisez en deux parties*. Electronic resource BNF/Gallica, Num. BNF de l'éd. de, Cambridge (Mass.) : Omnisys, [ca 1990] (French books before 1601 ; 77.3). 1 microfilm Reprod. de l'éd. de, Lyon : G. Roville, 1564.

Ubu's Almanac ('pour affiner l'or avec les salamandres') with its 'original' taken from *Les Secrets d'Alexis Piémontais* (Fig. 5). 'Prens' becomes 'Prends', 'jusques au' is updated to 'jusqu'au', but otherwise the text has remained unchanged.

The four recipes might first of all have been chosen because they ironically refer to personal details of Jarry's life. They could be seen as 'cures' for several of Jarry's own problems. The first one relates to his alcoholism, the others to his miserable financial situation (making gold would solve that) and to his dental problems.<sup>45</sup> The recipe 'Pour teindre les cheveux en vert' is taken from a supplement to Ruscelli's original book, attributed to 'various authors.'<sup>46</sup> Legend has it that Jarry, as a tribute to Baudelaire, actually did paint his hair green once.<sup>47</sup>

Whereas the recipes might be partly chosen for their references to Jarry's biography, the collage of these recipes has more interesting effects. They obviously satirize popular tradition, but the attention with which they were copied also suggests a fascination Jarry and his collaborators shared for popular culture in general and for these odd texts in particular.

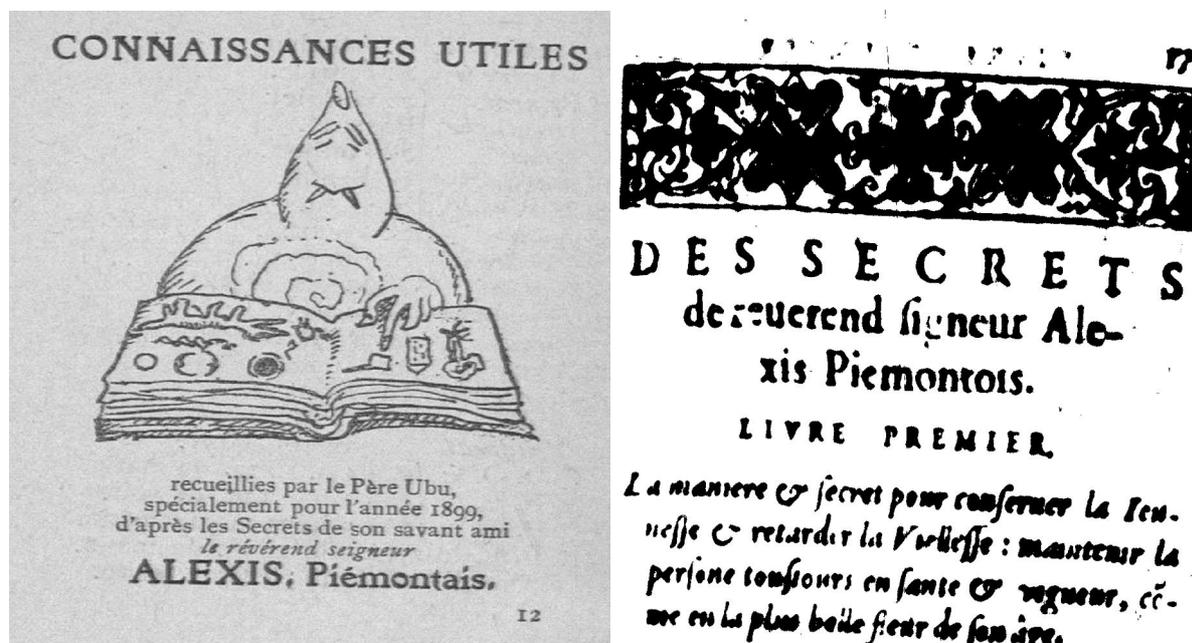


Figure 4: Recipies Almanac 1899 and an excerpt from Ruscelli (1564)

<sup>45</sup> In real life Jarry also had a tendency to turn his personal problems into literature. In a letter to Rachilde for example Jarry related 'Père Ubu's' visit to the dentist under the title 'journal dentaire du Père Ubu', OC III, pp. 591/92.

<sup>46</sup> As is revealed in *Les Secrets de Alexis Piémontais* from 1588, Microfilm BnF, établi sur l'édition de Rouen, 1588, chez Thomas Mallard, près le Palais, à l'Homme armé. See Béhar, Dubbelboer, Morel, 'Commentaires pour servir à la lecture de l'Almanach du Père Ubu illustré', note to p.13.

<sup>47</sup> According to an anecdote told by Franc-Nohain, Jarry painted his hair green one day to attract attention. Unfortunately, when he walked into a café, everyone (warned in advance) pretended not to notice it. Arnaud, *Alfred Jarry. D'Ubu Roi au docteur Faustroll*, p. 430.

*Pour affiner l'or avec les salamandres.*  
 Prends deux liures d'airain limé, vn pot de  
 lait de cheure, neuf salamandres, mets le  
 tout en vn pot large par dessous, & estroit  
 par haut, couures-le de sa couverture bien  
 serrée laquelle ayt vn trou au dessus, fouis-  
 se le pot en terre humide si profond q̄ le des-  
 sus de la couverture ou est le trou paroisse  
 seulement, à fin q̄ les salamandres puissent a-  
 uoir air & qu'elles ne meurent point. Laisse  
 le ainsi iusques au septième iour après midy.  
 Tirez alors vostre pot dehors, vous trouue-  
 rez avec les salamandres contraintes de faim  
 auront mangé l'airain, & la grande force du  
 FFF ij

*Pour affiner l'or avec les salamandres.*  
 Prends deux livres d'airain limé, un pot  
 de lait de chèvre, neuf salamandres, mets le  
 tout en un pot large par dessous et étroit  
 par en haut, couvre-le de sa couverture bien  
 serrante, laquelle ait un trou au-dessus,  
 fouissez le pot en terre humide si profond  
 que le dessus de la couverture où sont les  
 trous paroisse seulement, afin que les sa-  
 lamandres puissent avoir air et ne meurent  
 point. Laisse-le ainsi jusqu'au septième  
 jour après-midi. Tirez alors votre pot  
 dehors, vous trouverez que les salaman-  
 dres contraintes de faim auront mangé  
 l'airain, et la grande force du venin contraint  
 le cuivre se tourner en or. Fais puis après

Figure 5 Les Secret d'Alexis Piémontais and Almanach du Père Ubu

There is however another more important effect. Even though Père Ubu explicitly mentions his debt to the work of 'his friend' Ruscelli, the uninformed reader might nevertheless wonder about the exact origins of these four recipes. For someone unfamiliar with Ruscelli's book or with Jarry's biography, these recipes inserted by Ubu might appear utterly random and fictional. At best they might cast doubts about the originality of all the other texts in the Almanacs. The collage thus blurs the distinction between the authentic texts and these borrowed texts and authorship of the texts is rendered uncertain.

The fictitious author of the Almanac, Père Ubu, takes on the role of the medieval *compiler* in this segment. He merely recycles and compiles the texts, in line with the tradition of popular almanacs. However set in Jarry's contemporary literary context, such an author-role has more profound implications. As such the collage questions both a concept of originality and rethinks the function of the author, much in the same way the collaborative authorship of the Almanacs did. The originality of the texts is made less important; they need not be the unique creation of a singular individual, they can be copied, borrowed to function in a new context. Instead the collage favours a concept of the endless repetition and recycling of texts. Furthermore the author is no longer a singular creator of unique material, but receives as *bricoleur*, someone who carefully selects both authentic and non-authentic material.

#### 4.2.2.3 Auto-collage and recycling

Another example of the collage of ready-made material can be found in the section 'Nécrologie'. A traditional almanac function, of keeping track of important current events, is respected by this obituary announcing the death of Mallarmé. Mallarmé died in Valvins on 9 September 1898 and was buried at the cemetery near Samoreau on the 11<sup>th</sup>. Jarry attended his funeral. Many obituaries for Mallarmé of course appeared at the time, such as the one from *Le Temps* (see Fig. 7). Ubu's Almanac equally commemorates

this poet, and mentor to Jarry. The text (see Figure 6) begins and ends with a thick, black line, common for regular newspaper obituaries.

The obituary starts with quotation marks. The first line reads: 'L'île de Ptyx est d'un seul bloc de la pierre de ce nom...' The unsuspecting reader might think he is dealing with a quote from Mallarmé's poetry, since this entire fragment is written in a style reminiscent of Mallarmé.

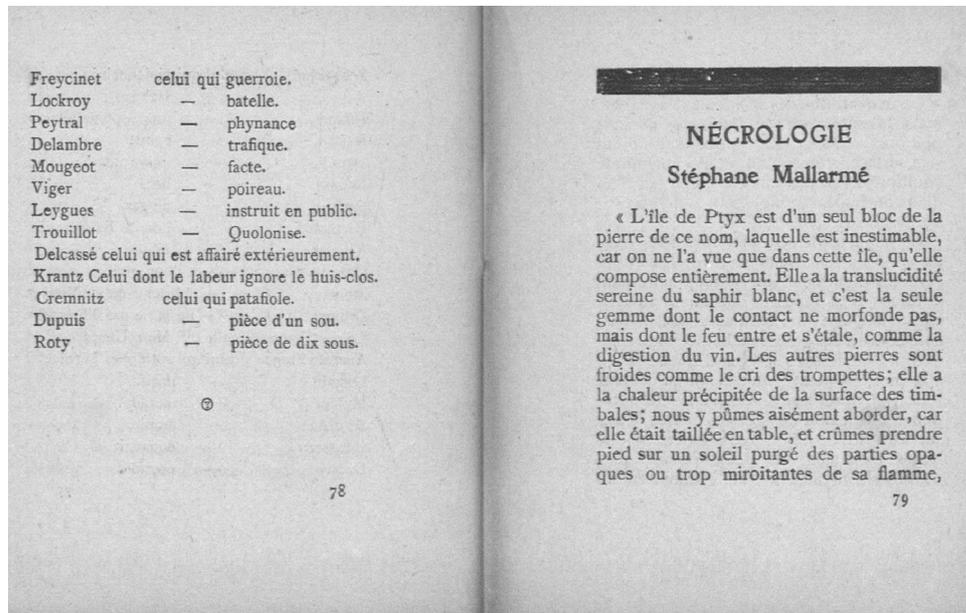


Figure 6: Obituary for Mallarmé on page 79, on page 78 the end of the list of names, Almanac 1899



Figure 7 Obituary for Mallarmé, *Le Temps*, 11 September 1898

However, the quoted text was written by Jarry himself. It is an excerpt from *Gestes et Opinions du Docteur Faustroll*, posthumously published in 1911, but written mostly in 1898. 'De l'île de Ptyx' is the title of chapter XIX in book III, dedicated to Mallarmé. The chapter quoted here in the Almanac is a prose poem which, through the image of the island of Ptyx (a nice metaphor for Mallarmé's hermetic poetry and status in the literary world), evokes Mallarmé's work. The word 'Ptyx' comes directly from Mallarmé's vocabulary and brings to mind his famous poem 'Sonnet en -yx' and the pseudonym, Yx, which he used for some of his journalism. The style employed by Jarry also evokes Mallarmé's work and the text contains references to Mallarmé's Tuesday salons. Mallarmé is described as the lord of the Island of Ptyx, welcoming his guests: 'Le seigneur de l'île vint vers nous dans un vaisseau [...]sa chaise à bascule hochait ses gestes de bienvenue.'<sup>48</sup> Sitting in his rocking chair, smoking his pipe, Mallarmé appears in the pose characteristic of how he received his guests at his salon.

When reading further, the previously unsuspecting reader is now quickly and explicitly made aware of the fact that this is a quotation from Jarry's text. After the quotation, the title of Jarry's novel is mentioned between brackets and, after the quote from *Faustroll*, Mallarmé himself now appears in the text:

...le vaisseau clair et mécanique recula vers l'horizon de l'île son haleine bleutée,  
et la chaise hochante qui saluait adieu. »  
(*Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll*,  
pataphysicien. De Paris à Paris par mer.)

Mallarmé se réjouit de lire le périple et se leva une dernière fois, la main vers le docteur, du fauteuil à bascule dans le décor de suggestive beauté.<sup>49</sup>

This first line does not belong to the quotation from *Faustroll*, but it is a citation nonetheless. It is a (slightly altered) auto-collage from one of the last letters Mallarmé ever wrote, addressed to Jarry. Jarry had sent him excerpts of *Faustroll* and on May 16<sup>th</sup> 1898 Mallarmé answered with a flattering letter, praising Jarry's texts and comparing him to Rabelais:

Mon cher Jarry,  
La suite des estampes est surprenante-, du Rabelais, dira-t-on, mais ce que ce divin eût écrit originellement tout à l'heure : je ne me suis jamais, moi, sur un décor de plus significative beauté, levé du fauteuil basculant que, cette fois, pour vous presser la main.

S.M.<sup>50</sup>

In Jarry's rephrasing of the letter, Mallarmé's final act before his death was to get up from his chair, offering his hand to the doctor (doctor Faustroll), as if to confirm his approval and to pass over an imaginary torch to Faustroll/Jarry. There is a hint of self-promotion here, but this is not that

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<sup>48</sup> OC I, p. 564.

<sup>49</sup> OC I, p. 565.

<sup>50</sup> Mallarmé, *Correspondance X Novembre 1897-Septembre 1898*, pp. 190/91.

odd, as such self-promotion pops up again in Ubu's Almanacs. Through the quote from Mallarmé's letter to Jarry, Jarry's work receives a sign of approval from the prince of poets himself. The rest of the 'obituary' evokes the burial at Samoreau attended by Faustroll. Jarry had been at Mallarmé's funeral, very distressed according to an eye-witness, and wearing an inappropriate casual outfit and shoes he had borrowed from Rachilde at the last minute.<sup>51</sup> This might explain why, in the text, Faustroll 'redescendit à l'automne, pieds nus sur la route, vers les arches de Valvins.'<sup>52</sup>

The collage of the chapter from *Faustroll* (already an ode to Mallarmé) and the quotation from Mallarmé's letter function primarily as a personal and moving homage to the poet, who had supported Jarry from early on. Instead of writing a generic obituary, such as the one in *Le Temps*, Jarry allows Mallarmé to speak through his own letter. Jarry expresses his sentiments and evokes Mallarmé's poetry through citing his own text from *Faustroll*. The poetic and serious tone of this section is radically different from the tone of the other texts in the Almanac. Furthermore the more serious, scholarly *Faustroll* is the protagonist here and not the 'idiot' Ubu which further emphasizes the singularity of this text. The segment evokes Jarry's personal memories of Mallarmé and his funeral, not through a conventional narrative or in a personal style one would perhaps expect from an obituary, but through a collage of texts, from Jarry's own work and Mallarmé's own letter.

#### 4.2.2.4 *An encyclopaedic text and the 'sign' of Pisces*

The use of pre-existent material in the collage text does not always have to be very visible or explicit. As said in the introduction, the rupture on the level of coherence which takes place in a collage work can also take place on the level of style and syntax. This is the case in 'L'Agronome citadin', in the February section, where a sudden rupture in style triggers the by now suspicious reader to think that this might be a 'foreign' fragment; one that is not completely integrated in its new context. Here the reader stumbles upon a pseudo-extraneous text, a paragraph seemingly drawn straight from an encyclopaedia. To understand the position of this encyclopaedic-like paragraph, one must first take a look at the whole text and how the collage writing works here. At first glance the February text seems to wander off in various random directions, with bits and pieces of texts and (seemingly incomprehensible) associations, not allowing the reader to discover any coherence or meaning. However this small textual collage does turn out to have a, carefully constructed, intrinsic logic. Thus this text offers two perspectives on the collage. Alongside the heterogeneous and the associative effect the text produces, which complicates the reader's interpretation, one can also discern various and simultaneous layers of meaning.

The February text starts with a paragraph narrated in the (royal) first person plural by Ubu:

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<sup>51</sup> 'De tous ceux qui s'affligeaient, personne ne m'a paru plus atteint que Jarry. Il semblait abîmé. La seule tenue d'été, ou de sport, qu'il avait trouvée, ou dont il disposât, ne l'avait pas arrêté. J'en ai vu se détourner pour rire. En 1898, elle pouvait choquer à un enterrement. Encore ignorait-on que ses souliers de bicyclette, jaune paille, il les avait, au dernier moment, empruntés à Mme Rachilde. [...] Dans le visage assez mat, un peu contracté, de Jarry, ses yeux noirs étaient secs. Aucun visage en larmes n'exprimait plus d'affliction', Thadée Natanson, *La Revue blanche*, n° 128, 1 October, 1898.

<sup>52</sup> OC I, p. 565.

Février

Sous le signe des Poissons. Errant un jour (le 30 février prochain) en notre tempomobile par les rues, nous partîmes des hauteurs de Montmartre, et comme un fulgurant météore notre gidouille avançait d'un pas majestueux et lent. Semblable à une sphère roulante, nous dévalâmes la rue Lepic, la rue Blanche vers la Trinité, où les cloches conviaient les fidèles par l'ouverture des portes au moyen des grandes orgues Alexandre Guilmant, suivîmes la rue Laffitte ; la rue de Richelieu, le pont des Arts.<sup>53</sup>

On an imaginary day in the future, February 30th (also the day of Père Ubu's partial eclipse), Ubu thus sets off on his 'tempomobile' to travel through the streets of Paris. The oxymoron of the title 'l'Agronome citadin' translates here into Ubu's account of his activities in the city of Paris and in the surrounding countryside later on the text. The future is predicted, not through astrology, as in a real almanac, but by way of Ubu's tempomobile. In Homeric fashion Ubu relates his own 'epic' journey through the city. Ubu's descent from Montmartre to the left bank, when visualized on a map of Paris, literally gives the impression of a 'fulgurant météore', tumbling down from the north (Montmartre) to the south (Quartier Latin/St Germain) of the city.<sup>54</sup> This description of Ubu travelling through both space and time conveys again a preoccupation with time and mastering time already visible in the previously discussed collage of numbers and dates. Ubu and his tempomobile transcend the boundaries of time and space.

The phrase 'sous le signe des Poissons' (under the sign of Pisces) at the beginning is all telling. As was the case with the March text, the word 'sign' must again be understood in its broader semiotic sense. Pisces does not just guide the month of February as a zodiac sign, it can also be read as a semiotic sign which triggers associations in the text and guides the narrative. Various 'thematic threads' are associated with each other and with the sign of Pisces. They can be discerned in this short, but dense text, most notably: text-image, biographical references, literary and artistic references and allusions to contemporary politics.

### *Text and Image*

The relationship between text and image is explored in this text through the constant play with both the textual and visual capacities of the sign of Pisces. On his majestic simultaneously fast and slow ride through the city Ubu suddenly comes to a halt on the Pont des Arts when he sees:

'...non pas un rassemblement, c'étaient des passants qui passaient, sans s'arrêter, mais peut-être se seraient-ils arrêtés sans l'intervention possible d'un sergent de ville, il n'y avait pas de sergent de ville, mais il aurait pu venir un sergent de ville, même deux sergents de ville, voire une brigade centrale de

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<sup>53</sup> OC I, p. 539.

<sup>54</sup> This analogy between Ubu and a 'fulgurant météore' is also made in *César-Antechrist*, 'Acte Héraldique', OC I, p. 293, 'Gestes érotiques', OC I, p. 520 and *Visions actuelles et futures*, OC I, p. 337.

sergents de ville, et nous nous sentîmes attirés vers la contemplation de l'eau. Et non sans raison, jugez-en.<sup>55</sup>

The word 'rassemblement' operates as a clue for the polysemic and phonetic wordplay that follows. The passing passers-by do not stop, but they could have been stopped (in the sense of arrested) without the 'possible intervention' of a 'sergent de ville'. There could have been a 'sergent de ville' and his presence here is not just guided by the one meaning of the word 'arrêter', but also evoked by the 'signe des Poissons'. In Émile Zola's novel *L'Assommoir* (1877) the character Poissons becomes a policeman. Zola's name is also mentioned further down in the February text, perhaps as an extra clue, which leads the reader to believe that this sudden intervention of a policeman is not entirely coincidental. The 'sergent de ville', related to 'Poissons' is the reason why Ubu feels the sudden need to contemplate the water.<sup>56</sup> The story is thus guided by the polysemic associations of this text. All the various referents of one sign are constantly explored, in which one sign evokes this referent which then evokes yet another sign. The association constantly jumps between figurative and literal meaning or between phonetic or visual resemblance. Such a visual association is made for example in the following fragment.

If the relationship between this fragment and the Pisces sign was not yet clear, the next fragment steers the reader towards a more concrete visual image of the fish, in which bits and pieces (literally) come together in a bizarre and humorist and at first abstract description of a limbless creature in the water:

Un être était immergé [...] sans souci d'aucune pudeur, il était entièrement nu, sans paralysie causée par le froid de saison ; sans l'aide de membres artificiels, car il n'avait ni bras ni jambes, il nageait ma foi très bien, un poisson, quoi !<sup>57</sup>

From Ubu contemplating the water, the reader is taken through the abstract image of a limbless creature, to a more concrete and gruesome image of a drowned person ('noyé') and back again to the image of a 'fish'. Then the narrative becomes even more specific, concentrating on a particular species of fish: the 'barbillon', the barb, also known as 'barbeau', which could be found in the Seine. It is here that we find the insertion of the encyclopaedic-like fragment:

Or le barbillon est un beau poisson, couvert d'écailles fines qu'à sérieux examen on reconnaît en toile métallique ; son nom lui vient de ses amples moustaches moscovites, dont il fuit. Son corps très dense supporte aisément les pressions des grands fonds d'eau où il se plait. On le découvre dans les eaux claires comme un plat d'argent qui vit sur le sable. Il ne boit que de l'eau, mais il est souvent victime de son goût immodéré pour le fromage de gruyère.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> OC I, p. 539.

<sup>56</sup> Jarry would also write one of his 'Spéculations' about the 'sergent de ville', entitled 'La cervelle du sergent de ville', *La Revue Blanche*, 15 février 1901, OC II, p. 277.

<sup>57</sup> OC I, p. 539.

<sup>58</sup> OC I, p. 539.

The matter of fact, descriptive tone constitutes a stylistic rupture with the previous fragments. It might suggest that this is a piece of encyclopaedic information was taken straight from a dictionary, encyclopaedia or fishing manual. Some of the sentences can indeed be traced back directly to the descriptions of this fish found in encyclopaedias. Although slightly altered, this paragraph consists of largely borrowed sentences. Bonnard's illustrative drawing of the barb (see Fig. 9 below) also seems to mimic the illustrations accompanying encyclopaedic entries for the 'barbillon', such as for example the one in the *Nouveau Larousse illustré* from this period (Fig. 8).<sup>59</sup>

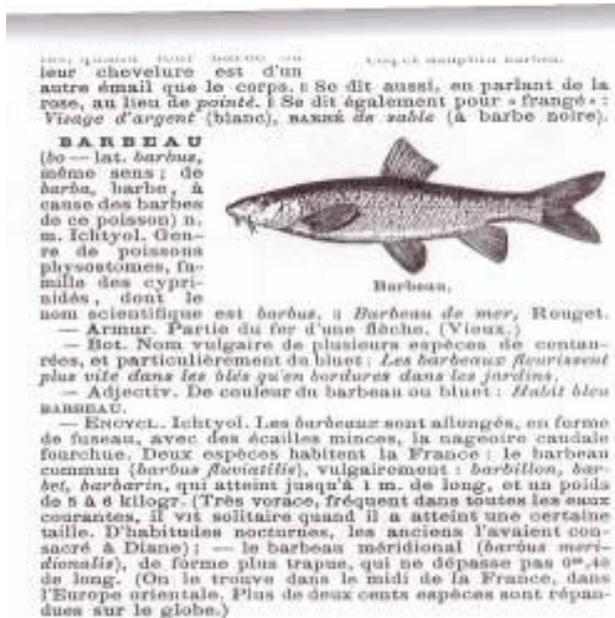


Figure 8 'Barbeau' *Nouveau Larousse illustré*, 1898.

The narrative is thus suddenly disrupted by an extraneous text. The rupture in style and tone suggest that the strange element is not completely integrated into its new context. Whereas the encyclopaedic fragment is fitted into the text (typographically or otherwise visually it does not stand out), the fragment achieves all the effects of collage through its stylistic rupture with the rest of the text.

The insertion of this fragment could stem on one hand from the authors' desire to mimic the traditional, encyclopaedic function of a popular almanac, providing 'practical' information and knowledge. There is an obvious irony in recycling the banal clichés of the description of the barb. On the other hand, and more importantly, it reveals Jarry's way of writing. Jarry often used encyclopaedic information which he would insert directly in his writings. In a letter to Vallette in the spring of 1898 he asked Vallette to provide him with two lines from Larousse he wanted to copy in the text of *Faustroll*.<sup>60</sup> Jarry

<sup>59</sup> Augé, ed., *Nouveau Larousse illustré: dictionnaire universel encyclopédique*.

<sup>60</sup> 'En outre, vous serait-il loisible de nous fournir un renseignement fort utile à notre *Faustroll* que nous venons de recopier. Il existe dans le dictionnaire Larousse, au mot *Haha*, deux vers de Piron, qui sont cités et qu'il nous embête de faire le voyage de Paris pour rechercher dans une bibliothèque', OC I, p. 1064.

would gather snippets of information, texts, images he found in books or other sources and paste them into his work. Instead of describing the barb in the Almanac a piece of encyclopaedic-like text is inserted as a substitute for more conventional story telling.

The 'barb' paragraph ends with the word 'gruyère' with which the barb can be captured (an actual fact according to fishing manuals) and this word starts off a similar (and ironic) encyclopaedic-like paragraph about the fascinating specifics of making another cheese, Emmenthal.<sup>61</sup> Again the last sentence of this 'cheese' paragraph ('On dirait de vastes quartiers de lard.') functions as a trigger for the following segment. Jarry's ideal of words as infinite 'polyèdres', opening up a new path in every direction, is truly put into practice. The word 'lard' is part of the name of one of Jarry's (literary) friends. Therefore the following paragraph opens with 'M. Pierre Quillard est l'un de nos plus grands poètes.' 'Lard' can also be read as a homonym for 'l'art'. Together with the word 'vers' ('L'Emmenthal est jaune, sans trous, sans vers.') in the previous sentence, they also seem to announce the presence of poet and art-critic Quillard in the text.

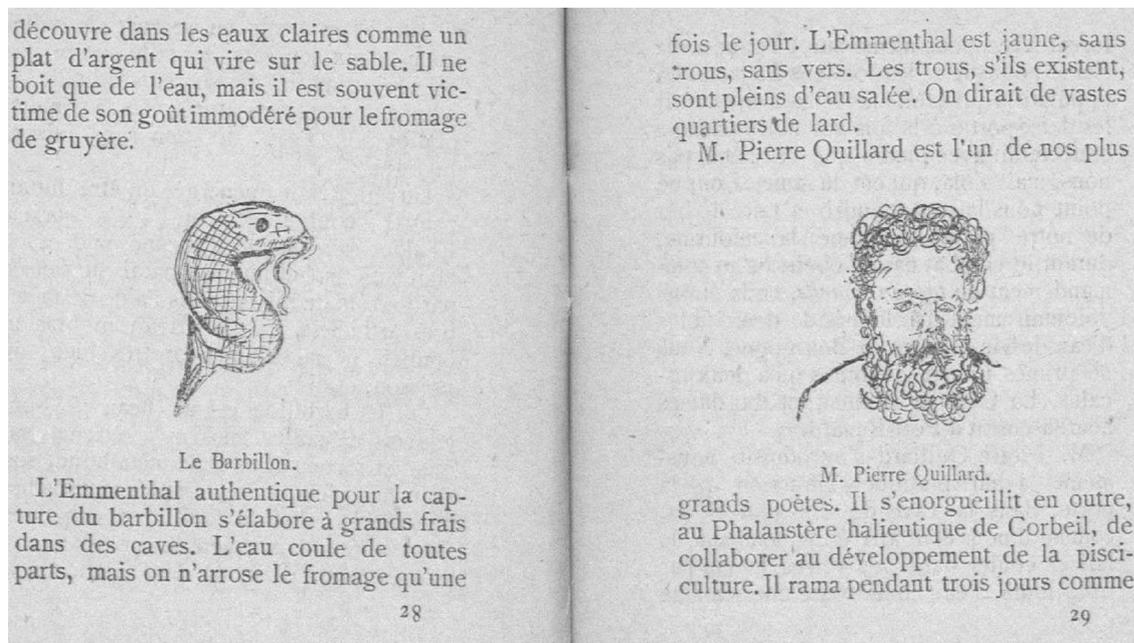


Figure 9 : Le barbillon and Pierre Quillard, Almanac 1899.

Furthermore Quillard's presence is justified by his link to the Pisces sign and more specifically to the barb. Quillard is linked to this fish by visual resemblance, thanks to his distinctive beard. Insiders knew that Quillard was often nicknamed 'Barbeau' by his friends. If this is not yet clear to the reader, Bonnard's sketch of the bearded Quillard, right beside that of the

<sup>61</sup> In an article about fishing Jarry also writes about capturing the illustrious barb with gruyère cheese: 'Que s'il vous est arrivé de mettre à mal, le séduisant au moyen de gruyère préalablement compissé par une jeune vierge, le gros barbeau de quatre à sept livres, vous aurez été ébahi, peut-être, des objurgations et jurons malsonnants que la bête éructe hors de sa barbiche', *La Pêche à l'Amiral*, *Le Canard Sauvage*, 4-10 octobre 1903, OC II, p. 521.

barb on the previous page, reinforces the visual association between the two (Fig. 9).

### *Biographical references*

Another semantic thread in this short text is a biographical one. Both the barb and Quillard appear in the text due to their personal connections with Jarry. Throughout the text, the Pisces sign allows Jarry to relate parts of his personal life. Jarry had already warned Quillard that he had confounded him with the barb. Quillard is therefore also connected to the Pisces sign because of his status as Jarry's fishing companion (and drinking buddy) and his contribution to the development of 'pisciculture' at the Phalanstère.

Ubu's journey through Paris at the beginning of the February text can equally be read as a thinly disguised personal account of Jarry's own bicycle route from Montmartre, home to Claude Terrasse for example, to the left bank, where Jarry's apartment was situated. In Ubu's further explorations as a 'paysan de Paris' the reader can see a mirror image of Jarry in 1898, literally travelling back and forth between Paris and Corbeil. In fact both in his life and his work Jarry had a tendency to transform the most trivial details of his own biography into facts of mythic proportions. All of Jarry's apartments received legendary names, such as the Chasublerie de Saint-Sulpice (his tiny apartment at 7, rue Cassette), and in the Almanac his bicycle tours and fishing trips became epic (Ubu) adventures. These references would of course only be obvious to Jarry's inner circle. The Pisces sign allowed Jarry to relate the (happy) memories of the country-life he enjoyed at the Phalanstère with Quillard and the other *compagnons*, to explore his knowledge of the barb and his love for fishing. Jarry had already expressed his love for fishing in the play 'l'Ouverture de la pêche', about a family who enjoys fishing, in 1888 when he was only fifteen. As an adult his passion for fishing showed for example in his review of Gaston Lecouffe's *Code-manuel du pêcheur et Code-manuel du chasseur*.<sup>62</sup> He also planned writing a fishing manual as he announced in his article 'La pêche à l'amiral'.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore Jarry once wrote to Vallette that Père Ubu was a respected member of the 'Société des pêcheurs à la ligne'.<sup>64</sup>

The 'barbillon', a large and fat fish found in the depths of the Seine, was Jarry's favourite. He prided himself in being able to capture it with cheese. For the members of the Phalanstère and others in Jarry's circle, Jarry's special bond with this fish became legend.<sup>65</sup> In letters Jarry sometimes refers to the barb as Monsieur, 'Fourneau' or, when he had caught a small representative of the species, as 'celui qui petit barbillon':

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<sup>62</sup> *La Revue Blanche*, 15 September, 1900, OC II, p.585.

<sup>63</sup> OC II, p. 521.

<sup>64</sup> 'Père Ubu : ancien roi de Pologne et d'Aragon, membre de la Société des pêcheurs à la ligne de Corbeil', Jarry to Alfred Vallette, March 1902, OC III, p.561.

<sup>65</sup> It led to some pittoresk, but often hard to believe anecdotes. Writer Lucie Delarue-Mardrus for example 'remembers' how Jarry ate the barb raw and straight from the water. 'Invité, comme plusieurs autres convives, à déjeuner à la campagne chez le père du père Ubu, toute la bande et Mirbeau trouvèrent le couvert mis sur un établi. Les assiettes étaient des ronds découpés dans du papier. Au centre, sur une feuille de chou, s'allongeait, pour tout repas, un barbillon cru ; car Jarry, qui pêchait beaucoup à la ligne, avait l'habitude de manger le poisson à sa sortie de l'eau, sans même arracher l'hameçon.' Lucie Delarue-Mardrus, *Mes Mémoires* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), p. 141.

'Malgré nos nombreux travaux, nous pêchons honorablement de dix heures à midi. Et avons capturé ce matin divers poissons, dont le gros gardon et celui qui petit barbillion d'un quart environ. C'est un animal presque comparable à celui qui dindon, quoique moins mélodieux, et dont les écailles sont semblables à de la toile métallique.'<sup>66</sup>

In Ubu-like manner Jarry compares the barb (in this case 'celui qui petit barbillion') to a turkey (or 'celui qui dindon'). The last line of Jarry's description in this letter to Vallette re-appears, straight from a fisherman's handbook, in the Almanac. The tone of the letter is also similar to the tone in the February text, showing that the boundaries between Jarry's life and his literary works were sometimes very thin.

Considering Jarry's predilection for polysemy, the choice of words in the previous description of the limbless creature could also be read on a biographical level. In this particular fragment several words hint at his financial situation. Apart from a description of a strange creature (limbless body, fish) in the water, it is figuratively an image of someone keeping his head above the water. The word 'engloutissement' is also used sometimes to refer to the disappearance of capital. Furthermore Jarry replaces the normal expression 'surface de l'eau' by 'surface liquide'. Knowing that 'surface' also means financial credibility and 'liquide' can signify cash flow, one can easily read this description as a metaphor for Jarry's financial problems.<sup>67</sup>

The rest of the February text continues with an account of Ubu's (Jarry's) and Quillard's fishing trip and traces their route from Corbeil along the Seine and Yonne. ('Il rama pendant trois jours comme forçat avec nous-même sur l'Yonne et la Seine pour suivre les poisons frayants.'). The names of La Cave, Vinneuf et Port-Renard all refer to small villages along the river. There are also other references to the Phalanstère. The name of the village La Cave for example triggers the following paragraph about quite a different 'cave':

M. Pierre Quillard s'introduisit, nous-mêmes, ayant pratiqué l'effraction de la porte, dans la cave des Emmenthal et, comme il nous était arrivé fréquemment de laisser couler dans nos verres le vin par trois jours, l'eau coula toute une semaine et s'éleva jusqu'aux voûtes, ouvrant le chemin à des bancs de barbillons monstrueux venus pour dévorer l'Emmenthal.<sup>68</sup>

In his letters, Jarry mentions the 'cave' at the house in Corbeil where the wine and food was stored. In his letter to Quillard, Jarry (who was in charge of the stocks in the cellar when the others were absent) gave him the 'mot de la Cave', the secret code for the lock, QQQQ. The phrase 'de laisser couler dans nos verres le vin par trois jours' is an obvious reference to the drinking habits of Jarry and the other Phalanstère members, and perhaps a reason for neglecting to see that water had reached an alarming level. As said, Jarry

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<sup>66</sup> Jarry to Alfred Vallette, November 1898, OC I, p.1068.

<sup>67</sup> In November 1896 Jarry had bought a state of the art racing bicycle on credit, but he never paid off his debt. Throughout the year 1897 he was pursued by letters from bailiffs from Laval urging him to pay. First of all there was a Monsieur Trochon, (immortalized in *Faustroll* as 'Trocon') and then a Maître Brioux, with whom in 1897 and 1898 Jarry corresponded frequently on the subject of his payments. Jarry sold his furniture and was forced to leave his house at 78, boulevard de Port-Royal. He stayed with painter Rousseau, before moving into the apartment at the rue Cassette in 1897.

<sup>68</sup> OC I, p. 541.

turned many aspects of his life into literature. Thus Ubu and Quillard's quest for fish is narrated in a legendary fashion, in terms that suggest a Homeric epos rather than a simple fishing trip. In real life, the cellar at the Phalanstère was prone to some occasional flooding caused by the river. However in Ubu's Almanac this flooding is transformed into a nightmarish, hallucinatory image of monstrous herds of fish invading the cellar to devour the cheese.

#### *References to art and literature*

Ubu's journey through Montmartre, as well as the rest of the February text, also contains references to Jarry's artistic and literary context. Several names, places, but also less obvious words belong to a semantic field that conveys this particular thematic layer in the text.

Père Ubu first passes along the rue Lepic, the rue Blanche and the Trinité church, with the 'grandes orgues Alexandre Guilmant.' Alexandre Guilmant (1837-1911) was its resident organist.<sup>69</sup> Claude Terrasse was of course also employed as an organist at this church and his house and the Théâtre des Pantins were situated in the rue Ballu, close to the rue Blanche. The *Chat Noir* and Lugné-Poe's office of the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre were also in the vicinity. Ubu then speeds to the rue Laffitte, home to many art galleries, among which that of Ambroise Vollard. Thus Ubu's journey through Montmartre reflects Jarry's inner circle and the artistic context in which the first Almanac was written.

It is perhaps not a coincidence that Ubu, after he comes to a halt on the Pont des Arts, that he witnesses the (rather gruesome) image of a limbless creature in the river Seine, which is described in very poetic terms. As said, the words 'vers' and the 'quartiers de lard' (quartiers de l'art) conjure up poet and art critic Quillard and might generally refer to the artistic community of the Phalanstère. Quillard's contribution to the 'pisciculture' can also be read in a different way. Jarry chose his words carefully and the word's (convenient) double reference to both fishing and culture in relation to Quillard could have inspired him to use it. Quillard had written one of the first Symbolist plays ever to be staged, *La fille aux mains coupées*, and he had written a Symbolist theatrical 'manifest', 'De l'inutilité de la mise en scène exacte', published in *Revue d'art dramatique*, May 1891. This manifest was of great influence on Jarry's theatrical ideas in his essay 'De l'inutilité du théâtre au théâtre'. Pierre Quillard was one of Symbolism's prominent theoreticians and this text is a witty homage to his status as Jarry's friend and his literary reputation.

The, partly archaic, naval terms ('ramer', 'forçat', 'chiourme', 'périple', 'escale', " tap-en-bouche' ) used to describe Quillard and Ubu's fishing adventure are also striking. Apart from giving an epic Homeric feel to their quest for the barb, these terms also evokes the story of *Ubu enchaîné*, in which Père Ubu is condemned to become a slave on a galley. Jarry finished writing this sequel to *Ubu Roi* in 1899 (it was published in 1900 by La Revue Blanche). In other texts of the Almanac similar references to Jarry's artistic

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<sup>69</sup> See appendix.

context, his literary contemporaries (friends and enemies), and his own work pop up, some more explicitly, others more hidden.

### *Political references*

There is also a fourth, less obvious thread in this short text, namely the political one. Quillard, while rowing the boat with Ubu, triggers the unexpected mention of Zola. When they approach a lock the 'population qui habite les écluses en ouvrait les deux portes à la fois sur notre passage et déclarait avec pleurs que ce n'était pas nous, mais Zola, qui eût dû ramer.'<sup>70</sup> This sentence appears to be a veiled reference to Quillard's and Zola's role in the Dreyfus Affair. Quillard was an ardent defender of Dreyfus. He had published articles on the case and had joined the newly founded 'Ligue des Droits de l'Homme' in 1898. Quillard publicly spoke out in defence of Zola, when the latter was convicted and exiled to England after the publication of *J'accuse*. The phrase in the Almanac suggests that, in the absence of Zola, it is now left to Quillard (and Ubu) to do the rowing, hence to fight his battle.

Political and social references are hidden in the wordplay of the text, a procedure we already saw in the March text. At the end of the February text there is a return to the previous association between 'sergent de ville' and fish, when Ubu and Quillard's idyllic fishing trip ends with them being pursued by the fishing guard and a 'gendarme'.

Le gendarme est un être redoutable, non par ses attributions légales, mais parce qu'il est impur. Nous ne rééditerons point les plaisanteries classiques, injustes d'ailleurs, sur son parfum. Nous connûmes un gendarme cul-de-jatte. Le relent nauséabond est, croyons-nous, sauf votre respect, celui de la Loi. Sous le signe des Poissons, il est utilisable en halieutique, comme amorce de tous poissons de rivière.<sup>71</sup>

The 'gendarme cul-de-jatte' brings back to mind the limbless creature in the water we met before. The pun on 'gendarme', who is depicted as an impure creature with a nauseating odour (the word 'gendarme' also meaning herring in French) allows Jarry to link this figure to fish and to state that the Law, and people's respect for it, smell equally unpleasant. As was the case with March, the sign of Pisces lets Jarry make a satirical reference to a pillar of French society, in this case the Law. The 'gendarme' was a favourite 'target' for Jarry. A similar link between fishing and the 'gendarme' is made in *L'Amour absolu*.<sup>72</sup> In Ubu's Almanac the reader learns that the 'gendarme' can also be used as fish bait, conveniently leaving in the middle whether that applies to the herring or to the police officer, or to both. In the last sentence of the February text all associations come together (sign, Pisces, fish, policeman) and the phrase 'sous le signe des Poissons' provides the reader with yet another clue regarding the associations made around this 'sign.'

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<sup>70</sup> OC I, p. 540.

<sup>71</sup> OC I, p. 541.

<sup>72</sup> See Jarry's articles 'Psychologie expérimentale du gendarme' and 'Appendice au "gendarme"', *La Revue blanche*, 1 September and 15 September, 1901, OC II, pp. 313-316. In *L'Amour absolu* one reads: 'Le soleil est couché réglementairement, le pêcheur à la ligne, de par le gendarme, rétracte ses tentacules', OC I, p.919.

First of all this 'play with the sign' shows the arbitrariness of signifiers when put in a different context. On one hand, it might seem as if 'it leaves the reader free to experience his own subjective response to the signs', as some scholars have argued with regard to visual collage.<sup>73</sup> However in the Almanac collage text we see that the author, who makes deliberate associations between signs, whether on a semantic, a phonetic, or even a visual level, uses this as a compositional tool for the text, and to manipulate the reader's response. The collage of encyclopaedic-like fragments introduces and triggers the rest of the more personal story of the fishing trip. However every time an object, name or thing appears in the text, it is not described in a traditional sense, but by an ironic, pseudo ready-made informational text. Consequently the reader is left lingering between the abstract and the concrete, between a narrative relating Ubu's adventures, personal references to Jarry and his circle (only available to insiders) and impersonal, encyclopaedic-like fragments.

Jarry's method of writing appears to involve careful composition, pasting together fragments of texts (and images). The narrative is no longer held together by a story or a conventional plot, but by the signifier. A word or a sign and its referents trigger by association the next line or paragraph. On the one hand there is polysemy, a dissemination of meanings and free play with the sign. On the other hand the author leaves clues on how to read the text and steers the reader's interpretation. The small fragment I discussed here is in fact exemplary of the Almanacs and of most of Jarry's other texts. The collage aesthetic in the Almanac is already a novelty in itself, announcing an aesthetic which would become important in avant-garde movements, but the way Jarry uses collage is also striking. The text constantly wanders from literal to figurative meaning and back, the wordplay and the phonetic puns are used to trigger the next fragment, including the insertion of pre-existent material. The wordplay thus leads the narrative and also generates meaning.

In the other texts of the Almanac, although some are slightly less hermetic than the texts of 'l'Agronome Citadin', similar strategies of writing are put into practice; wordplay, the juxtaposition of text and image and the collage of ready-made materials. Furthermore the same layers of meaning found in this small text re-appear in the rest of the Almanac; references to Jarry's biography, to his artistic environment and to contemporary issues.

#### 4.2.2.5 Advertisements

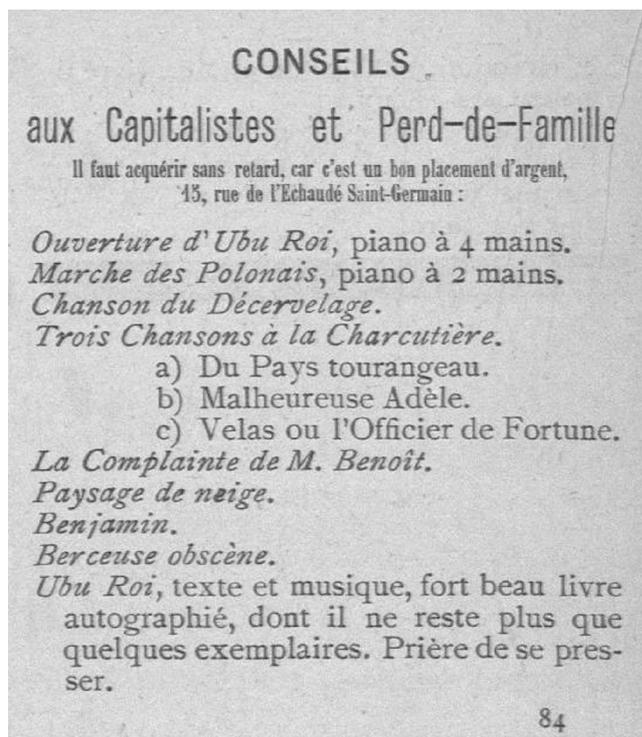
Among the use of 'ready-made' material, the use of newspaper fragments and publicity is a striking feature of many visual collages, but also of Ubu's Almanac. That being said, traditional popular Almanacs also contained advertisements and Ubu's Almanac might simply appear to abide by the

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<sup>73</sup> See for example Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Picasso Papers* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1998), p. 40, Christine Poggi, *In Defiance of Painting: Cubism, Futurism and the Invention of Collage* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 254. These scholars point to the free circulation of signs when it comes to the collage work, leaving meaning suspended and open to the beholder. But whereas one can emphasize this openness of meaning in the visual collage, one can equally stress the fact that a collage artist selects his material purposefully, both in visual art and in literature. Jarry's use of collage also shows that the author can guide the narrative this way and use the collage to attract the attention of the reader to the layers of meaning in the text.

conventions of the genre. However, like many of the other texts, the adverts in Ubu's Almanac seem to have been carefully chosen and manipulated. Some give the impression of pseudo-publicities rather than real advertisements. It seems likely that they were not merely placed in the Almanac to adhere to the conventions of the genre, or for commercial and financial purposes, but for other reasons.

One advertisement, bearing the title 'prophéties' (reminiscent of a popular, astrological almanac), announces the opening performance of Jarry and Terrasse's 'national play in five acts' *Pantagruel* at the 1900 World Exhibition in Paris. It contains a very detailed outline of the various acts and scenes of the play. Jarry and Terrasse were working on this project at the time as a play for the Théâtre des Pantins. It was an adaptation of Rabelais' famous second book to which excerpts from some of his other works were added. The irony of this 'prophecy' is obvious: this marginal, experimental play, with its sixteenth century language would hardly qualify as a 'pièce nationale' suitable for the prestigious World Fair. Furthermore it remained a never-ending project and Jarry would not live to see it performed.<sup>74</sup> The title 'prophéties' is painfully appropriate in this light.



**Figure 10: Excerpt 'Conseils aux Capitalistes et Perd-de-Famille' Almanac 1899**

<sup>74</sup> For this first version Terrasse called upon writer and critic Willy (Henri Gauthier-Villars) to help modernize the sixteenth century text. Terrasse tried to get it accepted by theatres, but without luck. Three other versions followed: a second one, again with Jarry, and a third one in collaboration with Eugène Demolder, at a time when Jarry was no longer capable of finishing anything. The final version of *Pantagruel*, finished by Terrasse, was an 'opéra-bouffe' and performed 11 times in 1911 at the Grand Théâtre de Lyon.

Another ad in the first Almanac (Fig. 10) has a similar ironic tone and is entitled 'Conseils aux Capitalistes et Perd-de-famille'. It advertises a number of recently published works by Jarry, Terrasse and Franc-Nohain, although their names, as said in the previous chapter, are never mentioned. The works were all part of the 'Collection du Répertoire des Pantins' published by the Mercure de France, most of them in 1898. Like the authors' names, the publisher's name is also not mentioned, merely its address (15, rue de l'Échaudé Saint-Germain). The first three titles listed and *Ubu Roi* are texts by Jarry for which Terrasse had written music. *Les Trois Chansons à la Charcutière* and the other titles are all poems by Franc-Nohain, also put to music by Terrasse. In addition Bonnard illustrated several of these works. The collective artistic spirit that characterized the genesis of the Almanacs clearly resonates here. Their works are advertised as a 'good investment', clearly mocking the commercial nature of such adverts. As for its use in the collage, this 'publicity' shows how pseudo ready-made material is carefully selected and inserted alongside the more 'original texts'. Thus this ad blurs the distinction between what is literary and non-literary, between authentic creation and banal advertising.

The above ads clearly suggest the contribution of the collaborators, but even more intriguing are the 'real' advertisements on the very last pages of the first Almanac. In later editions they have been omitted, probably because they were considered as mere commercial texts, hence of no literary significance. However these ads, by their tone and style, resemble the style and tone of 'Prophéties' and 'Conseil aux Capitalistes'. In fact, they also appear to have been consciously selected. Similar to 'Conseils aux Capitalistes', they advertise works people in Jarry's inner circle. Several of these artists and writers appear more than once in the Almanac, whether in Ubu's 'Homeric' list of names or elsewhere in the texts.

There is an announcement for Vollard's *Quelques aspects de la vie de Paris*, an album of lithographs by Bonnard, and for works by fellow Nabis Vuillard and Denis. There is also an ad for the Revue Blanche's publication of *Flûtes*, Franc-Nohain collection of poetry, and for the Mercure de France's editions of Jarry's works. Furthermore we find two adverts for *La Critique*, the magazine of Jarry's friend Georges Bans. Yet another ad promotes *L'Argus de la Presse*, which delivered newspaper clippings on demand. At the time of *Ubu Roi* Jarry had subscribed to this service, which delivered twenty-one reviews of the play to him the days after the premiere. Jarry had pasted these newspaper reviews in a notebook.<sup>75</sup> In one way or another, all of these advertisements stood in direct relation to Jarry, his work and his artistic circle.

Another reason to believe that these advertisements are more manipulated than they seem at first is provided by one in particular. On the bottom half of page 92 in the original edition (Fig.11) there is an ad that does not try to sell the work of Jarry's friends, but a very specific chemical product called 'poudre de sang'. This substance, drawn from cow's blood, was added to wine to filter out small particles. The address refers to an actual street of Bercy, home to numerous warehouses where barrels of wine

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<sup>75</sup> Besnier, *Alfred Jarry*, p. 276.

were stored. Whereas this might seem an odd ad among the others, the manufacturer's name, Charles Bonnard, explains a lot. Charles was Pierre Bonnard's brother. He was the director of the Théâtre des Pantins and was also mentioned as the initial vendor of the first Almanac. Again the ad is promoting someone from Jarry's inner circle. More important however is the tone of this text, which begins with the exclamation 'Commerçants, bistros, propriétaires, ivrognes'. It resembles the popular, Rabelaisian tone of other texts in the Almanac, such as that of the 'Conseils aux Capitalistes'. At first glance this advert appears real, but at second glance one gets the impression that it was also written by the authors. There is another reason to believe that the advertisements were indeed intended to be an integral part of the work. In the announcement for the first Almanac in *La Revue Blanche*, reference was made to this particular ad. Interestingly enough, it was therefore considered part of the work by whoever wrote the announcement (most likely someone well acquainted with the Almanac, if not Jarry himself).

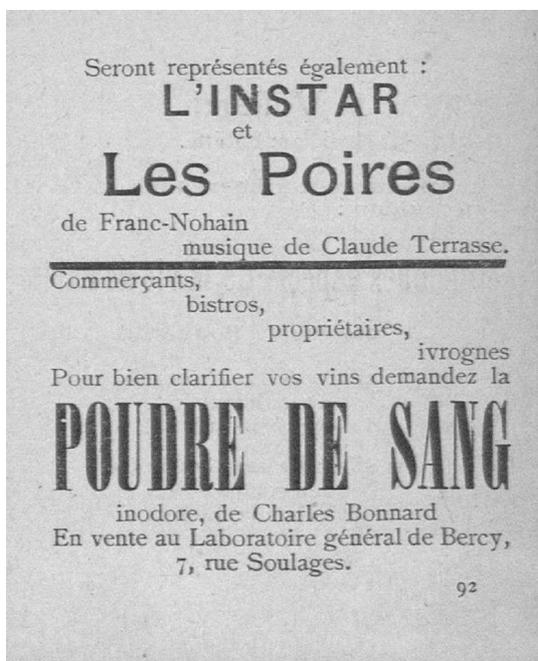


Figure 11: Two of the advertisements, original edition, Almanac 1899.

It therefore seems safe to argue that these adverts were not included solely for commercial motives or to comply with the demands of the almanac genre. The texts of course did promote the work of Jarry and his friends, but at the same time they were clearly intended to be part of the literary work as well. The effect of this confusing mix of real and pseudo-advertisements is that it again blurs the distinction between what is authentic and what is not. Furthermore the incorporation of adverts in a literary work constitutes a break with contemporary literary aesthetics in which literary language was clearly seen as distinct from the 'vulgar' discourses of newspapers and publicity.

#### 4.2.3 Mixing media; text and image

Not just the generic heterogeneity and the use of 'ready-made' material, but also Bonnard's images scattered throughout the text, contribute to the collage aesthetic in the Almanac. This mixing of media is crucial to the collage, although it must be emphasized of course that these 'media' all come in the form of textual material. Sometimes the artistic media come into conflict with each other, adding force to the fragmentary nature of the collage; at other times they appear to complement each other.

The cover image adheres to the traditional iconography of almanacs. It portrays Père Ubu as an astrologer in his study amidst astrological paraphernalia; books, telescope, globe. Peering out of the window with his telescope, he contemplates the stars. If one compares the cover of Ubu's Almanac to a cover of the *Almanach de Nostradamus* from the sixteenth century (1563) for example, the similarities are striking (Fig.12). The astrological, symbolic imagery is recycled, with Père Ubu taking the place of the astrologer Nostradamus, thus emphasizing of course his authority over all matters.

On one of the first pages of Ubu's first Almanac we find a small, idyllic picture of a farm house set in a winter landscape. Smoke is coming out of the chimney. This is an almost archetypical image for the month of February, found in most popular Almanacs and calendars. In *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* for example, the famous, richly illustrated, book of hours from the early fifteenth century, we find a similar image for the month of February, a winter landscape, a farmer's house, with people warm inside.

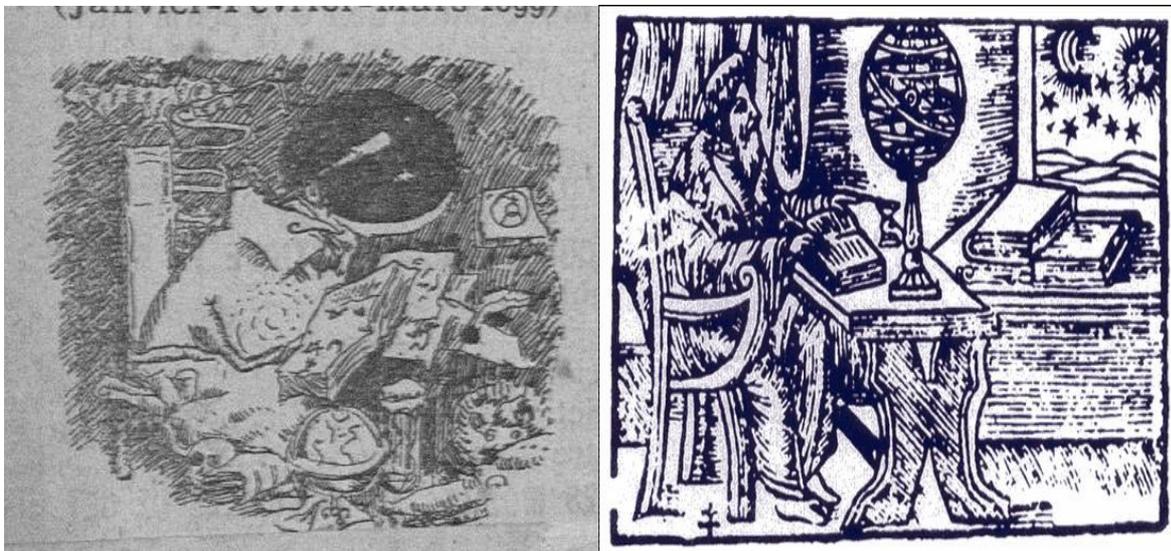


Figure 12: Cover Ubu's Almanac 1899 and detail cover *Almanach de Nostradamus* 1563

Regardless of the exact sources behind the images, Bonnard has obviously recycled the iconographic clichés of popular and astrological almanacs and merged them with Ubu's iconography. The redistribution of those popular images within a new (literary) context of course transforms them. They gain

new visual potential and become a source for evocations. This was the case for example in Bonnard's 'encyclopaedic' drawing of the 'barbillon', a simple generic image that triggered a series of associations. Bonnard's images thus evoke various cultural spheres: the iconography of popular almanacs, modern images of the city, mingled with scenes from Ubu's imaginary universe.<sup>76</sup>

As said, in some instances the collage creates more tension between the various elements than in others. Not all of Bonnard's images are strongly juxtaposed to the text. Some simply complement the text, while others, such as that of the barb, are illustrative, pseudo ready-made, but also evoke a new semantic thread. Whereas most of Bonnard's drawings for the first Almanac seem to have first and foremost an illustrative function, the combination of text and image does have another effect important to collage, that of simultaneity. In 'Le temps dans l'art' Jarry praised a painting's capacity to show objets, simultanés, qu'il a plu au peintre d'en rassembler'. Jarry envisioned the same for literature. He sought to substitute conventional narrative sequence with a simultaneous arrangement of textual and visual signs on the page. In the first Almanac this clearly shows in the examples from the March and February texts; one sign or word triggered a range of instantaneous associations.

### **4.3 Collage in the second Almanac**

The second Almanac has a different feel compared to the first one. Its larger format and its luxurious and expensive look differ from the small size and more traditional features of Ubu's first Almanac. This was mostly due to Vollard who published this Almanac in a lavish style similar to that of the illustrated 'livres d'artistes' issued normally by his gallery. The second Almanac contains fewer texts, which leaves more room for the Bonnard's lithographs. Consequently they are larger and more prominent than the drawings in the first Almanac. The second Almanac has a more minimalist look, with text scattered in between the images and the white space. However, despite these dissimilarities, the same three aspects I distinguished for the first Almanac also contribute to the collage aesthetic in the second; generic hybridity, the use of (pseudo-)ready-made materials and the juxtaposition of text and image.

#### **4.3.1 Generic hybridity**

The second Almanac contains fewer sections than the first one (Fig.13). It also conforms less to the traditional division of a popular almanac. Regular features, such as the pragmatic segment and the calculation of holy days or different calendars, are absent. However, some traditional features have been preserved judging by the titles; a Saint's calendar, a current event section, a 'useful knowledge' part. The mix of genres in this second Almanac is again striking, as traditional almanac genres are combined with literary and journalistic ones.

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<sup>76</sup> Marieke Dubbelboer, "L'écriture visuelle dans les *Almanachs du Père Ubu*. Jarry et Bonnard," in *Alfred Jarry et les arts*, ed. Julien Schuh Henri Béhar, *L'Étoile-Absinthe* (Laval: SAAJ & Du Lérot, 2007), 139-55.

<i>Almanach illustré du Père Ubu (XXe siècle)- 1er Janvier 1901. En vente partout.</i>
<b>Calendrier du Père Ubu pour 1901. Approuvé par Mgr St Bouffre.</b>
<b>Confession d'un enfant du siècle – Commentaires du Père Ubu. Sur les Événements récents</b>
<b>Alphabet du Père Ubu-Voyelles-Voyelles (suite)</b>
<b>Connaissances utiles et inventions nouvelles- Lettre confidentielle du Père Ubu</b>
<b>Ordre de la Gidouille</b>
<b>Ubu colonial</b>
<b>Philologie-Examen du Père Ubu au Saint-Sulpice colonial</b>
<b>Tatane- Chanson pour faire rougir les nègres et glorifier le Père Ubu</b>
<b>Vient de paraître chez Ambroise Volland, éd', 6, rue Laffitte, à Paris</b>
<b>Publications déjà parues à la galerie Volland</b>
<b>Conseils aux capitalistes et perd-de-famille</b>

Figure 13: Outline of the second Almanac (1901)

The second Almanac includes an elaborate Saint's calendar for the entire year. The segment entitled 'Confession d'un enfant du siècle-Commentaire du Père Ubu sur les Événements récents', suggests a traditional account of current events. However, the text lingers somewhere between a journalistic interview and a theatrical dialogue, complete with scenic indications. 'Ubu colonial' is a short play starring Père Ubu, Mère Ubu and Fourneau and the section 'Philologie-Examen du Père Ubu au Saint-Sulpice colonial' is also written in the form of a dialogue.

As for the rest of this second Almanac, the reader is confronted with an array of textual genres; a letter, an 'official' government document, a song. Since these different generic texts are even more scattered across the pages than in the first one, interspersed with many lithographs and white space, the impression of fragmentation is stronger here. Visually most striking in this kaleidoscope of genres in the second Almanac are, again, the lists.

#### 4.3.1.1 Lists in the second Almanac

The longest list in the second Almanac is the already mentioned Saint's calendar. Since this Calendar covers every month of the year, it takes up 6 pages in the Almanac. It is accompanied by Bonnard's evocative and provocative drawings in the margins (see Fig. 14).

The second important list in the second Almanac is the 'Ordre de la Grande Gidouille'. It sums up thirty-four names of people who are nominated for a rank in Ubu's prestigious order. This list had been carefully constructed and selected, like most of the lists in Jarry's work. In the manuscript files of Jarry's unfinished last novel *La Dragonne*, a newspaper clipping was found of a list of people admitted to the École Polytechnique in 1907.<sup>77</sup> No doubt this was to be used for his work. In similar fashion the

<sup>77</sup> Besnier, *Alfred Jarry*, p. 9.

contributors to the Almanac used actual Saint's calendars and lists of names published in the press to fabricate their own lists.

Several of Jarry's other works also testify to his general fondness of lists. In *Faustroll* for example we find the twenty-seven 'livres pairs.' Found among Faustroll's possessions by the bailiff, this list catalogues Faustroll's (and Jarry's) personal library. Two scholars have briefly addressed the presence of such lists in Jarry's work. Ben Fisher, writing about Faustroll's 'livres pairs' pointed to the influence of Rabelais. However he does not discuss the effect of these lists in the narrative.<sup>78</sup> Patrick Besnier has also briefly addressed the lists in the Almanacs and considers them as 'lists for list's sake'.<sup>79</sup> He believes they primarily reflect Jarry's love of names, words, sounds, phonetic and semantic play. This love for the linguistic imaginative possibilities created by these lists was of course clearly visible in the first Almanac as well. Besnier also suggested that the list of names conveys a certain encyclopaedic desire on the part of Jarry to honour his contemporaries and to preserve their names for history.

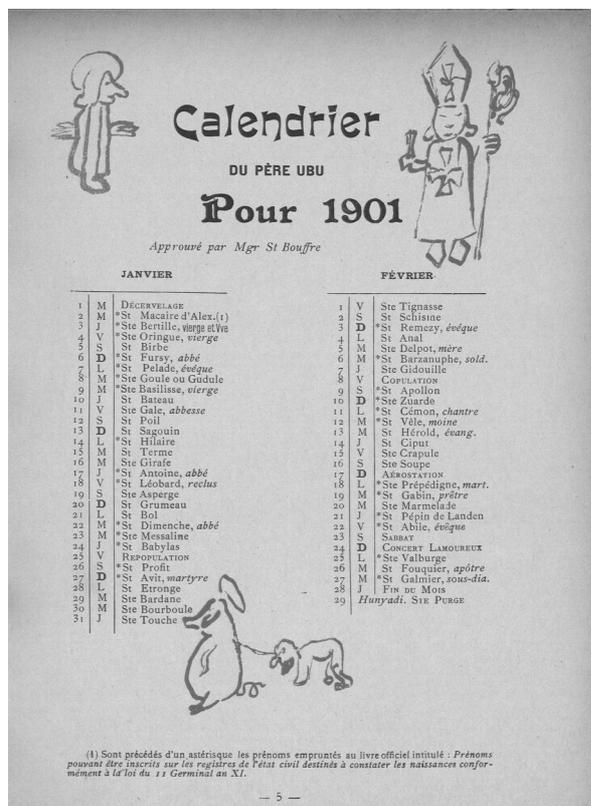


Figure 14: Saint's Calendar; January and February, Almanac 1901, original edition

However valid these interpretations may be, these lists also reveal another important aspect of Jarry's poetics. Jarry replaces conventional narrative by an enumeration of names or things. The list not only takes over from the narrative, but also guides the composition, as each name triggers a different

<sup>78</sup> Fisher, *The Pataphysicians Library. An exploration of Alfred Jarry's livres pairs*, p. 96.

<sup>79</sup> Besnier, "Dénombrement du peuple. Jarry et les écrivains de son temps," pp. 9-16.

name or object through association. The collage text, made up of these lists among others, thus offers a new way of representation. It conveys a way of capturing the world through the association of heterogeneous fragments, lists, bits and pieces. Jarry mixes various genres, including these lists, to realize a form of representation which he could not achieve through the use of one particular genre or through conventional narrative and composition.

#### 4.3.2 Ready-made and pseudo ready-made material

The insertion of (pseudo)ready-made material is the second and the most noticeable feature of the collage aesthetic in Ubu's second Almanac and brings about a similar effect as the inclusion of lists.

##### 4.3.2.1 Saint's calendar

The Saint's calendar is an amalgam of real and imaginary figures. Some are official names found in original calendars (see the first two months in Fig.14). Most of the other names are inventions by the authors. Each collaborator added some imaginary Saints to the calendar. Claude Terrasse had scribbled no less than sixty names in his notebook, although not all made it to the final list.

Some of the names were borrowed from a long-standing, popular tradition. During the Middle Ages and Renaissance period, a comic tradition of creating fake Saints emerged in France.<sup>80</sup> Some of them also appeared in the work of Rabelais, whose intention was of course to satirize the general worship of Saints, one of the reasons his work ended up on the infamous Index. These pseudo Saints probably ended up in Ubu's Almanac through Rabelais. In Ubu's calendar we encounter 'Sainte Barbe' and 'Sainte Nitouche' for example, both mentioned in chapter 27 of *Gargantua*, as well as 'Saint Boudin', 'Saint Raisin' and 'Sainte Andouille', who make an appearance in chapter 59 of Rabelais' *Quart Livre*.

Noël Arnaud has also suggested another plausible source for the calendar. In October 1896, the *Mercure de France* had issued the *Almanach des Poètes pour 1897*. It featured a selection of contemporary poetry, but also included a Saint's calendar for each month. The Saints' names seemed to have been predominantly chosen for their oddness, such as 'Sainte Pélagie', 'Sainte Pompeuse' or 'Sainte Galle'.<sup>81</sup>

In any case it is clear that the collaborators for the second Almanac would have had plenty of sources to choose from and that Ubu's second Almanac was rooted in a popular parodist tradition. The Saints of Ubu's calendar can roughly be divided into four groups:

1. Real Saints.
2. Names or holidays from Ubu's lexicon (Saint Merdre, 1 January 'Décervelage', Saint Phynance), referring to Ubu's Almanac (Sainte Tatane) or more generally to Jarry's work.

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<sup>80</sup> For a history and catalogue of these saints see Jacques E. Merceron, *Dictionnaire des saints imaginaires et facétieux* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

<sup>81</sup> Arnaud, Alfred Jarry. *D'Ubu Roi au docteur Faustroll*, p. 331.

3. Imaginary Saints or puns on real Saints' names, some vulgar or obscene (Saint Anal), some borrowed directly from Rabelais or popular tradition (Saint Andouille, Sainte Nitouche, Saint Tignasse), others from the collaborators' imagination.
4. Names referring to contemporary society and culture (Saint-Saëns, Saint Anatole F, Saint Bougereau, Saint Denis, *Maurice*).

Some of the names of real Saints have been chosen primarily for their innate humour. They conjure up a humorous association by simply adding a word, such as 'Saint Lazare, *Gare*'. Others have the association built in, such as 'Sainte Messaline' from January 23. It is the name of a real Saint, but also, conveniently, the infamous heroin from Jarry's novel *Messaline* (1901), based on the Roman empress Messalina. The holidays roughly follow the same procedure; some are real, some refer, as said, to Ubu. The French national holiday of 'quatorze juillet' for example is replaced by 'Fête du Père Ubu'. Other holidays refer to themes and episodes from the rest of the Almanac, for instance 'Répopulation' or 'Examen de Conscience'.

The names for each month are certainly not chosen randomly. As in traditional calendars every month is associated with a certain theme, relating to the weather, seasonal activities or the symbolism of its Zodiac sign. March, for example, is governed by the belligerent sign of the god Mars. In the second Almanac the reader encounters associations similar to those made in the March segment of the first Almanac. The Saints of March are in some way connected to warfare, murder or death. Therefore we find names such as 'St Guillotine', 'St Pranzini' (a notorious 19<sup>th</sup> century serial killer) or 'St Chemin-de-Fer, *ass*' (major train accidents were quite common). In similar fashion, the Saints of April are all associated with fish and meat (or fishing and hunting). In the first two weeks we find a string of 'fishy' Saints, including 'Ste Truite' and 'St Barbeau'. Considering the barb's prominent role in the first Almanac, it is hardly surprising that Jarry would sanctify his favourite fish in the second. These names come to a halt due to the new holiday of 'clôture de la pêche' on April 14<sup>th</sup> followed by a chain of 'meat' Saints and the equally new holiday 'visite des abbatoirs' on the 21<sup>st</sup>. On this menu of 'meat' Saints we find 'St Veau' and 'St Grenouille' as well as less refined meats such as 'Ste Hure' or 'Sts Abatis'. It makes perfect sense of course that this copious and unsavoury list of fish and meat ends with a holiday for purging oneself on the 31<sup>st</sup>, '*Hunyadi*, Ste Foire.' This is a reference to Hunyadi János, a well-known laxative mineral water at the time, which also makes an appearance in Jarry's novel *Les Jours et les Nuits*.<sup>82</sup> The word 'foire', discussed in the introduction, speaks for itself here. The Rabelaisian influences are obvious, in the obsession with the rudimentary aspects of life and in the debunking of Catholic Saints.

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<sup>82</sup> Hunyadi János was a mineral water with a mild laxative quality, fabricated by Andreas Saxlehner, a company located in Budapest. The product's name is derived from the national Hungarian hero, Hunyadi János, who defeated the Turks in the 15th century. It was widely advertised in Jarry's time. A photograph of the period for example shows a riverboat on the Seine with a large sign promoting it and flicking through contemporary newspapers one stumbles upon numerous ads for this 'purgative water'.

Ubu's calendar is an intricate collage of real, official names, popular imaginary Saints and newly invented ones. Each name or pun evokes multiple, humorous associations. This playful mix of personal and cultural references is characteristic for other texts in the Almanac as well. Like the other texts, the calendar was created with an eye for detail, the names drawn from a variety of cultural sources and foreshadowing some of the themes in the Almanac.

#### 4.3.2.2 Official legal text

On the same pages as the Saint's calendar we encounter a ready-made element, a legal text. Some of the Saints' names are in fact marked with an asterisk. This refers to footnote text at the bottom of the calendar on the first three pages (Fig. 15). Together with a list of official names, the official text was provided by Fagus who worked at the birth registration office. This particular law prescribed the names officially suitable for new born children. In the wake of the French Revolution triumphant names such as 'Liberté' had apparently been given to children. Freedom did however have its limits for the Revolutionary government and officials quickly restricted the choice of names to those from official calendars and from list list made up by the authorities.

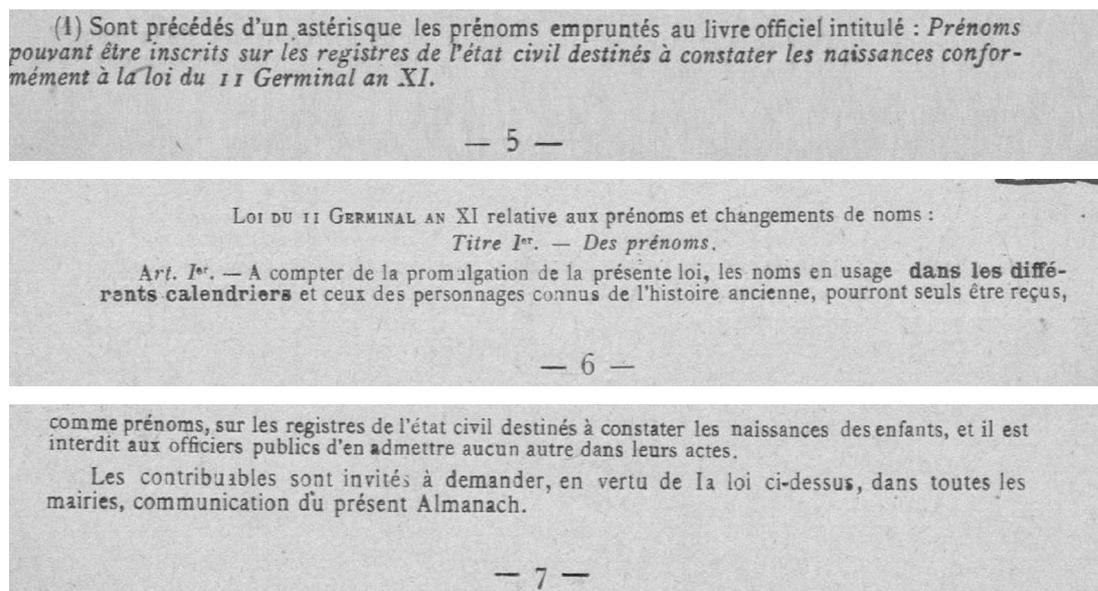


Figure 15: The judicial text below the Saint's Calendar, Almanac 1901, original edition.

Since then the 'Loi du 11 Germinal an XI' prevented the choice of inappropriate or outrageous names. Officially the choice of first names in France is still governed by this law, although several adjustments have been made. The law, as can be read in Ubu's Almanac, stipulates that:

'...les noms en usage **dans les différents calendriers**, et ceux des personnages connus dans l'histoire ancienne pourront seuls être reçus, comme prénoms, sur

les registres de l'état civil destinés à constater la naissance des enfants; et il est interdit aux officiers publics d'en admettre aucun autre dans leurs actes.'<sup>83</sup>

Notice that in the Almanac the phrase 'dans les différents calendriers' is made bold, a slight alteration of the original text. The emphasis points to an ambiguity in the legal text. The description is so vague and all-inclusive that Ubu's calendar could easily be included among these 'various calendars'.

The effect of this collage of the real legal text with Ubu's imaginary Saint's calendar is twofold. On one hand, it humorously questions its original context, challenging the clarity of the legal text and its validity. On the other hand, set in its new context, the collage of this pre-existent, official text playfully legalizes the suggestion for 'official' names made in the Almanac, thus pseudo-authorizing Ubu's alternative calendar.

#### 4.3.2.3 Other literary texts

Other literary texts also feature among the pre-existent material recycled in the second Almanac. The section entitled 'connaissances utiles et inventions nouvelles' appears to be the pragmatic section (Fig.16). The segment comes in the form of a 'confidential letter' from Ubu to the 'Ministry of Biz'Arts' reprinted exclusively in this Almanac. In his letter Ubu, ignorant as always, reveals the secrets behind his practical, but not so new inventions: the umbrella, slippers and gloves.

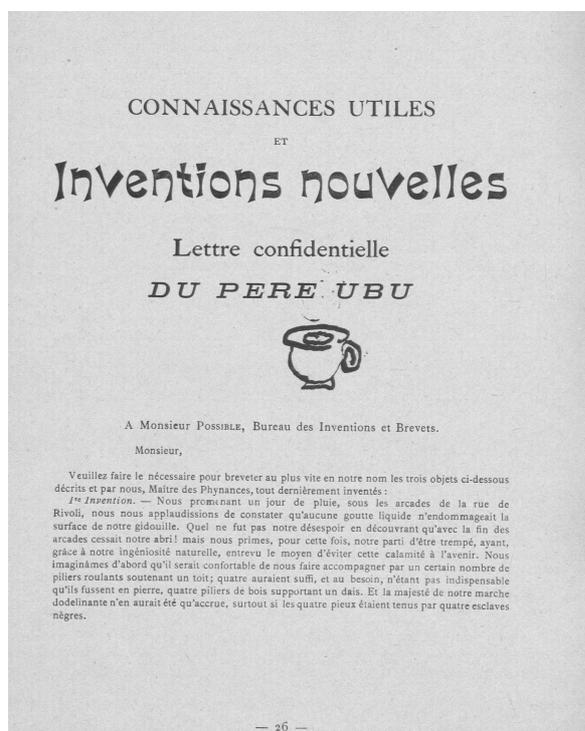


Figure 16: Confidential letter Ubu, Almanac 1901, original edition

<sup>83</sup> OC I, pp. 576/77.

The umbrella part is in fact a rewriting of a text by Alphonse Allais entitled 'Une invention. Monologue pour Cadet', written for actor Coquelin cadet.<sup>84</sup> Several sentences are literally taken from Allais' text; the rest of the text is a pastiche. Such recycling and rewriting of other literary texts is an important part of the collage aesthetic in the Almanacs, but a similar strategy can also be found for example in the novel *Faustroll*. Each chapter in this book represents an island visited by Faustroll. That island/chapter is dedicated to a writer or artist and often contains quotations or pseudo-quotations from that person's work.

The appropriation of other literary texts is on one hand intended to honour writers Jarry admired. On the other hand, and more importantly, it reflects Jarry's concept of writing. Throughout the Almanacs texts from all cultural spheres are recycled, whether these are mundane, popular recipes from Ruscelli, legal texts, or excerpts from Rabelais, Mallarmé or Allais. This redistribution of pre-existing texts challenges the idea that the uniqueness of the literary text is defined by the originality of the material. Not the texts or materials themselves need to be authentic; it is the author's arrangement and their insertion in a new context which ensures their originality.

#### 4.3.2.4 Newspaper clipping

Any (textual) material could therefore be used in the collage and therefore in this second Almanac we also encounter a slightly altered newspaper text. The rules of admission to Ubu's prestigious 'Ordre de la Gidouille' had already been provided in the first Almanac, but now we find an official list of nominees for his Order (Fig.17).

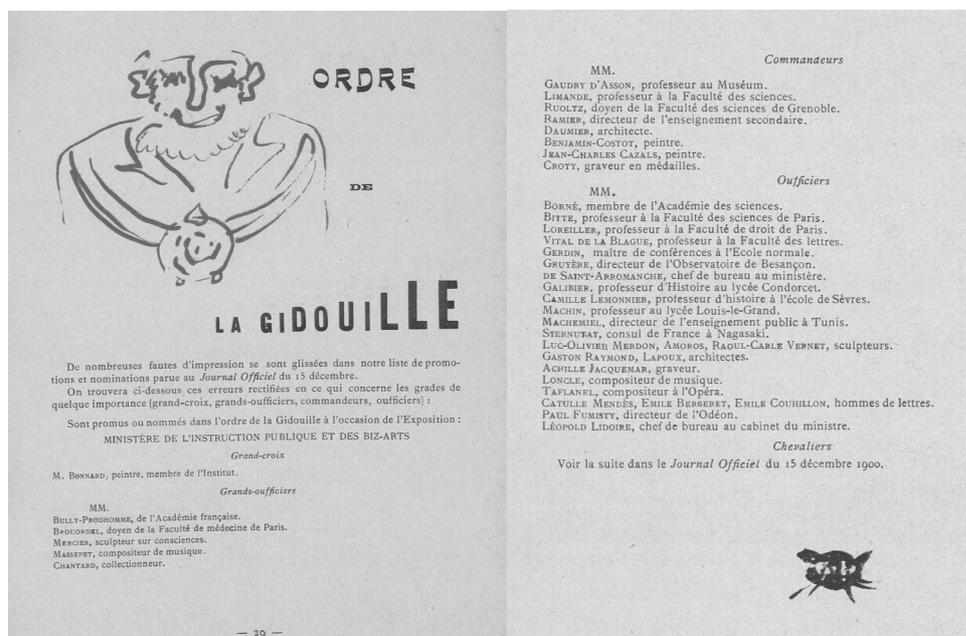


Figure 17: 'Ordre de la Gidouille', Almanac 1901, original edition

<sup>84</sup>Alphonse Allais, *Oeuvres anthumes I* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1970), pp. 127-29. Both Allais and Coquelin cadet were in the list of names of the first Almanac. See appendix.

The fact that this list has been cut and pasted from a newspaper is more or less revealed in the text. Ubu's list is presented as a correction of the names published in the *Journal Officiel* on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December. This journal was the official publication channel of the French government. The original text listed the nominees for the prestigious Légion d'Honneur. It was reprinted in several contemporary newspapers, for example in *Le Figaro* (see Fig. 18). Terrasse revealed in his journal that he and the other collaborators had copied this list. They altered the names of the real nominees a little and offered Ubu's 'Ordre de la Gidouille' as the 'rectified version' of the 'erroneous' list of names issued by the government. In Ubu's Almanac it is explained that the incorrect names in the official list were caused by some unfortunate typographical errors.



Figure18: *Le Figaro*, 16 December 1900, nominees for the Légion d'Honneur

The phrase 'Sont promus ou nommés dans dans la Légion d'Honneur à l'occasion de l'Exposition' in the original announcement has (logically) been changed to 'sont promus dans l'Ordre de la Gidouille à l'occasion de l'Exposition'. The French Ministry of Fine Arts and Public Education becomes the 'Ministry of Public Education and Biz'Arts', the same institution Ubu previously addressed his confidential letter to. The order of the names complies with the original list, but the names themselves are ingeniously

modified. Painter Bonnat, who was awarded the highest honour, the Grand-Croix, has become painter and Almanac illustrator Pierre Bonnard. Further down the list, the painter Ch. Cazin has been transformed into painter J. C. Cazals, a close friend of Jarry, who once painted his portrait. Other names are altered in irreverent puns on the original name. As such Sully-Prudhomme has become Bully-Prodhomme.

The collage is here obviously intended as a satire. Apart from the simple wordplay and obvious mockery of a prestigious French institute like the Légion d'Honneur, this collage of slightly altered nominees is also a rewriting of the contemporary cultural elite, substituting official names with those from the authors' inner circle. The effect is the same as in the collage of the legal text in Ubu's Saint's calendar. It humorously deflates the validity of the original list of nominees and the importance of the Légion d'Honneur. At the same time the collage provides a pseudo-official validation of Ubu's own, (and much more important) Order.

In addition, the collage of such a newspaper fragment enabled a more direct connection with reality. Newspapers' direct link with the world and as part of that everyday world made them a powerful medium in collage.<sup>85</sup> In the visual arts their graphic power proved inspirational in itself, but artists could also engage with the content of newspapers and this is what is at stake here in the Almanac. The newspaper fragment is double coded; it functions as part of the literary work but also continues to refer to an extra-literary reality.<sup>86</sup> By placing the fragment in its new context, that external reality is questioned and, through the alterations, the fragment now represents a very subjective 'reality', that of Ubu or that of the author. A similar subversive use of newspapers is also visible in later dada collages for example.<sup>87</sup> By using newspapers, Ubu's Almanacs equally challenge the 'objective' representation of reality newspapers claimed to provide.

#### 4.3.2.5 Advertisements

Advertisements are also an integral part of the second Almanac. There are ads for Vollard's gallery for example, spread out over two pages. This is hardly surprising, considering Vollard's involvement as publisher and co-author.

The advertisements for Vollard are followed by an already familiar segment, the 'Conseils aux capitalistes et perd-de-famille'( Fig. 19). This advert is a copy of the one from the first almanac with some minor additions. This time the first Almanac is also among the works advertised as indispensable investments for capitalists. The authors' names are still omitted, but the names of the publishing houses of *Le Mercure de France* and *La Revue Blanche* are mentioned explicitly this time. Even the prices for the works at *La Revue Blanche* are provided.

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<sup>85</sup> Möbius, *Montage und Collage*, pp. 237-40. In the 'city' novels of the 1920's and 1930's (Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* or Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer* for example) newspaper fragments appear as reflections of the heterogeneity and simultaneity of modern city life. See also Volker Klotz, *Die erzählte Stadt* (München: Hanser, 1969).

<sup>86</sup> Möbius, *Montage und Collage*, p. 240.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

Both Bonnard's drawing and the tone of this ad strongly suggest that the authors created this advert themselves. The use of advertising provided Jarry and the others with an opportunity to play with the conventions of advertising as well as with the conventions of a literary work. Despite its mocking, ambivalent title, this pseudo-ad is an integral part of the Almanac as well as a real advert. This self-created commercial platform gave the authors and the publishing houses a chance to promote their work.

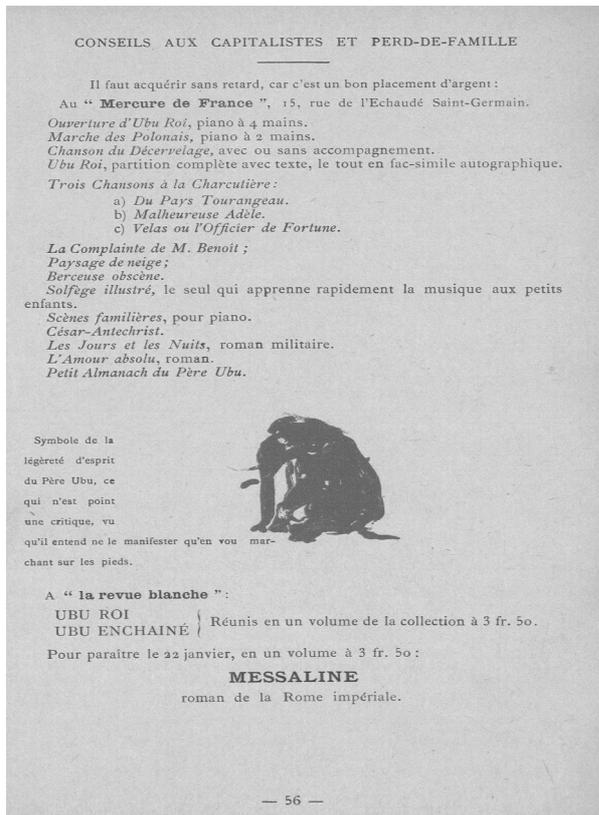


Figure 19: 'Advice to capitalists...', Almanac 1901, original edition

#### 4.3.3 Mixing media: text, image and sheet music

The third aspect contributing to the collage aesthetic is, also in this second Almanac, the mixing of artistic media. As said, the different look of the second Almanac, bearing fewer resemblances to traditional almanacs than the first one, is partially due to the prominent role of images. Bonnard's illustrations for the second Almanac are more prominent and more independent than the smaller, more illustrative drawings of the first Almanac. This can be explained by a difference in material. For the first Almanac Bonnard made simple pencil drawings, whereas for this second one he made lithographs. This accounts for the thick, black lines of the images and their larger size. The cover of the Almanacs again adheres to the iconography of the traditional almanac. We see a close-up of Ubu carrying a pen and his own Almanac. The cover drawing seems to have been modelled again after the iconography of popular, astrological almanacs (Fig. 20).

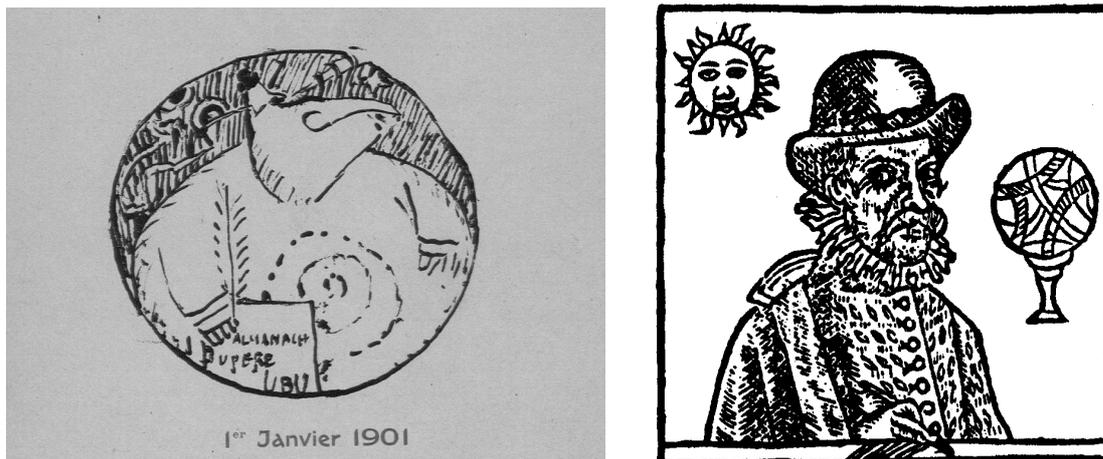


Figure 20: Detail cover Ubu's Almanac 1901 and *Les Prophéties de Nostradamus*, 1644

If we compare Ubu's pose to that of astrologer Nostradamus on the cover of one of his *Prophéties de Nostradamus* from the seventeenth century, one notices the resemblance. Ubu's pose is similar to that of Nostradamus, who, also in a close-up, is holding a book and a pen

The typography on the cover is an eclectic mix of several archaic-looking and modern fonts. Jarry had always been fond of experimenting with typography and special fonts; so much so, that it frustrated his publishers and printers at times. Throughout the Almanac the fonts are equally eclectic. For almost every title a completely different one is used, and both old and modern fonts are combined. The playful eclecticism of the Almanac is emphasized by Bonnard's drawings, which are almost cartoons. They have a more 'in your face' quality, emphasized by their thick, crude lines, visible for example in Bonnard's irreverent drawings of obscene Saints, scattered around the Calendar (see Fig. 14). All of Bonnard's images in the second Almanac are drawn loosely around the text, both in and outside the margins. Bonnard made similar sketchy drawings for Vollard's illustrated edition of Verlaine's *Parallèlement* (1900). In this work his drawings ventured outside the margins, playfully engaged with the poems, characteristics which constituted a small revolution in the art of illustration. Jarry, in a review of *Parallèlement*, had praised Bonnard's' light sketches in the margins as they seemed to evoke the rhythm of the words.<sup>88</sup>

Bonnard was not particularly known as a caricaturist, such as Caran d'Ache, Forain or Steinlen. However, much of his graphic work did possess, like that of fellow Nabi Vallotton, a satirical undertone. This made him a good candidate for the comical illustrations in the Almanacs. More importantly, Jarry considered Bonnard to be capable of painting the grotesque, or as he called it 'another side of beauty'.<sup>89</sup> Jarry's remark suggests that Bonnard's images corresponded with a key element of Jarry's

<sup>88</sup> 'Ses crayonnages légers dans les marges semblent les propres fantômes qui s'évoquent des rythmes à mesure de la lecture, assez diaphanes pour ne point empêcher de lire.' *La Revue Blanche*, 15 février 1901, OC II, p. 608

<sup>89</sup> 'Pierre Bonnard est le peintre de la grâce [...] quoiqu'il construise, quand il lui plaît, le beau ou le grotesque, cette autre forme du gracieux.' OC II, p. 608.

poetics and of collage; incorporating that which is monstrous and unusual, at least at odds with conventional ideas of beauty. Bonnard's comical and incongruous images thus complemented the collage aesthetic of the Almanacs.

Several images in the second Almanac have a more or less independent position towards the text; meaning that the pictures can also be read on their own. There is more tension between the textual and visual elements here than there was in the first Almanac. In the section Ubu Colonial, we find a short sort of comic. It is a pictorial narrative in which Ubu chases exotic animals during his visits in the colonies and can be enjoyed separately from the text. An even better example is the Alphabet section, a sort of educational intermezzo. This contains a large-sized lithograph spread out on two pages. It shows Ubu (literally) embodying the vowels of the alphabet. Of course Almanacs traditionally had an educational function and some contemporary almanacs still retained this civilizing mission. In the *Almanach Hachette* for example educational photographs depicting the proper pronouncement of vowels were commonplace (see Fig. 21). In fact it bears some remarkable similarities with Ubu's Alphabet. Considering the fact that the *Almanach Hachette* had served as a source for some of the 'factual information' in Ubu's Almanacs, Bonnard might have been inspired by these images as well when he created his 'educational' drawings.

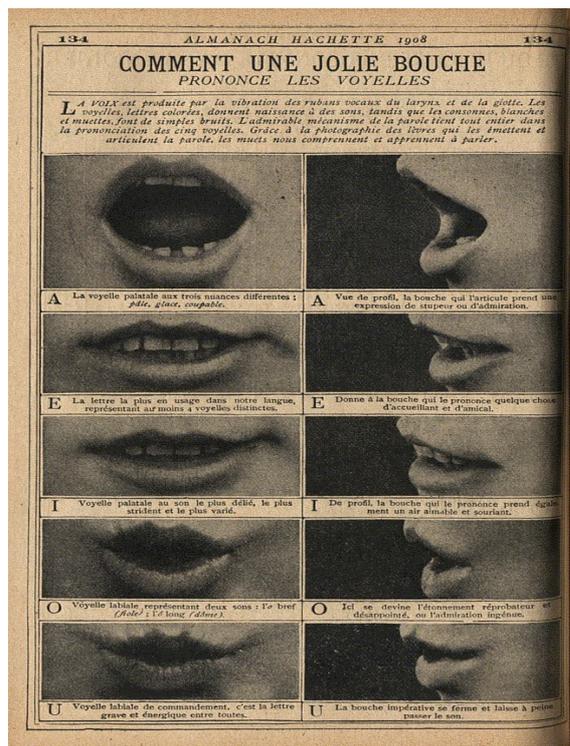


Figure 21: 'How a pretty mouth pronounces vowels', *Almanach Hachette* 1908

However Bonnard's illustrations connect the vowels of the alphabet to Ubu's bodily functions and primal urges. The vulgarity and banality of the images obviously undermines any possible educational or civilizing effect. Besides being a spoof of almanacs or educational manuals teaching how to

pronounce properly, Ubu's alphabet has a double advantage of referring to Rimbaud's famous 'Voyelles'(1871). The images combined with the text thus refer to a variety of so-called 'low' and 'high' cultural spheres, whether it be a banal educational text on how to pronounce vowels, or a (comical) reference to an admired literary icon such as Rimbaud.<sup>90</sup> In the Almanac the vowels are no longer associated to colours or sensory experiences, but, by a similar process of analogy and association, are mainly linked to Père Ubu's basic emotions and bodily functions. In the poem Rimbaud associates O with blue, due to its phonetic similarity with 'l'eau', with strange, mysterious sounds and Omega the violet ray of eyes, whereas in Ubu's Almanac O is simply linked to the common exclamation of admiration 'Oh'. Through its form, it also evokes Ubu's bellybutton ('O. *L'admiration* -le nombril du Père Ubu-').<sup>91</sup> The juxtaposition of text and image enables the polysemic associations so cherished by Jarry. The phonetic and visual punning we saw in the previous texts is again put into practice here, further enhanced by Bonnard's comical images full of sexual innuendo.



Figure 22: 'Tatane' accompanied by Bonnard's illustrations, Almanac 1901, original edition.

<sup>90</sup> Jarry was a great admirer of Rimbaud's work, which had become available since 1891. *Les Illuminations* appear in Faustroll's list of 'livres pairs'. Critic Albert Thibaudet, Jarry's classmate at the Lycée Henri IV, remembered how they once walked through Paris and how every place reminded Jarry of a passage in *Illuminations*. Albert Thibaudet, 'Réflexions sur la littérature', *Nouvelle Revue Française*, February 1922, p. 204.

<sup>91</sup> 'A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O, bleu : voyelles [...] O, suprême Clairon plein des strideurs étranges, Silences traversés des Mondes et des Anges : - O l'Oméga, rayon violet de Ses Yeux !', 'Voyelles', Arthur Rimbaud, *Œuvres complètes*, Paris, Gallimard, 1972, p. 53.

There is also a third artistic media in this second Almanac, that is a song, or to be more precise, sheet music. At the end of the Almanac we find the lyrics and sheet music for the song 'Tatane', composed by Terrasse (Fig. 22). Judging from the original edition, it appears that the piece of sheet music was casually drawn in around the already printed text. The song is preceded by some blank pages and pages with Bonnard's equally sketchy images of naked, dancing figures. The song, which is part of the section relating Ubu's 'colonial adventures' is said 'to glorify Ubu and make black people blush'. Bonnard's illustrations of the dancing figures emphasize this quite literally, as the African figures are indeed coloured red in the original edition instead of black. The images also seem to suggest movement and dancing. The dancing figures emphasize the rhythm and musicality of the printed sheet music on the following page. The drawings thus complement the notes in the score, attempting to evoke the music. Even the text wanders off in different directions as if to follow the movements of the figures. Together they form a prelude to the song on the next page. Text, image and music interact, in what is almost visual poetry.

At the end of the nineteenth century reuniting art, music and literature was in fact an ideal shared by Symbolists and many contemporary writers and artists. This ideal was shared by Jarry and his circle. The Nabis aimed at bringing art forms together in collaborative projects. The staging of *Ubu Roi*, the plays at the Théâtre des Pantins; they were all collective projects. In a way we see that collaborative ideal transposed in these pages of the Almanac. However the effect of this mélange of artistic media in the Almanacs could not be further removed from the Symbolist ideal of reuniting the arts. Although the Almanac obviously builds on contemporary ideas, its union of word, music and image is quite opposed to the Symbolist ideal of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, in which the arts formed a natural symbiosis. The end result of the Almanacs could hardly be labelled as beautiful or harmonious in the contemporary sense. The mingling of arts in the Almanac does not result in a natural symbiosis', but in a crude, comical, eclectic and incoherent work.

Terrasse's sheet music is as sketchy as the style of Bonnard's illustrations. Bonnard's images, in both Almanacs, but even more in the second one, give the impression of being preliminary drawings or unfinished studies, of doodles in the margins rather than well composed illustrations. Jarry's own graphic work, for example the posters he made for the performances of the Théâtre des Pantins, possess a similar, crude style. This has also been remarked by Emmanuel Pernoud, who argues that Jarry's apparently 'amateurist doodles' were diametrically opposed to the luxuriously, elegantly crafted lithographs of the period.<sup>92</sup> This corresponds of course to Jarry's idea of integrating the 'weak and bad' or the 'monstrous' in the work of art. Through its reunion of unexpected, disjunctive and heterogeneous elements the collage achieves precisely that effect. And this is where Ubu's Almanac stands in great contrast to the Symbolist ideal of

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<sup>92</sup>Emmanuel Pernoud, "The art of facsimile: Alfred Jarry and reproduction," *Word & Image* 16, no. 4 (2000): pp. 355-56.

harmonious unity of the arts and counteracts contemporary conceptions of beauty.<sup>93</sup>

#### 4.4 Re-inventing the literary text, the author and representation

Several Jarry scholars have in the past linked the notion of collage to Jarry's work, but a satisfactory analysis of the effects of collage in his work has been lacking. Brunella Eruli for example has pointed to the collage of classical texts in Jarry's novel *Messaline*. She also related Jarry's images of monsters to the collage, but focuses mainly on the visual instead of discussing the effects on his texts.<sup>94</sup> Henri Béhar has also remarked the collage of popular songs and other elements of popular culture in Jarry's works.<sup>95</sup> More recently, Jill Fell has described Jarry's writing as 'a series of layers, superimposed like a collage rather than as a coherent linear sequence', but she does not develop this observation any further.<sup>96</sup> However, as I have shown in this chapter, the collage aesthetic provides an important key to understanding Jarry's writing and poetics. In Ubu's Almanacs, the collage practice has several important effects.

Firstly, there is the re-evaluation of what 'makes up a literary text'. This is achieved through the appropriation of extra-literary and 'ready-made' materials, from newspapers, everyday life and popular culture. The recycling of pre-existent materials defies contemporary concepts of (singular and unique) originality and beauty. In that sense Ubu's Almanacs stretch the boundaries of how, in Jarry's time, a literary text was defined

Secondly, the collage practice also re-evaluates the role of the author. The author role in Ubu's Almanacs is not so much that of an inspired genius or original creator, but that of a collector of materials who cuts and pasts as he pleases, a 'bricoleur' of texts. The author's originality lies in the arrangement of those materials. The almanac genre, through its characteristics, provided a vehicle for assembling and combining heterogeneous materials. This new concept of the author's role is also reflected in the collaboration and collective production of both Almanacs

Interestingly, poet and collaborator Fagus seemed to have shared similar ideas on authorship; an idea of (inspired) craftsmanship versus that of the divinely inspired poet. In a letter from 1924 Fagus questioned the perpetuated romantic myth of (divine) inspiration, writing that inspiration 'comporte rien de mystérieux' and that poetic creation consisted of a 'opération à la fois instinctive et réfléchie'.<sup>97</sup>

He also stated that 'le poète use nécessairement d'assemblages de mots : lesquels ont généralement un sens', combining words to create an atmosphere 'que le poète avait délibérément calculée'.<sup>98</sup> Fagus uses a

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<sup>93</sup> See also Copeland, who opposes collage's inherent disjunctiveness and the fusion of elements in the Symbolist Gesamtkunstwerk. Roger Copeland, "Merce Cunningham and the Aesthetic of Collage," *The Drama Review* 46, no. 1 (2002): p. 3.

<sup>94</sup> Eruli, "Le monstre, la colle, la plume," pp. 51-55.

<sup>95</sup> Béhar, "Jarry, l'almanach et le fleuve oral," pp. 31-39. Béhar mainly focuses on finding some sources behind the text and remarks Jarry's appropriation of popular culture.

<sup>96</sup> Fell, *Alfred Jarry. An Imagination in Revolt*, p. 63.

<sup>97</sup> Letter to Pierre Lièvre, 10 July, 1924, Fagus, *Le Divan. 50 lettres de Fagus*, pp. 256-57.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

pragmatic, scientific vocabulary such as 'résultats', 'opération', comparing the writing of a poem to constructing a building, with nothing (supposedly) left 'au hasard'.<sup>99</sup> He thus underlines the constructed nature of the poetic text and advocates a similar 'methodical' view of writing as Jarry's character Sengle in *Les Jours et les Nuits*. Fagus offers a more intentional, less mysterious and more down to earth version of poetic inspiration and describes it as both 'inspired' as well as a 'conscious operation'. It bears many similarities with the writing practice in the Almanacs and with Jarry's ideas in 'Linteau'. With Ubu's Almanacs the constructed nature of the text and the author's role as an arranger of materials are equally put to the forefront.

The collage aesthetic in the Almanac, like the strategies of collaboration and 'anonymity', put emphasis *on* the figure of the author. The author is very much at the centre of the work, but in a different manner than in the ideal of the 'unique genius'. The author in the Almanacs, by cutting and pasting the texts in the collage, is visibly pointing attention to the 'writing' process and the text's construction, and by combining the materials in a specific way is, also visibly, steering the reader through the text, inviting him/her to make certain connections.

The third result of the collage aesthetic is the re-evaluation of writing itself and with it of conventional modes of narration and of representation. The collage first of all defies the contemporary literary aesthetic of homogeneity and narrative coherence and offers a heterogeneous, incoherent work instead. The collage in Ubu's Almanacs is also *about* writing itself, about the way a literary work is constructed, as the heterogeneous, not entirely integrated elements emphasize the constructed nature of the text. Conventional representation, which created an illusion of reality, is substituted by, what could be considered as another sort of 'realism'. In Ubu's Almanacs reality is documented through bits and pieces from that reality, names, quotations, rather than *telling* and ordering it through conventional narrative. The reader is left to question both the realism of the literary narrative and that of the inserted fragment, of the new context and that of the original context.

The insertion of (pseudo) ready-made 'documents from reality' can also be seen in Jarry's other works. In the novel *Les Jours et les Nuits*, for example, a copy of the hospital's medical form revealing Sengle's condition serves as the novel's ending. In *Le Surmâle* the lovemaking scene between Marcueil and Ellen is 'narrated' through the insertion of the text of a sentimental popular song. A borrowed text that represents the scene or an event also replaces conventional storytelling here. Rather than narrating and ordering reality, reality is presented as a mosaic of scattered fragments pasted together. This mode of representation results in a polysemic work that is instable and incoherent, in which the various signifiers are juxtaposed and interact with each other. This semiotic instability and fragmentation is precisely the intended effect of the collage aesthetic and of Jarry's poetics. Jarry's innovative use of collage lies in his particular use of language. He constantly

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<sup>99</sup> 'Cependant qu'au cours de la confection, des 'solutions spontanées', des inspirations, jailliront, surprises, mais non hasards, non miracles : résultats, ou résultantes, si vous préférez.[...]Opération à la fois instinctive et réfléchie.' Ibid., p. 257.

alternates for example between literal and figurative meaning, associating and playing with words. This demands an active role from the reader. Jarry's phonetic puns are not mere language games, but used to generate meaning by creating a complex mix of semantic threads.

The collage aesthetic in the Almanacs and the consequent reevaluation of existing modes of representation, prefigures the experiments of the early avant-garde movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, of the early Cubist 'papiers collés' and of the work of writers surrounding these painters, such as Apollinaire. Picasso, together with Apollinaire and Salmon, was an admirer of Jarry and his work. He apparently owned the manuscript of *Ubu Cocu*, which he seemed to know by heart and which inspired his play *Le désir attrape par la queue*.<sup>100</sup> Familiar with Ubu and Jarry's work, it is highly likely he knew of the Almanac, if only through Vollard or Apollinaire. In any case Jarry's persona and work influenced this new generation. His literary experiments and reinventions were of course also influenced by others before him. For an earlier example one could think of Lautréamont's *Poésies*, a source of inspiration for Jarry. His work was filled with borrowed texts, and often claimed to be collage poems *avant la lettre*.<sup>101</sup> One could also think of artist experiments in the artistic cabarets, such as wall journal *Le Mur*, featuring a collage of poetry, images and clippings from the visitors of cabaret Les Quat'z Arts.

Jarry's use of collage in Ubu's Almanacs fits the mindset of the period and reflects paradigmatic changes taking place in contemporary art and literature. Around 1900 the 'world as we know it' was under scrutiny, among artists, writers and philosophers. Positivist claims to a universal truth or reality were being re-evaluated and contradicted. Modern life, the city and the hectic it brought seemed to demand new ways of representation, of perceiving the world. Philosophers such as Nietzsche questioned man's perception of the world and himself. Theories of the relativity of time and space could be found in the works of philosopher Henri Bergson, popular among artists and writers around 1900. Jarry himself attended Bergson's classes at the Lycée Henri IV during the years 1891/92 and took extensive notes. Bergson's theories on (the relativity of) time and space influenced Jarry and many other writers of his generation, who were exploring representation in their work. In the Almanacs and in Jarry's work that exploration became visible in his use of collage. Jarry was one of the first to practice collage, but as the artistic expression of broader cultural developments, it was also 'in the air'.

The collage in Ubu's Almanacs, in particular the direct incorporation of elements from everyday life in these works, raises some more questions that were not yet fully addressed in this chapter; questions about literature's relationship to reality, about the text's representation of and 'commitment' to that reality. The following chapters will therefore provide further discussions of the relationship between the Almanacs and contemporary society: the

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<sup>100</sup>L'Étoile-Absinthe, vol. 41/42 (1989), p. 32.

<sup>101</sup> For example by the Surrealists, see Aragon, *Les collages*, p. 132. In 1891 Remy de Gourmont had published extracts of Lautréamont's *Poésies* in the *Mercure de France*. Jarry would discover Lautréamont's work by the end of 1893. Lautréamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror* is also one of the *livres pairs* in Faustroll's library and references to Lautréamont's poetry can be found throughout Jarry's work.

appropriation of news and newspapers in the two works, the redefinition of the relationship between art and life and in the last chapter the treatment of contemporary social and political themes.

# Chapter 5

## Ubu Reporter. News and newspapers in the Almanacs

### *Introduction*

In collage works of the early twentieth century newspapers occupied a special position. They had a direct link to the world, were readily identifiable as part of everyday life and thus proved excellent material.<sup>1</sup> Ubu's Almanacs are no exception. In fact the two works engage extensively with contemporary newspapers and their contents, as I will show in this chapter. First, I will address the importance of the press around 1900, the close but ambivalent ties between writers and newspapers and Jarry's own articles. The way Jarry dealt with news in his later 'speculative' journalism is already visible in Ubu's Almanacs.<sup>2</sup> Both Almanacs make use of 'newspaper aesthetics' in an innovative way.<sup>3</sup> The two works appear to linger on the boundaries of journalism and literature and this affects their aesthetics as well as the representation of events. In Jarry's writing, in the Almanacs and in his journalist texts, one can distinguish a fascination for news as well as a transformation of that same news and of journalistic strategies. The texts in the Almanacs not only question representation and truth claims, acting as counter-discourse to contemporary journalism, but also seem to provide realities alternative to those presented in the contemporary press.<sup>4</sup>

### 5.1 Writers and the press

Jarry's fascination for news and newspapers is understandable considering the historical context. The nineteenth century witnessed a booming press, but the years around the turn of the century are generally considered to be the golden age of the French press.<sup>5</sup> Several liberal laws adopted during the Third Republic ensured more freedom of press and publicity. New

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<sup>1</sup>Möbius, *Montage und Collage. Literatur, bildende Künste, Film, Fotografie, Musik, Theater bis 1933*, pp. 237-38.

<sup>2</sup> Since the Almanacs have received so little critical attention, this has gone somewhat unnoticed apart from some scarce remarks. Beaumont for example dismissed the Almanacs as 'a mixture of parody, pastiche, satire and plain nonsense, with the occasional fragment of serious information', apparently holding the works up to a journalist standard. Oddly enough, he did recognize the Almanacs as frontrunners of the articles in *La Chandelle Verte*, considering Père Ubu of the Almanacs simply as a sign of Jarry's 'obvious satirical talents.' Beaumont, *Alfred Jarry. A Critical and Biographical Study*, p. 145.

<sup>3</sup> I borrow this term from Weiss, who devotes a chapter of his study the use of 'newspaper aesthetics' by avant-garde movements. Jeffrey Weiss, *The Popular Culture of Modern Art* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1994). PP??

<sup>4</sup> See also Marieke Dubbelboer, "Ubu Reporter. News and newspapers in Alfred Jarry's Almanacs du Père Ubu," in *Vision in Text and Image. The Cultural Turn in the Study of Arts*, ed. Mary Kemperink Herman W. Hoen (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), pp. 127-42. And Marieke Dubbelboer, "Rewriting the news. Journalism and literature in fin de siècle France. The case of Alfred Jarry (1873-1907)," in *Form and Style in Journalism. European Newspapers and the representation of news 1880-2000*, ed. Marcel Broersma, *Groningen Studies in Cultural Change* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), pp. 157-75.

<sup>5</sup> See Claude Bélanger, *Histoire générale de la presse française. Tôme III 1871-1940* (Paris: PUF, 1976).

technological developments such as photomechanical printing and more efficient printing machines also made reproduction easier and cheaper. Furthermore social and educational reforms helped increase literacy. Because of these factors newspapers became more abundant and available to a larger audience.<sup>6</sup>

At the end of the nineteenth century popular newspapers such as *Le Petit Journal*, *Le Petit Parisien*, *Le Matin* and *Le Journal*, made up two third of all publications in Paris. Newspapers and magazines catered to different groups in society. Besides the four mentioned above, there were other well-known newspapers such as *Le Temps*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Journal des Débats* and *Le Gaulois* that aimed at a more well to do audience. There were also a large number artistic and literary journals, as well as specialized magazines about sports, fashion, travel and other leisure activities. Political *feuilles* often centred on a political personality or movement, such as the socialist *La Lanterne*, Clemenceau's *L'Aurore* or the right-wing *La Libre Parole*. Newspapers, magazines and publicity had become a prominent presence in everyday life. The first issue of *Le Journal* in 1892 was accompanied by a large-scale publicity campaign that flooded Paris with billboards and publicities. Similar advertising campaigns were used to promote *Le Petit Journal* and its successful illustrated supplement. Street vendors shouted out its latest headlines to attract readers. By 1890 *Le Petit Journal* sold over a million copies each day.<sup>7</sup>

At the time of Ubu's Almanacs, the press had become an important player and a dominant discourse in society. Emile Zola observed that the 'world had entered an era of information'.<sup>8</sup> Other writers were less neutral when it came to the dominance of the media. The omnipresence of the press made writers reflect on issues of authorship, genre and language.<sup>9</sup> Since the newspaper, as a textual medium, came so close to literary narratives, writers reconsidered the nature of literary language compared to newspaper language, seen as trivial and vulgar. Following in Baudelaire's footsteps, Mallarmé condemned newspaper language for its banality; it posed a threat to literature, although, he regretted to say, 'nothing really escapes journalism.'<sup>10</sup> Mallarmé felt that literature and poetry were and should be distinct from the (vulgar) language of 'universal reportage' in newspapers. Although many of them relied on journalism for their necessary daily bread,

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<sup>6</sup> Of course a certain democratisation of reading audiences had been set in motion over the last two centuries ever since the advent of periodicals and a growing bourgeoisie. In the course of the nineteenth century a larger middle class and educated members of the working class joined the reading public as well.

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Wolgensinger, *La grande aventure de la presse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), p. 79.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>9</sup> Marie-Eve Thérenty, *La littérature au quotidien. Poétiques journalistiques au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2007), p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> Stéphane Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes II* (Paris, Gallimard, 2003), p. 82. In *Mon cœur mis à nu* (1887), Baudelaire wrote: 'Je ne comprends pas qu'une main pure puisse toucher un journal sans une convulsion de dégoût'. Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes I* (Paris, Gallimard, 1975), p. 706. Many contemporary writers shared this sentiment. In *The Critic as Artist* (1891) Oscar Wilde stated dryly: 'But what is the difference between journalism and literature? Oh! Journalism is unreadable and literature is not read. That is all.' Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis, The Ballad of Reading Gaol and Other Writings* (Hertfordshire, 2002), p. 183. On Mallarmé and journalism see also Dina Blanc, "Mallarmé on the Press and Literature: "Étalages" and "Le Livre, instrument spirituel"," *The French Review* 71, no. 3 (1998): pp. 414-24. Stacy Pies, "'Un fil visible". Poetry and Reportage in Stéphane Mallarmé's "Un spectacle interrompu"," *French Forum* 29, no. 2 (2004): pp. 1-18.

most (Symbolist) writers shared Mallarmé's sentiment at the end of the nineteenth century.

The press also spurred questions about the role of writers and literature in society, about the author's autonomy in a literary world increasingly dominated by the press. Many studies have remarked the close links between literature and journalism in these years.<sup>11</sup> Popular newspapers employed literary authors to attract readers and gain status and respectability. Editor Fernand Xau for example presented his popular newspaper *Le Journal* as a 'literary' paper. He contracted the contemporary literary elite, such as Catulle Mendès, Gyp, Maurice Barrès, Octave Mirbeau, Léon Daudet, Jean Lorrain, Tristan Bernard, Courteline, as well as humorists such as Raoul Ponchon and Alphonse Allais.<sup>12</sup> Many newspapers had literary supplements, reviewing books, publishing interviews and reports of literary events. Journalists reported who frequented which literary salon and what was said. The literary pages contained interviews with authors as well as literary gossip. Sociologists have argued that the literary field during this time was increasingly dominated by commercial values, due, among others, to the press.<sup>13</sup> Books became commodities that needed to be sold. Newspapers attracted a large audience and serial novels published in papers were extremely successful. For best-selling authors this meant an increase in income, but also an increasing dependence on the market. For other authors (especially those belonging to the avant-garde) it made access to the market difficult. Writers perceived newspapers and their large audiences as a threat to literature. Avant-garde writers however started their own magazines and created their own platform and this resulted in a large number of 'little magazines' at the end of the nineteenth century, among others *La Revue Blanche* and *Le Mercure de France*. They provided an excellent podium for young writers, such as Jarry, and an alternative to the more mainstream newspapers and literary market. In any case authors were often dependent on the press, whether mainstream or not, for income and success.

There was another reason why some felt the independence of authors was at stake. The image of the author as a committed intellectual, participating in public debate, had strongly emerged during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Writers started to speak out through the press, publishing their articles, manifests and petitions in the numerous newspapers and magazines. Authors were frequently interviewed in surveys on a range of cultural, social and political topics. Jules Huret's *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire* (1891), in which he probed writers on the current state of literature, is a well-known example of such a survey, but there were many similar ones about all sorts of issues. In the political turmoil of the 1890's

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<sup>11</sup> Apart from the above mentioned study by Thérenty (2007), see also Bélanger, *Histoire générale de la presse française. Tôme III 1871-1940*, Christophe Charle, *Naissance des "intellectuels" 1880-1900* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1990). Micheline & Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink Cambron, "Presse, littérature et espace public: de la lecture et du politique," *Études françaises* 36, no. 3 (2000): pp. 127-45.

<sup>12</sup> Poet Raoul Ponchon (1848-1937) for example was known for his 'gazette rimée', a collection of satirical and poetic articles commenting on daily events.

<sup>13</sup> Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, Venita Datta, *Birth of a National Icon. The Literary Avant-Garde and the Origins of the Intellectual in France*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), Genova, *Symbolist Journals. A Culture of Correspondence*, Géraldi Leroy, Julie Bertrand-Sabiani, *La vie littéraire à la Belle Époque* (Paris: PUF, 1998).

writers participated more and more in public debate.<sup>14</sup> The Dreyfus Affair has become the archetypical example of this kind of author's commitment, in particular of course Zola's *J'accuse* (1898). In return the public expected authors to take on these roles of intellectual and public figure.

Even Jarry, hardly a well-known writer or intellectual at the time, could not entirely escape such expectations. In the *Mercure de France* he responded to a couple of questionnaires including one on the issue of Alsace-Lorraine.<sup>15</sup> Writers were asked whether a new war between France and Germany would be supported by the public. The writer was to give his personal ideas, as well as his thoughts on the opinion of young people and on the general opinion of the country. Jarry answered with humorist indifference and aloofness:

Quant à l'opinion de la jeunesse et du pays, je crois que cette question ne les intéresse pas, moi non plus d'ailleurs, ni la question ni celle de savoir ce qu'ils en pensent.<sup>16</sup>

His ironic words ridicule not only the question itself, or these surveys, but also contemporary expectations of writers to ventilate their opinion on virtually everything. In the Almanacs and in his journalism Jarry often conveys a similar ironic attitude towards this public function of the writer.

Of course it is important to note that there was no such thing as *the* press. The French press in this period was a complex, dynamic and creative world with a diverse range of publications. Ties between journalism and the literary world were close; the two worlds influenced each other considerably.<sup>17</sup> The press not only provided job opportunities or a new platform for authors, but it also prompted new modes of artistic expression and new genres (literary chronicle, column, spoof news, cartoons).

The tension between these new opportunities offered by the press on one hand and writers' sceptical attitude towards the media on the other can also be discerned in Jarry's work. Jarry was critical of the press, the commercialism that came along with it and writers' public positions. However he also made use of journalistic forms as new sources of creativity, not only in his chronicles, but also in his literary work. The Almanacs are closely related to his journalism, through their tone and style, through their fascination and transformation of news, and because they also juxtapose journalism and literature in an innovative way.

## **5.2 Alternative news. Jarry's 'speculative' journalism**

Jarry's chronicles appeared between 1901 and 1904 in *La Revue Blanche*, *La Plume*, *L'Oeil* and *Le Canard Sauvage*; first under the title of 'Spéculations' and then 'Gestes'. Two of his articles were even published in the mainstream

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<sup>14</sup>See among others Charle, *Naissance des "intellectuels" 1880-1900*.

<sup>15</sup> See for Jarry's 'réponses a des enquêtes', OC I, p. 1028.

<sup>16</sup> OC I, p. 1030-31.

<sup>17</sup> Thérenty, *La littérature au quotidien. Poétiques journalistiques au XIXe siècle*.

newspaper *Le Figaro* under the mundane title of 'Fantaisies parisiennes'.<sup>18</sup> However Jarry's contribution to *Le Figaro* was short-lived.<sup>19</sup> His 'Fantaisies parisiennes' were probably a bit too much 'fantaisies' and too little 'parisiennes' for the editors; Jarry's unconventional writing did not seem to suit a mainstream newspaper such as *Le Figaro*.

In fact this anecdote is significant. Despite an effort to reach a larger audience and to make money with his journalism, Jarry again did not compromise on his style of writing. Instead of turning his back on journalism like Mallarmé or reluctantly working as a journalist out of necessity, as many other contemporaries, Jarry seems to have perceived journalism more as a creative challenge. There was, for him, no essential difference between his journalist writings and his literary texts, as he simply refused to adjust his style to contemporary journalist or literary standards. The title 'spéculations', given to his series of articles in *La Revue Blanche*, already implied the imaginary nature of the articles. The other title 'gestes' brings to mind the article 'Barnum' in which Jarry stated that all gestures of daily life were equally aesthetic. Both titles revealed Jarry's strategy of turning news into literature. At the end of his life, Jarry planned to collect his articles, which he considered to be an important part of his oeuvre, in one single work. He had first thought of the title *Soloques, superloques, soliloques et interloques de Pataphysique*. After that he imagined publishing an even broader selection entitled *La Chandelle Verte. Lumières sur les choses des temps*. The project was never realized during Jarry's time; only much later the articles were published under the latter title.<sup>20</sup> Both titles are however noteworthy, for they link the articles to Jarry's overall philosophy of pataphysics and poetics behind his oeuvre. 'The Green Candle. Some light on the events of the day' superficially reads as a cliché title for a collection of cultural commentary, but can and should be read in other ways. First of all, 'chandelle verte' is slang for 'snot.' 'Chandelle' is also argot for 'bottle' and the 'green bottle' could also refer to one of Jarry's favourite drinks, 'la fée verte', the green fairy, absinth. In any case these somewhat vulgar meanings of the word act as a provocation and immediately diminish the importance and insights of the 'lights' shed on events. Secondly it refers to 'de par ma chandelle verte', one of Ubu's favourite exclamations often used to emphasize or validate his (absurd) statements. The use of this exclamation for the articles equally validates their 'unique' truth. The titles Jarry chose for his articles linked them to pataphysics and Ubu's universe, and clearly tied his journalism to his literary work and poetics. It makes clear that pataphysics affected his whole body of work, from his plays, his novels, and his journalism to the Almanacs. Pataphysics provided Jarry with a method to question general knowledge, as well as claims to truth made by science but also, in this case, by journalism. This is achieved through reconciling the languages of literature and journalism. Blurring the boundaries between

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<sup>18</sup> For more on Jarry's journalism see also David F. Bell, "*La Chandelle Verte* and the *Faits divers*," *L'Esprit créateur* 24, no. 4 (1984): pp. 46-58, Caradec, "Alfred Jarry, témoin de son temps."

<sup>19</sup> Also noticed by André Salmon who writes that 'la collaboration de Jarry au *Figaro* dura à peine une saison, sans qu'on sache trop bien qui le premier s'est lassé de l'autre', Salmon, *Souvenirs sans fin 1903-1940*, p. 556.

<sup>20</sup> It would take another 60 years before Maurice Saillet would publish the first comprehensive collection of Jarry's journalism with the title *La Chandelle Verte* in 1969.

journalism and literature, Jarry uses the news and transforms it into literature, providing imaginative, alternative realities and new ways for literature to deal with everyday life.

### 5.2.1 News fascinates

First of all Jarry's chronicles clearly display an overall fascination for news and trivia, which no doubt satisfied Jarry's 'encyclopaedic curiosity.'<sup>21</sup> His articles professed to his keen interest in news and *faits divers*. Jarry was an avid consumer of magazines, newspapers, and practically any publication he could find. The 'library' at his tiny apartment on the rue Cassette consisted of piles of books and old newspapers (including the Catholic paper *La Croix* and his very own almanac), at least according to André Salmon:

'L'attraction sensationnelle du lieu c'était la bibliothèque. Soit une pyramide de bouquins et de brochures s'élevant jusqu'au plafond, à vrai dire si bas que seul Jarry, très court de jambes, pouvait en cet étrange logis se tenir debout sans devoir plier les épaules. La "librairie" se composait, avec les livres et brochures, de vieux journaux dont un nombre surprenant d'exemplaires de *La Croix*, les collections complètes du *Mercur de France* et de *l'Ymagier*, la revue de Jarry et de Remy de Gourmont; des volumes offerts par les poètes de la rue de l'Échaudé, des ouvrages de philosophie, de mathématiques, de théosophie, un exemplaire de luxe de *l'Almanach du Père Ubu* par Alfred Jarry et Pierre Bonnard, le mieux désigné de ses illustrateurs; enfin la longue série des *Aventures du colonel Ronchonnot*, en petites brochures à couverture rose ornée du portrait de ce militaire.'<sup>22</sup>

The themes discussed by Jarry in his chronicles are equally diverse; new stamps, the Dreyfus Affair, new road signs put up by the Association Générale Automobile, the psychology of a police officer, laughter in the army, a discussion of Liane de Pougy's performance at the Folies-Bergères, a train accident killing 22 people, a trial of an infamous serial killer. Such eclecticism corresponds to the idea Jarry already outlined in 'Linteau', that all material is worthy as literary material as well as to Jarry's later statement that all gestures were equally aesthetic. Pataphysics also enabled Jarry to focus on the marginal or on what was considered trivial. Jarry was just as much interested in 'low culture' as he was in 'high culture'. No wonder then that Jarry's attention was often drawn to the *faits divers*, small, often sensational, local news items, such as crime or accidents. In his article entitled 'Faits divers', Jarry wonders if the *fait divers* is not merely 'a novel, or at least a novella sprung from the brilliant imagination of the reporter.'<sup>23</sup> Jarry considers news items to be of pure literary value. Further along in that same article Jarry writes that 'les faits divers sont le théâtre à côté des grands articles', the theatre alongside the big articles.<sup>24</sup> To him the *fait divers* represented spectacle, emphasized by the analogy with the theatre. The attraction and effect of those spectacular stories on people is compared by Jarry to the appeal, effect and popularity of a theatrical performance. The

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<sup>21</sup> As Besnier remarks, Besnier, *Alfred Jarry*, p. 445.

<sup>22</sup> Salmon, *Souvenirs sans fin 1903-1940*, p. 160.

<sup>23</sup> '...mais le fait divers est-il autre chose, sinon qu'un roman, du moins qu'une nouvelle due à la brillante imagination des reporters?', OC II, p. 518.

<sup>24</sup> OC II, p. 518.

reporter of the *fait divers* intended to draw the reader into the event by making it as 'realistic' as possible.<sup>25</sup> In similar fashion the theatre aimed at luring its spectators into the 'realistic' play in front of them. However both, as Jarry appears to argue, created only an illusion of reality.

Jarry was neither the first nor the last in his fascination for the 'fait divers'. Throughout the twentieth century this particular category of news would attract French writers and thinkers, including the Surrealists, Camus, Genet or Barthes among many others. They looked for inspiration in the *fait divers*, whether to gain insight in everyday life and in the human mind or to transform it and subvert its contents.<sup>26</sup> In Jarry's articles the focus on the marginal side and the details of everyday life (symbolized by the *fait divers*) first of all has the effect of debunking the 'big' and serious news stories. By bringing new traffic road signs up to the same level as for example the Dreyfus Affair, Jarry's articles reduce all news items to the same level of importance or non-importance. But there is more to it than a mere levelling of news to a stage of absurdity or claiming that news is as illusionary as theatre. For this interaction with journalism and news also provides a new source of creativity, allowing an exchange, as with collage, between 'high' and 'low' culture in the literary text. Furthermore for Jarry the eclectic variety of news items also functioned as a point of departure for 'speculations.'

### 5.2.2 Transformation

Jarry's articles do not simply comment on the news, they transform it. News items, events, spectacles, *faits divers* are sources for associations, for speculative writing as the original title implied. In the articles we encounter a writing strategy similar to that of the texts in the Almanacs. A certain word or concept is foregrounded (as was the case with *poisson* in the February text from the first Almanac) and all its different connotations and possible associations are explored.

The article *l'Appendice du Roi* (The King's Appendix), for example, first published in *La Revue Blanche*, July 15, 1902, refers first of all to a real event: the coronation of King Edward VII which was planned for June 26, but moved to August 26, because, it was said, the king had undergone an emergency appendectomy. However Jarry does not focus on the king nor the postponed event, but on the king's appendix. Jarry proceeds to explore the word 'appendix', while maintaining a journalist and persuasive style. Focusing on the appendix is not merely banal, as Jarry argues, because 'The King's appendicitis was diagnosed for the more serious reasons of protocol'.<sup>27</sup> This is because, Jarry explains, 'no one may become King unless he can give proof of a vermicular appendix of the caecum, just as it is required of a

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<sup>25</sup> Kalifa describes how the *fait divers* at the end of the nineteenth century aimed at creating an 'effet de réel', to tell and show reality as it was. Dominique Kalifa, "L'écriture du *fait divers* au 19e siècle," in *Presse et événement: journaux, gazettes, almanachs (XVIIIe-XIXe siècles)*, ed. Mollier Jean-Yves Lüsebrink Hans-Jürgen (Bern: Lang, 2000), p. 304.

<sup>26</sup> See David H. Walker, *Outrage and Insight. Modern French writers and the 'Fait divers'* (Oxford and Washington DC: Berg, 1995).

<sup>27</sup> OC II, p. 364. The English translations of this article are taken from: Jarry, A., *Adventures in Pataphysics. Collected Works I*, edited by Alistair Brotchie and Paul Edwards, translations by Paul Edwards and Antony Melville (London, 2001), pp. 261-63.

Pope that he exhibits certain guarantees on demand.' Like a true investigative journalist, Jarry provides his readers with 'valuable' and 'new' inside information as to why Edward's operation was part of the whole coronation ceremony. Jarry states with aplomb that the appendix is a criterion for becoming king, using arguments based on historical premise:

Qu'on se souvienne que le roi est par définition le premier gentilhomme de son royaume, et comme tel doit posséder les parchemins de la noblesse la plus ancienne. Or qu'est-ce que l'appendice vermiculaire du caecum, organe rudimentaire, comme on sait, et vestige d'animalités ancestrales, sinon la preuve que celui qui en est pourvu descend d'aïeux si reculés qu'ils existaient même avant l'homme ? Qu'on ne s'ébahisse donc plus si le peuple anglais, avant de couronner son roi, a désiré s'assurer qu'il n'y manquait rien par-dedans et, comme un enfant anatomise son jouet, l'a ouvert, pour voir.<sup>28</sup>

The pataphysical focus on such a (literally) irrelevant detail as the appendix accompanied by an apparent logic and historically based facts, debunks the importance normally surrounding news about the king in daily newspapers. Jarry reduces royalty to a 'wormlike' and useless organ (rudimentary in this sense applying to the monarchy as well), and in the process compares the king to his ape-like ancestors. Throughout the text he maintains a similar rhetoric style aimed at convincing the reader.

Jarry then proceeds to associate freely on the word appendix, moving further away from the original news item. The respect attached to the vermicular appendix logically extends, following the dictionary's definition of an appendix (hence by semantic association), to a respect attached to all 'things that hang' ('choses qui *pend*' in French). This includes a respect for the somewhat vulgar sexual organ of a bull, revered in ancient cultures, and for the Flag, symbol of the French nation: 'And what else does the Flag bear today but a perfect resemblance to a certain Thing which Hangs?'<sup>29</sup>

Through semantic and phonetic association and play with the literal and figurative meaning of the word, Jarry thus establishes an analogy between royalty, the national flag, an appendix and a male sexual organ. Jarry's satire of respected institutions thus originates in the language itself, and in the way he uses that language. He does this while making use of all the techniques of logical argumentation and intellectual rigor readers would expect to find in a serious article. Jarry draws on the genre of the chronicle, journalist rhetoric devices and discourse, then transforms them in order to create an obscene, absurd, alternative world and meanings. In this article on the 'King's Appendix', the original news item becomes the basis for a fun and playful text, which is also about writing, meaning and language and not merely about the actual event. The sign (appendix) that triggers the text remains on a concrete level, still referring to the news item, but it also receives all sorts of other connotations, conjuring up a completely different reality. The text itself is also no longer a journalist article, but becomes a literary, almost poetic text.

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<sup>28</sup> OC II, pp. 364/65.

<sup>29</sup> Jarry, *Adventures in Pataphysics*, p. 263.

### 5.2.3 Parody and satire; questioning claims to truth

The most obvious effect of this transformation and wordplay is of course parody and satire, disparaging other newspaper articles and their claims to truth. As said, there is obvious irony in Jarry's treatment of both important and more trivial news items. Jarry makes journalistic reportage look like something imaginative, in other words, like literature. He thus provides the reader with alternative viewpoints, or discourses, and forces us as readers to reflect on what we consider to be true and absolute. He underlines the infinite creative possibility of language and at the same time the limited capabilities of language to represent *the* truth or *a* reality. Through his almost postmodernist play *avant la lettre* with language and subsequent questioning of representation, Jarry's writing prefigures the idea that language does not only represent reality, but that it constructs it. His articles make readers aware of the fact that newspaper language too constructs a reality, just as literary language does.

With regard to this satire of journalism, Jarry was certainly not alone. Irony and satire were inherent to French journalism at the time. There was a strong tradition of parody within the world of newspapers. This is illustrated for example by the large number of satirical papers such as *La Vie Parisienne*, *Le Rire* or *Le Chat Noir* which parodied news.<sup>30</sup> There was also a strong satirical counter-discourse to that of the press among the contemporary avant-garde.<sup>31</sup> The satirical tone of Jarry's journalism and the Almanacs owes a lot to this context. The already mentioned collage wall journal *Le Mur* at *Les Quat'z'Arts* was of course a collaborative spoof newspaper. Within the same artistic cabaret tradition, Alphonse Allais wrote parodies on the news, first for *Le Chat Noir* and later in mainstream newspapers. Humorist Raoul Ponchon was well known for his *gazette rimée*. Jarry's friend, writer and journalist Tristan Bernard directed the humorist supplement at *La Revue Blanche* 'Chasseur des Chevelures', which sported the subtitle 'moniteur du possible'.<sup>32</sup> Its title shares the idea of 'possible news' with Jarry's speculative journalism. Some years later, in 1906, Felix Fénéon wrote his satirical 'nouvelles en trois lignes' (news in three lines) in newspaper *Le Matin*. Before this Fénéon had worked for *La Revue indépendante*, in which he had published his very own *Calendrier de Félix Fénéon*, a subjective 'filter of public events'.<sup>33</sup>

In general, the mixing of art with forms of mass culture (e.g. journalism, advertising, popular entertainment) was 'en vogue' among the artists and writers of Montmartre's counter-culture. I discussed in chapter two how around 1900 this often humorous dialectic between the avant-garde and popular culture came to blossom in the artistic cabarets. Jarry's 'journalism' can be firmly placed in this particular culture.

However, none of the above examples of contemporary writers mixed up this sort of pseudo-journalism with literature to the extent Jarry did.

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<sup>30</sup> Bélanger, *Histoire générale de la presse française. Tôme III 1871-1940*, p. 385.

<sup>31</sup> See also Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse. The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France*. (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1985). In his book Terdiman describes the emergence of this counter-discourse towards the press in the second half of the nineteenth century.

<sup>32</sup> Tristan Bernard also receives a mention in Ubu's list of names, see appendix.

<sup>33</sup> Salmon, *Souvenirs sans fin 1903-1940*, p. 555.

Journalist writing was always something writers practised 'on the side' of their more serious work. Satirical writers such as Allais and Ponchon were, even though they were much admired, known primarily as 'humorists', not as 'serious authors' and their spoofs of journalism and parodies of current events were not considered literature. When it comes to Jarry's work, the boundaries between literature, journalism and satirical writing were much less clear. His humorist articles were not entertaining writings on the side, but intended to be part of his literary oeuvre. Other scholars have remarked the satirical element in his journalism, as well as his play with language and the consequent 'deconstruction' of language and meaning.<sup>34</sup> However, the innovative way in which Jarry mixes journalism and literature in these chronicles implies more than just satire. Jarry pushed the boundaries of humour in his articles to such an extent that they surpassed the point of mere satire and created a world of their own as well.

#### **5.2.4 Alternative realities**

There is a fascinating tension in Jarry's attitude towards journalism. He mocked writer's commitment in the press, their roles as journalists and intellectuals, but through his use of journalism he himself ventures in their domain. Jarry's use of journalism and news offered a way to gain access to everyday life, enabling him to create his own subjective and associative reality and allowing it to compete with the 'real' one.

However, whereas Jarry mingles elements of journalism and literature, the tension between these two different forms of writing remains nonetheless; the boundaries are not completely lifted. Journalist styles and themes are transformed by Jarry and turned into literature. In his literary journalism Jarry's view on contemporary society results primarily from his innovative use of language. Through Jarry's style and associative use of language, his articles provide different 'lumières sur les choses des temps' or alternative realities. Jarry engages with society, not by taking up the role of actual journalist or intellectual, but through (literary) writing. His journalism is turned into literature and his literary works (among which the Almanacs) are invaded by journalism. In fact, all of the above aspects (fascination for news, satire, transformation and the rethinking of language, genre and representation) equally applied to the incorporation of journalism in the Almanacs.

### **5.3 News and newspapers in the Almanacs**

The boundaries between journalism and literature are not simply blurred in the Almanacs, but transgressed. The reason for this is first of all that the almanacs were already originally a journalist genre, and, more importantly, a genre traditionally on the brink of literature and journalism.

In keeping with that tradition, Jarry juxtaposes journalist, popular and literary genres in Ubu's Almanacs. We saw how the Saint's calendar and the useful knowledge section figured alongside sections such as 'Lettres et Arts' or 'Commentaires sur les événements les plus récents'; texts that lingered between an interview and a theatrical dialogue. Mallarmé's obituary was

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<sup>34</sup> Bell, "La Chandelle Verte and the *Faits divers*," pp. 48-56, Grojnowski, *Aux commencements du rire moderne. L'esprit fumiste*, p. 203.

obviously modelled after obituaries in the contemporary newspapers, but contained quotes from a literary text. Their genre characteristics already turned Ubu's Almanacs into crossovers of literature and journalism. With Ubu's Almanacs, Jarry and his collaborators united the worlds of counter-cultural satirical journalism and 'highbrow' literary traditions.

Contemporary news is also a main source of inspiration for the texts in the Almanacs. Several central themes in the Almanacs dominated the news in 1898 and 1900: the Dreyfus Affair, Colonialism, spelling reforms, repopulation (a government plan to boost declining birth rates), Rodin's controversial statue of Balzac, nominees for the Legion of Honour, the 1900 World Fair<sup>35</sup> Jarry's fascination for news, which also marked his later chronicles, is clearly expressed in both works.

### **5.3.1 Satire and parody; questioning representation and claims to truth**

The Almanacs are obviously intended as parodies of newspapers and magazines. In the texts, as in his journalism, Jarry employs journalist discourse and genres to satirize the press and transform the news. This is the case in the section *Lettres et Arts* from the first Almanac. Here the use of a typical newspaper or magazine title implies that this is the Almanac's 'cultural supplement.' It is in fact a discussion about recent cultural events in the form of a (fictional) walk through Paris. During that walk Ubu casually chats with his companion Athanor le Fourneau, a 'winter character' ('personnage d'hiver'). His name is a tautology, as Athanor, like 'fourneau', is another word for an oven, originally used to describe an alchemist's oven. The name is an alchemist amalgam of a fictional and real character.<sup>36</sup> Jean-Paul Morel, editor of Vollard's Ubu works, suggests that it might be based on a real character, Xanrof, né Léon Fourneau (1867-1953).<sup>37</sup> Xanrof was an anagram of 'fornax', latin for 'fourneau'. He was a lawyer turned singer and composer in the Chat Noir circle, writing songs for cabaret performers. In one of his articles, Alphonse Allais, after a public feud between him and Xanrof in 1891, reminded everyone that 'vieux fourneau' signified 'imbecile'.<sup>38</sup> As such it entered the *Nouveau Larousse illustré* in 1900. In any case, in an Argot dictionary from 1896, this connotation was already provided, as well as the meaning of 'vagabond', explaining perhaps why Fourneau wanders the streets of Paris with Ubu. Vagabond/oven/imbecile Athanor Le Fourneau is Ubu's regular companion in the texts of the first and second Almanac. Bonnard's drawings of Fourneau depict him with a head shaped like a triangular oven, including a chimney, and with big gaping eyes. Although his name implies otherwise, Fourneau's questions and

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<sup>35</sup> I consulted issues of *Le Temps*, *Le Figaro* and *La Croix* from 1898 until 1901, made available online by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. The Dreyfus Affair and Zola's trial dominated the front pages almost every day in 1898, as did the World Exhibition in 1900.

<sup>36</sup> 'Fourneau' was also used by Jarry as a synonym for 'barbeau' or 'barbillon'. On an April fool's card sent by Jarry to Vallette, there is a drawing of a gigantic fish devouring a man. The accompanying text reads: 'Mossieu le Fourneau retiré en ses appartements ingurgitant une modeste partie de son frugal repas.' OC III, pp 559/60. Rachilde wrote : 'Tout à coup, le père Ubu s'écrie d'une voix féroce: "Le fourneau!" et il tire de l'onde mystérieuse et perfide un superbe barbillon.' Rachilde, *Le Surmâle des lettres*, p. 20.

<sup>37</sup> Vollard, *Tout Ubu Colonial et autres textes*, p. 63.

<sup>38</sup> François Caradec, *Alphonse Allais* (Paris: Belfond, 1994), p. 416.

remarks often make more sense than Ubu's. Fourneau' function is that of comic sidekick, asking reasonable questions or telling Ubu off, paving the way for Ubu's absurdist reflection on events. Whereas Fourneau, although typecast as an absurd figure, acts as the voice of reason, Ubu, presented as an authority in the Almanacs, utters only absurdities. This role reversal can no doubt be read as a parody of the authority role of journalists or literary commentators.

In the arts and letters section Jarry employs a specific journalist genre to further emphasize the parody. Chronicles, dialogues and commentaries about cultural events in fact filled the pages of late nineteenth century press in Paris. Entitled *causeries*, or *promenades*, they were presented as elegant strolls through Paris. *Le Petit Journal* for example sported a chronicle entitled 'Promenade à Paris', in which the chronicler presented himself as a *flâneur* who simply had to walk the streets of Paris in order to find the news.<sup>39</sup> Ubu's stroll through Paris, described in the section 'Lettres et Arts', is evidently modelled after this particular journalist genre, as Ubu is also portrayed as a *flâneur*. In his *Peintre de la vie moderne* (1859) Baudelaire had of course depicted newspaper illustrator Constantin Guys as the perfect *flâneur*, who moved through the crowd like a fish through water, 'to become one with the crowd.' Walter Benjamin has turned the nineteenth century figure of the *flanêur* into an emblematic figure of modernity in his analysis of Baudelaire and the modern city.<sup>40</sup> Ubu's casual stroll in fact becomes emblematic for the way of writing in the Almanac and the way modern life is transmitted in the text. In his capacity as *flâneur*, the 'Ubu Reporter' of the Almanacs appears as a mirror of the author figure as *receiver* of materials from the outside.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore Ubu's walk from one place to another mimics the text as it wanders from one subject to another. Ubu is the 'coincidental' recipient of images and impressions from the city. From there Ubu's apparently random commentary on current events evolves.

However Ubu's walk is not really a casual stroll, but a 'fête automobile' (the section's subtitle. An 'automobile feast' is of course a pun on the calendar's *fêtes mobiles* or 'moveable feasts'; holidays which fall on the same day of the week, but of which the date varies. The term is also a metaphor for things changing over time, but the slightly different title of 'automoveable feast' in the Almanac overturns that cliché, presenting instead Ubu's speedy, motorized version of events. As such the title conveys the random, fragmented nature of the text, with Ubu and Fourneau moving from one place to another and from one topic to another; reflecting perhaps the fragmented way newspapers transmitted news and information. Of course, Ubu's representation of events in the Almanac is superior to that of newspapers. This is made very clear by Ubu in the opening dialogue of the Arts and Letters section:

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<sup>39</sup> Gregory Shaya, "The *Flâneur*, the *Badaud*, and the Making of a Mass Public in France, circa 1860-1910," *The American Historical Review* 109, no. 1 (2004): p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1997).

<sup>41</sup> As Décaudin also argues with regard to the role of the author in collage, Michel Décaudin, "Collage et montage dans l'oeuvre d'Apollinaire," *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur* (Beiheft 7) Apollinaire (1980): p. 36.

PÈRE UBU: Monsieur mon ami, vous êtes imbu d'idées absurdes par la fréquentation exclusive des journaux ; je vous conseille la cure de votre cerveau par la lecture de notre Almanach, ou mieux, monsieur, la promenade digestive à jeun dans mon Omnubu *Cours-des-Événements – Postérterne*.<sup>42</sup>

Ubu presents his Almanac, in other words Jarry's literary work or literature in general, as a cure for newspapers, both to Fourneau and to the readers. He invites Fourneau on a healthy 'digestive morning stroll on an empty stomach' in his miraculous 'Omnubu Course of Events in Reverse' as an antidote to the 'absurdities' propagated by the press. Again an analogy is made between transportation and news. This idea of an omnibus bears a close resemblance to the short-lived satirical *L'Omnibus de Corinthe* Directed by painter Marc Mouclier, the magazine appeared between October 15 1896 and February 15 1898. Several people from Jarry's circle contributed to the magazine, and even Ubu pops up in it.<sup>43</sup> It sported the subtitle, *Véhicule illustré des idées générales. Départ tous les trois mois*, which also suggested the image of a motorized means of transport driving through the streets of Paris to pick up the news. Like the title of *La Chandelle Verte* and its 'lights on the events of the time', the cliché titles normally given to similar sections in newspapers and magazines were parodied and transformed.



Figure 9: Ubu and Fourneau in front of a kiosk, Almanac 1899

Ubu's direct dialogue with newspapers is poignantly illustrated by Bonnard's drawing of Ubu and Fourneau, standing in front of a Parisian kiosk (Fig. 1). After having contemplated the magazines and images, Ubu and Fourneau

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<sup>42</sup> OC I, p. 552.

<sup>43</sup> See chapter 7 for examples. See also appendix, Georges Bans and Emile Strauss, for *L'Omnibus de Corinthe*.

start their digestive walk through Paris. The kiosk is the logical starting point for their discussion of current events. Ubu's Omnibus travels in reverse and so does Ubu's logic. Ubu offers his (absurd) 'truths' as real truths instead of the 'absurdities' ('idées absurdes) of real newspapers, thus questioning the claims to truth and realist representation made by the press. The use of a journalist genre only enhances the parody and the questioning of these conventions.

This is also the case in the second Almanac in which we find a similar treatment of current events. The section *Confessions d'un enfant du siècle* sports the subtitle *commentaire du Père Ubu sur les événements récents*, and is, apart from a jab at Musset, also reminiscent of contemporary newspaper articles written by a prominent intellectual figure. The figure of the author as intellectual is clearly mocked, by allowing the character of Ubu to take on that role. In this text Ubu is questioned by his Conscience. The character of Conscience made several appearances before in the Ubu texts. In the early *Guignol* (the short Ubu play from *Minutes du Sable Mémoires*), there is already a dialogue between Ubu and (his) Conscience. Conscience appears again in *Les Paralipomènes d'Ubu* as well as in *Ubu Cocu*. In both *Guignol* and *Ubu Cocu* (which contains a reworking of *Guignol*), Conscience jumps out from a suitcase, dressed, according to the scenic directions, as a 'grand bonhomme en chemise', 'a gentleman in his nightgown'.<sup>44</sup> As I discussed in chapter one, the marionette Ubu is literally separated from his Conscience. In the 1901 Almanac Conscience pops out of Ubu's bedside table as a snake-like figure, which says a lot about the nature of his conscience and its credibility. It emphasizes again that Ubu himself is an untrustworthy, paradoxical character. Conscience wakes Ubu up, urging him to reflect on the past and the future. In the vein of the first Almanac, this section is poured into the form of a short theatrical dialogue, complete with introduction of the characters and scenic directions interrupting the dialogue. The dynamic between Ubu and Conscience is similar to that between Ubu and Fourneau in the first Almanac.

The dialogue between Ubu and Conscience also has all the characteristics of a journalist interview. Abbreviations are used for example to indicate the speakers, as they would be in newspaper interviews. The names of Conscience and Ubu are thus conveniently and comically reduced to the vulgar 'CON' (French for 'idiot') and 'P.U' (phonetically evoking the French word for 'stinks'). Both tone and style of an actual interview are rigorously maintained in 'Confessions d'un enfant du siècle', as Conscience probes Ubu on current events. Ubu replies either with his usual illogical logic, or with reluctance at being interviewed:

CON. : Puisque vous aimez à ne rien faire comme tout le monde, vous devez être séduit par la réforme de l'orthographe ?

P.U. : Assez peu, monsieur, et je m'étonne que vous me fatigiez l'esprit à m'interviewer sur cette ineptie !<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>*Les Minutes du sable mémorial*, OC I, p. 183, *Ubu Cocu ou l'Archéopteryx*, OC I, p. 498 .

<sup>45</sup> OC I, pp. 586/87.

Conscience, irritated by his unwillingness, reproaches Ubu for his absurd comments, but nevertheless maintains his role as a poised journalist, by continuing to ask questions on Ubu's thoughts in a detached tone and interview-like style:

CON. : "Père Ubu, vous ne dites que des bêtises. Quelles sont, pour changer, vos dernières absurdités en matière de peinture ? <sup>46</sup>

In return Ubu also maintains the rhetoric and techniques of the interview genre in order to validate his absurd argument or idea. In doing so the text turns journalism, with its emphasis on the real and the truth, into something utterly speculative. Set in the context of the Almanacs, the codes and conventions of newspapers are obviously questioned and overturned.

First of all, the use of the interview genre therefore functions as a parodist device. The Almanacs question the representation of reality as it is transmitted in newspapers. Conscience's interview with Ubu can be seen as a parody of interviews and writers 'enquêtes' in these years, deriding the position of the author as an intellectual authority who, in this text, is personified by Père Ubu. It is easy to see the resemblance between Ubu's absurdities and Jarry's own ironic answers to surveys.

However there is another more important effect of this use of the interview. The interview was a relatively modern journalist genre, which became popular around 1900, when newspapers started to present the news differently.<sup>47</sup> French newspapers increasingly modelled themselves after American-style journalism. This meant that 'real life' reportage became as important as the chronicles and intellectual commentaries on the news. Reporters and special correspondents ventured into the world and sought to tell the stories as they happened to them.<sup>48</sup> The interview apparently abolished any mediation between reader and event and, similar to reportage, gave the impression of realism and immediacy.<sup>49</sup>

In the Almanacs reality is 'documented' (subjectively) by appropriating newspaper fragments, styles and genres. The effect of realism sought by journalism is thus suggested in the Almanacs as well. This process is also visible in other works, for example in Jarry's 'science-fiction' novel *Le Sûrmaie* (1902). Journalist reportage is inserted as substitute for the ongoing narrative, functioning as an 'authentic' document of reality:

Pour plus d'exactitude, nous empruntons le récit de la course dite du Perpetual-Motion-Food ou des 'Dix Mille Milles' à l'un des hommes de la quintuplette, Ted Oxborrow, tel que l'a recueilli et publié le New-York Herald. <sup>50</sup>

What follows in *Le Sûrmaie* is a first person, eye-witness account of the 10.000 mile bicycle race between a five person bicycle and a locomotive. The

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<sup>46</sup> OC I, p. 591.

<sup>47</sup> Bélanger, *Histoire générale de la presse française*, p. 277.

<sup>48</sup> Vanessa R Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities. Early Mass Culture in Fin de Siècle Paris*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 26-40.

<sup>49</sup> Kalifa, "L'écriture du fait divers au 19e siècle," p. 304.

<sup>50</sup> OC II, pp. 218/19.

blurry mix of referential and fictional discourse also applied to certain newspaper genres at the time. The 'reportage' for example was a good example of this, in which the journalist/writer was also an actor in his own adventure, as is the cyclist in the fragment from Jarry's novel. The stories, seen and experienced by the reporter included the journalist's personal emotions and views on a certain issue.<sup>51</sup> Since the personality of the journalist could exercise such an influence on stories in contemporary newspapers, Ubu's role as journalist and commentator is not that far removed from reality.

The effect of this insertion of newspaper genres is twofold. First of all, as emblems of an extra-literary reality, these genres alter conventional literary representation. Secondly, the juxtaposition of the newspaper fragment with the literary text also alters the supposed realism of that 'everyday' element. The representation of reality transmitted through newspapers is questioned. The language in Ubu's Almanacs 'tells' a different everyday reality than the language of newspapers. Within the context of a newspaper readers are inclined to accept a reporter's account of events. Within the (literary) context of the Almanacs, Ubu's version of events of course immediately becomes doubtful. Jarry thus comments on journalist accounts of events, showing that it is also a matter of genre, codes and conventions how one reads the papers and how they represent reality.



Figure 10: *Le Figaro*, September 10, 1898, advertisement for a miraculous cure for toothache

<sup>51</sup> Thérénty, *La littérature au quotidien. Poétiques journalistiques au XIXe siècle*. In chapter three of her book Thérénty discusses the hybrid forms of literature and journalism in newspapers (fait divers, reportage, even the interview) and the fact that boundaries between fiction and non-fiction were often very ambiguous in nineteenth century journalism.

The collage of recipes in the first Almanac was perhaps intended to have a similar effect. Whereas they might seem humorist remnants of a distant past, they turn out to be not so distinct from contemporary publicities. In *Le Figaro* of 10 September 1898 and in *Le Temps*, of February 2 1898, one could find adverts for miraculous toothpaste able to cure all tooth aches (Fig. 2). On the 15<sup>th</sup> of December 1900, around the time the second Almanac was written, the same ad appeared again in *Le Figaro*. In fact if one examines advertisements of this period, one can remark a large amount of (curious) cures and medicines for illnesses such as throat ache, tongue diseases, skin diseases, and constipation. One could see Jarry's (Rabelaisian) attraction for these inflictions and their miraculous cures. For similar reasons the widely advertised laxative Hunyadi Janos ended up as a Saint in Ubu's Saint's Calendar.

The *Figaro* advertisement tries to endorse this miraculous product by emphasizing its old heritage, made by monks since the fourteenth century. The popular scientific discourse employed here is similar to that in Alexis Piémontais' recipes from four hundred years earlier. The collage of old recipes in Ubu's Almanac renders clear that these old recipes are equally valid or equally silly as contemporary 'miracle cures'. With Ubu's Almanacs Jarry generally challenged claims to truth, whether through satirizing popular almanacs, pseudo-recipes, newspapers genres or contemporary publicity. Jarry made clear that *faits divers* could be as imaginative as a novel and the same applied to news, advertisements or popular recipes. By manipulating the reality transmitted in newspapers or advertising, the Almanacs question their representation of that reality.

### 5.3.2 Re-illustrating reality

In this respect, Bonnard's drawings also play an important role. Ubu's Almanacs provide the reader with a subjective, alternative reality, in which the Ubu universe blends in perfectly with contemporary everyday life. To emphasize this even more Bonnard's illustrations situate Ubu and his Omnubu within the everyday reality of Parisian street life.

In fact, Bonnard was renowned at the time for his depictions of street scenes and everyday life. Just as Jarry saw theatre in the triviality of the *faits divers*, Bonnard also appreciated the 'theatre of the everyday' in the streets.<sup>52</sup> Most mornings Bonnard would walk the streets to find inspiration for his art work, seeking to record the particularities of a place or building. The illustrations to the first Almanac's 'Arts and Letters' section, show an obvious resemblance to Bonnard's other work, for example the lithographs of *Quelques aspects de la vie de Paris*, published by Vollard in 1899, or the *Croquis parisiens*, also advertised in the 1901 Almanac.<sup>53</sup>

In the first Almanac one illustration depicts Ubu and Fourneau on the roof of their *Omnubu* (Fig.3). Below, on the horizon, we see an alignment of several major landmarks in Paris, the Eiffel tower, the Sacré Coeur. The discussion about current events is triggered by the characters' journey through the streets of Paris. Bonnard's images illustrate this search for news on the street. In another drawing for example we see Fourneau and Ubu

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<sup>52</sup>Hyman, *Bonnard*, p. 50.

<sup>53</sup> See Bonnard's illustrative work in Terrasse, *Bonnard illustre*.

passing the restaurant Foyot and the Senate (Fig.4). These particular buildings trigger a conversation about politics, as I will discuss in chapter seven.

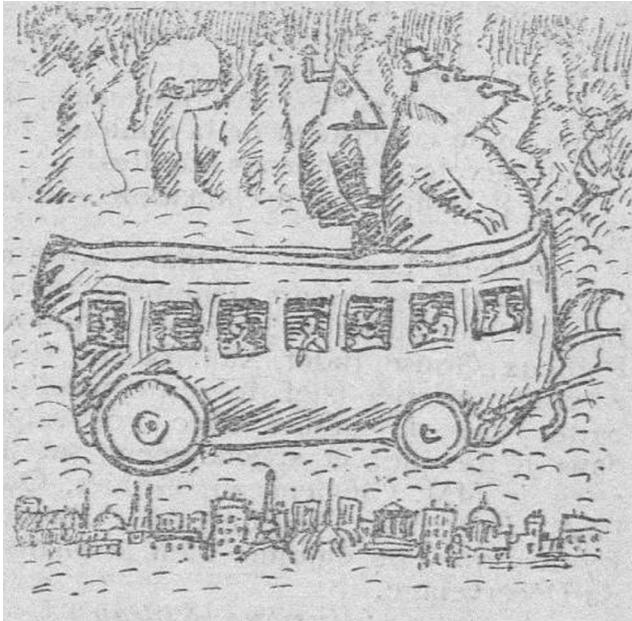


Figure 11 Ubu and Fourneau on top of the *Omnibus*, Almanac 1899.

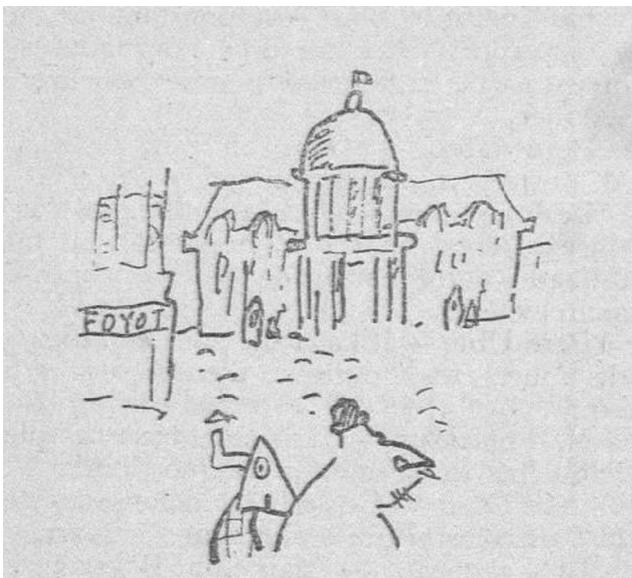


Figure 12 Ubu and Fourneau walking past restaurant Foyot and the Senate

Bonnard's miniature comic drawings of Ubu and Fourneau posing in front of monuments capture, as Baudelaire's painter of modern life, fugitive and ephemeral street life. These fleeting, pseudo-realistic 'postcards from Paris' accompany Ubu's journalist view on events. The illustrations work in the same way as the other newspaper genres employed in the Almanacs. They are used to emphasize the 'realism' of the text, as images in newspapers

normally would. Bonnard's illustrations strengthen the parody, questioning the 'truthfulness' of illustrations in the press. Furthermore they help to create the alternative reality of the Almanacs in which Ubu effortlessly blends in with 'real' life.

### 5.3.3 From sensational news to alternative realities

The transformation of news has indeed on the one hand an obvious satirical goal, but the (sensational) stories reported in newspapers could also spur new, creative sources of associations, metaphors and symbols. I discussed how in the text of the February section in the first Almanac a strange figure emerges when Ubu stares at the water of the Seine:

'...non pas un rassemblement, c'étaient des passants qui passaient, sans s'arrêter, mais peut-être se seraient-ils arrêtés sans l'intervention possible d'un sergent de ville, il n'y avait pas de sergent de ville, mais il aurait pu venir un sergent de ville, même deux sergents de ville, voire une brigade centrale de sergents de ville, et nous nous sentîmes attirés vers la contemplation de l'eau. Et non sans raison, jugez-en :

Un être était immergé, un être luttait contre l'engloutissement, à la surface liquide ; sans souci d'aucune pudeur, il était entièrement nu, sans paralysie causée par le froid de la saison ; sans l'aide de membres artificiels, car il n'avait ni bras ni jambes, il nageait ma foi très bien, un poisson quoi !<sup>54</sup>

The description in this fragment eventually leads to the revelation that the creature is a fish, due to the text's association with the zodiac sign of Pisces. However, I quote this passage again because it also conjures up a layer of meaning not previously addressed, linked to the contemporary press. The first impression one gets when reading these lines is that of a human-like, albeit macabre, creature. The figure implied here in the text is that of the *noyé*, the drowned person. Although the word is not mentioned as such the image is evoked by the description.

The image generally seems to refer to a particular macabre news item. The sensational press often reported gruesome stories about dismembered bodies found in the Seine. In 1876 crowds had gathered at the area of the Seine where the limbless body of Marie le Manach was discovered.<sup>55</sup> *Le Petit Parisien* reported that 3000 visitors came to see her body at the Paris morgue. The words 'rassemblement' and 'passants qui passaient' can be read as a reference to curious crowds gathered on the river bank. The image might have originated from one of the many *faits divers* in the press, or may even have been something witnessed by Jarry himself.<sup>56</sup> But in fact the above passage in the Almanac seems to have been more directly inspired by a lithograph by Félix Vallotton. It accompanied an article entitled 'le noyé' in Octave Uzanne's *Badauderies Parisiennes. Les rassemblements : Physiologies de la rue* (1896). The book contained impressions of everyday Parisian street life, and commentaries particularly on the issue of crowds. Several

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<sup>54</sup> OC I, p. 539.

<sup>55</sup> Shaya, "The *Flâneur*, the *Badaud*, and the Making of a Mass Public in France, circa 1860-1910," pp. 41-78.

<sup>56</sup> In her recent study of Jarry, Jill Fell for example explains the figure of the 'noyé' from a psychological perspective, suggesting it could be a traumatic image haunting Jarry's imagination. Fell, *Alfred Jarry. An Imagination in Revolt*, p. 164.

prominent writers, many from Jarry's inner circle, contributed articles.<sup>57</sup> Vallotton made 30 black and white illustrations for the publication.<sup>58</sup> It contained scenes of sensational crimes, accidents, rallies, any event that attracted large crowds. They were the sort of thrilling scenes one could also see illustrated in popular newspapers, such as *Le Petit Journal* and its illustrated supplement. Only here writers and artists shared their observations of Parisian city life, of street scenes, crowds gathering or people gaping at something happening in the street.



Figure 13 Félix Vallotton, 'Le Noyé', from *Badauderies Parisiennes. Les rassemblements: Physiologies de la rue*, 1896.

The word 'rassemblement' evokes the title of this book and Jarry's 'physiological' description of the 'drowned' figure also evokes the work. The previously abstract description of curious passers-by and the possible intervention of a sergeant take on a concrete form when one looks at Vallotton's drawing (Fig. 5).

The importance of this figure for Jarry's writing lies primarily in its imaginative power and the multiple associations it could induce. To the semantic fields I previously discerned in this fragment (text-image, biographical, artistic/literary, political) one can add another one, that of news and newspapers. The choice of words appears to refer clearly to

<sup>57</sup> Vallotton's illustration accompanies the article 'Le Noyé', by Victor Barrucand, in *Badauderies Parisiennes. Les rassemblements: Physiologies de la rue*, Henri Floury, 1896, pp. 50-54. The book also contains contributions by, among others, Tristan Bernard, Fénéon, Léon Blum, Gustave Kahn, Ernest La Jeunesse and Thadée Natanson. They were all involved with *La Revue Blanche* and several were friends of Jarry.

<sup>58</sup> On Vallotton's graphic work for this book see also "Vallotton," ed. Rudolf Koella (München: Heimer Verlag), *Vallotton: Graphics*, ed. Ashley St James (London: Ash & Grant, 1978).

Vallotton's drawing that was inspired by sensational events and their depiction in the papers. Of course, Jarry, considering his predilection for semiotic polyvalence, would not allow the figure of the 'noyé' to be solely limited to this one reference. The *noyé* and the image of a limbless creature floating in the water were in fact recurring images in Jarry's work. In his journalism Jarry showed a particular preference for horrid crime and macabre accidents and it is here that this figure also appeared several times. His article 'Les mœurs des noyés' (the customs of drowned people) is a pseudo-anthropological study exploring the habits of these mysterious creatures, who reside in the water.<sup>59</sup> A similar analogy with fish is made, although contrary to fish, as Jarry explains in his deadpan logic, the 'drowned person' only floats downstream and does not travel in groups.<sup>60</sup> If one draws an analogy between the 'noyé' and the author, the author is here presented as someone who goes against the current. In another article from 1902, 'Communication d'un militaire', there is a similar dehumanizing of the drowned figure, arguing again that it is an aquatic animal species. The 'noyé' can cast off his limbs to rescue himself from people trying to recover the body.<sup>61</sup> The figure of the 'noyé' returns again in Jarry's last unfinished work, *La Dragonne*.

The drowned figure appears first of all in the Almanac text because of its resemblance to 'fish' (Pisces sign). 'Repêcher un noyé', the expression signifying fishing a drowned person out of the water, also links the two 'signs' together. Apart from its meaning as a drowned corpse, 'noyé' is also *argot* for 'a drunk'.<sup>62</sup> In 'Les mœurs des noyés' Jarry refers to this meaning, describing the 'noyés' as 'ces intéressants ivres morts de l'aquatisme'.<sup>63</sup> This association of course establishes a thinly veiled reference to Jarry's own drinking. Apparently the inhabitants of the Phalanstère were also referred to as 'les noyés', the 'drunks'.<sup>64</sup> Figuratively this limbless figure also means someone keeping his head above the water, signifying someone who is in trouble. On the one hand the words 'engloutissement' and 'liquide' could be read as biographical references to Jarry's financial struggles. On the other hand they also refer to a semantic field of water and liquid and are thus tied to both fishing and to drinking (of alcohol). In one small sentence, the biographic thread in the February text and some recurring motifs in the Almanac (art, news, fishing, drinking, money, Phalanstère), come together.

This small paragraph alone illustrates the complexities of Jarry's writing and the density of his texts. News items, illustrations, collage material and words appear to have been carefully chosen to evoke a multitude of connotations. Together they are used to create a symbolic and highly subjective reality. However, Jarry's use and transformation of news enabled him not merely to satirize and critique the contemporary press, nor to use it

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<sup>59</sup> OC II, p. 357.

<sup>60</sup> OC II, pp. 357/58.

<sup>61</sup> OC II, p. 360/61 As Jarry explains in this article, this relates to a bizarre historical fact. There were rewards for recovering bodies out of the water and oddly enough pulling a dead body out of the water was rewarded with more money than rescuing a person drowning but still alive. This could of course be an incentive for dubious practices. (see OC II, *Notes* to pages 360/61)

<sup>62</sup> Georges Delasalle, *Dictionnaire Argot-Français & Français-Argot. Préface de Jean Richepin* (Paris: Ollendorff, 1896).

<sup>63</sup> OC II, p. 357.

<sup>64</sup> OC II, p. 861.

merely to create his own imaginary and subjective universe. The Almanacs could perhaps also function as a 'healthy' substitute for newspapers.

#### 5.4 Ubu's Almanacs as a 'cure for newspapers'.

The idea of Ubu's Almanac as a substitute for newspapers is put forward in the 'editorial foreword' of the first Almanac, entitled 'exhortation aux lecteurs' (advice to readers); an essential text which reads both as a parody and critique of the press and as a sort of manifesto. In it Ubu, in his usual grand manner, addresses the 'people', or in other words the readers and potential buyers of his Almanac:

Grandes princesses et princes, citadins, villageois, soldats militaires, vous tous fidèles abonnés et acheteurs de cet Almanach de notre astrologie et nos bien-aimés sujets et sujettes, vous n'aurez point à lire de journaux cet hiver. Ô quelle économie d'argent. Le journal d'un sou chaque matin, cela fait bien près de quatre francs, dix, onze ou douze sous tous les trois mois. Je ne parle pas de ceux qui achètent des journaux à trois sous ; car plus on vous fait payer cher des faussetés, plus qu'on vous vole.(...) Notre almanach trimestriel (*quarterly*, disent les Anglais) est un terme payé d'avance dans le rond, solide, confortable, à l'image de notre Gidouille, immeuble terrestre ; vous êtes assurés de vivre encore trois mois, tout un an les abonnés des quatre fascicules des saisons, pour cinquante centimes ! Cornegidouille! quel élixir !<sup>65</sup>

As said in the previous chapter, this text is a pastiche of the prologue of Rabelais' *Pantagrueline Pronostication*. Just as Pantagruel's prologue mocked popular almanacs, Ubu's prologue pokes fun at contemporary newspapers.

Again a journalist genre is employed to achieve this satirical goal. In Jarry's time the validity of the news was often emphasized by a similar foreword or editorial comment in newspapers.<sup>66</sup> Written by the newspaper's editor, such a paratextual comment was meant to denounce other newspapers to promote their own, claiming of course that their reports and their insights were more reliable and true. Ubu takes up the role of the editor here, pleading in favour of his own Almanac and consequently his own truths. Contrary to the more subtle parodies in the rest of the Almanacs, newspapers are explicitly criticized in this text. Ubu continues his rant by scolding the reading audience for their gullible behaviour, 'car vous entendez les vedettes d'un autre journal crier, ou lui-même confesse ses menteries de la veille, pour avoir la gloire d'informer le premier qui ment.'<sup>67</sup> Readers would rather be amused than hear the truth. They, Ubu warns, are manipulated with false information, unable to recognize truth when it does, by chance, come along, and even if they do recognize it, they don't care since it is not entertaining ('Et quelque vraie, authentique information égarée par hasard, ça vous est égal, parce qu'elle n'est pas drôle').<sup>68</sup> Ubu labels newspaper readers as 'lecteurs des feuilles à chute quotidienne', combining a reference to the expression 'feuilles qui tombent' with a pun on 'chute du jour'. Here one reads 'chute quotidienne' and this particular phrasing translates more

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<sup>65</sup> OC I, p. 535.

<sup>66</sup> Kalifa, "L'écriture du fait divers au 19e siècle," p. 304.

<sup>67</sup> OC I, p. 536.

<sup>68</sup> OC I, p. 536.

or less as 'daily fall' or 'daily devaluation', whereas the double meaning of 'quotidien' helps to emphasize the link with the newspaper.

Ubu's foreword, like Jarry's use of newspapers in the Almanacs in general, is clearly intended as a satirical counter-discourse. Through collage of newspaper's fragments, through appropriation of journalist styles and genres and through engaging with news, the strategies of newspapers are turned against them. Newspapers presented themselves as mere reflections of the world. In their articles and pictures, journalists claimed to present a coherent view with clear, causal relationships. With the Almanacs Jarry calls into question these claims, rendering clear how the press could, like literature, construct its own reality.

However, this innovative use of forms and strategies from contemporary 'mass culture' deserves some further consideration. Jarry is one of the first to incorporate them in his work and touches upon an important issue; art's relationship to mass culture or more broadly to everyday life, a topic which would become important throughout the twentieth century. In the following chapter I will therefore discuss in greater detail the effects and the goal behind this use of newspapers and the new bonds Jarry seemed to establish between art and mass culture in the Almanacs.

# Chapter 6

## Bringing art to life

### *Introduction*

In the previous chapter I discussed how Jarry incorporated news and newspapers in his work. Apart from satirical purposes, this use of mass culture raises more questions. In this chapter I will therefore address why Jarry appropriates news and newspapers in the Almanacs and tackle the issue of literature's relationship to mass culture and to everyday life in general. I will argue that the inclusion of forms of mass culture in the Almanacs provided Jarry with means to challenge that culture. Regardless of Jarry's ambivalence and obvious reservations, his work is representative of new bonds emerging between art and mass culture in the early twentieth century. The integration of mass culture also reveals a certain view on art in relation to modern, everyday life. I argue that through engaging with forms of mass culture, and thus bridging a gap between art and everyday life, Jarry sought to revive forms and definitions of art and to rethink the relationship between art, everyday life and mass culture.

### **6.1 The foreword in the first Almanac; a manifesto?**

In the editorial foreword to the first Almanac, Ubu presented his work as a 'cure' against newspapers. Having dismissed the 'feuilles à chute quotidienne', what does Ubu then claim to offer the reader in return? Ubu argues that the Almanacs provide true value for money, using a similar economic and commercial argument newspapers would use. However, unlike newspapers, the Almanacs do not just report the present or the past, but they can also predict the future:

Nous, Père Ubu, vous ouvrons notre savoir de toutes les choses passées, plus vraies que de n'importe quel journal, parce que : Ou nous vous dirons ce que vous avez lu partout ailleurs, le témoignage universel vous assurera ainsi de notre véracité : ou vous ne trouverez nulle part la confirmation de nos dires : notre parole s'élèvera donc en sa vérité absolue, sans discussion. Et au moyen de notre Tempomobile inventée par notre science en physique afin d'explorer le temps (...), nous vous dévoilerons toutes choses futures. Acquérez donc notre Almanach; les journaux dont vous vous encombrâtes naïvement, contrôlez dans ce bréviaire s'ils sont conformes à notre infaillible opinion ; les journaux qui paraîtront demain, notre savoir en météorologique (...) vous les rend inutiles par avance.<sup>1</sup>

Ubu is capable of travelling through time. Time, including time travel and the mastering of time, is a recurring motif in the Almanacs and, as I pointed out before, an important motif throughout Jarry's work. Jarry was a fan of

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<sup>1</sup> OC I, p. 536.

science-fiction and Henri Davray's translation of H.G Wells' *The Time Machine* had recently been published by the Mercure de France in 1898. Ubu's time machine is obvious evidence of this fascination. In the Arts and Letters section we saw Ubu on his miraculous 'Omnubu Course of Events in Return', speeding through both the city and through a seemingly random selection of topics. In the foreword time travel is made possible by Ubu's self-invented *Tempomobile*. This represents a domain in which the Almanacs can not only compete with newspapers, but can also outdo them; foreseeing the future, hence imagination.

Here the time travel motif therefore functions as a metaphor for imagination and creativity. In Ubuesk logic Ubu continues to explain that his version of the past and the present is superior to those found in newspapers. Either people will find proof of Ubu's words elsewhere, only emphasizing the truth of his words, or people will not find any confirmation of what he has said. However in that case nobody will challenge Ubu's claims and his words will logically be the only and the absolute truth. Ubu's reasoning is, as always, irrefutable.

The Almanac is not only presented by Ubu as an imaginative and superior cross-over between literature and journalism in this foreword. Ubu's rant also seems to reflect certain ideas about the place of literature and of the writer in society.

### **6.1.1 The writer as prophet**

It is interesting to situate this discourse in its cultural and historical context. Scholars have argued that the increasing professionalization in the nineteenth century robbed writers of several domains which before had belonged to the realm of literature.<sup>2</sup> Specialized historians now claimed history, sociologists tackled society and journalists took on the present. Some aspects of life were no longer exclusively the domain of writers and this made some reconsider the place of authors and literature in society. 'Predicting the future' was one domain that was left and one that could bridge the gap between literature and life.<sup>3</sup> This led to a prophetic model of the writer. The author was thought to have a message that 'breaks with the established order'; he could intervene in society, by providing alternative viewpoints.<sup>4</sup> The writer was thought to have an original vision on the future which others did not have.

Ubu's claim of being able to predict the future in his Almanac seems to attribute precisely such a status to the writer. Ubu not only reclaims the journalist domain, but also emphasizes the 'prophetic' powers of his Almanac, hence literature. He employs an almost religious discourse to get his 'message' across, claiming his word as the absolute truth, describing his almanac as a 'bréviaire', a prayer book. This religious terminology emphasizes, with a good dose of humour of course, the image of the writer (symbolized by Ubu) as a prophet.

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<sup>2</sup> Among others Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, Charle, *Naissance des "intellectuels" 1880-1900*, Gisèle Sapiro, "Forms of politicization in the French literary field," *Theory and Society* 32 (2003): pp. 633-52.

<sup>3</sup> Sapiro, "Forms of politicization in the French literary field," p. 638.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

The foreword seems to mirror Jarry's paradoxical views on authorship expressed in 'Linteau'. In that text he appeared to adhere to a longstanding nineteenth-century (originally Romantic) idea of the author as someone with an inspired vision, superior to the public. The author possessed visionary capacities that other 'mortals' did not have, certainly not journalists, as is made very clear here in the Almanac. While with the Almanacs Jarry mocks contemporary journalism, he nevertheless seems to want to intervene in life and public debate. Part jokingly no doubt, the prophetic role of the writer is claimed to be indispensable through Ubu. While the text might poke fun at some of the high strung contemporary ideas about authorship, literature appears nevertheless to be presented as the only logical counter-discourse to the press.

### 6.1.2 Literature as a cure for life

The editorial foreword thus almost reads as a literary manifesto. Of all the texts in the two Almanacs, this foreword is most directly and most aggressively aimed at the reader. This combative tone brings to mind later avant-garde manifestoes, which used similar strategies to convey their artistic and political message; aggressive speech, a semi-prophetic discourse and blatant self-promotion.

By engaging in a direct dialogue with readers, Ubu reveals the aim of his Almanac, but also seems to express an idea about literature's place in society. Ubu's Almanac (hence literature) is the refreshing and only reasonable alternative for the 'journal d'un sou'. Ubu's second Almanac was of course advertised in *La Revue Blanche* as a 'Revue des plus récents événements politiques, littéraires, coloniaux, par-devant le Père Ubu.'<sup>5</sup> The Almanac is, part mockingly no doubt, and part seriously perhaps, but nevertheless *very explicitly* presented as 'competition' for the press. It appears that Ubu is looking to reach a potentially very large audience, in order to educate people. Education was after all an important traditional feature of the almanac genre.

In fact Ubu's Almanac renders all other publications superfluous, since it is comprehensive and absolute. As the omniscient Ubu states with aplomb: 'Les journaux qui paraîtront demain, notre savoir en météorologie...vous les rend inutiles par avance. [...] N'êtes-vous pas à présent certains, Messieurs, que l'Almanach du Père Ubu fera la pluie et le beau temps.'<sup>6</sup> Ubu's Almanac controls the course of events, past, present and future, and the weather. In other words the Almanac sets the tone. In using a pseudo-scientific term such as 'tempomobile', invented by Ubu's 'science en physique', this foreword ties in with Jarry's philosophy of pataphysics. Pataphysics can be read as a plea for the superiority of art and the imagination over other (rational) domains in life, such as science. In this case Ubu's Almanacs, as representatives of Ubu's pataphysical knowledge, take their revenge on newspapers. The Almanacs, with the help of pataphysics, allow Ubu to speak out on every possible subject and delivering his absurdist view of the world.

In 'Le temps dans l'art' Jarry himself had praised the a-historical, a-temporal nature of the work of art. The Almanac has a similar advantage

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<sup>5</sup> *La Revue Blanche*, January 1, 1901, OC I, p. 1211.

<sup>6</sup> OC I, p. 536.

over newspapers. It could be both topical and up-to-date *and* a-temporal, possessing an eternity value newspapers did not have. The choice for the almanac genre is telling in this respect. Traditionally it was a publication meant for preservation; readers were supposed to keep it and re-read it, since it contained valuable practical tips and important life lessons. Unlike a newspaper it should not be thrown away. This seems to be the argument made by Ubu in the foreword as well. In the Arts and Letters section Ubu recommended the reading of his Almanac to Fourneau as a 'cure' for newspapers. A similar vocabulary is used in this foreword, offering the Almanac (and no doubt literature in general) as an 'élixir', as a miraculous cure for the 'absurdities' in the press, for the stupidity of the reading public and for life in general.

## **6.2 Art and mass culture; ambiguities**

However, to get this jubilant 'message of praise' across, aggressive publicity techniques and self-promotional discourse are also employed. 'Acquérez donc notre Almanach!' Ubu exclaims for example, like a vendor selling his newspaper in the street. This does raise another question: how do the Almanacs relate to contemporary forms of mass culture? And more generally what is said about art's position towards this culture and everyday life?

The emergence of mass culture and its relation to (avant-garde) art has of course been a complex and heavily debated subject throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century up until now. Mass culture raised concerns about the fate of autonomous art. Critics feared a declining status of the literary work and the author. Benjamin, for example, described the loss of the aura of the work of art in modern times, although he also considered mass culture as a possible democratizing force. The Frankfurt School, in particular Adorno and Horkheimer, would critique the uniformity, banality and hegemony of the 'culture industry'. In the last decades, especially under the influence of cultural studies, that attitude has in return been criticized, spurring discussions about what defines 'high' and 'low' culture. An elaborate historical overview or theoretical discussion of this complicated issue goes beyond the scope of this book. What I would like to argue in this chapter is that, although Mallarmé and many Symbolists shared an anxiety towards mass culture, the attitude among many writers and artists was always highly ambiguous, as that same culture also provided new creative possibilities. This clearly manifests itself in Jarry's work.

### **6.2.1 The modern work of art is a stuffed crocodile**

The attitude towards mass culture, as one can read between the lines in Ubu's Almanacs, is neither straightforwardly optimistic nor unambiguously negative. Let us take a look again for example at the pseudo-advertisement 'Advice to capitalists and lost/family fathers' of the first Almanac and the way the works are promoted:

CONSEILS AUX CAPITALISTES ET PERD-DE-FAMILLE

Il faut acquérir sans retard,  
car c'est un bon placement d'argent  
15, rue de l'Échaudé-Saint-Germain

*Ouverture d'Ubu Roi*, piano à quatre mains.  
*Marche des Polonais*, piano à quatre mains.  
*Chanson du Décervelage*.  
*Trois Chansons à la Charcutière*.  
 a) Du Pays tourangeau.  
 b) Malheureuse Adèle.  
 c) Velas ou l'Officier de Fortune.  
*La Complainte de M. Benoît*.  
*Paysage de neige*.  
*Benjamin*.  
*Berceuse obscène*.  
*Ubu Roi*, texte et musique, fort beau livre autographié, dont il ne reste plus que quelques exemplaires. Prière de se presser.  
*Sollicitudes*.  
*Romance des Romances*.  
*Ubu Roi*, texte seul, format de poche, édition imprimée avec des caractères spéciaux et dont il reste à cette date 14 exemplaires.  
*Chanson du Porc-épic*.  
*Ronde des Neveux inattentionnés*.  
*Ce qu'on entendait le soir dans les rues de Gênes*.  
*Le Triangle orgueilleux a dit*.  
*Histoire de la vieille dame très dévote*.  
*Pied de Saint-Pierre*, cantique.  
*Les Pédicures*.  
*Propos de bain*.  
*Solfège illustré*, le seul qui apprenne rapidement la musique aux petits enfants.  
*Scènes familiales pour piano*.<sup>7</sup>

As I remarked before, this 'advice' to capitalists ('buy quickly, for it is a sound financial investment') discloses an essential ambiguity towards advertising. Books, poetry and music are linked to money and commercial values. The phrases 'conseils aux capitalistes et perd-de-famille' and 'c'est un bon placement d'argent' reveal a certain sarcasm.

Jarry's own feelings towards mass culture and the economic values that many felt dominated art, were no less sarcastic. This becomes clear in 'Prix Divers', an article written for *Le Canard Sauvage* in 1903. In it Jarry reflects on the system of awarding prizes, comparing the work of art to a stuffed crocodile, in other words to something lifeless and meaningless, deemed valuable solely for its ornamental purposes and its rarity:

L'objet d'art, par définition, est le crocodile empaillé. « Curiosité agréable à suspendre au plancher d'une chambre », a dit Molière. Les temps ont marché depuis, mais restent de l'argent toujours. L'objet d'art moderne est une curiosité agréable à suspendre au « clou ». <sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> OC I, pp. 566/67.

<sup>8</sup> OC II, p. 495 and p. 911 (note 2). Probably from memory, Jarry quotes Molière, *L'Avare*, act 1, scene II: "Plus, une peau de lézard, de trois pieds et demi, remplie de foin, curiosité agréable pour pendre au plancher d'une chambre. »

Jarry's funny analogy reveals a rather cynical view of the modern work of art as a mere curiosity and economic commodity in a world reigned by money. The underlying sentiment of course is a desire to tear that ornamental artwork down from the wall. In other words art should regain a more meaningful position in society.

Jarry's words reflect the anxieties of writers and artists towards an increased commercialism, a fear similar to that towards the dominance of the press. Throughout the nineteenth century, as the patronage system was gradually replaced by a market system, the literary world had grown increasingly commercial. Publishers started to sell 'authors', no longer just books.<sup>9</sup> Readers began to buy books based on the name of the author. Successful or prize winning authors became good 'investments', whereas unknown authors had difficulties selling their work. Since most avant-garde authors stood outside of the commercial literary market, they created their own forms of publicity and support to generate income and recognition.

Regardless of his obvious reservations towards these mass market values, Jarry was well aware of the fact that commercialism and success often went hand in hand. At the time of his involvement with the Théâtre de l'Œuvre, he wrote to Lugné-Poe for example:

Reçu une lettre d'une dame de mes amies qui demande deux places, payantes bien entendu, si on reprend *Peer Gynt*. Il sera plus politique *sûrement* de les lui donner, car il y en aura dix autres très riches qui s'abonneront et peut-être à des loges.<sup>10</sup>

Although the tone in this letter reveals a disdain for the 'very rich' and their money, it also shows a Jarry aware of the necessity to woo potentially lucrative subscribers to the theatre.

A similar ambivalence characterizes the advertisement in the Almanac. The discourse of commercialism and capitalism is ridiculed, but simultaneously used to promote and sell the work of the authors of the Almanac. In the 'Advice to capitalists' ad, the luxury edition of *Ubu Roi* is described as a 'curiosity' as a 'must-have', thus marketed not so much for its content, but for its rarity. It is presented as a 'really beautiful autographed book, with only a few copies left'. Potential buyers are therefore urged to hurry ('Prière de se presser'). The other edition only has 14 left in stock. The idea of the work of art as a 'curiosity' Jarry dismissed so vehemently in his article, is here part-mockingly and part-seriously employed to sell his own work. A similar, tongue in cheek, 'selling strategy' can also be found in an advert that Jarry wrote for his novel *Messaline* (1901), which he ended with the bombastic phrase: 'La forme de ce roman est nette, éclatante et définitive, comme un camée ou une médaille de ces temps anciens.'<sup>11</sup> The ad was never published in *La Revue Blanche*, for it was deemed a bit too over the top, but it illustrates again how Jarry, to absurd extremes, promoted the 'uniqueness' of his work.

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<sup>9</sup>Demoor, ed., *Marketing the Author. Authorial Personae, Narrative Selves and Self-Fashioning 1880-1930*, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Letter to Lugné-Poe, 17 November 1896, OC I, p. 1057.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in *L'Étoile-Absinthe*, 1983, 17/18, p. 16.

In his memoirs Vollard wrote that Jarry reminded him that the Almanac was destined for a large audience and should therefore not contain anything implausible.<sup>12</sup> If the anecdote is true, the irony of Jarry's words is obvious, since his Almanac hardly appealed to a large audience and it contained nothing but incredible facts. Nevertheless, this anecdote hints at a recurring ambivalence in Jarry's career: his desire to reach a large audience on one side and his uncompromising disdain for the general public on the other. There was a similar ambiguity regarding the potential readers of Ubu's Almanac. Vollard wrote that he printed 1000 copies which had cost him 1000 francs. The reluctance of the printer to issue the Almanac, the fact that the work seemed doomed before its publication, made Vollard decide, or so he writes, to launch it as an 'occasion' for one franc. He was hoping this could still make it a financial success. When buyers stayed away, Vollard began to think that the Almanac was not appreciated *because* of its low price, so he raised the price to two francs. Wanting to boost sales, he felt he had to market it as a 'rare curiosity', similar to the way Jarry had described the status of the modern work of art. However, Vollard's marketing strategies proved to be unsuccessful.

In the end, the second Almanac was a lavish and limited edition publication, which made it primarily available to readers of the cultural elite. It was set in the contemporary trend of the *livre d'artiste* or *beau livre*. These were luxuriously illustrated books, printed in limited editions by small, mostly avant-garde, publishing houses. Such publications were partly a reaction against mass produced images and books and aimed at preserving the elevated status of the printed work. The luxuriously illustrated catalogues and works published by Vollard are a good example of this. Jarry and De Gourmont's *L'Ymagier* from 1894 can equally be situated within this trend.<sup>13</sup>

The Almanac authors, due to their work's marginal status, probably would not and certainly could not reach a large audience, or in any case not the kind of mass audience newspapers and most other popular almanacs catered to. Nonetheless the second Almanac was (akin to the first) made to look like a widespread periodical. This included fictional mentions such as 'on sale everywhere' and 'second edition' on the cover, as a mock selling strategy. Jarry, Vollard and the others created a luxurious limited edition, while at the same time trying to sell it by suggesting it was an actual popular publication. Had the initial thousand copies sold better, it would have no doubt become a more widespread publication. Not to sell it at all was never the initial goal, certainly not that of Vollard, and neither that of Jarry.

This ambiguity of both mocking advertising, placing oneself outside of mass culture as well as making use of of publicity strategies and self-promotion was in fact characteristic of many avant-garde artists, within the circles of Montmartre cabaret culture, but also in the later avant-garde

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<sup>12</sup> 'Jarry m'avait écouté, visiblement intéressé. [...] Mais n'oublions pas que notre *Almanach*, s'adressant au grand public, ne doit pas contenir l'ombre seulement d'une invraisemblance.' Vollard, *Souvenirs d'un marchand de tableaux*, p. 363.

<sup>13</sup> For a more detailed discussion of *L'Ymagier* in this particular tradition, see Juliet Simpson, "Symbolist Illustration and Visual Metaphor: Remy de Gourmont's and Alfred Jarry's *L'Ymagier*," *Word & Image* 21, no. 2 (2005): pp. 150-68.

movements. In fact this (problematic) relationship between art and advertising became prominent in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and it still is today.<sup>14</sup>

### 6.2.2 Ubu as dandy and part of the crowd

The ambivalent attitude towards mass culture is also embodied by the double role Ubu plays in the Almanacs. In the Arts and Letters section, strolling through Paris with Fourneau, as well as in the interview with Conscience, Ubu's role is twofold. At times, he seems to voice popular opinion. At other times, as I pointed out in the previous chapter, he incarnates the position of the ironic bystander, that of the *flâneur*, observing everyday life from a distance. This semantic field of the *flâneur*, discussed in the previous chapter as emblematic for the process of writing, also raises the broader issue of the attitude toward modern, everyday life.



**Figure 1: A crowd gathers around Rodin's new work (Almanac 1899)**

The poet-*flâneur* was separate from the crowd, with a detached observing gaze, while at the same time, like Baudelaire's ideal painter, being able to blend in with the crowd. The illustration in the first Almanac of Ubu and Fourneau on top of their *Omnubu* (Chapter 5, Fig. 3), displays in the background a sort of frieze with an anonymous crowd of people, men, women and children. Ubu and Fourneau are literally and symbolically above and separated from the crowd. A similar dandy-like detachment from society can also be discerned in the text of 'Lettres et Arts' and in other images. At one point Fourneau asks: 'Quel est ce grand peuple en rumeur?' as both him and Ubu watch another anonymous crowd of people flocking together. They are, as it turns out, assembled around Rodin's recently revealed statue of Balzac. The scene is illustrated by Bonnard (Fig. 1). Another poignant

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<sup>14</sup> See for example Joan Gibbons, *Art and advertising* (London/New York: I.B. Taurus, 2005), Kirk & Gopnik Varnedoe, Adam, ed., *Modern Art and Popular Culture. Readings in High and Low*. (New York: Abrams/Museum of Modern Art, 1990), Weiss, *The Popular Culture of Modern Art*.

example of this disconnected contemplation of the crowd is given in the 1901 Almanac. Here Conscience asks Ubu if he has been to the World Exhibition. Ubu resents the question and, with dandy-like contempt, compares the crowds visiting the pavilions as live stock trapped in a barn, these 'myriades de badauds capturés dans cet enclos comme en une souricière. Si mon désir eût été d'observer des passants, je les aurais bien vus en liberté, sur leur boulevard natal.'<sup>15</sup> Ubu's attitude, as a sort of biologist observing the masses in their natural habitat, underlines his distance and superiority towards the public.

The use of the word *badaud* is telling, for this figure had become emblematic of contemporary mass culture.<sup>16</sup> Between 1906 and 1908 the satirical weekly *l'Assiette au beurre* would run several issues criticizing the mass press and mass audiences, showing images of the *badaud*, with a gaping mouth, astonished by everything he sees.<sup>17</sup> The perceived threat posed by crowds was also expressed in contemporary scientific studies such as Gustave Le Bon's, *Psychologie des foules* (1895). Octave Uzanne's *Badauderies Parisiennes. Les rassemblements : Physiologies de la rue* (1896), to which the figure of the 'noyé' in the Almanac text indirectly referred, is also an example of fin de siècle preoccupations with the masses.

The *badaud* represented a loss of individuality and uniqueness. Crowds were seen as a threat, as impressionable and violent; organizing rallies, provoking mass hysteria, causing riots, going on strikes. The World Exhibition was of course the place *par excellence* where curious crowds gathered, in awe of the objects on display. Referring to the World Fair in the Almanac, Ubu proclaims, as a true fin de siècle aesthete looking down on the masses, that 'the most beautiful art object becomes banal in the hands of many'. He would therefore never 'read popular handbooks, only wears tailor-made clothes around his spiral belly and never take the omnibus.'<sup>18</sup> Ubu embodies an attitude common among many contemporary Symbolist and Decadent writers. They rejected anything related to the masses; journalism, politics, vulgar language. It was also a rejection of everything those writers felt was linked to the dominant realist and naturalist movement.

However Ubu's plea for the work of art versus the banality of everyday life is of course hard to believe coming from the prototype of everything vulgar, obscene and banal. The Père Ubu of the Almanacs, as was the case in the other Ubu plays, regularly fills his speech with crude language and obscene innuendo, talking about money, sex, food and violence, or reducing important subjects to the level of obscenities. Whereas Ubu might express this dandy-like view of society, symbolizing anxieties towards mass culture felt among the cultural elite, this position is simultaneously ridiculed when transmitted through the grotesque and paradoxical figure of Ubu. He can embody the refined fin-de-siècle aesthete, the poet-*flâneur* but also its anti-thesis, a rather grotesque dandy.

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<sup>15</sup> OC I, p. 586.

<sup>16</sup> See Shaya, "The *Flâneur*, the *Badaud*, and the Making of a Mass Public in France, circa 1860-1910," p. 4. Walter Benjamin, in his book on Baudelaire, also distinguished between the *flâneur* and the *badaud*, basing his observations on nineteenth century definitions of these two emblematic figures.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p 18.

<sup>18</sup> OC I, p 586

### 6.2.3 Transgressing the boundaries of art and life

Ambiguities towards mass culture were not just limited to Jarry's work, but can also be spotted in Jarry's life, or to be more precise, in his public author persona. Jarry uncompromising attitude often prevented him from having any kind of commercial success. However, this did not prevent Jarry from making clever use of self-promotion and publicity strategies to create a specific media image or spectacle.

Jarry's public and private identification with Ubu, playing the part of (grotesque) dandy and the bohemian eccentric, has been seen as a publicity stunt, provocation or, from a psychological point of view, as a way to cope with the world, or as an alter-ego.<sup>19</sup> The future avant-garde movements, with their poetic agendas, Dada and the Surrealists in particular, would completely identify Jarry with his characters and applaud him for it.<sup>20</sup> André Breton fitted Jarry nicely into Surrealist and Freudian thought. For Breton, Jarry transgressed the boundaries, between the real and the imaginary or the subconscious in his fusion of art and life.<sup>21</sup> Seeing his life as the ultimate work of art, several critics have focused less on his work and more on the gun shooting Jarry, in other words on personal details and anecdotes.<sup>22</sup> Others, working within a more text-centred tradition, tried to liberate Jarry from this mythical identification with his characters, which only, as some felt, distracted from the merits of his work.<sup>23</sup> Changing conceptions over what real literature should be or how the writer relates to his work have, as can be expected, determined how scholars have looked at Jarry's life and work. However it has often distracted from examining Jarry's own ideas about literature and the role of the writer and how his literary works might relate to his public appearances.

As his texts were all so carefully constructed, it seems logical, and this has been somewhat overlooked in my opinion, that Jarry's public performances were an equal part of his poetic strategy. This included the use of creating a (media) spectacle, a performance art *avant la lettre*. In similar fashion, everyday details of Jarry's life received grand and imaginative names and as such entered his literary work, for example his houses (Calvaire du

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<sup>19</sup> C.A. Hackett, "Jarry and Ubu," in *The Writer and his Other Self* (London: Grant & Cutler, 1995), pp. 91-107. In this collection of essays, Hackett sets Jarry in a tradition of writers and their other self's who speak through their literary alter-ego's.

<sup>20</sup> 'Jarry a mis tout son génie dans sa vie', Phillipe Soupault wrote in 1923, Alfred Jarry, *Gestes et Opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien* (Paris, Stock, 1923), 'Les Contemporains', p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> See for example Breton, *Anthologie de l'humour noir*. Pp ?

<sup>22</sup> Seigel's historical study on the *bohémien* for example devotes several pages to how Jarry merged art and life, Seigel, *Bohemian Paris. Culture, Politics and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life 1830-1930.*, pp. 310-22. However he focuses solely on biographical details and anecdotes, not on his literary work. He relies for example on Rachilde's 'biography' of Jarry, *Le Surmâle des Lettres*. This book contains a very personal analysis and she assimilated Jarry with his literary alter-ego. Shattuck wrote a seminal cultural and historical study of the period and discussed Jarry's merging of art and life from a more psychological point of view, Shattuck, *The Banquet Years. The origins of the avant-garde in France 1885 to World War I. Alfred Jarry, Henri Rousseau, Erik Satie, Guillaume Apollinaire*. They and others are right in saying that Jarry turned his life into art, but the focus on his eccentricities almost turn Jarry into a character himself, whereas none of them really address Jarry's poetics or his texts in relation to his public persona.

<sup>23</sup> Many of the scholars in the Collège de Pataphysique in the 1950's and 1960's also tried to focus on his work and less on the myth. Scholars like Noël Arnaud and Michel Arrivé for example were writing within a text-centred, structuralist tradition. As such, they were less concerned with the historical and biographical context of Jarry's texts.

Trucidé, Chasublerie de Saint-Sulpice, La Tripode, Phalanstère). This is not the same as claiming that the person Jarry and his literary characters were one. There was the author Jarry on one side, the private person, the aspiring author, well immersed in the literary world, the loyal friend, the passionate fisherman.<sup>24</sup> On the other side there was the author Jarry in public, speaking like Ubu, his face 'painted white' at the opening night of *Ubu Roi*, boasting about his drinking, shooting his gun, reciting his poetry at the banquet of *La Plume*, in Ubuesque fashion.<sup>25</sup> The latter was, like his literary characters, created by himself. Part of the whole media controversy surrounding the opening night of *Ubu Roi* was incited by Jarry, who deliberately set out to provoke and create publicity, whether negative or not. If the media did not promote him, Jarry would do it for them.

Jarry not only used promotional techniques in his literary work (such as the marketing of his own work and that of his friends in the Almanacs), but he employed similar tactics in his job as art critic. In 1901 for example he promoted the work of painter Cazals, a friend, in *La Plume*. In the review Jarry takes on the role of Ubu and writes in a style similar to that of the adverts in the Almanacs. The article, entitled *Privilège d'Ubu Roy*, reads as a royal patronage of his friend's book. <sup>26</sup> The text is an odd mix of a serious journalist review, a pastiche of Henri II's patronage of Rabelais, a literary Ubu text and blatant publicity. As was the case in Ubu's Almanacs, Jarry effortlessly mingles literature, journalism and publicity.

In his memoirs, Salmon wrote that Jarry had appreciated his effort to merge his life with art, and his art with life, blurring the boundaries between the two:

"Il y eut Alfred Jarry m'assurant que je choisissais la bonne route et si charmé quand je lui confiai mon désir de mettre ma vie dans l'art, l'art dans la vie, tout en pratiquant un certain art de la déception, ce que bientôt approuverait Max Jacob à son tour."<sup>27</sup>

A 'certain art of deception', as Salmon called it, certainly played in Jarry's merging of art and life. However, it was not simply intended to deceive, part of a commercial strategy or meant for provocation (although these were all equally welcome side effects). His literary works as well as his dandy-like posing were an integral part of his poetics to bring art closer to life. Jarry used media strategies to his advantage and satirized them, but they also provided new ways to unite art with life.

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<sup>24</sup> Jarry emerges as much more human and down to earth in Besnier's recent biography (*Alfred Jarry*, 2005) than in many of the previous studies. However Besnier does not elaborate on the apparent contradictions between Jarry's public and private behavior.

<sup>25</sup> Salmon, *Souvenirs sans fin 1903-1940*, p. 52 and p.158.

<sup>26</sup> 'Ubu par la grâce de Dieu roi de Pologne, docteur en pataphysique, celui qui connaît ainsi, grand-maître de la Gidouille et ancien roi d'Aragon ; à Notre Président de Notre république française, à Notre préfet de Notre police et à tous nos autres justiciers et officiers, ou à leurs lieutenants, et à chacun d'eux, si comme à lui appartiendra, salut et dilection. De la partie M. F.-A. Cazals, peintre de chansons, lequel désire sous Notre bon plaisir mettre en lumière et vente un grand livre, « le Jardin des Ronces » illustré d'une préface de Mme Rachilde...', *La Plume*, 1 September, 1901, OC I, p. 414. The text appeared as a preface to Cazal's *Jardin des Ronces*. It is a pastiche of Henri II's patronage of Rabelais' work in 1550.

<sup>27</sup> Salmon, *Souvenirs sans fin 1903-1940*, p. 89.

### 6.3 Art and mass culture; new bonds

The merging of art and life was, in Jarry's case, consistent. This consistency and the carefulness with which Jarry constructed his texts and his public persona suggests an artistic practice, in which life and art ceased to be completely separate entities, and in which the notion of art and its place in society were reevaluated. Jarry transgressed the boundaries between art and life so that art was perhaps no longer limited to a canvas, to a printed text or to hanging on the wall as an over-priced 'stuffed crocodile'. Art could maybe regain a more prominent role in all corners of life, if it engaged itself more with modern everyday life and with its forms and expressions. This engagement takes on various shapes in Jarry's work, creating new aesthetic possibilities and new bonds.

#### 6.3.1 Aesthetic valorisation of everyday life

The Almanacs, apart from all the ambiguities, attempt to reconcile the language of art with the language of modern, everyday life within the literary work.<sup>28</sup> There was an increasing aesthetic valorisation of the everyday emerging among artists and writers towards 1900 and within Jarry's own circle. Painters, such as Bonnard and Vallotton, looked for inspiration in modern, street life. Toulouse-Lautrec, associated with the Nabis, depicted contemporary Parisian nightlife. The Nabis were especially known for restoring art's decorative value in society.<sup>29</sup> Bonnard himself declared that a painting must, above all, be put to practical use, instead of hanging in a museum somewhere. Bonnard later recalled how 'our generation always sought to link art with life. At that time I myself envisaged a popular art that was of everyday application: prints, fans, furniture, screens.'<sup>30</sup> One of the ideals of the Nabis and their circle was to make applied art, art which would be seen in the streets and which would bring artistic beauty into everyday life. In other words the everyday was aestheticized. Remy de Gourmont viewed the commonplace as the union between the banal and the absolute. In his vision the banality of everyday life could thus lead to universal beauty and truth.<sup>31</sup> In *L'Ymagier* DeGourmont and Jarry had put this union between mass produced, popular imagery and art into practice. Trivial 'images d'Épinal' were accompanied by poetic texts, which celebrated the beauty of such clichés. These images served, in true Symbolist fashion, as vessels for a higher artistic and symbolic world. Jarry and De Gourmont raised formerly banal images to the level of art. In his review of Gustave Kahn's book *L'Esthétique de la rue*, Jarry praised Kahn's poetic appreciation of the street and the city:

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<sup>28</sup> My concern in this book lies primarily with Jarry and his engagement with the everyday, set in its historic context. The relationship of art with everyday life is of course a broad and complex subject that has provoked much debate among artists and theoreticians. For a discussion of the theme of 'le quotidien' in 20<sup>th</sup> century art and theory (including avant-garde and postmodern artistic practices and writings by people like Lefebvre and Barthes) see for example Michael Sheringham, *Everyday life. Theories and practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>29</sup> See Gloria Groom, ed., *Beyond the Easel: decorative painting by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis, and Roussel, 1890-1930* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Hyman, *Bonnard*, p. 29.

<sup>31</sup> Remy de Gourmont, 'Les mots et les idées'(1900), quoted in : Dorra, *Symbolist Art Theories. A Critical Anthology*, pp. 300-05.

'Il appartenait à un poète, inventeur de rythmes, de codifier l'art de la rue : car qu'est-ce que la rue, sinon un vers multiforme écrit par les allées et venues de l'humanité, jusqu'à réaliser ces poèmes, les villes ?'<sup>32</sup>

Jarry incorporated 'everyday aesthetics' in the Almanacs as well, but at the same time defied Symbolist standards of 'beauty' with the text's obscenities, the innovating and disruptive collage aesthetics and 'in your face' language and humour. The trivial elements are hardly elevated to universal beauty and truth, at least not the kind of higher, symbolic truth and beauty De Gourmont was writing about. This does not mean that Jarry aimed at debunking art or levelling it with more popular forms of expression. However, he did not, like many of his contemporaries, try to simply aestheticize everyday life in order to lift it to contemporary standards of art.

### 6.3.2 Poetic language versus newspaper language

Aestheticizing everyday life in art or finding beauty in its triviality was one of art's responses to the modern world. Writers wondered in which way the language of poetry and literature differed from the language used in newspapers and advertising. These sentiments were part of a broader 'crisis of representation' among artists and writers at the end of the nineteenth century, I also evoked in chapter four. It provoked reflections on language and the limitations of literary communication. How could poetic language 'tell' the world, communicate a message? Mallarmé's poetic theory for example conveys this obsession with language. His answer was to break with the idea that literary language should have a direct, referential relationship to the world unlike the 'everyday' language of newspapers for example. Literary language referred to ideas or to an inner, symbolic world; hence meaning lay primarily in the text (or in the reader's perception), not in its reference to the world.

Interestingly, Mallarmé also created his very own journalist magazine, entitled *La Dernière Mode*, in which he wrote under a journalist pseudonym mock articles about social events, gossip and fashion. Mallarmé's 'magazine' can, like Jarry's satirical journalism, be seen as an example of the artistic counter-discourse to the dominant discourse of newspapers.<sup>33</sup> Poggi has equally argued that Mallarmé made use of newspaper language to condemn it.<sup>34</sup> Weiss however feels the truth lies in an unresolved conflict between artistic and commercial language, claiming that this ambiguity is crucial.<sup>35</sup> In a recent article, Pies argues that it is precisely this ambiguity that leads to an attempt to reconcile the two languages within a literary work.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, despite this ambiguity towards newspapers, Mallarmé remained a firm believer in the *l'art pour l'art* principle, viewing poetic language as clearly distinct from referential language in newspapers.

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<sup>32</sup> 'Gustave Kahn, *l'Esthétique de la rue*, Bibliothèque Charpentier', *Le Revue Blanche*, 1 March, 1901, OC II, p. 612.

<sup>33</sup> See also Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse. The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France*.

<sup>34</sup> Christine Poggi, "Mallarmé, Picasso and the Newspaper as Commodity," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 1, no. 1 (1987).

<sup>35</sup> Weiss, *The Popular Culture of Modern Art*, pp. 133-51.

<sup>36</sup> Pies, "'Un fil visible". Poetry and Reportage in Stéphane Mallarmé's "Un spectacle interrompu", pp. 1-18.

Mallarmé thus retreated in his ivory tower of autonomous, non-referential language. However Jarry, although he shared many of Mallarmé's ideas on language, opted for another solution. He chose to incorporate fragments of the newspaper world in his literary texts, allowing them to engage directly with that world. If literary language had its limitations when it came to representing everyday life, the collage of fragments from everyday life could bring that world directly into the work, and perhaps reconcile literature with its surroundings.

### **6.3.3 Collage; new bonds between art and mass culture**

With the Almanacs Jarry broke with the Symbolist concept of aesthetic autonomy and concepts of 'beauty', mainly through the incorporation of forms and expressions from everyday life. Mass culture offered material for the collages and new and rich sources of imagery. It also enabled Jarry to question the aesthetic conventions of mass culture as well as literary conventions and concepts of organic and autonomous art.<sup>37</sup>

Perloff has argued with regard to pre-World War I collage works, that avant-garde artists were 'quick to accept the world of commodity production and of the mass media as a challenge rather than as a threat'.<sup>38</sup> This applies to Jarry's Almanacs as well. Jarry's poetics announced a paradigmatic change occurring in the arts in these years, a new dialectic between avant-garde and mass-culture. Apollinaire would, somewhat later, also find poetry in the morning's newspaper, as he wrote in his poem *Zone* (1910), allowing his poetry to reflect the dynamics of modern life, through content and form. Composer Erik Satie started out his musical career as a cabaret pianist and drew from those experiences for his later musical works. Popular forms were, as he said, highly evocative and natural materials for modern artistic expression.<sup>39</sup> Other artistic experiments with forms of popular entertainment such as the ballet *Parade* (1914) are also evidence of this new dialectic.

## **6.4 Bringing art to life**

The ambiguous position towards mass culture transmitted through the persona of Ubu, as well as Jarry's own ambivalence, are mirrored in the Almanacs, and quite aggressively in Ubu's foreword to the first Almanac. Ubu passionately dismisses the vulgarity of mass culture and argues in favour of the supposedly prophetic powers of literature. One can clearly read echoes of *fin de siècle* concerns about the autonomous work of art faced with mass culture in the text. At the same time that attitude is also ridiculed due to the irony and humour inherent to Ubu's persona and words. Apart from the ambiguity towards mass culture, the embrace of everyday life, and of forms and expressions of mass culture in the Almanacs, is rather striking. In Jarry's work, mass culture seems to be considered as a challenge and not simply as a threat. Jarry's incorporation of mass culture in the Almanacs announced important changes in art and literature. First of all a shift in

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<sup>37</sup> Which is also argued by Andreas Huyssen with regards to later 20<sup>th</sup> century art and their use of mass culture. See Andreas Huyssen, *After The Great Divide. Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988).

<sup>38</sup> Perloff, *The Futurist Moment*, p. 74.

<sup>39</sup> Mary E. Davis, "Modernity à la mode: Popular Culture and Avant-Gardism in Erik Satie's *Sports et divertissements*," *The Musical Quarterly* 83, no. 3 (1999): p. 464.

aesthetics, by allowing these new forms and materials into the work of art, creating new forms, genres and ways of representation (e.g. collage). Secondly a shift in the politics behind those aesthetics, aimed towards bringing art closer to life, made possible through this use of 'everyday' materials.

# Chapter 7

## Jarry's engagement with contemporary culture

### *Introduction*

One could ask if Jarry's attitude towards 'everyday life' does not articulate a very disconnected position. Hence, are Jarry's ideas not merely those of his Symbolist mentors wrapped in a new packaging? Even if he sought to bring art closer to life, does Jarry not simply hide behind irony and experiment to avoid having to take position, to engage with society? Indeed, his dandy-like attitude towards society resembles that of his fin-de-siècle contemporaries. To Jarry, literature remained aesthetically autonomous, in the sense of distinct from forms of mass culture. This can be inferred from the disdain or at least the ambivalence expressed towards that culture in his work. Albeit ironically, the superiority of Ubu's Almanac, hence of literature, over newspapers was clearly advocated as were the prophetic skills of Ubu, hence, of the writer or artist. However, it also seemed to express a desire to attribute a more significant place to literature in society. The recurrent incorporation of newspaper aesthetics, fragments from news and everyday life in the Almanacs further enhances that idea. It seemed to be suggested that literature could engage with society and important issues, because it possessed a distance towards everyday life. In this chapter I argue that the indirect commitment expressed through the text enabled Jarry to refrain from any public expression of commitment or direct political allegiance. I will show that Jarry's 'commitment' is embedded in his literary experiment and in his irony. His elusive and paradoxical stance characterizes Jarry's position towards contemporary issues, both in life and in his texts.

### **7.1 Writers and politics around 1900**

Ubu's Almanacs were written at a highly politicized moment in French cultural life. It marked an important stage in the history of writers' commitment.<sup>1</sup> Dreyfus Affair was at its peak in 1898; it was the year of Émile Zola's *J'accuse*. Due to the political turmoil, writers intervened more frequently in public debate and these years saw the emergence of the writer as intellectual. As I demonstrated in chapter five Jarry's feelings towards this author role were ambiguous, to say the least. Fears of compromising his artistic integrity and independence seemed at the heart of his ironic refusal to give a straight answer to questionnaires for example. However, Jarry appeared to be particularly hesitant towards a certain type of public commitment. Furthermore, current political events play a remarkably

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<sup>1</sup> Benoît Denis, *Littérature et engagement. De Pascal à Sartre* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), p.219. I am well aware of the complex notions and practices surrounding the issue of engagement, but my primary aim in this chapter is to situate Jarry and the Almanacs in their historical context and within contemporary literary concepts of commitment.

important role in the Almanacs. This might suggest that Jarry's position was not as detached as his public responses implied.

It is interesting in this regard that Sapiro has argued that 'the way of being a writer conditions the way one engages in the political sphere.'<sup>2</sup> She distinguished four types of commitment that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. First there was the group of 'notables', committed influential figures, institutional writers, prize winners, who sought to preserve social order through their writing and commitment. Such authors used their literary work as a tool in political debate.<sup>3</sup> An example is Maurice Barrès, whose *romans à these* became a platform for the nationalist, reactionary views he also expressed in public debate.<sup>4</sup> The second position is that of the 'aesthetes' who were committed, but guarded the independence of their literary work. Zola is an example of this attitude. He claimed a political voice in public debate without compromising on his artistic freedom. A disinterested intellectual such as Zola could turn the recognition he had gained through his literary work to the benefit of the 'good cause'. It allowed him to take position in public debate in the name of impartial and universal values of freedom and justice.<sup>5</sup> Thirdly Sapiro describes the category of the avant-garde. These writers advanced the subversive dimension of art. They also cherished the autonomy of their work, but their transgression of aesthetic, ethical and social norms could lead to political radicalism. The fourth group she distinguishes is that of writer-journalists, who, to keep visibility, related their work to current events and who wrote mainly in journalist minor genres.

Naturally these four positions are generalizations and they cannot be absolute. Many writers could at one point possess characteristics of different groups and cross boundaries between them. However, they are useful in order to situate Jarry's position as a writer and the 'commitment' expressed through the Almanacs in their historical context. In order to show how contemporary political issues are treated in the Almanacs, I will focus primarily on the main theme of the first Almanac, the Dreyfus Affair. I will also address other important themes in the texts, such as anti-colonialism (the main theme of the second Almanac), anti-clericalism, anti-militarism and anarchism, albeit more briefly.

## 7.2 The first Almanac: the Dreyfus Affair

The Third Republic was plagued by political scandals during the 1890's and by ever-changing governments. The Republic dealt with the Panama crisis, with colonial rivalry with England and Germany, with a general distrust towards the government, with extremist movements, with anarchist bomb attacks, assassinations and of course with the Dreyfus Affair. Many of these pressing issues emerge in Ubu's first Almanac, but the Affair, as it was simply known, is by far the most prominent theme.

Since there is no need to recall in detail this well-known Affair, I will only briefly summarize it here. In October 1894 Jewish artillery captain Alfred

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<sup>2</sup> Sapiro, "Forms of politicization in the French literary field," p. 641. Sapiro bases her model on forms of literary engagement that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century.

<sup>3</sup> Denis, *Littérature et engagement. De Pascal à Sartre*, pp. 21/22.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

Dreyfus was arrested on suspicion of providing the Germans with confidential documents. In February 1895 he was convicted for high treason, publicly stripped of his ranks and exiled for life to Devil's Island. Two years later new evidence surfaced that challenged the original verdict and this prompted a campaign for a revision of the case. However, it also triggered a counter-reaction from supporters of the military that opposed this revision, and sparked a wave of anti-Semitism in France. The case was reopened and a new suspect, Esterhazy, was put forward, but he was acquitted. Despite sufficient proof of Dreyfus' innocence, authorities preferred to reconvict him rather than implicate the whole army.<sup>6</sup> After Esterhazy's acquittal, Émile Zola published his famous open letter to the president, *J'accuse*, in *L'Aurore* on the 13<sup>th</sup> of January 1898, condemning the conspiracy and the injustice. Zola was taken to court by the army which accused him of libel. He was sentenced and fled to London. Thus in 1898, the Affair dominated headlines. It divided society, families and friends into anti-Dreyfusards (people opposing the revision) and Dreyfusards (supporters of Dreyfus). The friendship between writers Marcel Schwob and Paul Valéry for example ended abruptly due to their differences concerning the Affair. The literary and artistic world, for a while at least, seemed torn in two.

The focus on the Affair in the first Almanac was inspired by these recent events and by Jarry's direct literary and social environment. Fellow Phalanstère member journalist and writer Pierre Quillard, who appears so prominently in the Almanac, was an active supporter of Dreyfus. He was a friend of Zola and had joined the *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme*, founded in 1898. There must have been some discussion about the Affair among the Phalanstère members, since Rachilde for example sided with the anti-Dreyfusards. Jarry's almost daily conversations and outings with Quillard at the time when he wrote the first Almanac no doubt influenced the text, reflected for example in Ubu's fishing trip with Quillard. The political undertones of the Almanac might also owe a lot to the politicized (and mostly Dreyfusard) environment of *La Revue Blanche*. Since Alfred Vallette had ceased to publish Jarry's work in 1897, Jarry had found a new home at *La Revue Blanche*, and received the support of editor Félix Fénéon and the Natanson brothers; all well-known Dreyfusards.

The figure of Ubu had already lent itself to the Dreyfus Affair before the first Almanac. Ubu had appeared earlier in 1898 in a drawing by E. Couturier in *l'Omnibus de Corinthe* (Fig. 1). Ubu, in a much more human form than in Jarry's own work, is seen here scolding Ernest Judet, director of *Le Petit Journal* and responsible for a violent campaign launched against Zola and other supporters of Dreyfus. Here Ubu symbolizes the Dreyfusards.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Alfred Dreyfus was eventually granted a pardon, but he was only officially reinstated in 1906.

<sup>7</sup>The fact that Père Ubu appealed to all sides is also illustrated by the fact that the notoriously right-wing and anti-Semitic author Gyp admired Ubu as well, drawing a portrait of Ubu in her work *En balade* of 1897. See Schoonbeek, *Les portraits d'Ubu*, p. 72.



Figure 1: Ubu scolds Ernest Judet for attacking Zola. *Omnibus de Corinthe*, voyage 6, 18 January 1898.

Unlike some of his contemporaries Jarry hardly spoke publicly about the Affair, at least as far as is documented. Only once, in 1901, did he refer to his own opinion in a review of the book *Pour la justice et pour l'armée*, by Georges Duruy and wrote:

'quant à Dreyfus, on sait bien qu'il est innocent, c'est même notre opinion personnelle: nous allons jusqu'à penser qu'il est le type du soldat et du bon officier et loyauté. La trahison implique un esprit délié, c'est travail de bureau et de grade supérieur.'<sup>8</sup>

Jarry's belief that Dreyfus was innocent seems mainly rooted in a general contempt for the army as an institution. Dreyfus is portrayed as a typical, ignorant 'good soldier' duped by cleverer, higher officials.

It was not until a few years after the first Almanac that Jarry would refer to the Affair again. He did so in the article *l'Affaire est l'affaire* (April 1903), published in the satirical *Le Canard Sauvage*, whose editor was Pierre Quillard. The wordplay with the Affair and its connotations in this article is typical of Jarry's writing and irreverent treatment of serious issues. The opening line reads: 'Les Affaires sont les Affaires, au théâtre et de par le grand talent de M. Octave Mirbeau. Mais à la Chambre [...] il n'y a, n'y eut et n'y aura qu'une Affaire, une!'<sup>9</sup> The Dreyfus Affair, which dominated headlines again in 1903, is linked to Mirbeau's play *Les Affaires sont les*

<sup>8</sup> *La Revue Blanche*, 1 October, 1901, OC II, p. 626.

<sup>9</sup> OC II, p. 425.

*Affaires* which successfully premiered that same month.<sup>10</sup> This analogy is perhaps not so surprising since the Dreyfus Affair is turned into a comedy in the first Almanac.

### 7.2.1 The Affair as a spectacle

It is in the three act play entitled 'L'Île du diable. Pièce secrète en trois ans et plusieurs tableaux' that the reader will find the most straightforward representation of the Affair.<sup>11</sup> The title refers to Devil's Island, to which Dreyfus was banned whereas 'en trois ans' indicate the time that has passed since the original trial in 1895. The adjective *secrète* obviously refers to the army's cover-up. The phrase 'plusieurs tableaux' could be interpreted as the various conflicting testimonies and versions of the Affair. For insiders the title already steers the play towards the side of the Dreyfusards.

The characters from the play *Ubu Roi* take on the roles of several main players in the Affair; Ubu's former accomplice Captain Bordure now represents Dreyfus. Père Ubu acts as the incarnation of the French army and government. The plot of the play revolves around the initial accusation of Bordure/Dreyfus, his subsequent sentence and the disputes between both sides. The Affair's transformation into an Ubu play and its setting in this grotesque, comic context convey the idea of the Affair as a spectacle. This is not surprising, considering Jarry's analogy between the 'faits divers' and 'theatre', as he emphasized the spectacular, dramatic qualities of many news items. In reality, the Affair had in fact taken on extravagant proportions.

The first scene of the play immediately emphasizes the injustice and conspiracy that led to Bordure's (Dreyfus) indictment and outlines the plot of both the real Affair and the Ubu play:

L'Île du diable

***Pièce secrète en 3 ans et plusieurs tableaux***

Acte premier

*Le Palais du Roi*

Scène première

Père Ubu, Mère Ubu, *en dame voilée*

Père Ubu : Madame France, Mère Ubu, veux-je dire, vous avez raison de vous cacher la figure, voilez votre laideur et vos larmes : notre bon ami, le capitaine Bordure, est accusé d'un crime. Notre palotin Bertillon a mesuré la trace de ses pas sur les dalles de marbre de notre cabinet de nos affaires secrètes. Il a vendu la Pologne pour boire.

Mère Ubu : Ha, père Ubu

Conjurés et soldats : Nous voulons sa mort.

Nobles et magistrats : Nous voulons sa mort.

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<sup>10</sup> The Dreyfus Affair was subject of debate again in parliament in April 1903. At that time, two other affairs also made headlines: the Humbert Affair and one which involved a tiara, which had supposedly belonged to the Scythian king Saïtapharnes. It was purchased by the Louvre, but ended up being a forgery. Jarry combines all the affairs together in his article.

<sup>11</sup> J.A.Cutshall, in his article on the Dreyfus case in Jarry's work, considers this the 'most important and original part of the *Almanach*', no doubt because it is one of its most accessible and straightforward texts, but he seems to ignore the fact that the theme also appears, albeit less explicitly, in other texts of the Almanac. Cutshall, "Celui qui Dreyfuse: Alfred Jarry and the Dreyfus Case," pp. 26/27.

Père Ubu : Notre fils Malsain Athalie-Afrique est le vrai coupable, mais il est l'héritier de notre savoir en théologique et de nos études au séminaire de Saint-Sulpice ; il s'est confessé de son crime à notre Chanoine, il en été absous, il n'est plus coupable, il ne l'a jamais commis. <sup>12</sup>

The characters from *Ubu Roi* blend in with the actual 'characters' of the Dreyfus Affair. This happens already in the scenic direction in which Mère Ubu is described as appearing 'en dame voilée'. The *femme voilée* was in fact a mysterious figure in the real Affair. Major Marie-Charles-Ferdinand Walsin-Esterhazy was brought to trial in January 1898, on suspicion of being the real author of the *bordereau*. The *bordereau* was the mysterious handwritten document with classified, military information Dreyfus was accused of having provided to the Germans. During the trial, a 'veiled woman' was frequently invoked by Esterhazy, whenever he wanted to obscure a situation that could compromise him as the author of the *bordereau*. Esterhazy claimed to have had secret encounters with this 'very elegant worldly woman' who supposedly warned him that he was being framed by the Dreyfus family.<sup>13</sup> Bonnard's drawing in Ubu's Almanac (Fig.2) portrays Mère Ubu as this veiled, although slightly less elegant, woman. She stands in front of Ubu, surrounded by what appear to be caricatures of clergymen on the left and army officials on the right.



**Figure 2: Mère Ubu as the 'veiled woman', first Almanac**

In a similar confusion of character, Père Ubu starts off the scene by mistakenly addressing Mère Ubu as 'Madame France'. This is in fact a double reference. First Ubu's slip of the tongue refers to actress Louise France, who played Mère Ubu in the premiere of *Ubu Roi* in 1896. In the list of people at the end of the Letters and Arts section she is also referred to as 'celle qui Mère Ubu' (see appendix). France's identification with Mère Ubu is

<sup>12</sup> OC I, pp. 545/46.

<sup>13</sup> Michel Winock, ed., *L'affaire Dreyfus* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), p. 44.

continued when later on in the play, Bordure is referred to as Ubu's 'fils adultérin, ou de Mme France votre épouse', Ubu's adulterous son, or of his wife Madame France. Apart from being an inside joke, the pun also functions on another level.

For secondly, 'Madame France' symbolizes the country of France. In this sense Mère Ubu and Père Ubu become the very unlikely couple Mrs and Mr France, and Bordure (the Jew Dreyfus) is their adulterous son and that of France (hence a second-class citizen). The sentence 'Madame France, vous avez raison de vous cacher la figure, voilez votre laideur et vos larmes' then takes on another meaning (apart from being a returning gimmick in *Ubu Roi* commenting on Mère Ubu's unflattering looks). It is a clear reference to the French nation's way of dealing with the Affair. Jarry employed a similar writing strategy in his later chronicles. The wordplay, apart from its comic effects, becomes a tool for social commentary.<sup>14</sup>

Blending the characters from *Ubu Roi* with those of the Affair continues throughout. *Palotin* Bertillon found traces of Bordure in Ubu's 'cabinet de nos affaires secrètes'. The words 'affaires', 'cabinet', 'secrètes' prolong the impression of cover-up and secrecy. The 'palotin' is one of Ubu's three mindless, mechanical servants and loyal accomplices from *Ubu Roi*. The 'palotins' normally do Ubu's dirty work, including torture and executions. Bertillon is also the name of the police chief who, in 1894, wrote the rapport in which Dreyfus was first implicated as the author of the *bordereau*.

Other actors from the Affair are not transformed into *Ubu Roi* characters but their names are transformed through puns. Ubu reveals for example that 'Notre fils Malsain Athalie-Afrique est le vrai coupable [...]. Il s'est confessé de son crime à notre Chanoine, il en été absous'. Here, Chanoine not only refers to the title of a Catholic clergyman, but also, hence the capital c, to the real-life general Chanoine. He became Minister of War in September 1898 and indicted Picquart for pointing the finger to someone else instead of Dreyfus. Like 'Madame France', Jarry's economical use of the word 'Chanoine' and its connotations, serve to critique both the Catholic Church and the army. The name of Ubu's son Malsain (unhealthy) Athalie-Afrique is a transformation of Walsin-Esterhazy. It is typical of Jarry's associative wordplay and 'undressing' of words. Pronounced as 'Esterasie' in French, it could also be spelled as Esther-Asie. Through association the names are then replaced by the name of another female figure from the Old Testament (Athalie) and the name of another continent (Afrique). Another explanation for the association between the two names is the fact that *Esther* and *Athalie* are two plays by Racine. The transformation of the heroic queen of Persia Esther into the not so heroic Biblical queen Athalia, also hints at Esterhazy's two-faced role in the Affair. Athalie-Afrique is the real culprit but, seeing he is the hereditary son to Ubu's theology (e.g. a good Catholic opposed to the 'fils adultérin' Bordure, the Jew Dreyfus), he is absolved. Scapegoat Bordure/Dreyfus is accused instead of having sold Poland (Ubu's kingdom) for drink. The conspirators ('conjurés') are set on the same line with soldiers, nobles and magistrates who all join together to demand Bordure's execution.

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<sup>14</sup> Rather than just meaningless 'formalist wordplay' as Pollack seems to believe and for which she criticizes Jarry's treatment of the Affair in the Almanac. Pollack, *Pataphysik, Symbolismus und Anarchismus bei Jarry*, p. 252.

### 7.2.2 'Commitment' through wordplay

The short opening segment of this brief play highlights the constructed and economical nature of Jarry's writing. The satire of the Affair is not only achieved by transforming the plot of the Affair into the plot of an Ubu play, but also on the level of language itself. This is not surprising considering Jarry's own statements, which I discussed in chapter one, namely that the truth could be revealed through humour and that wordplay was not a mere game. As the Almanac text ridicules the army, the clergy and the state through wordplay, a Dreyfusard point of view is implicitly expressed.

The mix of elements from *Ubu Roi*, references to the real Affair and personal references, characterizes the entire text. Ubu's palotins claim that they hold proof of Bordure's crime on a 'papier pelure d'oignon' which contains a detailed plan of the city of Thorn. This paper obviously refers to the infamous *bordereau*, whereas the city of Thorn refers to a location in *Ubu Roi*. In the second scene palotin Clam makes an appearance. The real-life Colonel du Paty de Clam (whose name lends itself perfectly for a pun) was the principal accuser of Dreyfus from the beginning. He appears here as Ubu's servant, his name referring to 'clamer' (to shout out). Ubu's Conscience is extended to 'notre Conscience nationale et militaire', the national conscience. Further on, after Conscience objects to Ubu's behaviour, Ubu refuses to listen to it, 'malgré les picquartements de vos reproches acérés.' Major Picquart was the army official who objected to Dreyfus' conviction, as he had proof that Esterhazy was the real culprit. He was court-martialed by the army for this 'betrayal'. The entanglement of his name with the verb 'piquer' (to sting) in the neologism 'picquartements', alludes to Picquart's uncomfortable position in the army.

The Ubu play then takes a gruesome, Grand Guignol-like turn. Together with Clam, Ubu proceeds to torture Bordure with some of his favourite methods ('torsion du nez', 'enfouissement du petit bout de bois dans les oreilles'); all this occurs 'à huis clos'. Again the choice of words evokes the atmosphere of secrecy which of course had its roots in reality. Dreyfus' hearing before the military tribunal in 1895 took place behind closed doors; not even Dreyfus' attorney was allowed to be present. In the Almanac, Ubu explains to Bordure: 'il n'y a que notre Conscience qui vous ait entendu, elle ne le répétera à personne.' In one sentence the injustice of the real trial is made evident, with Ubu as the symbolic incarnation of the military tribunal.

The unfair trial and bias leading to Dreyfus' conviction is also pointed out by the use of absurd logic. After Bordure has been scalped (Ubu's favourite punishment in *Ubu Roi*), Ubu's general Lascy (also from *Ubu Roi*) cries out in the final and third act: 'Justice est faite! Le capitaine était bien coupable, puisque le Père Ubu, en son omniscience, l'a décervelé.' In Ubu's reversed universe, reminiscent of the episode with the Queen from *Alice in Wonderland*, the sentence precedes the verdict. In similar fashion Ubu adjusts the evidence to fit the defendant.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> As one can read in chapter twelve from *Alice in Wonderland*: 'No, no!' said the Queen. 'Sentence first—verdict afterwards.' Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 108. Ubu's absurd logic is often reminiscent of Lewis Carroll, as has also been remarked by Pollack, *Pataphysik, Symbolismus und Anarchismus bei Jarry*, p. 249

The religious and military discourse employed in the text implicates and simultaneously ridicules two pillars of French society; the Church and the army. Ubu himself testifies to his love for the military: 'Ha, messieurs, nous aimons l'armée, il n'est rien que nous ne fassions pour elle'. Ubu continues his militarist monologue in a majestic and pompous style by praising his young son Freycinet. In reality, Minister of War Charles de Freycinet was appointed in October 1898. As usual, Ubu's speech ends in utter absurdity: 'c'est à lui que nous remettons publiquement le commandement de nos estafiers et le grand-cordon de l'ordre de la Grande-Gidouille, bien qu'il ne soit âgé (car, plus l'on approche du siècle plus l'âge diminue) que de treize mois.' Minister of war Freycinet not only heads Ubu's infamous Order, but has also become a thirteen month old baby (the real Freycinet was seventy years old). In his address to the people Ubu then praises God and the Truth, followed by an aggressive call for battle:

Grâces soient rendues de tout au Seigneur. Nous entendrons un beau *Te Deum* en notre église de Notre-Dame[...]Réjouissons, messieurs, du triomphe de la vérité et de la lumière. Tudez, décervelez, coupez les oneilles !

TOUT LE PEUPLE, *par acclamation* : C'est clair !

LE GÉNÉRAL LASCY : Soldats, sabre au clair ! Chefs des chœurs, Humbert, Meyer, Bec, Méline, Zurlinden, Mercier, Drumont, Pellieux, Gonse, Judet, Xau, Barrès, Gyp, et vous, guerrier chef de notre musique, battez tous la mesure avec vos sabres dans le peuple et spécialement sur les têtes de MM. Clemenceau, Gohier, Quillard, Pressensé, Rochevoort, Anatole France, que l'on entonne bien la chanson du Décervelage.

*Musique. Rideau*<sup>16</sup>

Towards the end, vocabulary belonging to the semantic field of music is added to the religious and military discourses. Ubu's soldiers (anti-Dreyfusards) and the enemy soldiers (Dreyfusards) engage in a battle, but they are described as a choir imposing their beat on the opposing party. Earlier in the play a similar choir of conspirators, soldiers, noblemen and magistrates already appeared. This time the names refer to actual historical figures. The group, Ubu's soldiers, is made up of noted anti-Dreyfusards.<sup>17</sup> Military men such as Mercier and Gonse join ranks with newspaper directors such as Meyer or Xau and writers such as Barrès and Gyp. A link is made here between the expressions 'chefs de chœurs', 'chefs militaires' and 'chefs de journaux'. This musical metaphor, which relates to the previous pun on 'clam' and 'clamer', is used throughout the fragment alluding to the shrill

<sup>16</sup> OC I, p. 551.

<sup>17</sup> Alphonse Humbert was the director of *l'Éclair*, a newspaper known for its violent anti-Semitic and anti-Dreyfus campaigns, also targeted by Zola in *J'accuse*; Arthur Meyer, director of *Le Gaulois*, anti-Dreyfusard although of Jewish origin; Jules Méline, prime minister in 1898, who instigated action against the Dreyfusard camp; General Zurlinden was appointed Minister of War on September 5<sup>th</sup> 1898, but resigned on the 17<sup>th</sup>; General Mercier and later short-term Minister of War was one of Dreyfus initial accusers. Journalist Édouard Drumont founded the anti-Semitic paper *La Libre Parole*; General de Pellieux led the investigation against Esterhazy, but exonerated him; General Charles Arthur Gonse, in a famous letter exchange about Esterhazy with general Picquart, maintained Dreyfus's guilt; Director Ernest Judet of *Le Petit Journal* campaigned against Dreyfus and Zola. Fernand Xau was director of the anti-Dreyfusard *Le Journal*; writer Maurice Barrès was an active anti-Dreyfusard and member of the nationalist *Ligue des Patriotes*; writer Gyp was the author of numerous anti-Semitic articles. Several also appear in the 'list of names' at the end of 'Lettres et Arts' (see appendix).

debates surrounding the affair with all parties trying to shout louder than the other. The references to these journalists and editors can be read as a satire on the dominant role of the press in the Affair. The fact that the military and the press are linked is not coincidental; most anti-revisionist, anti-Dreyfusards newspapers were supported or even subsidized by the military. The Dreyfusard press was constantly harassed by the authorities and outnumbered (or out-shouted in the Almanac) by the mainstream, reactionary press. In the Almanac text, the opposing, Dreyfusard 'choir', beaten down and outnumbered by the first, consists of Jarry's friend Quillard and other eminent Dreyfusards such as Clemenceau and France.<sup>18</sup> The scenic directions 'Music/Curtain' then close the curtains on this cacophonous and spectacular final battle between Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards.

### 7.2.3 Ironical distance and deconstruction of truth

On the one hand this short play takes the side of the Dreyfusards. Ubu symbolizes French authorities and the injustice, whereas the anti-Dreyfusards are portrayed as a violent, fanatic bunch. Captain Bordure bears close resemblances to Dreyfus and embodies the individual, faced with the powers of the army and authorities. On the other hand there is also a constant ironical distance towards the Affair, ridiculing both sides and the media spectacle it had become. This distance is created by situating the Affair in the world of Ubu and by the wordplay. The protagonists are not flesh and blood characters and as a reader one does not establish any emotional connection with them; Ubu is a mere puppet symbolizing the state, while Bordure also functions as a pawn to serve the purposes of the text, symbolizing a rather anonymous victim. The play's ending of course emphasizes this detachment even more. The battle between the two opposing parties culminates in a musical, opera-like finale. The text mainly illustrates the Affair's 'spectacular' qualities, ridiculing the real-life spectacle it had become in French society. It also belittles the importance of intellectuals and public figures and their opinions on the Affair. The musical analogy made in the last part of the text creates the impression of choirs of different voices (e.g. opinions) battling it out with each other. The play thus creates a perspective in which the reader first of all appears to become a bystander who observes an entertaining spectacle from the sidelines.

Most current events are dealt with in a similar manner in Ubu's Almanacs. The texts transmit the various opinions and voices in society, but in a paradoxical way. The text in fact negotiates various positions and discourses, but cannot be pinned down to one in particular, because it simultaneously seems to undermine every position or opinion. That ambiguity is largely due to the character of Père Ubu, who switches 'sides'

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<sup>18</sup> Politician, journalist and later French president Georges Clemenceau was editor and chief of *l'Aurore*, the paper that published Zola's *J'accuse*; Journalist, lawyer and Dreyfusard activist Urbain Gohier wrote for *l'Aurore*, although he would turn anti-Semitic later in life and collaborated in World War II; Francis de Pressensé was a politician and pacifist and defended Dreyfus after Zola's trial; Rochevoort was the pseudonym used by Henri Dagan for the single issue paper he launched on 25 November 1898, *Le Transigeant*, intended as an antithesis to the anti-Dreyfusard newspaper *L'Intransigeant*, led by Henri Rochefort. Dagan continued his campaign in *La Revue Blanche*; Successful novelist Anatole France was a journalist for *Le Temps*, co-founder of the *Ligue des droits de l'homme*.

and 'personalities' from one text to the other. Both as a narrator and a character Ubu remains untrustworthy and elusive. Since it is impossible for the reader to identify with any of the characters, reader's 'commitment' with the text is also complicated. However, Ubu's cruel execution of justice in the Alice in Wonderland-like passage is too brutal to be understood as mere 'irony'. I would suggest that the text's ambiguity is not simply meant to undermine every side and every truth. Regardless of the cynical and detached display of the Affair as a spectacle, the gravity of the theme alone implies a form of commitment or a position. For readers aware of the historical details, the text is at least thought-provoking and makes for an uncomfortable read. Jarry first and foremost appears to deconstruct the discourse and 'facts' surrounding the Affair. Nevertheless the text appears to implicitly side with the Dreyfusards, not only through the excessive brutality attributed to Ubu and his band of 'anti-Dreyfusards', but also through puns on the names of authority figures.

The Almanacs and their texts explore and question a complex social, cultural and political reality. This is of course a common feature of literature, but the Almanacs achieve this through their unconventional use of genre, narrative forms and language. Poet and inventor of 'free verse' Gustave Kahn, whom Jarry admired and to whom he had given a copy of his Almanac, had already written in the preface to his poetry in 1897 'qu'en ébranlant un pan de la façade artistique on touche à toute la façade sociale.'<sup>19</sup> His words represent a type of avant-garde commitment, achieved through the subversive, innovative quality of art. Jarry might have taken Kahn's idea to heart. Traditional contemporary narrative forms, such as the play or the novel, generally used to express ideas about society, no longer sufficed. Social commentary needed perhaps new forms. I would argue that transgressing contemporary literary conventions in Ubu's Almanacs enabled Jarry to challenge social and political discourses, and to engage with contemporary issues.

#### 7.2.4 Repainting the Affair

Bonnard's drawings equally blend Ubu's literary universe with the reality of the Affair. Some drawings are obviously inspired by the 'iconography' of the Dreyfus Affair. The Affair engendered a vast amount of images.<sup>20</sup> Even at the time, the many visual representations of the Affair did not go unnoticed.<sup>21</sup> Popular merchandising also appeared on the market, as in a media event *avant la lettre*. Jarry's cynical portrayal of the Affair as a spectacle was not that far removed from the truth. Paper fans, postcards, even an adult board game, based on 'Jeu de l'Oie', provided entertainment and helped shape opinions. Bonnard plays with some of the Affair's most noted icons in his

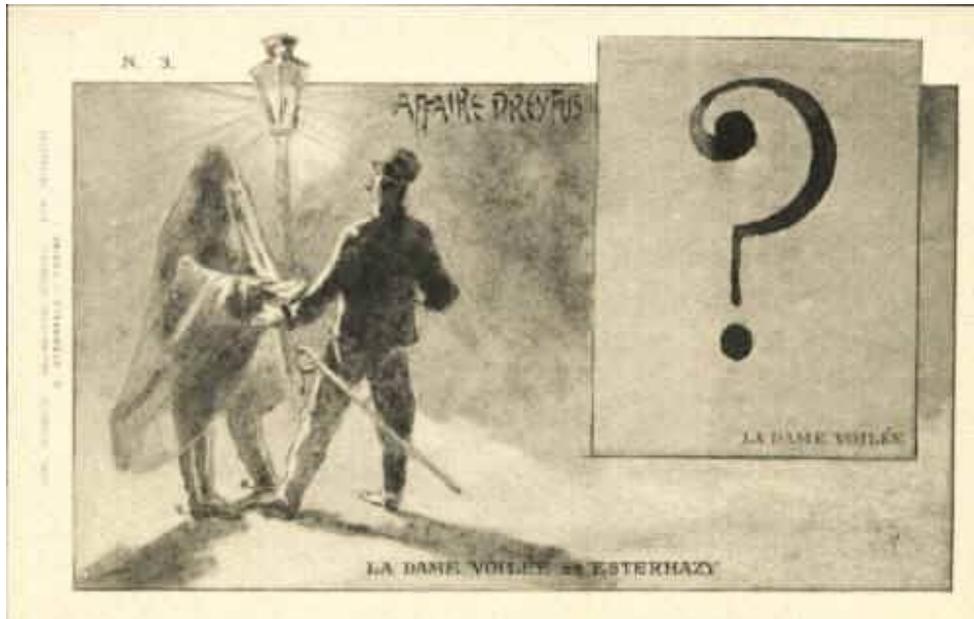
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<sup>19</sup> Gustave Kahn, *Premiers poèmes précédés d'une étude sur le vers libre* (Paris: Société du Mercure de France, 1897), p. 21. The preface is written in defense of 'free verse' and against the critics denouncing this poetic innovation. Kahn, who had anarchist sympathies, also writes that the fact that artistic innovation can have a social impact is why it receives so much resistance. Gustave Kahn appears in the almanac's list of names (see appendix). Two of Kahn's books are included among Faustroll's 'livres pairs' in *Gestes et Opinions du docteur Faustroll*.

<sup>20</sup> For a catalogue of these visual documents see Norman L. Kleeblatt, ed., *The Dreyfus Affair. Art, Truth and Justice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

<sup>21</sup> Such as John Grand-Carteret, *L'Image et l'Affaire Dreyfus*, 1899.

drawings and substitutes them with a personal Ubu iconography, 'repainting' visual representations of the Affair.



**Figure 3: Postcard Dreyfus Affair, the 'veiled lady' and Esterhazy**

Contemporary postcards, such as the one in Figure 3, portrayed episodes of the Affair. This postcard depicts the secretive meeting between Esterhazy and the mysterious, veiled woman. A similar image is evoked in Bonnard's drawing of Mère Ubu as the veiled woman (Fig.2). Setting this scene in the context of the Ubu play of course undermines the already questionable truth of this particular 'fact'.

In another illustration Bonnard has 'ubused' another known scene from the Affair's iconography. The humiliating public ceremony in which Dreyfus was stripped of his military ranks had been described and depicted numerous times in newspapers. The event appeared for example on a well-known cover illustration of the anti-Dreyfusard newspaper *Le Petit Journal*, which labelled Dreyfus as a traitor (Fig.4). Bonnard must have had this event and its many representations in mind when drawing his picture for the Almanac (Fig.5). Just as Dreyfus looks small and bland compared to the general, Bordure appears disproportionately small and unimportant compared to Ubu's bigger than life stature. Bordure, like Dreyfus, stands upright and has to look up to his superior, emphasizing the hierarchical relation. As in the cover illustration where the reader's gaze is aimed at the general, the focus of the picture is on Ubu, thus emphasizing Ubu's position of power towards his unfortunate prisoner. Ubu's power is symbolized by the fact that he is represented in his 'tyrant' outfit, wearing the pointy Inquisition-like hat. By portraying the grotesque Ubu as the incarnation of military force, the reader might be made to question that power. Both Dreyfus and Bordure are portrayed in simple dress, robbed of all military ranks and attributes, looking anonymous.

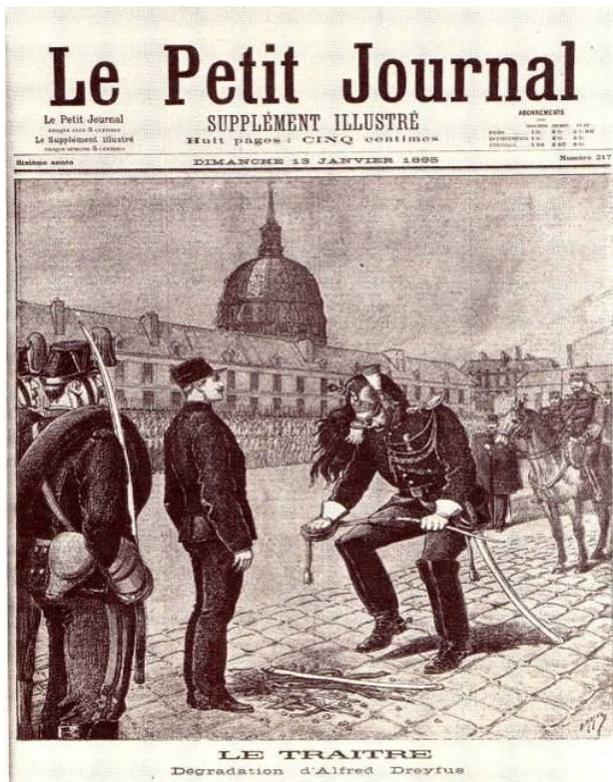


Figure 4: The 'traitor' Dreyfus is stripped of his ranks, *Le Petit Journal*, 13 January 1895

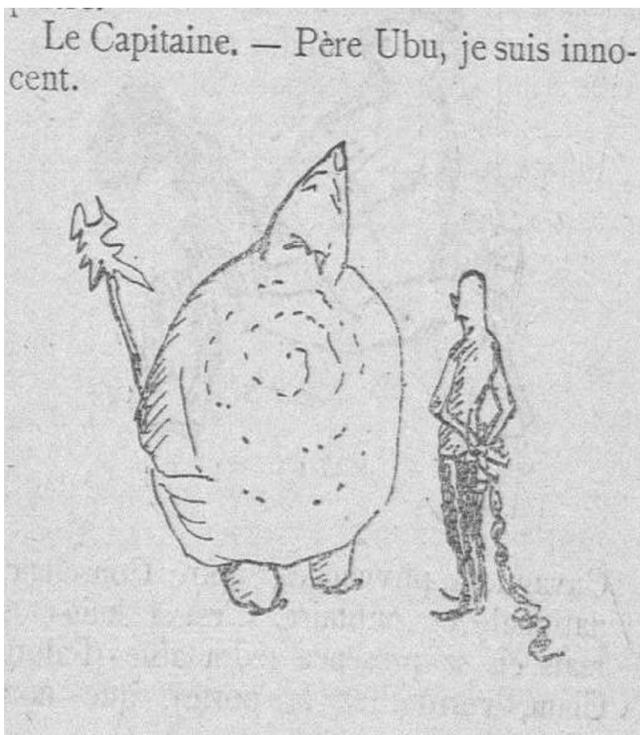


Figure 5: Bordure is sentenced by Ubu, first Almanac

Bonnard's drawing is not just a representation of the real event, but also a representation of the representation of that event in newspapers. Bonnard's drawing questions the (ideological) codes and conventions guiding those representations, by situating his interpretation in the grotesque context of Ubu. The real-life illustration in *Le Petit Journal* equally steered readers. The small, vile traitor is opposed to the proud, powerful grandeur of the French army. Bonnard's drawing does the same, but by re-painting the event as an Ubu scene the bias behind the Affair and the ways it was depicted, is strongly emphasized.

### 7.2.5 The city of Paris and the Affair

The theme of the Affair also appears, although less explicitly, in other texts of the first Almanac, for example in the 'Arts and Letters' section. Ubu and Fourneau's ride in their *omnibus* mostly takes place in the 6<sup>th</sup> arrondissement, judging from the names and landmarks mentioned in the text (l'Église Saint-Germain-des-Prés, l'Odéon, rue du Tournon, Sénat, the army casern Cherche-Midi, École des Beaux-Arts.) Bonnard's drawing of the fountain where Ubu allows the horses of his *omnibus* to 'baptiser l'estomac' (baptize their stomach) clearly resembles the fountain ornamented by lions on the Place Saint-Sulpice. The setting is partly autobiographical since Jarry lived in this quarter at the Rue Cassette (behind the place Saint-Sulpice). Furthermore the quarter was and is known as a real-life 'republic of arts and letters'. Home to numerous bookstores, galleries, academies, students, artists and writers, it functions as the perfect backdrop for the Almanac's 'Arts and Letters' section.

As said, the real-life geographical locations guide the dialogue on current events in the text. Ubu's casual stroll as a *flâneur* through the quarter inspires an associative and seemingly random and non-linear dialogue, triggered by his surroundings. Thus the Odéon spurs a discussion about theatre and music and the Senate, irreverently referred to as one of Ubu's charities, namely an 'asile des vieillards', triggers political commentary. So when Ubu and Fourneau stumble upon a military casern, this triggers a reference to the Dreyfus Affair:

LE FOURNEAU: Mais cette caserne que j'aperçois et ces nombreux guerriers ?

PÈRE UBU: Ce sont les défenseurs de la Patrie, ceux qui détiennent Picquart.<sup>22</sup>

The caserne de Cherche-Midi (situated in the rue de Tournon, close to the rue du Cherche-Midi) was home to the French Republican Guard, but also prompts Ubu to mention the name of Picquart. Further along in the conversation, Fourneau mentions the names of these 'défenseurs de la Patrie', the anti-Dreyfusards 'Déroulède, Pellieux, Gonse, Billot, Drumont, Marinoni, Xau er et autres soldats militaires.'<sup>23</sup>

Throughout this text there are again puns on the names of eminent figures the Affair. Fourneau tells Ubu that the above mentioned people have

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<sup>22</sup> OC I, p. 555.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

been persecuting M. Gohier. Urbain Gohier, Dreyfusard and anti-militarist, was trialed for his book *l'Armée contre la nation* in 1898, but acquitted. In 1905 he was again trialed and this time sentenced to one year in prison for being a member of the 'Association internationale anti-militariste'. Ubu, however, has no pity for Gohier either, because 'Urbain Gohier, c'est un nom de pape ou de templier, cet homme, de par ses ancêtres, mérite le bûcher.'<sup>24</sup> The connotation of his name seems to determine his fate. Punning on a real person's name in order to express an opinion about that individual is also at stake in Fourneau's following words when he asks: 'Pourquoi pas Boisdeffre, ou Billot, comme *Panurge*, pour cuire ses moutons, brûlait les grosses souches pour en avoir les cendres ? Panurge is of course Rabelais' character who, in book IV, starts to throw his sheep in the water after which the other ones blindly follow. The analogy is made through a pun on the name of general Le Mouton de Boisdeffre, who, in the Dreyfus Affair, blindly followed his superiors as well.<sup>25</sup> One is tempted to see in this wordplay an implicit position of the text and of the author(s).

Shortly thereafter, during their stop at the fountain, Ubu decides to see whether 'la pêche est fructueuse dans les rues de Paris'. Soon he not only catches three horses, two stray dogs but also Maurice Barrès.<sup>26</sup> However, public figures from the Dreyfusard camp receive a similar irreverent treatment as Barrès. Having run into Mme France, Fourneau politely enquires: 'Et son fils Anatole? Anatole France' to which Ubu replies: 'Il fait des choses merveilleuses et dreyfuse dans un journal anti-dreyfusard'. Anatole France was a prominent intellectual in the Affair and the second writer after Zola himself to sign *J'accuse*. France more or less held the position of official writer of the Third Republic, embodying the rational, refined French spirit. Denis calls France the 'écrivain engagé du juste milieu', and he would belong to what Sapiro labels as the group of 'notables'.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore France, a prominent critic, was not always favourable to the innovations of the more avant-garde writers.<sup>28</sup> Not surprisingly they often targeted established writers such as France, and this is also the case in the Almanac. Ubu's words refer to France's employment at the newspaper *L'Écho de Paris* whose anti-Dreyfus campaigns were particularly notorious.<sup>29</sup> The ironic portrayal of the pro- Dreyfus France, who

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Boisdeffre left the army in 1898 after the revelation that the document on which the accusation against Dreyfus was based was forged by Colonel Henry. 'Les moutons de Panurge', the sheep of Panurge has of course become a common expression for someone blindly following the herd.

<sup>26</sup> Also seems to refer to a drawing by Steinlen which depicted Barrès in front of Toulouse-Lautrec's poster 'Aristide Bruant dans son cabaret', accompanied by Bruant's monologue 'Les Quat'Pattes', *Le Mirliton*, n° 113, 9 June 1893.

<sup>27</sup> Denis also labels Barrès as an 'écrivain engagé', since many of his *romans à thèse* expressed his nationalist, conservative views. Denis, *Littérature et engagement. De Pascal à Sartre*, pp. 210-21.

<sup>28</sup> Poet Gustave Kahn for example, in the previously cited work, explicitly mentions Anatole France as one of the critics objecting to his 'free verse'. Barrès and France remained favourite targets for the later avant-garde movements. In 1921, Dada organized the fictional trial of Barrès for 'crimes against Dada' with a wooden puppet posing as Barrès and Breton acting as judge. After France's state funeral in 1924, Breton and Tzara wrote the provocative pamphlet *Un cadavre* in response. In it, they suggested putting France's corpse in a book case, dumping it in the Seine, and getting rid of this conventional figure and his stuffy books once and for all.

<sup>29</sup> *L'Écho de Paris* was one of the two newspapers (together with *l'Éclair*) Zola accused of supporting the conspiracy against Dreyfus in *J'accuse*.

worked for a newspaper that did not share his opinions, mocks his role as a notable public figure and casts doubts about his integrity.

Jarry refrained from any political alliance in public, no doubt to preserve his much cherished independence and autonomy, and mocked the public role of writers. This might explain why, although the text appears to side with the Dreyfusards, the public commitment, and with it the artistic integrity, of writers from both camps is ridiculed.

### 7.2.6 The Affair and the controversy around Rodin

In the Almanac, the satire of the Dreyfus Affair and of the role of the political establishment evolves into a satire of the cultural world. In the Arts and Letters section for example, both the politics and the artistic integrity of illustrator Forain, who together with fellow illustrator Caran d'Ache founded the short-lived anti-Dreyfusard paper *Le Sifflet*, are questioned. Ubu declares that Forain is first and foremost working for 'phynance'. Both Forain and Caran d'Ache were two highly successful and well paid illustrators at the time, which partially explains this sneer. It is implied that both their work as well as their political allegiance could be bought. Such a statement could be seen as reflecting the avant-garde's general resentment (or perhaps envy) towards artists who had made it and who publicly committed themselves to politics. Jarry's text questions the sincerity of their political commitment *and* their work. It almost seems to be suggested that only an artist who is independent and not corrupted by money or other ties, can express genuine motives and commitment.

A similar debunking of public position taking can be seen in the long list of names at the end of the Arts and Letters section. Apart from comprising people from the world of arts, letters and politics the list also contains many very active Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards (see appendix). In the text these people are seen gathered around the recently revealed statue of Balzac by Rodin who, miraculously, 'monte sur un banc pour faire un discours'. Ubu remarks that it is merely a copy of Falguière's statue, which refers to a real-life controversy. In 1892 Rodin was commissioned by the Société des Gens de Lettres and its president Émile Zola to make a statue of Balzac. After years of preparation the statue was revealed in 1898, but refused by the Société for its 'unfinished' look and for not honouring its subject matter in a respectful way. The Société then commissioned sculptor Falguière to make a more appropriate copy of Rodin's work. Through all this Zola remained supportive of Rodin. Interestingly, this controversy came to parallel the heated debates around the Affair. Progressive (pro-Rodin) and reactionary (anti-Rodin) views became entangled with respectively Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards opinions.<sup>30</sup> Collaborator for the second

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<sup>30</sup> 'Jamais on n'a eu l'idée d'extraire ainsi la cervelle d'un homme et de la lui appliquer sur la figure', anti-Dreyfusard Henri Rochefort wrote in *L'Intransigeant* (1er mai 1898), criticizing its rough features. 'La lutte entre partisans et adversaires du Balzac interviendra en pleine affaire Dreyfus. Zola, qui soutenait Rodin, venait de prendre la tête du parti dreyfusard en publiant le fameux "J'accuse" (L'Aurore, 13 janvier 1898). La Société des gens de lettres, qui refusera la statue, fera exécuter une pale effigie par Alexandre Falguière. "Falguière ayant emprunté (à Rodin) le cou puissant, la carrure, la draperie, la chevelure, le menton, les prunelles de son Balzac (...) toute l'opération consista à asseoir le personnage ainsi amenuisé sur un banc de square" (Charles Chincholle, dans *La Petite République*, 15 novembre 1898).

Almanac, Fagus, recalled having taken up his 'first weapons' when he defended Rodin's work in a magazine issue devoted to the artist. His words illustrate how, at the time, artistic battles were fought with an increasingly politicized discourse.<sup>31</sup>

The 'name dropping' in Ubu's enumeration of the crowd gathered around Rodin's sculpture also bears witness to the increased public roles of cultural figures. Petitions, manifests, open letters in newspapers often contained names of prominent people from the world of arts and letters. Just like 'L'Île du Diable' ended with the chaotic battle between the choirs of Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards, the Arts and Letters section ends with an eclectic list of names, who are labelled by Ubu as 'ce grand peuple en rumeur', and are reduced to a sort of talking heads. In this list the previously mentioned Forain becomes 'celui qui siffle'. But the Dreyfusard side is not spared either. Henri Ibels, illustrator and Nabi, founded the Dreyfusard magazine *Psst!* to counteract Forain's paper. He is equally comically reduced to 'celui qui Psst' in the list. The ideological battle between the two men is diminished to a mere utterance of opposing sounds, just as the opposing choirs at the end of 'Île du Diable' ended in a musical cacophony.

#### 7.2.7 The Affair in the rest of the Almanac

In other texts in the Almanac, allusions to the Affair are even less straightforward. Here the very indirect references are hidden in choice of vocabulary and in the wordplay.

In the January text, for example, we encounter suggestions for a nice dish with 'dinde' (turkey), which should be accompanied by a *salade*, later referred to as 'salades nationales [qui] se blanchissent aux vibrations des musiques'. This seems first of all to be a copy from the recipe of the month from the Almanac Hachette.<sup>32</sup> Ubu's Almanac partly fulfils its 'pragmatic' function. Secondly, however, the choice of words, an ignorant or idiot ('dinde') who is 'accompanied' by complicated national affairs (*salade* in its other meaning) suggests other references as well. Furthermore the word 'blanchir' evokes the idea of white washing, of covering something up, whereas the phrase 'vibrations des musiques', is reminiscent of the musical metaphors discussed above.

Considering the complex layers of meaning in the February text, a political layer might also be distinguished here. When Ubu and Quillard row their boat, Ubu remarks that Zola should have been rowing instead ('C'est Zola qui eût dû ramer'). After his sentence Zola had fled to England in July 1898. Pierre Quillard had testified on Zola's behalf during his trial. The scene of Ubu and Quillard rowing their boat upstream the Seine to hunt down the barbs takes on another symbolic and politically charged meaning in this context, as if they are left to do Zola's work.

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<sup>31</sup> 'Pour le pauvre grand Rodin, si grand, si lamentable mort, j'eus l'honneur de le connaître en 1897. Il venait de produire cet admirable Balzac qui fit tant scandale. Je faisais alors mes premières armes dans certaine *Revue des Beaux-Arts et des Lettres*, furieusement académico-institulaire. J'eus l'aplomb d'y lancer un numéro-Rodin, largement illustré, et étoffé par Mirbeau, Gustave Geffroy, Roger Marx, Léon Riotor, Arsène Alexandre, Jean Dolent, etc...plus moi-même indigne.' Letter to Mme A. Chaumat, 30 May 1927, Fagus, *Le Divan*. 50 lettres de Fagus pp. 274/75.

<sup>32</sup> Béhar, Dubbelboer, Morel, 'Commentaires pour servir à la lecture de l'Almanach du Père Ubu illustré'.

In 'Trait de probité' we find Ubu, Fourneau and Captain Bordure in the garden, in what mostly resembles a moralistic fable, as they speak about geese, a fox and hunting. Set in the context of the Affair all this talking in animal metaphors also takes on a more specific symbolic meaning. In fact such particular metaphors were not uncommon in Dreyfusard discourse. Dreyfus was considered by his defenders as an innocent sitting duck hunted down by the large majority.

There are no doubt more hidden references to be found to the Affair throughout the first Almanac, perhaps clear for insiders, but difficult for the (present-day) reader to grasp. As was the case in the constant paradoxical position of Ubu, this very indirect way of writing about the Affair also complicates the reader's understanding of the position or 'commitment' expressed in the Almanac.

### 7.2.8 Anti-militarism

The reluctance towards expressing a univocal position also becomes visible through the issue of anti-militarism. In 1897 Jarry had published his first novel *Les Jours et Les Nuits*, with the telling subtitle *roman d'un déserteur*. This semi-autobiographical account, based on Jarry's own experiences in military service in 1894 and 1895, relates the story of Sengle, a sensitive individual who is faced with the brutality and uniformity of the military regime. Similar anti-militaristic views can be found in the Almanac, where the military is a constant target and part of a general satire of authorities. In the first Almanac the repeated pleonastic labelling of the anti-Dreyfusards as 'soldats militaires' (whether actual military officers, journalists or writers) portrays them as simple marionettes of the army and of the French Republic. However in his review of 'Pour la justice et pour l'armée' Jarry portrayed Dreyfus as an equally 'loyal soldier'. Jarry primarily seemed to consider the army as a threat to a person's individuality and freedom. As an institution the army was a source of mockery and contempt because, as Jarry wrote, 'avec combien de faussaires l'armée reste-t-elle intègre?'<sup>33</sup>

However, Jarry's behaviour in public was often in complete contrast with the sentiments expressed in his work. He possessed a well-known fascination for weapons (guns and swords) and Jarry also confessed to Salmon that he loved reading military stories. Jarry once reportedly said to Salmon that he 'passionately loved the army', although Salmon's memoirs should not be taken at face value.<sup>34</sup> But elements of fascination for army life can also be detected in *Les Jours et les Nuits*, alongside a rejection of the institution. Like the character of Ubu in his work, Jarry's own positions or opinions in public life were often equally contradictory and elusive.

This might be explained by the way he positioned himself as a writer. The public commitment of established intellectuals ('notables' such as France or Barrès), but also that of less recognized artists, is a constant target of ridicule in the Almanac. The motives and allegiances of these writers are questioned. Their ties to politics would probably be seen by Jarry as a danger to artistic independence. This could be seen to relate to a fact also pointed out in this chapter's introduction; that the writers who saw

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<sup>33</sup> 'Georges Duruy : Pour la justice et pour l'armée', OC II, p. 626.

<sup>34</sup> Salmon, *Souvenirs sans fin 1903-1940*, p. 161. Besnier, *Alfred Jarry*, pp. 179/80.

themselves as the avant-garde claimed a position as 'real intellectuals'. Not corrupted by money or political allegiances like established writers, they felt they were more capable to symbolically defend the oppressed and the right causes.<sup>35</sup>

Both in life and in work Jarry expressed paradoxical points of view, but I suggest that this can be seen as a 'committed' position in its own right. Paradox seemed a necessary given for the subversive anti-establishment position Jarry embodied. Moreover through this use of paradox, Jarry could prevent himself from becoming caught up in institutionalized politics and joining the ranks of contemporary 'intellectuals', while still calling attention to serious issues.

### 7.3 The second Almanac: anti-colonialism

A similar contradictory position also applies to the second Almanac, which features the theme of colonialism. Between 1880 and 1914 France had embarked on a new wave of colonization. At this time French colonial politics relied on the official doctrine of the *mission civilisatrice*. This doctrine was based on the idea that France was materially and morally superior to the rest of the world and therefore had a natural obligation to bring the ideals of the Republic to other nations. The doctrine partially needed to justify the discrepancy between the Republic's democratic ideals on the one hand and its imperialism on the other. In 1895 the French government thus decided to end an era of conquest in West Africa and to implement a policy of 'constructive exploitation'. Civilization should not be achieved through force but through export of culture and economy.<sup>36</sup> Therefore the French 'civilizing mission' was aimed at improving living conditions in the colonies and replacing 'primitive' and 'barbaric' African customs by French civilized ideals of progress, democracy, reason, respect for private property and moral. In return France could take from the colonies what they needed. While the government sought to promote and justify their colonial politics, accounts of abuse and cruelty by European colonials started to reach France. Atrocities in the Belgian Congo for example made headlines at the beginning of the twentieth century. These stories spurred heated debates and seriously questioned the so-called 'civilized' nature of European colonial politics. Socialists, anarchists, writers and artists joined forces in an active anti-colonialist movement, expressing their indignation in cartoons, pamphlets and public rallies.<sup>37</sup>

Pierre Quillard was among the writers who publically denounced colonial misconduct. He spoke out during a protest rally organized by the *Comité de Protection et de défense des indigènes* and by the *Ligue des droits de l'homme* in 1905. In his speech Quillard apologized, 'on behalf of a so-called superior and evolved race' to his 'brothers of a different colour' for the crimes committed against them:

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<sup>35</sup>Charle, *Naissance des "intellectuels" 1880-1900*, p. 131.

<sup>36</sup> Alice L. Concklin, *A Mission to Civilize. The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> See for example Charles-Robert Ageron, *L'anticolonialisme en France de 1871 à 1914* (Paris: PUF, 1973). Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) is of course a well-known contemporary literary example.

Tout à l'heure on nous disait qu'il y a dans la presse française une indifférence pour les choses coloniales, une indifférence pour les crimes qui se commettent au Congo ou ailleurs. Il n'y a pas d'indifférence, il y a quelque chose de pire, il y a l'apologie, il y a la glorification de ces crimes...c'est en tant qu'homme d'une race soi-disant supérieure et évoluée, que je voulais ici faire...une sorte de confession publique et demander à mes frères d'autre peau et d'autre couleur, de bien vouloir nous pardonner les crimes que nous avons commis envers eux.

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Quillard rejects the idea of European (and French) superiority propagated by the government of the Third Republic. In literary and artistic circles Quillard did not stand alone in his anti-colonial sentiments and it is not surprising the theme is taken up in the Almanac. The texts were also greatly influenced by Vollard's childhood experiences. Having grown up on Réunion, Vollard's knowledge of Creole language and culture came in handy. The collaborators of the second Almanac probably shared Quillard's anti-colonial position. However, Jarry's interest in the colonial theme should, in my opinion, probably be seen in the light of his poetics and his challenging of artistic and cultural values, rather than as a heart-felt commitment to the issue.<sup>39</sup>

Ubu had been dressed up as a colonial explorer before in an issue of *l'Omnibus de Corinthe*. Here we find Ubu and Bourgreles (his son from *Ubu Roi*) in Madagascar in a drawing by André Ibels. 'Colonel' Ubu accuses captain Bougreles of having 'slept with the queen of Madagascar' and of using a French colony for his own profit (Fig. 6). It is striking that both themes associated with Ubu in the cartoons of this last issue of *l'Omnibus de Corinthe* were picked up in respectively the first (the Affair) and the second Almanac (colonialism). Perhaps the contributors to Ubu's Almanac sought to continue the political satire of this short-lived periodical after its demise. More importantly it shows that Ubu had already become a powerful, symbolic figure in artistic circles during Jarry's time. The second Almanac also confronts its readers with a satire of European colonial politics and attitudes, most notably in 'Ubu colonial' and 'Examen du Père Ubu au Saint-Sulpice colonial'.

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<sup>38</sup> Pierre Quillard, *Les illégalités et les crimes du Congo (Comité de protection et de défense des indigènes-Meeting de protestation 31 octobre 1905)*, 54-57, quoted in : Patricia Leighton, "The White Peril and L'art nègre: Picasso, Primitivism, and Anticolonialism," *The Art Bulletin* 72, no. 4 (1990): p. 620.

<sup>39</sup> Patricia Leighton, *Ibid.*, pp. 609-30, also pays attention to Jarry's anti-colonialism in the Almanac, linking him to Picasso's celebration of primitiveness. She is right in pointing to Jarry's subversion of colonial politics and prejudices, but her textual analysis unfortunately remains limited (as she also relies on the English translation of the section 'Ubu colonial', not the entire Almanac). She concludes that Jarry was the quintessential anarchist and celebrator of primitivism, thus influencing Picasso's sculptures, but how this influence exactly came about is not addressed. She also claims that 'Africa had long been a special preoccupation of Jarry' (p. 621), but apart from the Almanac and one article, there is no actual evidence for this. The Almanac's colonial texts were greatly influenced by its other contributors. As I suggested in the text, Jarry's preoccupation with the colonial theme appears to originate primarily from his overall anti-establishment position rather than from a profound connection with Africa.



Figure 6: *Omnibus de Corinthe*, voyage 6, 18 janvier 1898, p. 44

### 7.3.1 Ubu's 'civilizing mission'

In 'Ubu colonial' Ubu has just returned from Africa and narrates his colonial adventures to Fourneau. Ubu tells his friend how he regrets that slavery has been abolished and that he was forced to employ the African people as 'free labourers', like workers in Parisian factories. Nevertheless, Ubu continues, with a brutal and cynical irony, he did have a responsibility to take care of them and keep them happy, emphasizing his 'enlightened' colonial attitude:

Désireux de faire leur bonheur à tous et de les maintenir dans le bien, nous leur avons promis, s'ils étaient bien sages, de leur octroyer, incontinent après dix ans de travail libre à notre service, et sur un rapport favorable de notre garde-chiourme, le droit d'être électeurs et de faire eux-mêmes leurs enfants.<sup>40</sup>

In fact the nineteenth century crisis in slavery and its subsequent abolishment had led to an idea of colonization based on free labour, which would help civilize Africa and transform its inhabitants into true French citizens.<sup>41</sup> Not only does the text call into question the freedom of the colonial labourers, it also establishes a link with the supposed freedom of French factory workers, questioning the conditions of the domestic working class. The fact that the workers are kept in check by a 'garde-chiourme', a person guarding slaves on a galley, says it all. Ubu's attitude, representing

<sup>40</sup> OC I, p. 601.

<sup>41</sup> Concklin, *A Mission to Civilize. The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa 1895-1930*, p. 16.

contemporary colonialist efforts to 'educate' and 'enlighten' the Africans, clearly derides the hypocrisy behind the Republic's so-called democratic policies and the doctrine of the *mission civilisatrice*.

While it would have been easy to identify for example with Quillard's humanist speech and tone, identification with the Almanac is more difficult because of the text's cynical distance and Ubu's elusiveness. Ubu represents European colonial power and the 'Raison d'État', but at other times, as we have seen previously, he also represents the outsider, the bystander. Identification with Ubu or what he stands for is constantly rendered difficult by his ambiguity and 'lack of character'. The reader would expect from the opening lines that the text continues to oppose the European colonialist Ubu and the poor, oppressed African. However the text wanders off into the obscene, proceeding with wordplay and jokes on a number of subjects often associated by Europeans with 'primitive' cultures: promiscuous sexuality, cannibalism, as well as shameless nudity and toilet habits.<sup>42</sup> Ubu's colonial Africa represents a very Western vision; an Africa which was considered exotic and fascinating, noble in its primitiveness but also condemned for its immorality or barbaric ways. Therefore the text should not simply be read as a satirical, political pamphlet against colonialism or as a humanistic defence of rights of the African people, even though it does also contain these aspects. Jarry is neither a human rights activist nor a forerunner of twenty-first century political correctness and sensitivities. Africans in this text are not more or less grotesque than Ubu. Ubu might be his usual crude, obscene and cruel self, representing universal abuse of power; the Africans he encounters neither are poor suppressed people nor naïve and pure 'noble savages'.<sup>43</sup> The text ennobles neither Europeans nor Africans, but calls into question the morals and motives of humankind in general.

That being said, the text does appear to mock a specific Western fascination with the perceived primitiveness and authenticity of African cultures. Ubu's song 'Tatane' or 'Nookie', which ends the text about Ubu's sexual escapades in the colonies, is said to make even the black people blush. Their obvious shock at Ubu's blatant sexuality implies that titillating stereotypes about Africans were mainly the fruit of European imagination. The text scrutinizes negative Western prejudices, but also supposedly positive, yet equally stereotypical assumptions about the supposed lack of sexual inhibitions among indigenous Africans.

Jarry often employs dominant or prejudiced discourse and pushes it to such absurdist extremes, that it undermines that speech. In Ubu's interview with Conscience Ubu wonders: 'à quoi bon faire tant d'enfants si on nous les

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<sup>42</sup> Apart from Leighton's remarks on Jarry's anti colonialism in the Almanac and its avant-garde context, Jean-Paul Morel has been the only one to tackle the 'colonial' texts in his edition of Ambrose Vollard's Ubu works, providing some enlightening notes. However the colonial references in the second Almanac, the puns, the use and function of Creole language in the texts and the song, as well as this text's specific relationship to other contemporary texts with a colonial theme or colonial discourse could still do, in my opinion, with some further and more in-depth (textual) analysis. However, since this exceeds the specific scope and general argument of this chapter, this will remain a suggestion for future research.

<sup>43</sup> Leighton also argues that whereas many modernist artists and writers were anti-colonialist in their opinions, their artistic celebration of African primitivism and the perceived 'noble authenticity' of these cultures often revealed an equally Western (mis-)understanding of Africa. Leighton, "The White Peril and L'art nègre: Picasso, Primitivism, and Anticolonialism," pp. 609-30.

tue à mesure au Transvaal?’ If the reader were to expect a heartfelt appeal denouncing violence and war after these words, he/she is of course thoroughly mistaken. For Ubu makes an even more gruesome proposal:

‘C’est peut-être du bon commerce de livrer des enfants massacrables à vingt ans d’échéance, mais ce n’est pas la peine d’attendre, ni de les envoyer si loin. On peut les tuer aussitôt et sur place, moyennant un escompte, et en tout cas on économisera leurs souffrances et aussi quelques frais pour nous, et même ils seront plus frais, pour les amateurs anthropophages.[...] Et puis, si on ne veut pas les manger, il n’y a qu’à pas faire d’enfants du tout.’<sup>44</sup>

With such absurd exaggeration, Jarry situates himself (consciously I would suggest) in a longstanding literary, satirical tradition. One can spot echoes of Swift in this text. In *A modest proposal* (1729), he made the equally grotesque suggestion that rich Englishmen should buy and eat the babies of poor Irish women. Arguing that babies are nourishing, that it would control population and provide income for the Irish, Swift questioned English stereotypes about the Irish.<sup>45</sup>

Jarry’s examination of European prejudice also shows in ‘Paris black colony’, published in *La Revue Blanche* only shortly after the second Almanac in 1901. The article was inspired by a news item about a black man wanted by the police for having assaulted a waiter and leaving a bar without paying:

M. Girard, commissaire de police de Belleville, recherche activement, dit-on, un nègre qui, après avoir absorbé diverses consommations dans un café de la rue de Palikao, se serait enfui sans payer, et en renversant, d’un coup de tête dans le ventre, le garçon de l’établissement. Que nos fonctionnaires prennent garde de traiter comme un vulgaire filou ce noir, en qui nous hésitons pas à reconnaître et à saluer un explorateur, que tous ses actes dénotent émule admirable, encore qu’un peu trop servilement fidèle, des Stanley, des Béhagle, des Marchand ! Il dégustait, dans l’intérêt de la science africaine, les produits de notre sol [...] Nul doute que, si on ne l’eût interrompu, il n’eût pas tardé à planter quelques drapeaux, brûler des monuments choisis et emmener plusieurs personnes en esclavage [...].<sup>46</sup>

Jarry puts an entirely different spin on the original news item. In Jarry’s version the black man is no longer an uncivilized criminal (as he was portrayed in the papers). He becomes a colonial explorer who, like European explorers in Africa, discovers foreign treasures, without knowing he has to pay for them. Jarry transforms the original news item not so much into a defence of the black man, but into a satire of European colonial politics. Stating that the man in question would have planted some flags, burned some monuments and taken slaves if he had not been interrupted, Jarry clearly draws attention to the behaviour of ‘explorers’ in the colonies.

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<sup>44</sup> OC I, p. 589.

<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal: For Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland from Being a Burden to Their Parents or Country, and for Making Them Beneficial to the Public* (1729).

<sup>46</sup> OC II, pp. 287/88.

### 7.3.2 Anti-clericalism

Politics and colonialism are not the only aspects of French society under scrutiny in the Almanac. The educational system and the Catholic Church are also targeted in 'Philologie' or 'l'Examen de Père Ubu au Saint-Sulpice colonial'. Although the Third Republic's official *mission civilisatrice* was secular and anti-clerical, the Catholic Church remained an important player in the colonies, as it still was in France. The clergy played a particularly important role in 'educating the natives.'<sup>47</sup>



**Figure 7: Ubu, frère Ignorantin and Zozo, Almanach 1901**

The text is a short play or dialogue in which the décor of the Saint-Sulpice church in Paris is now relocated to the colonies. In 'Paralipomènes d'Ubu' Jarry had already explained that Ubu studied at the 'séminaire de Saint-Sulpice'.<sup>48</sup> As Jean-Paul Morel argues, some of Vollard's own school experiences with the Catholic 'frères' of Réunion probably inspired this text.<sup>49</sup> Whereas 'Ubu colonial' portrayed Ubu as a colonial entrepreneur and administrator, this text portrays Ubu as a reluctant schoolboy unwilling to learn. The Catholic Frère Palmiste ('brother Palmtree'), aptly named Ignorantin, puts Père Ubu's knowledge and education to the test. Père Ubu in return questions the father's knowledge, or in Ubu's words: 'Vous devriez au moins avoir la pudeur de ne point afficher votre incapacité sur votre nom.'<sup>50</sup> But Frère Ignorantin stoically replies that his name is *Ignorantin*, like one would say *latin* and proceeds with Père Ubu's exam, by asking him

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<sup>47</sup>See J.P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided. Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism 1880-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>48</sup> OC I, p. 468.

<sup>49</sup> Vollard, *Tout Ubu Colonial et autres textes*. Morel, in his effort to reinstate Vollard as co-author, notes that the entire text a school story Vollard told to Jarry. Morel bases this assumption on Vollard's memoirs. However, Vollard's memoirs were written long after the Almanac and hardly constitute, like most ego documents, an objective source. Since there is no other manuscript evidence on who wrote what, the specific origins of this story, as of the other texts, remain a source of speculation. This probably would have pleased 'author' Père Ubu and the 'anonymous' collaborators of the Almanac.

<sup>50</sup> OC I, p. 612.

how the vowels are formed.<sup>51</sup> This dialogue appears to be a pastiche of the dialogue between the Maître de Philosophie and Monsieur Jourdain in act two and scene five of Molière's *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670). The text is thus again situated in a literary, satirical tradition. Only here, contrary to Molière's play, the lesson consists not of how to pronounce the vowels, but how to write them. And contrary to the bourgeois social climber monsieur Jourdain, Ubu reluctantly refuses to be educated.

To confront Père Ubu's with his utter lack in writing skills, Frère Ignorantin introduces him to the native African child, Zozo. The name means 'oiseau/bird' in children's language and is synonym for idiot in Creole. He pops up like a Jack-in-the-box, which startles Père Ubu (Fig.7).

'Zozo-in-the-box' recites his lesson in a docile manner. Excelling in his knowledge of the French language, Zozo seems to make for a better Frenchman than Père Ubu, at least according to Frère Ignorantin's standards. Of course the demeaning portrayal of the child as a jack-in-the-box presents him as a mindless puppet, moulded by the Catholic mission and robbed of his own identity. Again, the utter lack of any reality or human emotion in any of the three characters prevents any identification on the part of the reader with them or with the plot. It is through humour and wordplay that the reader is challenged to rethink established values (educational, religious, cultural etc.), not through an engaging story or relatable characters.

The colonial theme in the second Almanac has of course little to do with Africa itself. Contrary to Vollard, Jarry, like most of his contemporaries, knew Africa only from newspapers. He could have caught an exotic glimpse of these 'dark cultures' at The Paris World Exhibition of 1900, Ubu comments upon in the Almanac, which boasted an enormous amount of ethnographic and colonial exhibits. It showed the richness and exoticism of the colonized territories to a curious and avid European audience and served to justify the Republic's colonial expansion.

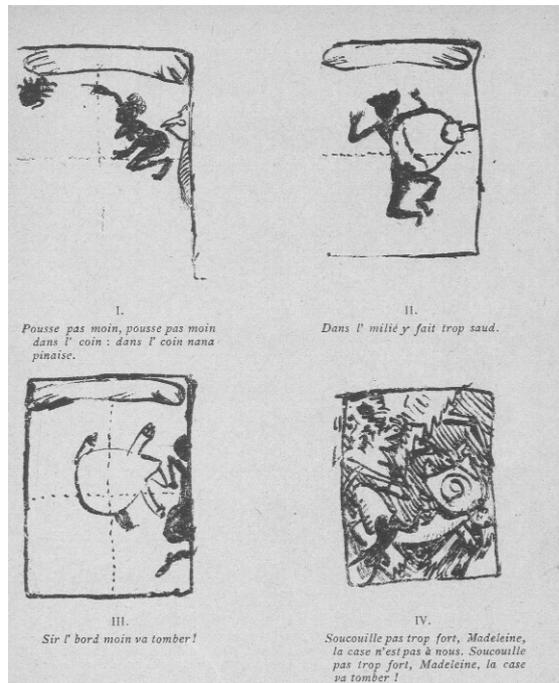
The 'colonial' texts do not aim at any sort of authentic representation of African people or life in the colonies, but primarily poke fun at contemporary European values. It does so with bawdy humour, juxtaposing vulgar puns and Creole language with European 'rational' colonialist discourse. This is reinforced by Bonnard's suggestive images. The spelling lesson at the colonial Saint-Sulpice is interspersed with a sort of comic in which Ubu and a black woman engage in sexual activities (Fig. 8). In the last of these four sketches, in which the sexual act becomes rather explicit, the drawing becomes conveniently blurry. The text accompanying this raunchy 'comic' is filled with sexual innuendo, made up of lines that were apparently borrowed from popular songs from the isle of Réunion.<sup>52</sup> Provided no doubt by Vollard, they are another evidence of the collage technique employed in the Almanac. Whereas Ubu, Zozo and Ignorantin continue their very serious spelling lesson, Bonnard's images counteract this 'lesson' by depicting Ubu's erotic adventures. Within the multi-layered collage text Bonnard's drawings often create yet another dimension, independent and juxtaposed to the text. This was also the case in Bonnard's lithography of acrobatic and dancing black

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<sup>51</sup> OC I, p. 613.

<sup>52</sup> As Morel notes in Vollard, *Tout Ubu Colonial et autres textes*, p. 107.

figures following the text who literally dance across two pages. Bonnard portrayed these Africans as the ultimate anti-thesis to white Europeans and European culture.



**Figure 8: Ubu's sexual 'explorations' in the colonies, Almanac 1901**

From our contemporary perspective, these images represent an equally misguided Western perception of African cultures and people as the patronizing attitudes of European colonials the Almanac also criticizes. Nevertheless, set in its historical context, this celebration of primitivism, freedom and crude forms, apart from satirizing European culture, was radical and new in terms of artistic and cultural values. Bonnard's images signal a rupture with contemporary aesthetic ideals and foreshadow the avant-garde's embrace of primitive forms, for example in the Cubist movement and in Picasso's sculptures.<sup>53</sup> The text and images of the Almanac equally challenge the values of the Third Republic, in which the idea of civilization was still tied to a concept of mastery, of nature, of the human body, over instinct and over ignorance; that which the French were thought to possess and other people supposedly lacked.<sup>54</sup>

#### **7.4 Jarry, the Almanacs and politics**

As we have seen, the texts in the Almanac comment on contemporary issues, but their 'commitment' to these issues is often indirect and ironic, and reveals Jarry's own detached position when it came to politics. This might partly have been due to the turbulent and increasingly politicised context in which the works were written.

<sup>53</sup> As is also argued by Leighton, "The White Peril and L'art nègre: Picasso, Primitivism, and Anticolonialism."

<sup>54</sup> Concklin, *A Mission to Civilize. The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa 1895-1930*, p. 5.

### 7.4.1 Censorship

Disguising the social and political commentary in the literary context of the Ubu texts, in the complex puns and humorous wordplay or in the Creole language of the colonial texts may have had a pragmatic advantage; to escape censorship and the authorities. The political climate could be repressive, despite the liberal and democratic foundation of the Third Republic. Censorship laws sometimes led to literary trials or to bans on plays and performances. Zola was brought to trial for his alleged contempt and defamation of the French army in his pamphlet. For that same reason the aforementioned Urbain Gohier had been prosecuted for his anti-militarist book in 1898.

Censorship was particularly focused on morals and politics; anything to do with the Revolution or anti-militarism for example was punishable. The theatre especially was under surveillance.<sup>55</sup> This was one reason why the opening word of *Ubu Roi*, 'merdre', had the extra 'r' to avoid the moral scrutiny of the censors. Jarry had gotten away with 'merdre' in 1896, but two years later he would not. Even a small, semi-amateur theatre such as the Théâtre des Pantins had to submit all of its texts. When *Ubu Roi* was staged there as a marionette play, the censor wanted the word 'merdre' omitted; the extra 'r' did no longer suffice. Jarry first suggested to replace 'merdre' with 'sangsurdre', which was rejected, then simply with 'dre', also declined, and finally with nothing.<sup>56</sup> Jarry would refer to the infamous word and the changes forced upon him by the censors through Père Ubu's conspicuous 'silence' in the opening lines of *Ubu enchaîné*. Ubu is almost tempted to say the word, but quickly utters another 'M word', Mère Ubu:

*Père Ubu s'avance et ne dit rien*

Mère Ubu : Quoi ! Tu ne dis rien, Père Ubu. As-tu donc oublié le mot ?

Père Ubu : Mère...Ubu ! Je ne veux plus prononcer le mot, il m'a valu trop de désagréments.<sup>57</sup>

The Montmartre cabarets might have enjoyed some artistic freedom in the early days, but their success and their setting in an 'anarchist' quarter had also led to inspection. When *Ubu Roi* was staged at Les Quat'z'Arts Jarry had to rewrite the final scene. The play ends with Père and Mère Ubu setting off for France, at which point Ubu recites a poem about the 'joys' of the country. In line with the satirical tradition of the cabaret, Ubu simultaneously pokes fun at the supposed grandeur of France and at censorship:

La France réunit pour nous tous les attraits :  
Il y fait chaud l'été, l'hiver il y fait frais,  
Les institutions sont mises sous vitrine :

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<sup>55</sup> On censorship in theatre and popular entertainment see F.W.J Hemmings, *Theatre and State in France, 1760-1905* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 204-26. Theatre and entertainment endured the most censorship, since they could reach a potentially large audience.

<sup>56</sup> Alfred Jarry, *Ubu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), p. 453. In their notes to this edition, Arnaud and Bordillon discuss the censorship files on the *Ubu* plays, including that of the Théâtre des Pantins. Whether Ubu's Almanacs were also subjected to censorship, is still unknown. No files or information has been recovered, as far as I know.

<sup>57</sup> OC I, p. 429.

Défense de toucher au clergé, la marine,  
Au sceptre immaculé des gardiens de la paix  
[...]<sup>58</sup>

The Almanacs, contrary to these other Ubu works, appear to have escaped censorship. There could be several reasons for this. First of all the Almanacs were not widely available. Even within the avant-garde, they only catered to a small elite. Moreover, by 1900 the censors simply could not cope anymore with the sheer amount of plays being produced, let alone all other publications.<sup>59</sup> In addition, the innovative form of the texts blurs the social and political commentary. Their 'politics' are less clear. The Almanacs also did not fit a particular literary genre nor did they represent a distinct journalist category, in other words more common platforms for social commentary. As they escaped these categories, they could have easily escaped attention. The punning, whether to avoid censorship or not, would have masked the potentially provocative content of the Almanacs for non-insiders.

Potential problems with censorship could explain why the vulgar obscenities of the second Almanac, such as in the Saint's calendar as in the Ubu colonial text, are all masqueraded in puns or in Creole language. All the elements for which a book or a play would have been under investigation are present in the Almanacs; anti-militarism, critique of the Third Republic, obscenities, and a 'revolutionary' and 'anarchist' tone. Any explicit expression of such themes, could, as examples show, have led to a trial or a ban.

#### 7.4.2 Anarchism

Writers in particular were thought to have ties to radical political movements. The Paris Commune (1870) which was bloodily suppressed by the government (20.000 people were killed), was still in everybody's minds and the 1890's were a decade of ongoing social unrest, strikes and demonstrations. In the wake of the assassination of President Sadi Carnot (1894) and several anarchist bomb attacks police surveillance increased. This also affected literary society.<sup>60</sup> Subversive literary work was often believed by authorities to go hand in hand with a potentially dangerous political agenda.

Many artists, especially in Symbolist and avant-garde circles, were in fact sympathetic to anarchist ideas. Some, such as Félix Fénéon, were even actively involved in the anarchist movement.<sup>61</sup> Anarchist thinkers such as Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin had written about art's revolutionary

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<sup>58</sup> OC I, p. 651.

<sup>59</sup> Hemmings, *Theatre and State in France, 1760-1905*, p. 224.

<sup>60</sup> Charle, *Naissance des "intellectuels" 1880-1900*, p. 111.

<sup>61</sup> On to the close connections between anarchism and the French cultural world around 1900 see, among others: Pierre Aubery, "L'anarchisme des littérateurs au temps du Symbolisme," *Le mouvement social* 69 (1969), Joan U. Halperin, *Félix Fénéon: Aesthete and Anarchist in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), Patricia Leighton, *Re-Ordering the Universe. Picasso and Anarchism, 1897-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), Dieter Scholz, *Pinsel und Dolch. Anarchistische Ideen in Kunst und Kunsttheorie 1840-1920* (Berlin: Reimer, 1999), Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin de Siècle France*, Alexander Varias, *Paris and the Anarchists: Aesthetes and Subversives during the Fin de Siècle* (New York: St Martin's, 1996).

potential. Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin had argued that the true artist would reject the bourgeois system and, as a frontrunner of the future, had an important role in changing society. These ideas were well received by some artists. Ideologically, avant-garde artists and writers felt a kinship with the movement's resistance to the establishment. Writer Paul Adam wrote for example: 'Ce que l'anarchie veut prouver par la violence, c'est que la minorité intelligente et audacieuse devient une force contre le nombre stupide et féroce'.<sup>62</sup> The previously cited Gustave Kahn also underlined art's capability of bringing about social change. Moreover, there was a geographical link between anarchism and the avant-garde. They gathered in the same venues in Montmartre and in the bars of the Quartier Latin.<sup>63</sup> Not surprisingly many writers contributed to anarchist publications. *La Révolte* for example, edited by Jean Grave, counted known authors such as Octave Mirbeau, Alphonse Daudet, Anatole France, Pierre Loti, Leconte de Lisle, Stéphane Mallarmé, or artists such as Signac and Pissarro among its contributors. Émile Pouget's anarchist *Almanach du Père Peinard*, whose title brings to mind Ubu's Almanac, also had close connections to the literary world, including writers from Jarry's circle, such as Mirbeau, Fénéon, Laurent Tailhade and Paul Adam. Literary journals, such as *Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires*, *La Revue Blanche* and *La Plume*, also wrote about anarchism.

During the aftermath of the murder of President Carnot, the subscription list of *La Révolte* was seized by the police in 1894. The recently founded Théâtre de l'Oeuvre also became a target of surveillance. A police informer called it an 'anarchist literary society'.<sup>64</sup> The archives of the 'Préfecture de Paris' contain many reports on the theatre's activities. In one report, from 1894, Jarry is mentioned as the possible editor of an 'anarchist publication' and as a 'literary anarchist':

'There is a question of launching an anarchist publication in the genre of *La Revue Libertaire*...It is at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre that there has been question of that publication for which one foresees a considerable number of subscribers. They will have as principle editors: Louis Lormel, Alfred Jarry, Leon-Paul Fargue, and other literary anarchists of the Latin Quarter.'<sup>65</sup>

Artistic venues, even houses of suspected anarchists had to endure police surveillance for years. Police archives also contain numerous personal files on for example Pierre Quillard, Urbain Gohier, Félix Fénéon and the inhabitants of the Bateau Lavoir, including Picasso.<sup>66</sup> Jarry was also included in a list of suspects, for the simple fact that he lived next door to a noted anarchist. Police agents reported on February 21, 1904, that the anarchist Zanetta lived next to Jarry at no. 6, rue Cassette.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Charle, *Naissance des "intellectuels" 1880-1900*, p. 114.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Sonn describes this 'symbolic space' of Parisian anarchism in: Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin de Siècle France*, pp. 79-94.

<sup>64</sup> Hyman, *Bonnard*, p. 27.

<sup>65</sup> Archives de la Préfecture de Paris, B/a79, May 25, 1894, quoted and translated in Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin de Siècle France*, p. 77.

<sup>66</sup> Leighton, *Re-Ordering the Universe. Picasso and Anarchism, 1897-1914*, p. 71.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71

Artists and writers protested against this repression through petitions and letters. In 1894, after Jean Grave's arrest, 124 writers signed a letter of complaint, published in the left-wing journals *La Petite République* and *La Justice*. Jarry, plus friends including Léon-Paul Fargue, Paul Fort, Paul Léautaud and Félicien Fagus, also signed. In fact these petitions are among the few public displays of Jarry's political commitment. In 1893 Jarry had also signed a protest opposing the ban on Gerhard Hauptmann's play *Les âmes solitaires*. It was supposed to be staged at the Théâtre de L'Œuvre, but had been forbidden by the police.<sup>68</sup> Hauptmann's translator Alexander Cohen, a Dutch/Jewish writer and journalist of *La Revue Blanche*, was expelled from France on suspicions of anarchist leanings. The subscribers protested Cohen's expulsion 'pour ne savons quelle raison' and the equally 'random' ban on the play, justified neither 'by its intentions, nor by its audience.'<sup>69</sup> Around the time when they were working on the second Almanac, Fagus and Jarry had signed a letter of support for Belgian writer Georges Eekhoud. He was trialled for his novel *Escal-Vigor*, published in 1899 by the Mercure de France, because of the novel's homosexual theme. No less than eighty writers and artists signed the petition which appeared in *Le Mercure de France* on 29 September 1900.<sup>70</sup> They advocated 'la liberté de l'Art et de l'Idée'. Both Jarry and Fagus would also sign an appeal for their friend, anarchist writer Laurent Tailhade, who was sentenced to one year imprisonment for one of his articles. Tailhade's controversial article was re-published in *La Plume* together with the signatures of his supporters.<sup>71</sup>

All these petitions demanded freedom of expression above anything else. Writers made sure they distanced themselves from any links with political radicalism. Many were in fact more preoccupied with artistic freedom than politics. Others were forced to keep a low profile due to the oppressive climate. Any explicit defence of a supposed anarchist cause could mean criminal investigation. Some, such as Fénéon or Zo d'Axa, were outspoken and militant anarchists, but the majority of writers sympathized with anarchism for its shared philosophy of freedom and individuality, and tried to stay clear from its more violent and political repercussions. They expressed their politics in the form of a symbolic resistance against an increasingly repressive atmosphere. Their attitude appeared to be part of a general set of cultural politics challenging the establishment.

This also becomes evident in the Almanacs. The 'revolutionary' tone, the attack on political, religious and cultural icons, use of popular slang, could all be interpreted as 'anarchist' in spirit. Collaborator Félicien Fagus had, in 1898, the year of the first Almanac, published his anarchist collection of poetry *Testament de ma vie première*. He blended his political views with his poetics, rejecting bourgeois, academic art in favour of the avant-garde painters, as in this excerpt from his poem *Variation autre sur le vieux theme*:

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<sup>68</sup> A little over a month earlier the theatre had staged Ibsen's play *L'Ennemi du peuple*, which had caused some controversy, because Laurent Tailhade had provocatively celebrated 'Anarchy' in his preliminary speech.

<sup>69</sup> OC II, p. 576.

<sup>70</sup> OC II, pp. 584/84.

<sup>71</sup> Besnier, *Alfred Jarry*, p. 467.

Tu fais pleuvoir aux éventaires-Des petites marchandes de fleurs-De si adorables horreurs-Que le bourgeois pris de coliques-Croit voir les splendeurs hérétiques-De van Gogh et Pissarro-Et recommande avec terreur-En passant devant les boutiques-Des petites marchandes de fleurs-Sa pauvre âme à Notre Seigneur-A Notre Seigneur Bouguereau !

The bourgeoisie and their artistic God, academic painter William Bouguereau, are opposed to the 'heretics' Van Gogh and Pissarro. In the first Almanac, Bouguereau, is similarly mocked as the representative of established art and perhaps this fragment owes something to Fagus' text. The avant-garde counterpart of Bouguereau is said to be Gauguin, founder, according to Ubu, of 'Haitian (*sic*) academic art.' His disciples are the Nabis painters Vallotton and Vuillard.<sup>72</sup> Although the text equally pokes fun at artists from Jarry's own circle, since no one is spared in Ubu's universe, the critique of academic and established art is strikes as much less compassionate. In the second Almanac, Père Ubu casually remarks that he has stopped giving advice to M. *Bougrereau*, mixing his name with Ubu's cherished 'bougre'.<sup>73</sup>

When the actual issue of anarchism is discussed in the first Almanac, the position is, as usual, detached and ironic. As Ubu and Fourneau approach the Senate building, Fourneau remarks:

Le Fourneau: C'est pourtant de là, m'ont appris mes lectures journalières, qu'est partie la fameuse bombe Scheurer-Kestner.

Père Ubu: Dans un pot, je sais, monsieur notre ami, au restaurant Foyot

Le fourneau : Vous brouillez les histoires, Père Ubu. Ce n'est pas là que fut tailhadé notre camarade par la jeunesse anarchiste ?<sup>74</sup>

In a typical Ubu-like confusion of bawdy humour and linguistic associations, real and symbolic bombs are mixed up in only a few sentences. In 1893 anarchist Auguste Vaillant had planted a bomb in the Chambre des députés. Scheurer-Kestner was a member of parliament who had declared Dreyfus innocent in 1897. The symbolic bomb he set off eventually cost him his vice-chairmanship of the Senate in 1898. Close to the Senate building was the fashionable restaurant Foyot which had been target of a bomb attack on April 4, 1894. Apparently the explosives were hidden in a flower pot. In an ironic twist of fate, the blast only injured Jarry's friend Laurent Tailhade, a sympathizer to the anarchist movement. Jarry's friend and future editor Félix Fénéon was arrested and charged for the attack. He was imprisoned for several months and put on trial during the infamous Procès de Trente at the end of 1894, together with other anarchists and sympathizing artists. In the end most of them, including Fénéon, were acquitted due to lack of evidence.<sup>75</sup>

A certain anarchist spirit can certainly be attributed to Jarry's work, especially where the aggressive and irreverent attitude towards society's institutions and authorities is concerned. Jarry labelled Ubu as the 'perfect

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<sup>72</sup> OC I, pp. 558/59

<sup>73</sup> OC I, p. 591.

<sup>74</sup> OC I, pp. 554/55.

<sup>75</sup> In the Almanac's list of names Fénéon is described as 'celui qui silence', mainly because he always kept quiet about his role in this bomb attack during his life. See appendix.

Anarchist', due to his infinite possibilities as a character and his elusive, provocative nature. But this had little to do with the political ramifications of anarchism. Jarry himself expressed uneasiness when it came to militant anarchism and the active support of some of his close friends for the movement. In *Visions actuelles et futures* (1893), Jarry had said the following:

*Vous traquez les anarchistes en bloc, je frappe la bourgeoisie en bloc, disait Émile Henry. Apparente logique éblouissante de potaches, absurdité guerroyant contre l'absurdité (...) Aveugles pour aveugles...<sup>76</sup>*

In these remarkably straightforward lines, Jarry derides anarchist ideology by equating it to another 'absurdity', the bourgeoisie, and stating that it is 'absurdity battling absurdity, the blind for the blind', based on nothing but a 'schoolboy logic.' I would argue that Jarry seemed first and foremost interested in challenging any ideological framework that claimed the truth, whether bourgeois values or anarchism, as well as questioning the people who blindly followed specific ideologies. In a review of Augustin Léger's *Journal d'un anarchiste* from 1896, Jarry mockingly wrote that the book mainly 'tendrait à démontrer que les "overriers" anarchistes sont des mauvais littérateurs.'<sup>77</sup> In other words, it appears that for Jarry politics and literature proved a bad mix.

#### **7.4.3 'Commitment' through the text**

Many contemporaries, such as Zola, France or friends like Pierre Quillard and Félix Fénéon, publicly spoke out as intellectuals and were politically active. Jarry, for the most part, kept an ironic distance towards most political issues in public, illustrated for example by his response to the Alsace question. In the Almanacs contemporary displays of extra-literary engagement and the figure of the 'intellectual' are clearly mocked. Prominent intellectuals of the Dreyfus Affair such as Zola, France, Barrès, are ridiculed, comically reduced to fishing bait or a cacophonous choir. Did Jarry therefore remain a sort of dandy and bohemian *pur sang*, one who refuses to become involved with politics at all?

This is of course only partly true, as we have seen. In his journalism, published in *La Revue Blanche*, he did on occasion, albeit always in his own paradoxical way, address 'hot' issues. Furthermore, like his contemporaries, he signed a number of petitions. Out of all his literary works, the Almanacs engage the most with contemporary issues. Seen in the historical context, the choice for the almanac genre is a striking one. Through this genre, and through their form and themes both works venture into the domains of journalism and politics.

If we recall Sapiró's division from the beginning of this chapter, Jarry mainly appears to take up an avant-garde position. Jarry's 'commitment' is expressed through his texts, as an integral part of his subversive poetics, not just through subject matter, but through formal innovation. Juxtaposing

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<sup>76</sup> OC I, p. 337.

<sup>77</sup>OC I, p. 1013.

literature with journalism in Ubu's Almanacs enabled Jarry to challenge the premises of both domains, but in particular the representation of politics and events in newspapers. The almanac genre, unlike any other contemporary literary genre, allowed Jarry to comment on social-political reality by appropriating journalist strategies and discourse, but without succumbing to journalist standards. The Almanacs differ from the 'aesthete' position of contemporary writers (including many Symbolists), for whom their literary work was separate from any political convictions the writer might have in real life. The Almanacs are also distinct from committed literature, such as the *roman à thèse*, in which contemporary writers such as France or Barrès articulated political ideas and possible solutions to society's problems.

The Almanacs express a position in which the transgression of artistic norms also implies the transgression of social and political norms, thus underlining art's subversive potential. The paradox and the constant irony are in fact inherent to, if not a condition for this position, since they avert an allegiance to one political view or side. It explains why the attitude towards anarchism was ambivalent, if not dismissive. In the end, all doctrine, how attractive it might seem, needed to be rejected in Jarry's work. In real life, he also did not commit to any set of (radical) politics. That stance is also expressed through the ambiguous figure of Père Ubu, who represents every single political viewpoint and none at the same time. Despite the serious themes of the Almanacs, which would call for a point of view, it generally remains unclear what sort of ethical or political position may be expressed in the text. Identification with the character or 'commitment' to the themes on the part of the reader is therefore problematic, not in least because of the text's grotesque buffooneries.

However, the informed reader is left to rethink the 'facts' presented in the press or in public debate on certain issues. In 'L'Ile du Diable' Ubu's ruthless brutality and the cruelty of the verdict do, despite all the cynical humour, imply an attack on the procedures of the actual Affair or at least a deconstruction of the facts and stories surrounding it. I would also argue that the texts nevertheless contain a defence of universal values such as justice and individual freedom, as the hypocrisies of certain groups and people in society are clearly attacked. The presentation of that opinion is more paradoxical, ambiguous and indecisive than in most contemporary works, but this also seems a condition for the text's commitment. For literature to keep its subversive dimension, to be 'engagé', it needed, although it could defend certain causes, to be free from actual political affiliation. The 'anarchist spirit often attributed to Jarry's work is has its roots on a much broader philosophy of individuality and freedom, which Jarry expressed through pataphysics, in his work as well as in his public life. By signing petitions, he primarily challenged the restrictions placed by the contemporary political and cultural establishment on freedom of expression, whether for political figures (for instance Grave) or writers and artists (such as Eekhoud).

In the Almanacs a concept of the work of art capable of being a changing force in society appeared to be put forward. Nevertheless Jarry's work and actions make clear that the work of art needed to remain independent, free

from political affiliation. Hence, paradoxically, its influence was limited in advance. On the one hand the Almanacs can certainly be read as 'committed', or political; on the other hand they represent the uncomfortable relationship between art and politics; they articulate a desire for art to have a social impact, but at the same time this is out of reach unless, at least in Jarry's eyes, artistic autonomy is compromised.

Jarry hid behind his paradoxical character Ubu in the Almanacs and in his life, mainly, it seems, to guard his independence. Political context and censorship might have played a part in the ironical distance expressed in his works, but it is more likely that this need for independence was the main reason behind the strategy of indirectness and indecisiveness. Both in his life and in his work, Jarry chose not to conform to any established ideology or framework, whether it came to politics (in his dismissal of *fin de siècle* literary anarchist sympathies), religion (ridiculing the Catholic Church), science (creating instead his all-encompassing philosophy of pataphysics) or artistic (not adhering to one particular set of aesthetics but his own).

# Conclusion

Jarry's work can be characterized as playful, elusive, paradoxical and provocative. In fact, these qualifications formed the essence of Jarry's writing and thinking. Whether he was challenging literary and artistic conventions or dissecting social and political issues, Jarry's non-conformist attitude was at the heart of his literary texts and determined his outlook on the world. Nowhere does this become clearer than in the two Almanacs. Although long overlooked, they are in many ways exemplary, if not the most radical expression of Jarry's poetics.

In chapter one I showed how Symbolism provided an inspirational environment for Jarry in the 1890's and helped shape his ideas on literature. The ironic manner in which Jarry outlined his (Symbolist) aesthetics in 'Linteau' (1894) already illustrated his scrutinizing attitude towards contemporary literary ideas. 'Linteau' is a seminal text; a starting point for understanding the Almanacs. In it, he introduced his vision of a polysemic and hybrid work, inclusive of genres and forms from all cultural spheres. In short, he was in search of models and modes of expression that defied contemporary notions of originality and artistic beauty. Around the time of the first Almanac (1898), Jarry's career witnessed several changes in publishers and platforms that also signalled a transformation in his writing. His texts were now being published by the more progressive and more politicized *La Revue Blanche*, where the editors were more willing to accept Jarry's uncompromising attitude when it came to his texts. Jarry's work left Symbolism behind and embarked on a new direction set in motion since *Ubu Roi* (1896). From 1900 onwards and around the time of the second Almanac (1901), Jarry also became acquainted with a new generation of avant-garde writers and artists, including Apollinaire and Picasso, on whom he would have a considerable influence.

In fact, several phases of Jarry's career and aspects of his work appear to come together in the Almanacs. They link Jarry's early Symbolist influences, his love for images from *L'Ymagier* (1894/95), the cycle of Ubu plays, the erudite and innovative novel *Gestes et Opinions du Docteur Faustroll* (1911[1898]), his satirical journalism, the more accessible, titillating nature of novels such as *Messaline* (1901) or *Le Surmâle* (1902), the light-hearted playfulness of the libretto's he wrote for Terrasse's operetta's, such as *Le Moutardier du Pape* (1903), and pataphysics. Jarry's first published prose text 'Guignol'(1893) introduced Ubu's pataphysical knowledge to the world, but nowhere is this more clearly expressed than in the Almanacs. The absurd logic, crucial to pataphysics, characterizes the texts and the character of Ubu. It shows in Ubu's ability to speak out on every subject, in the focus on ridiculously trivial details to comment on important events of the year, in short in a constant reevaluation of accepted values and ordering structures. Both Ubu and pataphysics function as provocative tools that challenge not only contemporary literary aesthetics, but contemporary cultural sensibilities in general.

The Almanacs were inspired by aspects of the artistic-counterculture found amongst *fin de siècle* humorist literary groups and in the cabarets of Montmartre, as well as by popular tradition. I argued in chapter two that the almanac genre had the advantage of falling outside of contemporary literary genres or models of writing. The artist cabaret must have appealed to Jarry for the same reason. Characteristics of Montmartre's cabaret culture (use of popular culture, collaboration, mixing the arts, satire and provocation) and of the popular genre of the almanac (heterogeneity, 'anonymity' and collective authorship) suited Jarry's vision of literature and can be found in both Almanacs. As a result Ubu's Almanacs linger between journalism, literature, popular culture and artistic counterculture, but precisely that hybridity gave Jarry the tools to play with prevailing notions of art and literature.

The Almanacs were, as I showed in chapter three, the result of an artistic collaboration. The contributors, Nabi painter Pierre Bonnard, composer Claude Terrasse, poet Félicien Fagus and art dealer Ambroise Vollard, all from Jarry's inner circle, brought with them various cultural spheres and artistic domains which influenced the content, form and structure of the two works. The historical details of this collective effort also illustrated how the Almanacs were known and appreciated among the literary and artist avant-garde of the day and how Ubu had already become a literary archetype. The pseudo-anonymous, collective genesis of the Almanacs challenged and reinvented contemporary concepts of the author and originality. Jarry of course remained in control of the creative process as the final editor; the other authors also still labelled him as the main author. However, the role of the author was re-interpreted. He was no longer a 'solitary' genius author, creator of unique material but a supervisor and editor of the text, ordering the words and images.

The genesis of the Almanacs as a collective work is reflected in their structure and composition, as I showed in chapter four. The collage form was also a logical extension of Jarry's vision of literature. His ideal text was heterogeneous, polysemic, fragmentary, inclusive of other artistic media and non-literary texts, and not restricted by genre boundaries or narrative conventions. The collage in the Almanacs has several effects. First of all, the incorporation of pre-existing texts challenged contemporary ideas in which the uniqueness of the literary text was defined by the originality of the material and singularity of the author. Secondly, the collage practice also re-evaluates the role of the author. With the Almanacs in particular (but also visible in other works such as *Faustroll*) Jarry and his collaborators put into practice another vision of the literary text and the author: the texts or materials themselves did not need to be authentic; the author's arrangement and their insertion in a new context ensured the originality of the work. The author retains a central role in the literary work, but not as a divinely inspired singular genius. Instead, he becomes a 'bricoleur', who consciously cuts and pastes his texts, combines the material, and invites the reader to make certain connections.

Jarry's inventive use of collage in the Almanacs is closely related to his particular use of language, as I also demonstrated in chapter four. In his writing he constantly alternates for example between literal and figurative connotations, and he associates words through phonetic and visual puns.

His economical use of language results in a highly constructed, dense text; no word is redundant, no connotation neglected. Collage, or combining apparently random fragments to create new connections, helped achieve Jarry's ideal of an associative, polysemic text. Apart from the obvious playfulness and humour of the texts, the puns are also employed to generate meaning and to create an intricate web of semantic threads. As I showed in the analysis of the 'February' text of the first Almanac, one word or sign (in this case 'Poissons') generated the narrative through an exploration of all its connotations. Thirdly, Jarry's use of collage therefore challenged conventional modes of representation, as reality was documented through bits and pieces from that reality (fragments, quotations, visual signs) rather than *telling* and ordering it through conventional narrative. He pushed the boundaries of contemporary definitions of the literary text.

Jarry's innovation of the literary form can be seen within a more general crisis of representation that was being felt around 1900 among artists and scholars. Scientists and philosophers challenged accepted knowledge about how man perceived the world. This influenced several artists and writers who sought new ways of representing the dynamic and complex nature of modern life. Ubu's Almanacs reflect if not foreshadow paradigmatic changes in art and literature of this period. Jarry can be considered a frontrunner when it comes to his use of collage in the Almanacs. It is known that he influenced artists such as Picasso or Apollinaire, who used the technique respectively in painting and in poetry. As the artistic expression of broader cultural developments, collage was certainly 'in the air', but Jarry was one of the first to practice it, certainly in a literary work.

In chapter five I discussed the prominent interaction with newspapers in Ubu's Almanacs. This is of course visible in the collage of newspaper fragments, but the content and discourse of the texts are equally inspired by news and journalism. I linked this to the major role of the press in society at the time. Writers were sceptical and ambivalent when it came to newspapers. They felt torn between the new financial and creative opportunities the press offered and the commercialism and perceived superficiality that went along with it. A similar attitude can also be discerned in Jarry's work. Jarry was critical of the press, of its mass appeal, and of writers who used journalism as a commercial or political platform. However, he also turned to journalism as a new source of creativity. The Almanacs prefigure the tone and style of Jarry's chronicles, in their fascination for news and their innovative juxtaposition of journalism and literature. In the Almanacs, forms and genres from the press (such as the interview or advertisements) are used in order to satirize them and to challenge journalistic representations of reality. Jarry appears to blur the boundaries between journalism and literature in the Almanacs. Still, the fact that journalist genres and aesthetics are turned into literature suggests that the two nevertheless remained distinct in Jarry's eyes. This is reinforced by the satire, as well as by the fact that Ubu's Almanac is presented as a 'cure' for newspapers and that Ubu's 'alternative reality' is offered as the only real 'truth'. Despite the obvious irony, there is a serious undertone in that statement, as it refers to the status of the literary work in society and literature's relationship to everyday life. Faced with contemporary manifestations of mass culture, such as newspapers or

advertising, writers and artists felt they needed to redefine the position of art in society.

In chapter six I addressed this complex issue in more detail and showed how Jarry's attitude was, as often, ironical and ambivalent. Like so many contemporaries, he expressed concerns about the pervasiveness of journalism or about writers bowing to commercial or popular standards. Through the character of Ubu a similar dismissal of the banality of mass culture was expressed, but at the same time *fin de siècle* anxieties about mass culture were also partially ridiculed. In Jarry's work, mass culture seems to be considered as a challenge and not simply as a threat to art. This was, in itself, not radically new, since many of his contemporaries, writers and artists, looked to everyday life or popular forms for inspiration. However, with the Almanacs, Jarry radically defied contemporary literary standards of 'beauty', through the wordplay, the bawdy humour, the crude and disruptive collage aesthetic, and the reinvention of the literary form. Jarry did of course not aim at debunking art or levelling it with more popular forms of expression. However, he also refused to simply aestheticize popular culture in order to lift it to contemporary artistic standards. The perceived vulgarity or triviality of mass culture is hardly elevated to universal beauty and truth, at least not the kind of higher, symbolic truth and beauty most (Symbolist) contemporaries were aiming at. Instead, Jarry chose to create a more hybrid form. The Almanacs are exemplary of the new, yet ambiguous, bonds emerging between art and mass culture at the beginning of the twentieth century. Jarry challenged the formulas and conventions of both popular aesthetics as well as literary aesthetics. By allowing these new forms and materials to enter the literary work, Jarry created new structures, genres and modes of representation (such as collage). Furthermore, the use of 'everyday' materials made it possible for Jarry to bring literature closer to everyday life, but without bowing to the demands of mass culture.

Considering their pseudo-journalistic form, it is not so surprising that Jarry addresses several 'hot' issues in the Almanacs, including the Dreyfus Affair and colonial politics. Most of Jarry's earlier texts hardly dealt with current events, but with these two works Jarry definitely broke with that trend, as I showed in chapter seven. When it comes to social and political issues in the Almanacs, Jarry is first and foremost interested in challenging the 'logic' behind ideologies and ideas which claim the truth. He would also continue that strategy in his chronicles. Jarry's innovative use of language is employed to question society's discourses and values. The collage and wordplay become tools for social commentary. As far as is documented, Jarry stayed clear from political movements and public commitment to any specific political ideology, as he guarded his independence as a writer. Yet precisely this independence seemed to have been a condition for his reflection on political issues. Jarry probably consciously situated the Almanacs in a tradition of literary satire. There are obvious hints to Rabelais, Molière and Swift in the texts. Ubu's excessive cruelty and lack of conscience or moral centre has obvious comic effects, but precisely the combination of comedy with the very real and serious issues addressed in the texts, including anti-Semitism, racial prejudice, abuse of power and colonial exploitation, often make for an uncomfortable read. Without pointing

explicitly to one specific ethical position, the brutal reality behind these issues is made evident. For readers aware of the seriousness of the themes, the texts in the Almanacs invite critical reflection, or at least provoke a reaction. However, whereas the Almanacs seem to implicitly side with the pro-Dreyfus camp and with the anti-colonialist movement, what strikes the most is the overall challenge posed to the cultural and political establishment. The humour, playfulness and paradox of the texts (in form and content), as well as the absurd, 'pataphysical' logic, seemed necessary means for the subversive anti-establishment position Jarry embodied, whether in his public persona or in his work. This independent, detached, attitude prevented Jarry from becoming caught up in institutionalized politics and joining the ranks of contemporary 'intellectuals', while still confronting and exposing serious issues in his texts.

The Almanacs are key works for understanding Jarry's poetics and they shed more light on Jarry's cultural and historical position. Jarry was a child of his time and his work owed a lot to contemporary developments in art and literature. Through their dialogue with contemporary culture, the Almanacs provide an off-beat perspective on French society around 1900. Jarry's work also took on a new direction, as he broke with the hermetic Symbolism of his earlier texts to become more engaged with his time and with contemporary culture. The Almanacs are an example of how literary works responded to their surroundings. They were to a degree shaped by contemporary cultural developments (the advent of mass culture, newspapers and advertising, the political turmoil of the *fin de siècle*) in their form, style and content. A number of formal innovations are visible in the Almanacs; the appropriation of new genres and discourses (from popular culture and journalism) within the literary work, collage, juxtaposition of text and image, and an economical, innovative use of language, made up of puns and endless connotations and references, that defied contemporary notions of genre and what a prose text should be.

Examining the Almanacs, it becomes clear that Jarry was at the forefront of many innovations that would occur in twentieth century art and literature. Furthermore he emerges as a key, transitional figure between the late nineteenth century Decadents and Symbolists, humorist groups (such as the Hydropathes), the artistic cabarets and the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century. As I said in the introduction, Jarry has influenced artists and writers throughout the twentieth century up until today, his work has inspired philosophers and Ubu and pataphysics even found their way into pop culture. But despite Jarry's cult status, his texts have always remained largely unread and unknown, no doubt due to their experimental and often hermetic character. With my discussion of the Almanacs, I hope to have not only demonstrated their vital role in Jarry's oeuvre and their importance for understanding his ideas and writing. I also hope this thesis contributes to a better understanding of Jarry and his oeuvre, which is valuable in its self, but not in the least because of Jarry's lasting legacy in literature and art.

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A rich source of information about Jarry and his context are the publications by the Collège de Pataphysique:

*Cahiers du Collège de Pataphysique 1950-1957*

*Dossiers acénonètes du Collège de 'Pataphysique 1956-1965,*

*Subsidia Pataphysica 1966-1974*

From 1975 onwards: *Organographes du Cymbalum Pataphysicum, Monitoires du Cymbalum Pataphysicum, Viridis Candela. Carnets trimestriels du Collège de Pataphysique*

Equally valuable are the articles on Jarry's work in:

*L'Étoile-Absinthe. Cahiers de la Société des Amis d'Alfred Jarry, 1979-present.*

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# Samenvatting

**Een schrijver die de wereld naar zijn hand zette. Alfred Jarry's subversieve poëtica in de *Almanachs du Père Ubu*.**

Ongrijpbaar en paradoxaal, zo kun je het werk van Alfred Jarry (1873-1907) nog het beste karakteriseren. Telkens als de lezer denkt te begrijpen waar hij of zijn werk voor staat, wordt deze weer op het verkeerde been gezet. Maar precies die paradox is essentieel voor het schrijven en denken van Jarry. Of het nu ging om conventies in de literatuur en kunst aan de kaak te stellen of om sociale, politieke kwesties onder de loep te nemen, Jarry's non-conformistische grondhouding was de basis voor zijn literaire teksten en voor zijn betrokkenheid op de wereld.

In dit proefschrift wordt betoogd dat dit nergens zo duidelijk naar voren komt als in de *Almanachs du Père Ubu* (1898, 1901), twee lang onderbelichte werken, maar in velerlei opzichten exemplarisch voor Jarry's poëtica and levensfilosofie. Jarry debuteerde eind negentiende eeuw temidden van het Decadentisme en het Symbolisme. Hij was een tijdgenoot van schrijvers als Gide, Valéry, Claudel en Proust, maar zijn werk bleek moeilijk te rangschikken onder dat van tijdgenoten of literaire stromingen. Posthuum is Jarry geloofd als voorvader van verschillende twintigste eeuwse schrijvers, kunstenaars en literaire stromingen. Wat in voorgaande studies over Jarry echter vaak onduidelijk is gebleven, is wat zijn werk zo vernieuwend of origineel maakte in zijn tijd. Binnen Jarry's oeuvre vormen de *Almanachs* een nog vreemdere eend in de bijt. Ze lijken te ontsnappen aan de destijds regerende opvattingen over literatuur en vertegenwoordigen een breekpunt in Jarry's oeuvre, waarin hij loskwam van zijn vroege Symbolistische invloeden en een geheel eigen poëtica schiep. In dit proefschrift worden een aantal wezenlijke aspecten van Jarry's schrijven en denken gebracht door middel van een tekstuele analyse van de *Almanachs*, gesitueerd in hun cultuurhistorische context, het Frankrijk van 1900. Deze aanpak laat zien in hoeverre Jarry's werk exemplarisch was voor de veranderingen die zich in deze tijd in de kunst en literatuur aankondigden. De eerste drie hoofdstukken zijn met name gewijd aan de context waarin Jarry schreef, terwijl in de overige hoofdstukken vooral wordt ingaan op de vorm, structuur en thema's van de *Almanachs* en, waar nodig, ook gerefereerd wordt naar Jarry's overige werk.

In het eerste hoofdstuk wordt beschreven hoe het Symbolisme, in het bijzonder de kring rond tijdschrift en uitgever *Le Mercure de France*, een inspirerende omgeving vormde voor Jarry. Maar hoewel Jarry mentoren als Mallarmé zeer bewonderde en veel Symbolistische ideeën ter harte nam, zette hij zich al vrij snel af van zijn tijdgenoten. De ironische ondertoon waarmee hij in een vroeg werk als 'Linteau'(1894) veel van de Symbolistische literatuuropvattingen poneerde, gaf al een glimp van de noodzaak bij Jarry om constant vraagtekens te stellen bij eigentijdse opvattingen van originaliteit en schoonheid. In deze tekst introduceerde Jarry zijn visie van

een hybride, heterogeen literair werk, waarin ruimte was voor allerlei genres, materiaal en vormen van expressie, met andere woorden een werk dat in die tijd niet als conventioneel mooi werd beschouwd. Jarry bracht de ideeën uit 'L'Inteaus' in de praktijk in de beide *Almanachs*. Rond de tijd van de eerste *Almanach* (1898) vond er bovendien een verandering in Jarry's literaire omgeving plaats. Het progressieve en meer politiek georiënteerde *La Revue Blanche* nam de publicatie van Jarry's werk over en stond welwillender tegenover zijn compromisloze houding dan *Le Mercure de France*. In deze periode liet Jarry het Symbolisme voorgoed achter zich, iets wat al in gang was gezet met zijn schandaaltoneelstuk *Ubu Roi* (1896). Omstreeks 1900 en rond het uitbrengen van de tweede *Almanach*, raakte Jarry ook bevriend met een nieuwe generatie schrijvers en kunstenaars, waaronder Apollinaire en Picasso, op wie hij een grote invloed uitoefende.

In feite komen in de *Almanachs* verschillende fases van Jarry's schrijverschap en aspecten van zijn werk bijeen. Ze combineren zijn Symbolistische invloeden, zijn liefde voor beeldende kunst te zien in *L'Ymagier* (1894/95), de Ubu toneelstukken, de erudiete en vernieuwende roman *Gestes et Opinions du Docteur Faustroll* (1911[1898]), zijn satirische kronieken, het meer toegankelijke, prikkelende karakter van romans als *Messaline* (1901) en *Le Surmâle* (1902), de lichtvoetige humor van de libretto's die hij schreef voor operette's als *Le Moutardier du Pape* (1903) en, niet onbelangrijk, Jarry's zelf-uitgevonden wetenschap de pataphysica in combinatie met het, letterlijk en figuurlijk, enorme karakter van Pere Ubu.

Ubu's patafysische kennis werd al geïntroduceerd in Jarry's prozadebuut 'Guignol' (1893), maar komt in de *Almanachs* echt tot uiting. De absurde logica, die centraal staat in de pataphysica, kenmerkt de teksten en het personage van Ubu. Deze uit zich in het gemak waarmee Ubu zijn alwetenschap spuit over elk onderwerp, in de focus op onbeduidende, triviale details als er commentaar wordt geleverd op het nieuws, en in een constante omkering van bestaande waarden en structuren. Ubu en de patafysica dienen als provocatiemiddel om literaire en culturele gevoeligheden op de hak te nemen.

In het tweede hoofdstuk wordt ingegaan op twee andere belangrijke contexten voor de *Almanachs*. Allereerst was dat de artistieke tegencultuur van humoristische literaire groepen (zoals de Zutistes en de Hydropathes) en de cabarets van Montmartre en ten tweede de eeuwenoude populaire traditie van de volksalmanak. De volksalmanak was nog steeds wijdverspreid in Jarry's tijd, maar het genre viel buiten de grenzen van de literatuur. Dit moet Jarry, die altijd op zoek was naar onconventionele inspiratiebronnen, dan ook aangesproken hebben. De tegencultuur van Montmartre opereerde eveneens in de marges van de kunst en literatuur. Montmartre was een experimentele vrijplaats en de provocatieve toon van de performances daar, de mix van kunstvormen, politieke satire en populaire cultuur zijn terug te vinden in de *Almanachs*. Hetzelfde geldt voor aspecten van het almanak genre, zoals bijvoorbeeld de anonimiteit, de heterogene mengelmoes van teksten en het collectieve auteurschap. In beide culturen vond Jarry zowel inspiratie als artistieke modellen voor zijn eigen almanak.

Beide *Almanachs du Pere Ubu* waren het resultaat van een artistieke samenwerking. Schilder Pierre Bonnard, componist Claude Terrasse,

galeriehouder Ambroise Vollard en dichter Félicien Fagus brachten invloeden uit verschillende culturele sferen met zich mee die de de twee werken mede hebben gevormd. Een dergelijk collectief schrijven was dan wel inherent aan het almanak genre, maar binnen Jarry's literaire context heeft het ook andere effecten. De historische reconstructie in hoofdstuk drie van de collectieve totstandkoming van de *Almanachs* laat ten eerste zien in hoeverre Ubu, al tijdens Jarry's leven, een literair archetype was geworden en een soort gemeenschappelijk artistiek bezit. Ten tweede daagde dit collectieve schrijven bestaande opvattingen over auteurschap en originaliteit uit. De artistieke samenwerking en het feit dat de de *Almanachs* 'anoniem' werden gepubliceerd (Ubu wordt genoemd als de auteur) conflicteerde met een idee van de schrijver als een uniek genie. Jarry bleef de hoofdauteur en eindredacteur van beide werken (de andere bijdragers benadrukten dit later ook), maar de rol van de auteur werd opnieuw geïnterpreteerd. In plaats van het 'geïnspireerde, solitaire genie' wordt in de *Almanachs* de auteur als een soort opzichter gepresenteerd, een monteur van teksten en illustraties die niet per se van hemzelf afkomstig waren.

De samenwerking wordt weerspiegeld in de structuur en compositie van de *Almanachs*, in de toepassing van collage *avant la lettre*. In beide werken zijn de technieken (het knippen en plakken van bestaande tekst) en het achterliggende principe (een ontregelend, fragmentarische werk creëren ) van collage duidelijk te zien. Collage was in feite een logisch gevolg van Jarry's visie op literatuur. Zijn ideale tekst, en dit laat de uitgebreide analyse van collage in hoofdstuk vier zien, was heterogeen, meerduidig, fragmentarisch, open voor andere kunstmedia, en niet gehinderd door genre restricties of narratieve conventies. De collage vorm in de *Almanachs* heeft verschillende effecten. Allereerst zet het hergebruik van bestaand materiaal vraagtekens bij het idee dat de uniekheid van een literaire tekst wordt bepaald door de originaliteit van de tekst en de auteur. Ten tweede wordt de rol van de auteur opnieuw gedefinieerd, waarbij niet de tekst zelf, maar de manier waarop de schrijver deze rangschikt de originaliteit van het werk bepaalt.

Wat met name opvalt in Jarry's collageteksten is zijn specifieke gebruik van taal. Hij speelt constant met letterlijke en figuurlijke betekenissen en met visuele en fonetische connotaties. In zijn economische teksten staat geen woord teveel. Elk fragment, citaat, woord of beeld roept in Jarry's collage tekst een nieuwe connotatie op betekenislaag op en deze associatieve, haast poëtische manier van schrijven is essentieel in Jarry's gehele oeuvre, of het nou de *Almanachs*, zijn romans, toneel, of zijn journalistieke teksten betreft. Afgezien van hun speelse humor, scheppen de woordgrappen ook een ingewikkeld web aan betekenislagen. In de analyse van de '*Février*' tekst in hoofdstuk vier wordt duidelijk hoe een woord of teken (in dit geval 'Poissons') de gehele vertelstructuur stuurt door alle mogelijke connotaties van dat teken te verkennen. Met dit taalgebruik zocht Jarry de grenzen op van eigentijdse definities van de prozatekst. Ten derde heeft het de collage tekst dan ook als effect dat het conventionele manieren van representatie ondermijnt. De werkelijkheid wordt niet verhalend en lineair weergegeven maar door middel van taalspel en documentaire fragmenten.

Jarry's vernieuwing van de literaire vorm kan worden beschouwd binnen een algemenere crisis van representatie die door kunstenaars en denkers werd gevoeld rond 1900. Verschillende etenschappers en filosofen hadden de menselijke perceptie en objectieve kennis van de wereld in twijfel getrokken. Dit spoorde sommige schrijvers en kunstenaars aan nieuwe, subjectieve manieren te zoeken om de wereld om hun heen weer te geven. Deze zoektocht is duidelijk te zien bij Jarry in zijn gebruik van collage. Hij was één van de eersten die het toepaste in een literair werk, maar collage hing in de lucht in deze tijd. Dichter Lautréamont, één van Jarry's grote voorbeelden, maar ook de literaire experimenten in de cabarets beïnvloedden Jarry die op zijn beurt weer van grote invloed was op bijvoorbeeld Apollinaire en Picasso, die collage toepasten in de poëzie en de beeldende kunst.

In hoofdstuk vijf komt de opvallende relatie tussen de *Almanachs* en de pers aan bod. Niet alleen is dit duidelijk in het gebruik van krantenfragmenten in de collage. Veel van de thema's zijn ontleend aan voorpagina nieuws en er worden journalistieke vormen en jargon gebruikt in beide werken. De pers was het belangrijkste massamedium in Jarry's tijd en speelde ook een grote rol in het culturele leven. Jarry stond sceptisch tegenover de massaliteit en uniformiteit die de pers naar zijn mening met zich meebracht en tegenover met name succesvolle schrijvers die de kranten als persoonlijk platform gebruikten. Desalniettemin vormde de journalistiek voor Jarry ook een bron van inspiratie. Vormen en genres uit de journalistiek (zoals het interview of advertenties) worden gebruikt om de weergave van de realiteit door kranten aan de kaak te stellen. De *Almanachs* lopen wat betreft toon en stijl vooruit op Jarry's kronieken. Andersom paste Jarry in zijn journalistieke teksten eveneens literaire technieken toe. Hoewel Jarry de grenzen tussen journalistiek en literatuur lijkt te doen vervagen in de *Almanachs*, blijven de twee toch duidelijk van elkaar gescheiden. Ten eerste door de overduidelijke satire, ten tweede door het feit dat journalistieke genres tot literatuur worden gemaakt, en ten derde omdat Ubu's almanak als 'medicijn' tegen de pers wordt gepresenteerd en Ubu's unieke werkelijkheid als 'waarheid'. Ondanks de overduidelijke ironie van deze statements, sluimert er een serieuze ondertoon die refereert naar de status van literatuur in de maatschappij en haar relatie tot de werkelijkheid. Veel schrijvers en kunstenaars, geconfronteerd met een toenemende massacultuur, hadden het gevoel de plek van kunst in het leven te moeten herzien.

Ook hierin was Jarry's houding vooral ambivalent, zoals in hoofdstuk zes wordt betoogd. Zoals veel tijdgenoten, was hij achterdochtig als het om de pers ging. Het personage Ubu functioneert als spreekbuis om te wijzen op de banaliteit van massacultuur, maar in zo'n overdreven mate dat de angstige houding van het *fin de siècle* ten opzichte van 'de massa' tegelijkertijd geridiculiseerd lijkt te worden. In zijn werk lijkt Jarry de massacultuur meer als een uitdaging te beschouwen. Hoewel andere tijdgenoten ook het dagelijks leven of populaire vormen als inspiratie gebruikten, was het Jarry niet slechts te doen om vormen van massacultuur te estheticieren, dat wil zeggen aan te passen aan de regerende opvattingen over artistieke schoonheid. Jarry neemt, in de *almanachs*, elementen uit massacultuur op zonder ze volledig te integreren. Het resultaat is een ruwe, hybride literair werk, dat indruisde tegen de literaire standaarden van zijn

tijd en ver verwijderd was van de mystieke, symbolische werkelijkheid en schoonheid waar zijn Symbolistische collega's naar op zoek waren.

Provocatie beperkte zich bij Jarry echter niet tot zijn teksten. Waar collage de literaire tekst directer relateerde aan het dagelijks leven, zo relateerde Jarry delen van zijn leven direct aan zijn literaire werk. Naast dat hij privé een fervent wielrenner en visser was die zich graag terugtrok met vrienden op het platteland, ontwikkelde hij ook een publiek personage, een dandy en bohémien die gebruik maakte van zelf-promotie en zich vereenzelvigde met zijn werk en personages. De vele anekdotes over Jarry's overmatige drankgebruik, losse gebruik van vuurwapens en andere excentrieke uitspattingen, hebben de merites van zijn werk nog wel eens overschaduwed. Maar dit publieke personage maakte evenzeer deel uit van Jarry's denken waarin alles op zijn kop gezet moest worden. Hij zocht de grenzen op tussen fictie en non-fictie, tussen werk en leven en tussen literatuur en massacultuur. Zowel in zijn werk als publieke optredens maakte hij dankbaar gebruik van reclame strategieën om zichzelf en zijn vrienden te promoten. De *Almanachs* kunnen als voorbeeld worden beschouwd voor de nieuwe, zij het ambivalente, banden die er aan het begin van de twintigste eeuw tussen kunst en massacultuur ontstonden. In Jarry's geval leverden deze banden nieuwe vormen op, zoals collage, en nieuwe manieren om de literatuur dichter bij het dagelijks leven te brengen, maar zonder daarbij een knieval te maken naar de door hem gewantrouwde massacultuur.

Jarry's teksten kenmerken zich door een aanstekelijke humor. En deze humor is, evenals zijn vormexperimenten, niet slechts vrijblijvend. In de *Almanachs* hebben het spel met taal en vorm en de collage een satirisch karakter. Het almanak genre zelf, van oudsher deels populair, informatief, literair en journalistiek, leende zich bovendien uitstekend voor commentaar op de maatschappij. Door bijvoorbeeld journalistieke teksten te integreren en soms licht te veranderen, laten Jarry en zijn mede auteurs hun eigenzinnige en excentrieke licht schijnen op de politieke en culturele realiteit en scheppen zij hun eigen alternatieve werkelijkheid. De ingewijde lezer met enige kennis van de context, herkent in de woordgrappen een duidelijk sociaal commentaar. Gevestigde schrijvers, salonkunst, maar ook de gevestigde politieke orde (in een cynische satire van onder andere de Dreyfus Affaire en koloniale praktijken) worden onder handen genomen door middel van de groteske figuur van Ubu. Zijn paradoxale karakter wordt ingezet om allerlei maatschappelijke rollen, discussies en waarden belachelijk te maken. Hoewel er in de tekst geen duidelijke ethische positie wordt ingenomen, wordt de realiteit van anti-semitisme, racisme en politiek machtsmisbruik pijnlijk duidelijk. In het laatste hoofdstuk wordt dan ook betoogd dat Jarry een meer geëngageerd schrijver was dan voorheen wel is aangenomen, zeker in de twee *Almanachs*. Humor en distantie waren echter voorwaarden voor Jarry's betrokkenheid op de wereld. Het paradoxale karakter van zijn werk, gevoed door de absurde logica van de patafysica, stond hem toe een constante subversieve positie in te nemen. Zo kon hij maatschappelijke kwesties kritisch bekijken en er een eigenzinnige kijk op geven, maar hij hoefde hij zich niet te scharen aan een bepaalde politieke zijde of een publieke rol op te nemen als intellectueel zoals zoveel van zijn collega

schrijvers deden tijdens de Dreyfus Affaire. Het onafhankelijke kunstenaarschap ging voor hem boven alles.

De *Almanachs* zijn niet alleen exemplarisch voor Jarry's poëtica, maar werpen ook meer licht op zijn cultureel-historische plek. Jarry was een kind van zijn tijd en zijn werk ontleent dan ook veel aan de toenmalige politieke, culturele en literaire context. Door zijn culturele omgeving te mengen met het Ubu universum, geeft Jarry een eigenzinnige kijk op de Franse samenleving rond 1900. De *Almanachs* laten zien hoe literatuur reageert op haar omgeving. De opkomst van massacultuur (in de vorm van de pers en reclame) en het turbulente politieke klimaat van het *fin de siècle* waren van invloed op de vorm en inhoud van beide werken en gaven Jarry nieuwe mogelijkheden voor artistieke expressie. De bestudering van Jarry's werk maakt bovendien duidelijk dat hij veel artistieke vernieuwingen van de twintigste eeuw vooruit was. Hij komt dan ook naar voren als een belangrijk schakelfiguur tussen het Decadentisme, Symbolisme, de humoristische tegencultuur van eind negentiende eeuw en de avant-garde bewegingen van de vroege twintigste eeuw.

Jarry's werk en ideeën hebben een schare aan schrijvers, kunstenaars en stromingen tot op de dag van vandaag beïnvloed, variërend van Picasso, Apollinaire, Dada, Surrealisme, Queneau, OULIPO tot hedendaagse Franse schrijvers als Echenoz, maar ook filosofen als Deleuze of Baudrillard. Zelfs in strips en popmuziek duikt Ubu hier en daar op. Ondanks deze cult status zijn Jarry's eigen teksten, afgezien van *Ubu Roi*, slechts bekend gebleven bij een select gezelschap, waarschijnlijk vanwege hun soms vrij ontoegankelijke, experimentele karakter. Dit proefschrift draagt dan ook bij aan een beter begrip voor een boeiend oeuvre, dat op zichzelf al meer aandacht verdient, maar ook vanwege Jarry's blijvende erfenis in de kunst en literatuur.







Moreno, Marguerite (Lucie Marie Marguerite Monceau, 1871-1948): Actress. She was employed by the Comédie Française where she played *Hamlet's* Ophelia in 1896. She married Marcel Schwob in 1901.

(32) Henri de Régnier                    celle qui cyclope  
Régnier, Henri de (1864-1936) : Writer. He was nicknamed Cyclops, because he always wore a monocle. The description might also allude to De Régnier's collection of short stories *Canne de Jaspe*, in which the alliance of animals and humans is an important theme. The work is listed as one of Faustroll's *livres pairs*. Chapter XX of *Gestes et Opinions du docteur Faustroll*, entitled 'De l'île de Her, du Cyclope et du grand cygne qui est en cristal', is also dedicated to him. He was a supporter of Rodin.

(33) Richepin                            celui qui gueuse  
Richepin, Jean (1849-1926): Poet, writer and playwright. One of the contributors to the magazine of the Chat Noir. He wrote *La chanson des gueux* (1876). He was sentenced to a month imprisonment and a fine for the political content of this work .

(34) Jacotot                            celui qui Paphnutius  
Jacotot, F. (unknown) : French actor who performed in the play *Paphnutius* by Hrotsvitha, staged at the Théâtre des pantins in 1898. The play was translated into French by André-Ferdinand Herold. Jacotot also performed in *Ubu Roi* at the marionette theatre.

(35) Réjane                            celle qui Parisienne  
Réjane (1856-1920): Actress. Nicknamed 'la Parisienne' by theatre critic Francisque Sarcey. Known as the 'Queen of the Boulevard' she starred in plays by authors such as Sardou, Bernstein and Bataille. In 1885 she performed in the play *La Parisienne* by Henri Becque at the Théâtre de la Renaissance.

(36) Sarah                            celle qui Mède  
Bernhard, Sarah (1844-1923): Actress. Nicknamed 'The Divine Sarah', she starred in both classic and tragic roles, as well as in contemporary plays. In 1898 she played the lead role in Catulle Mendès' *Medée* at the Théâtre de la Renaissance.

(37) Guitry                            celui qui vestonne  
Guitry, Lucien (1860-1925): Actor. His celebrity status equaled that of Sarah Bernhardt, with whom he often shared the stage. Dreyfusard and supporter of Rodin. He was also known for his smart, fashionable clothes, hence the pun. Father of Sacha Guitry, actor and playwright.

(38) Le Bargy                           celui qui cravate  
Le Bargy, Charles Gustave Auguste (1858-1936) : Actor and early film director. A member of the Comédie Française and successor of Coquelin in the role of Cyrano. In 1908 he directed an early successful French film *L'Assassinat du duc de Guise*, for which Saint-Saëns composed music. Like Guitry also known for his sense of fashion.

(39) Saint-Pol Roux                    celui qui magnifique  
Saint-Pol Roux (Paul Pierre Roux 1861-1940) : Symbolist poet. He was nicknamed 'saint-pol roux le magnifique' and wrote the 'Manifeste du magnificisme' in 1895. He was also interviewed in Huret's *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire*. Largely ignored by literary critics, he left Paris, but continued to receive writers and artists, among whom the Surrealists in the 1930's who heralded him as one of their spiritual ancestors.

(40) Henry Gauthier-Villars        celui qui ouvre estivalement  
Gauthier-Villars, Henri (1859-1931): Writer, best known as 'Willy'. He was a journalist and a feared music critic, among others for the *L'Écho de Paris* in which he wrote under the female pseudonym of l'Ouvreuse du Cirque d'été (see 41). He was equally notorious for publishing works written by ghost writers under his pseudonym Willy, among which the *Claudine* novels written by his wife Colette. Outspoken anti-Dreyfusard.

(41) L'Ouvreuse                      celle qui willyain monsieur  
L'Ouvreuse: Pseudonym of Henri Gauthier-Villars or 'Willy'. (see 40) The novel *Un vilain monsieur* was published in 1898 under the name Willy, but written by Jean de Tinan.

(42) Tristan Bernard                celui qui berne, nickelle les pieds et chasse les chevelures  
Bernard, Tristan (1866-1947): Writer, playwright and humorist. Author of the play *Les Pieds nickelés*, performed at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre in 1895, and chief editor of the *Revue Blanche's* humorist supplement *Le chasseur des chevelures*. *Moniteur du possible* from January 1893 until July 1894. A passionate cycling fan, he also owned a cycling course.

(43) Émile Bernard                celui qui bretonne  
Bernard, Émile (1868-1941): Painter. Belonging to the School of Pont-Aven, his work is characterized by Breton imagery and *synthétisme*, which he made famous with Gauguin. He later broke with Gauguin and traded France for Egypt for 10 years. Jarry dedicated chapter XIV 'Du Bois d'Amour' in *Gestes et Opinions du docteur Faustroll* to Bernard. Jarry's magazines *L'Ymagier* and *Perhinderion* played an important role in publishing Bernard's drawings and engravings.

(44) Saint-Georges de Bouhélier    celui qui naturise  
Bouhélier, Saint-Georges de, (Stéphane-Georges de Bouhélier-Lepelletier 1876-1974) : Poet and playwright. Founder of the *Naturist* movement, that intended to bring back live, nature and beauty into poetry. He also started the magazine *Documents sur le naturisme*, baptized *La revue naturiste* in 1897. A close friend and supporter of Zola.

(45) Vanderem                      celui qui calice  
Vanderem, Ferdinand (Fernand-Henri Vanderheym 1864-1939): Playwright and critic. Author of the play *Le Calice*, staged in November 1898 at the Théâtre de Vaudeville.

(46) Samain                         celui qui poète  
Samain, Albert (1858-1900): Poet and co-founder of the *Mercure de France*. Member of the *Hirsutes* and the *Hydropathes*, contributor the journal of the *Chat Noir*. In 1893 his collection *Au jardin de l'Infante* brought him much critical acclaim and among his peers he was recognized as one of the best living poets. Jarry wrote about Samain in *Souvenirs*, published in 1907.

(47) Hermant                        celui qui Transatlantiques  
Hermant, Abel (1862-1950): Novelist and journalist for the *Mercure de France*. The description refers to his novel *Les Transatlantiques*(1897) about rich American heiresses crossing the Atlantic to marry impoverished European nobles. It was adapted into a play in 1898, an operetta (by Franc-Nohain and Claude Terrasse in 1910) and even made into a film in 1928.

(48) Erlanger                        celui qui Kermaria  
Erlanger, Camille (1863-1919): Opera composer and music critic. He composed the opera *Kermaria*, an 'idylle armoricaine' in 3 acts together with Pierre-Barthélémy Gheusi, which premiered in January 1897 at the Opéra-Comique.

(49) Fauchey                        celui qui carmagnole  
Fauchey, Paul (1858-1936): Conductor and opera composer. Composer of the patriotic and Republican opera *La Carmagnole*, first performed on 2 December 1897 at the Théâtre des Folies-dramatiques.

(50) Dupont                         celui qui édite  
Dupont, Paul (1851-unknown): Publisher of musical works, among which those of Claude Terrasse.

(51) Durand                         celui qui édite





(68) A.-Ferdinand Herold      celui qui connaît ainsi

Herold, André Ferdinand (1865- 1940) : Poet and erudite critic. Collaborator of the *Mercure de France*, *compagnon* at the Phalanstère and involved in the Théâtre des Pantins. He was also a translator of German and Scandinavian works and a renowned specialist of popular legends and fables. In Chapter XXVI of *Faustroll* we therefore find a fable about a lobster and a can of corned-beef, dedicated to Hérold. He was a Dreyfusard and supporter of Rodin.

(69) Alfonse Hérold      celui qui meuble

Herold, Alphonse (unknown): Illustrator and decorator. Brother of André-Ferdinand Herold. Like his brother, he was involved in the Théâtre des Pantins. Together with Ranson and Roussel he illustrated the play *Paphnutius* by Hrotshvitha, translated by his brother, published by the *Mercure de France* in 1895, and performed at the Théâtre des Pantins in 1897.

(70) Odilon Redon      celui qui mystère

Redon, Odilon (1840-1916) : Painter and illustrator. A Symbolist, he was renowned for his black and white charcoal drawings depicting distorted figures, evoking occult and dream-like worlds. He became known to the public thanks to Huysman's novel *A Rebours* (1884), in which Des Esseintes collects Redon's drawings. In 1899 he was part of the Nabis exhibition.

(71) Gustave Kahn      celui qui voyage en palais

Kahn, Gustave (1859-1936): Poet and critic. He had been a member of the *Hydropathes* and was involved in the cabaret *Chat Noir*. His work was in fact one of the first in Europe to use 'free verse'. The description refers to his poetry collection *Les Palais Nomades*, published in 1887. He wrote for *La Revue Blanche*, *La Revue Indépendante* and *Le Mercure de France*. Kahn had written favourable reviews of Jarry's work. Jarry gave a copy of *Ubu Roi* and a copy of the first Almanac to him. Sympathizer of the anarchist movement, Dreyfusard and supporter of Rodin.

(72) Séverin      celui qui mime

Séverin Caffera, better known as 'le mime Séverin' (1863-1930) : Mime artist. He was employed at the *Théâtre des Funambules* in Paris and celebrated as the Pierrot of the *fin de siècle*. In 1929 his memoirs were published with the title *L'Homme Blanc. Souvenirs d'un Pierrot de Paris*.

(73) Léon Abric      celui qui parle avec élévation

Abric, Léon (1869-1946) : Playwright and humorist. He wrote comedies, operetta's and also created shadow plays for the *Chat Noir* cabaret. He also delivered horror pieces for the *Grand Guignol*, the Montmartre theatre founded by Oscar Méténier in 1897, which featured spectacular, macabre and horrific shows, often ending in a bloodbath.

(74) Ranson      celui qui tapisse

Ranson, Paul (1861-1909): Painter, illustrator, decorator. Together with Paul Sérusier, who he had met at the Académie Jullian, he was one of the creative leaders of the Nabis. He was also known for his 'Femmes en blanc' exhibited in 1894 and dubbed 'first tapestry of France'. Ranson had contributed to the backdrop for *Ubu Roi* and to the Théâtre des Pantins. He himself later installed a small marionette theatre in his studio where he showed the adventures of the anti-clerical abbé Prout, much appreciated by Jarry.

(75) Maurice Denis      celui qui mystique

Denis, Maurice (1870-1943) : Painter. Another member of the Nabis and an important art theoretician of the Symbolist movement. Denis was a devout Catholic and his works contain mystical undertones and devotional images. His religious, mystical beliefs would eventually separate him from the more 'wordly' Nabis, such as Bonnard and Vuillard.

(76) Toulouse-Lautrec      celui qui affiche

Toulouse-Lautrec, Henri Marie de (1864-1901): Painter and illustrator. Known of course for his posters depicting Montmartre life and Parisian entertainment. His famous poster of Jane

Avril is listed in *Faustroll* as one of three works of art among Faustroll's belongings (besides a poster by Bonnard and an etching by Aubrey Beardsley). Supporter of Rodin.

(77) André Mellerio                      celui qui estampe et l'affiche  
André Mellerio (1862-1943) : Publicist and art critic. Together with Clément Janin he founded the periodical *L'Estampe et l'Affiche* in 1894, devoted to graphic art. They also published artist's monographs, among *La lithographie originale en couleurs; couverture et estampe de Pierre Bonnard* in 1898. In *La lithographie*, André Mellerio claimed that colour lithography was the key artistic form at the end of the nineteenth century. He felt that lithography could be a democratizing force, for it offered the general public low cost access to good and original art.

(78) Colonne                              celui qui concert  
Colonne, Édouard Judas (1838-1910): Violinist, then conductor. He became head of the "Concert national" at the Théâtre de l'Odéon whose main objective was to introduce French composers to a large audience. He then went on to create his own orchestra, 'l'Association artistique des Concerts Colonne' ,at the Théâtre du Chatelet. The ' Concerts Colonne' programmed contemporary music from French musicians (Saint-Saëns, Massenet, Fauré, d'Indy, Charpentier, Debussy, Ravel, Widor, Dukas, Chabrier), but also Wagner et Richard Strauss.

(79) Georges Hue                      celui qui musique à dia  
Hüe ,Georges Adolphe (1858-1948) : Composer. He studied at the Conservatory of Paris and won the Prix du Rome in 1879. He was known for his compositions for flute. The description is a pun on his name with the word 'musique' and the expression 'à hue et à dia'(from left to right).

(80) Roussel                              celui qui pantinait  
Roussel, Charles (1861-1936): Artist. Brother of Ker-Xavier Roussel(below). Director of the Théâtre des Pantins, hence the description.

(81) Roussel                              celui qui Xavier-K  
Roussel, Ker-Xavier (François Xavier Roussel 1867-1944) : Painter and decorator. Member of the Nabis. Studied at the Académie Jullian. Roussel also worked as a decorator for the Théâtre de l'Œuvre. Of the Nabis, Roussel and Vuillard were closest to Bonnard. Roussel married Vuillard's sister Marie in 1893. In 1898 the three men were commissioned by Vollard to make color lithographs.

(82) Germain                              celui qui guignolet  
Germain, François Auguste (1862-1915): Writer and critic. He wrote reviews for *La Plume*. Author of the play *Miss Zut*(1897), written for the Grand-Guignol and of *Polichinelles* (1898).

(83) Charpentier                      celui qui muse  
Charpentier, Gustave (1860-1956): Musician and composer. In 1897 his work *Le Couronnement de la Muse* premiered in Montmartre. It was made for the 'Vachalcade' or 'Promenade de la vache enragée', a carnival parade organized in 1896 and 1897 by artists and inhabitants of Montmartre. Charpentier's biggest success was the opera *Louise* (1900, labelled as a naturalist 'roman musical'.

(84) Vollard                              celui qui devanture  
Vollard, Ambroise (1866-1939): Art dealer and publisher. His gallery, founded in 1893, was responsible for exhibitions and catalogues of many avant-garde artists of the era, from Cézanne to the Nabis and later Picasso. Vollard's publications included illustrated literary works and luxurious books with lithographs. He was also the publisher of the second Almanac and of course one of the collaborators for the text.

(85) Bourgault                              celui qui Ducoudray  
(86) Ducoudray                              celui qui Bourgault











(136) Roty

celui qui pièce de dix sous

Roty, Louis Oscar Roty (1846-1911) : Sculptor and engraver of coins and medals. He created the silver 50c, 1, 2 and 5F coins with the image of the 'Sémeuse' in 1897. In 1900 he was awarded the rank of Commandeur in the Légion d'Honneur. He appears in the second Almanac's *Ordre de la Gidouille* as 'Crotty, graveur en médailles'.



