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SEVERINE THE INDEPENDENT

by

BEATRICE BRAUDE

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
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▼

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INTRODUCTION

The Taride Guide to Paris indicates that the "Square Séverine" is at the city's outskirts, in the 20th Arrondissement, nearest subway stop "Gambetta." A visitor to the Square finds a large, well-designed park, with every facility, including a bandstand and a children's playground, for the edification and amusement of the neighborhood's inhabitants. The 20th Arrondissement is a working-class section and Gambetta remains a working-class hero. The Square Séverine therefore seems a fitting memorial to the brilliantly gifted journalist and celebrated public figure whose chief and passionate concern was the working-class, and particularly the poor in that class.

Although Séverine died only in 1929, it is doubtful whether any of those who currently enjoy the Square's facilities--even those in the appropriate age bracket--could identify her. Perhaps in the whole of France a few old-time Socialists, like the lady encountered in the summer of 1970 who had attended her funeral, still recall her. Otherwise, aside from a few of her articles that have been anthologized, her vast production has left no imprint.

Yet, at the height of her activity and influence, Séverine was perhaps the best-known French woman, a tremendously

successful and innovative reporter, a much sought-after editorialist, and the one person to whom those in trouble could write for help. "Quel est l'homme de quarante ans," André Salmon wrote, "qui n'a pas, au moins une fois, entendu un pauvre molesté ou un grand bourgeois témoin de quelque grande injustice s'écrier: 'Je vais écrire à Séverine?'"¹

For a suitable contemporary comparison of her place in society, one would probably have to combine Eleanor Roosevelt, Françoise Giroud and Simone de Beauvoir. And at that the composite would fall short of the original, for Séverine as a whole was much greater than any of these parts. In 1899 the public voted on who was the "Princesse de la Littérature" and, Le Figaro reported,² the plebiscite had been won by Séverine. That same year, when Séverine had suffered from a serious illness, the cover picture of a well-known humorous weekly Le Rire³ depicted Séverine, with a dog on her outstretched hand (her love of animals was legendary). The dog is smiling. The caption reads, "Séverine va mieux." She refused an offer to run for Deputy, to be Minister of Justice. She is mentioned fourteen times in a volume detailing the important events from

¹Cited in Bernard Lecache, Séverine (Paris: Gallinard, 1930), p. 95.

²November 18, 1899.

³Spring 1899.

1902 to 1918. The last reference, on April 29, 1918⁴ reports that she was considered for membership in the Académie Goncourt, along with Colette and Rachilde, but that a man named Céard was named instead. In 1905 she was a founding member of the Prix Fémina Jury.⁵ In addition to writing, she was a tireless and extremely effective speaker on behalf of many causes. The very last time she appeared in public was at the mass rally held at the Cirque de Paris in July 1927, on behalf of Sacco and Vanzetti. At that time the crowd almost mobbed her.⁶

Attractive and charming, as well as gifted, Séverine was able to forge a commanding reputation for herself in journalism a domain hitherto reserved almost exclusively to men.⁷ Furthermore, she was admired by everybody, including even those who criticized her, for her selfless devotion to the cause of the poor, her incorruptibility, and her limitless capacity to feel the sufferings of others.

How was it possible for one so revered, so well-known, and above all, one who was so excellent a craftsman in her chosen work, to slip so quickly into oblivion? There are several possible explanations. It is considered normal for a writer's

⁴Elisabeth Hausser, Paris au jour le jour (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, n.d.) (unpaginated).

⁵Ibid., January 28, 1905.

⁶Reported in an ORTF radio broadcast December 6, 1969, Séverine, one of a series on Les Femmes politiques.

⁷Notable exceptions were Delphine Gay, la comtesse d'Agoult, and George Sand.

reputation to go into eclipse immediately after his or her death. In Séverine's case, the natural course of events was intensified for two reasons. For one thing, journalism is a transitory medium. In addition, she had attained her greatest successes before 1900. The stand she took in the Dreyfus Case, and her steadfast pacifism during the First World War reduced her public, for many papers no longer took her work.

Another contributory factor to Séverine's decline was probably her own essentially undoctinaire attitude. She followed no party line, but only the dictates of her own conscience and emotions. She belonged at one time or another to both the Socialist and Communist Parties. Politicians are not known for their toleration of "deviationism." For that reason Séverine may have inspired some suspicion, and the survival of her ideas may not have been encouraged. A final reason for the erosion of her reputation may have been the fact that a good part of her hold on the public was due to her personal aura, which of course disappeared with her death.

There are at present some signs of at least a small revival of interest in Séverine. In June 1969 Jacques Prévert's suggestion that a selection be made of her best works and published was reported by Henri Jeanson in the newspaper L'Aurore.⁸ A Doctorat d'Etat on Séverine is in the making,

⁸June 3, 1969.

and a Diplôme on her Socialism was being written in the summer of 1969. Both of these studies are being written by students of Jean Maitron of the Sorbonne. A very well-researched and well-written radio program was produced at the O.R.T.F. on December 6, 1969. Called "Séverine, Femme Libre et Journaliste," it possessed a good part of the fiery quality of its subject.

It is probable too that some of the renewed interest in Séverine is partly due to her close intellectual association with Jules Vallès, one of the nineteenth century's giant journalists, and author of the Vingtras Trilogie, whose literary stock has greatly risen in recent years. Vallès, whose disciple Séverine was, founded and published Le Cri du Peuple during the days of the Paris Commune. 1970-71 is the one hundredth anniversary of the Commune, that extraordinary, still not wholly explained period of French history.

There may be those who object--and not a few, including Barbey d'Aurevilly, concurred in this point of view--that journalism is not literature. One answer to this argument might be that literature in its largest sense is a mirror of the civilization of its day. In that sense journalism is certainly one of the branches of literature, one of the facets of that mirror.

Journalism developed along those lines from 1830 on, fostered by the inventive talent of Emile de Girardin and others. Nineteenth-century French journalism was very rich in literary talent. It provided a framework in which fledgling authors

could develop their talent or in which established authors could air their theories. Thus Jules Vallès polished his prose in Le Figaro before founding his own papers. (The Trilogie is a kind of happy accident, resulting from Vallès's exile.) Zola published his theories on the theatre in the newspapers of his time before collecting them in book form. And the tables of contents of the great papers of the time show a distinguished list of writers, both great literary figures like Balzac and Lamennais, and professional journalists. Since those times other well-known political and literary figures have distinguished French journalism: Clemenceau, André Maurois and of course Paul Morand.

Séverine was very much at home in reportage and in editorials. The principal subjects of the over 6000 columns or articles she wrote in her lifetime--politics; current events; the poor and the oppressed; injustice--can be included in the larger definition of literature. Indeed, two of her chief preoccupations, women's pressure toward equality and the violence perpetrated by the anarchists of her day, are of the highest topical importance. To follow the unfolding of her ideas in these domains is to see a prefiguring of our own perplexed times. And when, moreover, these ideas are given expression in a strong, vibrant, sometimes poetic prose, the result is certainly worthy of being classified as literature.

A year after Séverine's death in 1929, her devoted grand-son by marriage, Bernard Lecache, published the only book

written about her to date. Séverine is a useful source book, because Lecache learned most of what he says from direct conversation with Séverine, and also because he lists, at the book's end (although not too accurately or precisely) the names of the newspapers and other publications in which her articles appeared. Although the book is nothing less than a paean to an idol, containing very little in the way of real analysis of either her ideas or her style, it is very helpful as a starting point. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that Lecache is the one responsible for the present difficulty in tracking down Séverine's work. Séverine was an extremely methodical person who carefully saved and filed every article she ever wrote, as well as articles about her. All of this was permanently scattered by Lecache when he sold at auction all of her literary material, which she bequeathed to him. Thus each individual issue of the years he lists must now be examined separately to see whether an article by Séverine appears.

The present study will attempt to deal with Séverine only until 1900. By that date she was in full possession of her talent. Her great reportorial exploits had been carried out and her ideas on almost all the important issues expressed. The three non-journalistic works she was to write would come after that date. A two-act play, A Sainte-Hélène, presented in 1902 at the Théâtre Libre, full of outcry against war and a woman's anguish and pity; Sac à tout, a delightful story of the rescue of a dog that had been badly mistreated (for this Séverine did

not only the story, but the layout and photographs as well); and Line, a charming and curious autobiography until the age of 12, which she published in 1921. Her journalistic work after 1900 is, incidentally, abundant and also worthy of study. But by 1900, every stone of importance in the mosaic of her ideas and emotions had already been laid down in Séverine's own, unmistakable mode of expression. Some of the ideas would develop, others would be reinforced. She would repeat herself sometimes and contradict herself sometimes. But by 1900 she had become every inch the journalistic and human phenomenon her era was to know as "la grande, la bonne Séverine."

CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHY

Séverine was born Caroline (Line) Rémy on April 27, 1855.¹ A child with a tremendous capacity for love and yearning for liberty, she was raised in a stifling, repressive petit bourgeois atmosphere later described--with perhaps only some slight exaggeration--in her fictionalized autobiography Line. She was a good student at school, excelling especially in composition. The latter talent led to her first serious difficulty with her family: a young cousin staying with them, who had become infatuated with a chance acquaintance, asked Line to answer his letters. The mail was intercepted and Line's handwriting recognized. The cousin did not confess, however, nor did Line give her away. As a result, Line was punished by being sent away to school, where treatment was so harsh she almost died of pneumonia. Filled with remorse, the family brought her home, and eventually learned the truth.

¹Most of the material for this chapter derives from Lecache, op. cit., but is also given in the many biographies in newspaper articles, obituaries, and encyclopedia material. Séverine's own newspaper articles and Line (Paris: Crès, 1921) also provide much light on her motivation. Mention will be made if the data given do not come from Lecache.

Perhaps the strong sense of injustice Line felt at the time contributed to her lifelong passion for justice. Her sense of pity was also aroused early in her life during the visits with her father to the various orphanages around Paris which he administered.

Since there was no work for a girl of Line's class at that time, early marriage promised the only liberation. A young man who had heard of her modest dowry came calling, and so eager was she for her freedom that the match was arranged after only three weeks. Line was 17 when she married Henri Montrobert, a Gas Company employee. Very quickly her romantic dreams and illusions were shattered. Henri Montrobert had a furious temper² and when he was angry, beat his wife. At the end of a year, after bearing a son, Line returned to her parents. A séparation de biens et de corps was arranged. Now forced to work at something in order to earn money, Line did a little of everything: sewing, piano lessons, copying, dabbling in the theatre. Then she found a position as a reader for a rich Swiss lady whose eyes were failing. The lady's son, Dr. Adrien Guébbard, fell in love with the lovely young woman, and Line agreed to marry him. To legitimize a child that was to be born, the couple went to Brussels in 1879, for France had not yet legalized divorce. In Brussels, Line was casually introduced

²Madame Denise Montrobert Lecache Chanal, Séverine's granddaughter, interviewed in early September 1970 still recalled the fright her grandfather's monumental wrath could inspire in her.

to Jules Vallès, the still-exiled Communard. The chance meeting was to revolutionize her life. When later that year Vallès returned to Paris after being amnestied, he called on her for assistance with a benefit for Maxime Lisbonne, another Communard. That evening was decisive. Vallès suggested she work with him in a kind of literary apprenticeship. "Line pleura d'aise," says Lecache,³ for apparently she was bored and frustrated, especially since she does not seem to have had either of her two children with her. "Il l'éblouit, il la subjuga, il la façonna,"⁴ says the author of one of the two principal magazine articles on Séverine.

Gradually Line became more and more involved in Vallès's work, to the point of making a real contribution to his book La Rue à Londres. When the family became alarmed at the extent of her attachment to Vallès and journalism, they forbade her to continue. Line attempted to kill herself. Fortunately, she did not succeed. The family then relented and permitted her to go on. Vallès was eager to found another newspaper and Dr. Guébard agreed to back it. So in 1883 the Cri du Peuple was re-launched with Dr. Guébard's money, with Vallès as Director. He was, however, already in very poor health, and Line was forced to spend more and more time both at the paper and nursing him. At

³Lecache, op. cit., p. 36.

⁴Albert Cazes, "Une Princesse du journalisme--Séverine," La Grande Revue, June 1930, p. 569.

Vallès's urging, she began writing for the paper, first as "Séverin," finally as "Séverine." After Vallès's death in 1885 she remained with the paper as Directrice, vainly attempting to reconcile the various factions of Socialism represented. Eventually she gave up, and she left in 1888. From then on she was a columnist and editorialist for almost every important newspaper of the period, contributing material to as many as four at one time. As "Renée" she wrote for Le Gaulois, a royalist and Boulangist paper, and as "Jacqueline" (in honor of Jacques Vingtras, hero of the Trilogy) she contributed to Gil Blas, from 1888 to 1892. If, for some reason or other, she left a paper, until 1900, at least, she always found another to replace it. It was a known fact that the presence of one of her articles in a paper increased its circulation.⁵

From the very outset, under the spell of Vallès and the impulse of her own temperament, Séverine was on the side of the poor and the oppressed, always pleading the cause of those who, no matter what their social class or their political party, were suffering, or were victims of injustice. To this overriding sentiment can be attributed her often changing opinions on issues, including her somewhat equivocal stand toward General Boulanger and her eventual, very effective, support for the Dreyfusards in the Dreyfus case. Her deep concern for the poor led her to introduce what seems to have been a new idea, her Carnet, to

⁵Lecache, p. 134.

raise money for those in need. It appeared in seven different newspapers, one for each day of the week. Aided by volunteers, she investigated the cases of those who wrote her for assistance and then distributed the money sent in by the public.

During the years from 1888, when she left the Cri, until 1900, Séverine became a prominent figure in the Paris intellectual and artistic world. Her on-the-spot reportages, at the Cri, in 1887, when she did a remarkable series of articles about the fire at the Opéra Comique, her editorials, in which she bared her thoughts; the various controversies where she was publicly involved; and the duels fought because of her; all of this kept her almost constantly before the public. Beautiful physically ("Séverine, un ovale court, ramassé, dans lequel il y a de tendres yeux, une grande bouche aux belles dents blanches, et de la bonté"⁶ said Edmond de Goncourt), she was painted by Renoir⁷ and others. Sponsored by Aurélien Scholl and Tony Révillon, she was admitted to the Société des Gens de Lettres. A good friend of both Zola and Anatole France, she is said to have been the model for France's amusing caricature "Maniflore" in L'Ile des pingouins.

Séverine was one of the many who believed in the guilt of Captain Alfred Dreyfus. Typically, although she still thought

⁶Cited in Lecache, op. cit., p. 73.

⁷This portrait hangs in the Robert Lehman collection in New York and is an excellent example of Renoir's luminous portraits of sweet and alluring young women.

him a spy, she raged when he was manhandled by his superior in 1894. Ultimately, convinced of his innocence, she supported his cause with her usual energy and verve. Just at the time of the Zola and Rennes trials, La Fronde, a newspaper printed and put out entirely by women, was founded by Marguerite Durand. In it Séverine had the perfect outlet for superbly written and compassionate articles, and her remarkable portraits of the witnesses and participants.

After 1900, Séverine lost a good many of her outlets, because of her support of Dreyfus. She found others, less important, however, and compensated by turning to speaking engagements. She was a compelling orator.⁸ She was still an important figure in Paris intellectual life: in 1904 she refused the chairmanship of the Prix Fémina jury,⁹ and, according to Lecache, refused the Legion of Honor on several occasions.

Séverine had always been anti-war and anti-militarist; from the days of the Cri du Peuple. When the First World War broke out, she did not yield to nationalist feeling, but continued to call for cessation of hostilities, to ask for arbitration of the conflict. Her articles were censored. She found very few newspapers willing to take them and her income was drastically reduced. She did not compromise, however, and

⁸Lecache, p. 184.

⁹André Billy, Les Ecrivains de combat (Paris: Les Oeuvres Représentatives, 1931), p. 232.

continued to work for an end to the war, especially within the framework of La Ligue des Droits de l'Homme. One of her great pieces of writing, Prière à l'innommée (Peace) dates from that period, having been written for the New Year of 1917. This Prayer can still be found in anthologies.

At the War's end, Séverine resumed publishing. She joined the Communist Party in 1920 but left it when she had to choose between it and La Ligue des Droits de l'Homme. She was without a doubt by that time the grand old lady of French journalism. When Paris-Soir was created in 1923, a reverential tribute to her appeared on its front page, along with her own excellent and timely article (reminiscent of Vallès's stand in 1883), about the need for all factions to compromise in order for all to get along.

She continued to support those unjustly treated, no matter what their status. Thus, when Joseph Caillaux, the former Finance Minister, finished his prison term in 1924 she kept him in her home at Pierrefonds for a number of months.

Her last article appeared only two months before her death, which came on her seventy-fourth birthday, April 27, 1929.

After her death, Séverine's friends and admirers formed a Société des Amis de Séverine,¹⁰ and established a literary prize in her name, to be awarded for the "ouvrage écrit par une

¹⁰Comoedia, October 24, 1929.

femme et de nature à servir l'idée d'une paix internationale."

It was awarded three times, as planned

Séverine's memory survived as long after her death as April 24, 1940, when L'Oeuvre devoted an article to her, calling it "Bouteille à la mer." But with the onset of the new war, she faded from people's memories.

Séverine chose from among her innumerable articles those to be included in her books. She had a special talent for titles: Pages rouges (1893)¹¹ stresses the revolutionary aspect of her character; Pages mystiques (1895)¹² includes the articles invoking the mystical side of her nature. Notes d'une frondeuse (1894)¹³ gives the best of her political judgments from the Boulanger period until the Panama Scandal; Vers la lumière (1900)¹⁴ includes her best articles on the Dreyfus case. And En marche (1896)¹⁵ centers on anarchists and anarchism. Her other works, written after 1900, were mentioned above.

¹¹Séverine, Pages rouges (Paris: H. Simonis Empis, 1893).

¹²Séverine, Pages mystiques (Paris: H. Simonis Empis, 1895).

¹³Séverine, Notes d'une frondeuse (Paris: H. Simonis Empis, 1894).

¹⁴Séverine, Vers la lumière (Paris: Stock, 1900).

¹⁵Séverine, En marche (Paris: H. Simonis Empis, 1896).

Some of the contradictions in Séverine's personal life, as opposed to the intellectual, should not be ignored. Although she fought staunchly to improve the lot of suffering children, she does not seem to have brought up her own children. At least one of them was very resentful and frustrated; after Dr. Guébard's death, their son Roland requested an autopsy on his father's body, as he suspected Séverine of poisoning him.¹⁶

Her feelings toward the Jews were at best mixed; but she came to feel great affection for her grand-son by marriage, Bernard Lecache, head of the Ligue contre l'Antisémitisme, and she willed him all her books, documents, and memorabilia. Her feeling must have been genuine, or Lecache could not have responded so warmly. Several reviews of his book refer to him as her "fils spirituel,"¹⁷ a title which is perhaps exaggerated.

The anomaly of a good and selfless human being associated for a long period of years with a man of doubtful character must also be mentioned. While director of Le Cri du Peuple, Séverine fell in love with a reporter on the paper, Georges de Labryère (a nom de plume. His real name was Poidebard). Deciding that an illicit affair would be "disloyal," she told her husband the story. A long-suffering and quiet man, Dr. Guébard departed and Séverine lived with Labryère until the latter's death in

¹⁶Conversation with Madame Denise Chanal, September 3, 1970.

¹⁷Victor Margueritte in "Au Fil de l'Heure" in La Volonté, December 28, 1930.

1920. A strange companion for this superior woman; he was a fairly good journalist and writer of feuilletons, but a rough, "condottiere" type. He fought several duels on her behalf in connection with articles she wrote, and even spent a brief time in prison in connection with the activities she had carried out, like the Padlewski Affair.¹⁸ He apparently treated her cavalierly, however. According to Gaston Gille, author of the best-known work on Vallès, Labruyère would whistle up to Séverine's apartment on the Grands Boulevards to summon her, and she would come scurrying down. Moreover, their association was responsible for the one serious attack on her reputation as journalist. Séverine had relentlessly criticized the continued freedom from conscription of the young sugar heir Max Lebaudy. Labruyère was accused of blackmailing him, of offering to have these attacks softened in return for money. Whether or not Séverine was aware of his conduct, it does seem, after reading L'Intransigeant and La Libre Parole, in which the attacks against her and her defense appeared respectively, that Labruyère was somehow implicated. However, he was exonerated at the trial.

In a recent conversation,¹⁹ Madame Chanal, Séverine's granddaughter, when asked about the motivation for the long association, said she believed it was sexual attraction. Séverine had suffered in her marriage to Montrobert. Dr. Guébard,

¹⁸See below, p. 85.

¹⁹September 3, 1970.

although a good and intelligent man, was a not very exciting person, e.g. so absorbed in his work he used to read at meals. The association with Vallès had been Platonic, so that the romantic young woman was still unfulfilled when she met Labruyère. Lecache intimates that Labruyère was very difficult in his last years,²⁰ and André Billy says that "Labruyère avait fait beaucoup souffrir Séverine."²¹ She remained faithfully with him until his death. Afterward, however, Dr. Guébard, still in love with her, wrote to her, and eventually came back to live with her at Pierrefonds. They are buried there next to one another.

The case of a superior woman allied to a man of lesser quality is fairly well-known. Freudian psychologists tend to explain it as originating in the woman's feelings of unworthiness or guilt acquired in childhood.²² This explanation may have some validity in connection with Séverine. Line is frequently the despair of her family. At one point she is told she has "les plus mauvais instincts"²³ and the Guignol Keeper in the Tuileries predicts constantly that she will end

²⁰Op. cit., p. 328.

²¹André Billy, L'Epoque 1900 (1888-1905) (Paris: Tallandier, 1951), p. 232.

²²Conversation with Dr. Roberta Edel, October 17, 1970.

²³Line, op. cit., p. 284.

"sur l'échafaud."²⁴

On the other hand, Séverine's actions and attitudes seem to transcend such narrow interpretation. She seems as well to fit into the framework of the description, given by the American psychologist, Maslow, of the "self-actualized" personality. This kind of person is characterized by the desire to become more and more what he is capable of becoming.²⁵ On the basis of her life and her work, Séverine seems to possess many of the qualities of this type of personality as outlined by Maslow:²⁶ more efficient perception of reality; acceptance of self, others, and nature; spontaneity; centering on problems outside themselves; quality of detachment and need for privacy; dependence for their own development and continued growth on their own potentialities and latent resources; continued freshness of appreciation; mystic experience, general feeling of identification, sympathy and affection for other human beings, a democratic character structure, strongly ethical, although their notions of right and wrong are often not the conventional ones; a philosophical, unhostile sense of humor; some kind of creativeness and originality. Furthermore, among one of the

²⁴Ibid., p. 18.

²⁵A.H. Maslow, Motivation and Personality (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), pp. 91-92.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 203-228, *passim*.

imperfections of this type of personality Maslow notes the fact that their kindness can lead them into mistakes; i.e. marrying out of pity, getting too closely involved with neurotics, bores, unhappy people and then being sorry for it; allowing scoundrels to impose on them for a while, giving more than they should so that occasionally they encourage parasites, etc. It would seem, then, from whatever evidence is available, that Séverine could also fit at least partially into the description of this kind of personality.

Whatever the fundamental psychological basis for Séverine's character, however, it is clear that the two dominant motivating forces were pity for the "wretched of the earth" and a burning desire to help right the wrongs from which they suffered. It is equally certain that the person overwhelmingly responsible for arousing these forces in her was Jules Vallès.

CHAPTER II

SEVERINE AND JULES VALLES

The accidental meeting in Brussels in 1879 between Séverine and the exiled Communard Jules Vallès modified the course of both their lives. Whereas the friendship sweetened the final years of a man who had suffered much throughout his life, it altered--almost overnight--the very fabric of Séverine's existence, dramatically and permanently. When Vallès returned to Paris in 1880 after the amnesty he solicited her help in connection with a benefit he was organizing. What followed was almost an illustration of Stendhal's theory of "crystallisation." Lecache says "Line trouvait enfin à s'épancher" When the evening was over, "Line comprit. Tous ces problèmes qui rôdaient autour d'elle--énigmatiques, se résolvèrent. Elle commença de comprendre pourquoi elle vivait, ce qu'elle devait vivre."¹

It is difficult to speculate on what Séverine's development might have been if she had not encountered Vallès. There was already some predisposition to sympathy for the underdog: in Pages rouges she tells of her surprise at the kindness of

¹Lecache, op. cit., p. 36.

the Fédérés at the time her family was escaping from Paris.² Perhaps she might have, of her own volition, eventually thrown herself into some philanthropic activity, already existing or of her own creation. But it seems safe to assert that without Vallès she would not have become a journalist.

In any case, throughout her life Séverine never tired of reiterating the debt she owed to Vallès and her devotion to the "patron." Her first book, Pages rouges, is dedicated "A la Mémoire de Jules Vallès," and goes on to say "Le peu que je sais, le peu que je suis, mon Maître inoublié, je vous le dois."³ The first chapter of En marche, is also dedicated to "Jules Vallès, mon Maître." There is no doubt whatever that Vallès was the greatest--perhaps the only--intellectual and moral influence on her thinking and, indeed, on her very life style.

The association began unassumingly enough. On the night of the benefit for Maxime Lisbonne in 1880, Vallès asked Line whether she would like to assist him in his work in a kind of journalistic apprenticeship. According to Frantz Jourdain, Vallès's childhood friend, "l'ancien membre de la Commune comprit la valeur de cette femme qui s'ignorait elle-même."⁴ Line of

²See "Pont de Charenton," in Séverine, op. cit., pp. 1-5.

³Dedication page.

⁴Revue Illustrée, July 1, 1890, "Séverine" (unpaginated).

course accepted joyfully.

The working relationship has been described by some writers and in interviews that Séverine herself gave. In the mornings Séverine would go to Vallès's apartment on the Rue Taylor and would wait while the author scribbled his copy, which he would then hand over to her. While she was recopying it he would talk, read aloud, recite his favorite verse or prose, and make known his opinions on anything and everything. Thus, says Lecache, "elle s'imprégnait du talent du patron, en connaissait les détours, prenait, à l'entendre, à le lire, des leçons de style, de syntaxe."⁵

Jourdain gives a further description of Line's conduct during those apprentice days. "Sans morgue, ni timidité d'ailleurs, elle se tenait à l'écart, parlant peu, n'attirant pas l'attention sur elle, écoutant et regardant les gens en face, je devrais dire en plein coeur, avec ses yeux bleus, calmes et profonds."⁶ In the evenings they would walk to a neighborhood restaurant, "learning from the street." Vallès taught her how to observe and to think, Séverine told Michel Zévaco.⁷ At other times they stayed in the apartment and the student, now a nurse, prepared the meal for Vallès, who was

⁵Lecache, op. cit., p. 37.

⁶Jourdain, op. cit.

⁷In Le Courrier Francais, Aug. 1892, p. 5.

already diabetic. With a cookbook in her hand, she told Zévaco,⁸ she learned how to prepare a few dishes and became very proud of her culinary ability.

She began to make progress in the art of journalism. As noted, she began her apprenticeship by copying Vallès's articles. Then one day she was promoted to correcting proofs. Next, she was given the right to add an occasional word--sometimes an adjective--always of course subject to approval of the "patron." The first proofs she worked on were those of Le Bachelier. Finally, she was promoted to the rank of "collaborateur actif."⁹

The apprenticeship lasted three years. At the end of that period, Séverine was well known in the journalistic world. Paul Ginisty recounts that Vallès would wait at the Café américain for Séverine to bring him the proofs of his articles.¹⁰

"Toute la vie de Séverine s'est dessinée, précisée, affirmée, dans ce bureau où l'accueillait Vallès. Tout Séverine s'est ébauché là, sous le contrôle, avec l'appui fervent et bourru du maître."¹¹ Soon the Rémy and Guébard families began to worry about the ascendancy the author was gaining over Line. So much so that, when she informed them that she definitely

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., pp. 5-6.

¹⁰In Souvenirs de Journalisme et de Théâtre (Paris: Les Editions de France, 1930), p. 59.

¹¹Lecache, op. cit., p. 38.

intended to become a working journalist, they formally vetoed the idea. Line then attempted suicide, after writing Vallès a note that was pure Vallès:

Je meurs de ce qui vous fait vivre; de révolte. Je meurs de n'avoir été qu'une femme, alors que brûlait en moi une pensée virile et ardente. Je meurs d'avoir été une réfractaire. Aimez-moi un peu pour cela et gardez en cet esprit que j'ai si fort aimé, si profondément compris, une petite place à votre bien navrée petite amie.

She then shot herself. Fortunately (whether by design, nobody seems to have asked) she succeeded only in wounding herself. Terrified, the family gave her permission to continue with Vallès, even to go to England with him and work on La Rue à Londres.¹²

Toward the end of 1883, with Dr. Guébard's backing, Vallès was able to relaunch Le Cri du Peuple, which had appeared during the days of the Commune. Since he was no longer able to watch over every aspect of the paper, Séverine was delegated to convey his instructions to the staff. At the same time, at Séverine's and Dr. Guébard's instigation, he moved closer to them, finally into the apartment of Dr. Guébard's mother. There Séverine nursed him constantly. In an article that appeared in L'Echo de Paris on February 17, 1885, she describes his last moments: "Tandis que je lui dépeignais les pommiers en fleurs, les grandes vaches rousses pâturent dans l'herbe verte, je

¹²Ibid., the quotation and recital are from pp. 39-40.

sentais littéralement la sueur de son agonie me tomber en gouttes glacées sur le visage."¹³

All observers are in agreement as to the depth and singular quality of the bond that united the two. Georges Montorgueil, one of her best friends, said: "Rarement communion d'âme et d'esprit fut plus complète . . . Ils étaient devenus inséparables. Liaison? Non, adoption. Ils s'étaient réciproquement adoptés par la plus singulière des adaptations."¹⁴ In this same connection Lecache says "Leurs affinités étaient si sûres, leurs opinions si parallèles qu'ils étaient spirituellement liés de la façon la plus étroite."¹⁵ In an article in Gil Blas Fernand Xau, who knew both Séverine and Vallès well, said she understood his thought, and assimilated it so well that "elle était devenue sa pensée propre. Il y avait une telle communauté d'idées entre ces deux êtres qu'ils n'en faisaient qu'un seul."¹⁶

A few letters written by Séverine to Vallès dating from 1881 to 1883 give some additional insight into the nature of the relationship. These letters, only a small portion of the number Séverine must have written to the "patron," were made

¹³"L'Amie de Vallès," by Georges de Labruyère.

¹⁴Cited by Lecache, op. cit., p. 38.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Gil Blas, February 16, 1885, quoted in Gaston Gille, Jules Vallès (Paris: Jouve, 1941), p. 513.

available by one of the contemporary editors of Vallès's work, Lucien Scheler¹⁷ of "Editeurs Français Réunis." When they were written, Vallès was away from Paris, in either Le Puy, or in London. One of the letters indicates she was returning from a trip to Italy. From the fact that the hour as well as the day of the week is given, it is obvious that Séverine wrote him several times daily in answer to his many letters to her. Vallès was a hard taskmaster and in these letters Séverine is sometimes exasperated by his forgetfulness and inconsistency. She never fears to express her annoyance, but on the other hand her affection never wavers. For instance, at the end of a letter in which she has emphatically informed him that he is now asking her to do something he had decided against "il y a un an, il y a un an, IL Y A UN AN!" she closes "A bientôt, mon patron. Je vous embrasse bien, bien fort."¹⁸ In even these few letters there are many signs of her affection. Writing from Italy, she says, at the thought that she will be seeing him soon: "Le 9 au soir, vers les six heures, je t'aurai la joue à votre grosse moustache."¹⁹ This letter is signed "Au revoir, mon patron. Je vous envoie toute ma filiale tendresse." She watches over his health from afar and wards off possible

¹⁷They originally were part of Séverine's inheritance to Lecache. Although they have been read before, it is not believed that they have been previously published.

¹⁸Letter from Séverine (Caroline Rehn) to Vallès, July 17, 1883.

¹⁹Letter from Séverine (Caroline Rehn) to Vallès, October 6, 1882.

wrath by saying "Je fais un peu la mère Vingtras, mais bah! laissez-moi faire. Mes cheveux blonds trouvent tant de plaisir à sermonner vos cheveux gris."²⁰ She herself characterized the relationship as being one of both mother and daughter to him. Fernand Xau, the journalist, said "Le Lion avait trouvé son maître--et non sa maîtresse--en une femme qu'on appelait du sobriquet bien caractéristique de La Dompteuse."²¹

Perhaps Canon Lecigne was right to some degree when he said that "Vallès lui (Séverine) infiltra goutte à goutte ses haines et ses inexpiables rancunes."²² For in one of the letters Séverine bursts out "il n'y a plus en moi que la haine contre leur Justice et la révolte contre ses sentences iniques, que la haine de leur Société telle qu'elle est bâtie dans le monde d'où je me suis évadée, grâce à vous."²³

Despite superficial appearances to the contrary, all observers agree that the bond between them was solely intellectual. Léon Daudet said "Elle joua auprès de lui, le rôle de Mademoiselle de Gournay auprès de Montaigne, de Mlle. Read

²⁰Letter from Séverine (Caroline Rehn) to Jules Vallès, September 28, 1881.

²¹Gil Blas, February 16, 1885.

²²Canon Lecigne, "Madame Séverine," Revue de Lille, XX (April 1902), 504.

²³Letter from Séverine to Vallès, August 12, 1883.

auprès de Barbey d'Aurevilly."²⁴ Fernand Xau, maintaining that he was one of those who knew them best, affirmed that "l'union entre eux était purement intellectuelle."²⁵ Lecache says categorically, "Les relations qu'ils devaient entretenir imposèrent le respect aux plus vils."²⁶ Gille sums it all up with "Elle fut à la fois l'amie dévouée et la secrétaire intelligente, la maîtresse de maison et la soeur de charité, la disciple fervente, le défenseur passionné de la mémoire de l'Insurgé et la servante de sa gloire littéraire devant la postérité."²⁷

How did the proud and sick man respond to the affection and devotion heaped on him? It was only natural for him to enjoy it. Gille reports that here and there in his letters to her, Vallès lets go a word of "gratitude émue" "Merci de votre amitié entêtée et douce."²⁸ She became indispensable, to judge by the correspondence. He asked for her advice and assistance with regard to his domestic arrangements, menus, apartment hunts, country stays. Without her generous assistance, he would probably not have been able to deliver all the articles for

²⁴Léon Daudet, "Jules Vallès" in L'Action Française, February 14, 1935, quoted in Gille, op. cit., p. 512.

²⁵Gil Blas, February 16, 1885.

²⁶Lecache, op. cit., p. 36.

²⁷Gille, op. cit., p. 512.

²⁸Letter from Vallès to Séverine, July 17, 1883, quoted in Gille, op. cit., p. 514.

which he had contracted. Certainly he could not have re-launched Le Cri du Peuple, nor completed La Rue à Londres.

Both Gille and Kau agree that Vallès was proud to be seen in Séverine's company. "Il faut l'avoir vue, Elle, créature douce, dévouée, aimante, and Lui, la crinière au vent, la prunelle enflammée, le coeur doucement bercé pourtant par la parole caressante de celle qu'il appelait 'son amie,'" wrote Kau²⁹ two days after Vallès's death. And Gille says charmingly "s'il est convié à une fête félibresque, dans le parc de Sceaux, c'est encore accompagné de l'élégante Line qu'on le voit arriver tout glorieux de son bonheur et jaloux des poètes assemblés qui trahiraient les Muses pour l'humaine déesse aux yeux de myosotis."³⁰

Vallès's exquisite and gracious dedication to Séverine of La Rue à Londres is a great testimony of his gratitude and, as Gille says, honors the Master and disciple equally.³¹ It follows here:

A SEVERINE

Ma chère enfant,

Je vous dédie ce livre, non comme un hommage de banale galanterie, mais comme un tribut de sincère reconnaissance.

²⁹Gil Blas, February 16, 1885.

³⁰Gille, op. cit., p. 514.

³¹Ibid.

Vous m'avez aidé à bien voir Londres, vous m'avez aidé à en traduire l'horreur et la désolation.

Née dans le camp des heureux, en plein boulevard de Gand--graine d'aristo, fleur de fusillade--vous avez crânement déserté pour venir, à mon bras, dans le camp des pauvres, sans crainte de salir vos dentelles au contact de leurs guenilles, sans souci du "qu'en dirat-on" bourgeois. Honny soit qui mal y pense! suivant la devise de la vieille Albion.

Vous avez fait à ma vie cadeau d'un peu de votre grâce et de votre jeunesse, vous avez fait à mon oeuvre l'offrande du meilleur de votre esprit et de votre coeur.

C'est donc une dette que mes cheveux gris payent à vos cheveux blonds, camarade en qui j'ai trouvé à la fois la tendresse d'une fille et l'ardeur d'un disciple.

Vous souvient-il qu'un jour, devant un Workhouse, nous vîmes une touffe de roses à chair saignante, clouée je ne sais par qui, je ne sais pourquoi, au battant vermoulu?

Cette miette de nature, cette bribe de printemps, faisait éclore l'ombre d'un sourire et d'un reflet d'espoir sur les faces mortes des pauvresses qui attendaient leur tour. Cela nous donna un regain de courage, à nous aussi, et nous franchîmes, moins tristes, la porte de cet enfer.

Au seuil de mon livre, dont quelques chapitres sont, comme le "Refuge", pleins de douleur et de misère, je veux attacher votre nom comme un bouquet.

Jules Vallès.

Paris, 1^{er} décembre 1883.

Vallès willed Séverine his literary property, and all of his personal souvenirs, manuscripts, and correspondence, as well, of course, as the "direction" of the Cri du Peuple.³²

³²Gille, op. cit., p. 516.

The extraordinary closeness of the communion between Séverine and Vallès is all the more remarkable in view of the striking difference in their background and the quality of their respective childhoods. It was not just that their origins were different, that he was barely a generation away from the soil, and that his parents were ineffectually trying to climb the social ladder. The household was not a happy one, if the Trilogy is to be believed, and though his parents may have had affection for him, they frequently punished him severely, and the boy was starved for love. As a result, he remained on the outside, always a réfractaire, to cite the name of one of his books. His humor was bitter and hard, and often at the expense of others.

On the other hand, to judge from Line, which Séverine wrote at the end of her life, and which of course may have represented just one more tribute by Séverine to Vallès, her family was respectably petit bourgeois, and could even boast of a nobleman not too far back. While the little girl rebelled early, fighting the boy's haircut imposed on her, and the colorless dresses, and asking a passing band of gypsies to kidnap her, she never doubted her family's love and in fact returned it, feeling very strong affection for them always. That is probably why, reading Séverine, one never feels she is fighting society from without, but from within. She belongs, as Vallès never did.

After Vallès's death, Séverine set up a cult to him, for which she was the priestess,³³ as Gille remarks. Handsomely bound red leather volumes, annotated in her own handwriting, kept every article printed about Vallès, and about herself.³⁴ She visited Vallès's grave twice weekly to lay fresh flowers on it.³⁵ Visiting her apartment for an interview, Michel Zévaco (sharing Gille's point of view), remarks, "Séverine n'a pas seulement gardé pour la mémoire de Vallès cette respectueuse reconnaissance que l'on a pour un maître, et cette ardente amitié qui subsiste par delà le tombeau. C'est un véritable culte qu'elle professe pour Vingtras." He describes the portrait of Vallès by André Gill that dominates the salon, as Vallès "domine la vie de Séverine." He leads one on to "contempler 'le reliquaire,'--tout ce qui lui reste du maître: mille riens," down to Vallès's mother's watch, the "montre qui sonnait l'heure du fouet pour le jeune Jacques." And he ends by saying "Et il y a dans l'attitude de Séverine découvrant, une à une, les pièces de son trésor, un attendrissement de tout son être, une sorte de vénération recueillie qui disent quelle place occupe celui-là dans son souvenir."³⁶

³³Ibid., p. 512.

³⁴Part of the legacy to Lecache, now owned by Monsieur Scheler.

³⁵Article by Trublot (Paul Alexis) in Le Cri du Peuple, April 21, 1885.

³⁶Le Courrier Français, p. 6.

Such was Vallès's imprint on Séverine that she attempted to be guided by his ideas, even after he was gone. His wishes were sovereign. In an article in Le Cri, February 23, 1888, explaining why there were no speeches on the anniversary of Vallès's death, she explains that that was the wish of "celui qui, vivant ou mort, est toujours le maître ici."³⁷

The same wish to follow Vallès's ideas is cited by Séverine when she is reproached by the Socialists for writing in the "journaux mondains." She tells Zévaco: "Mais c'est presque une affaire de famille, cette collaboration!--Vallès m'a inculqué cette idée--que je n'avais pas--qu'on est tenu d'écrire ailleurs que dans les journaux où on ne fait que refléter l'opinion de ceux qui vous lisent . . . c'est toujours les mêmes auditeurs qui se transportent dans les meetings. L'idée n'avance pas d'un iota. C'est Vallès qui m'a cité l'exemple des missionnaires qui s'en vont loin de la mission mère, pour aller porter la bonne parole chez des peuples à conquérir."³⁸

The most important aspect of Séverine's cult of Vallès is her defense of him whenever and wherever he was attacked or criticized. Systematically, point by point, she refutes the attacks. Or she reminisces about him, quoting him when it is relevant to the current situation; does portraits of his old

³⁷Le Cri du Peuple, February 23, 1888.

³⁸Zévaco, op. cit., p. 8.

Communard friends or their families, always managing to bring in Vallès. She never forgets him.

One of the first articles in Pages Rouges, called "Souvenir," written on the first anniversary of Vallès's death, describes how he was both her father and her child. Saying that there are those who believe him to have been egotistical and inhuman, she exclaims: "Croyez-vous donc qu'il fut si égoïste, si cruel, si inhumain, celui qui était capable d'inspirer cette passion de tendresse maternelle ou filiale, celui dont on garde le souvenir comme une religion?"³⁹ In another article in the same collection, this one called "Le Vrai Vingtras," and originally published in 1889 in Le Gaulois, she replies to each of the darts shot at Vallès by a young newspaper man. With documents, letters and statements, she asserts that Vallès did not flee, that he did not utter the incendiary statement so often attributed to him, "Si M. Thiers est chimiste, il me comprendra." She denies that he was responsible for the execution of the Roquette captives, insisting that instead he tried to save them; she quotes from a letter to his mother in which he specifically denies that responsibility. She asserts that later Vallès had explained personally to her what he had written in L'Insurgé by saying he wanted to bear his share of the Communards' responsibility. She repeats that Vallès had believed in full press liberty and had opposed censorship of Le Gaulois and Le Figaro.

³⁹Pages Rouges, pp. 7 et seq.

And she ends with the fiery declaration: "Vallès fut un communard Mais il ne fut ni un poltron, ni un voleur, ni un sanguinaire . . . ni un jacobin. Qui le dit, ment!"⁴⁰

In her article "Les Fous," also in Pages Rouges, also originally from Le Gaulois, she recalls Vallès's horrifying experience in the insane asylum to which his parents had confined him because of his revolutionary activity. One night he awakened to find one of the inmates, believing himself a dog, at his throat. She remarks that the sight, thirty-five years later, of the scar on Vallès's temple that had resulted "m'a fait comprendre bien des haines, bien des colères, bien des farouches rancunes, devant lesquelles j'étais demeurée étonnée tout d'abord." She ends, "Et je me suis dit que, toujours, à cause d'elle (the scar) je défendrais les opprimés contre l'arbitraire, contre l'injustice, contre l'assassinat légal de leur raison, le meurtre de leur liberté."⁴¹

In an article from her second collection, Pages Mystiques, Séverine answers those who had hypocritically evoked Vallès's memory when they criticized her sensational series of articles on Pope Leon XIII.⁴² "Vallès le proscrit, Vallès l'irréductible, était un trop pur et trop vaste esprit, pour que vous l'abais-siez à ce rôle d'épouvantail," she exclaims. She declares that

⁴⁰Pages Rouges, p. 89.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 121.

⁴²It ran in the Figaro in 1892.

she is what he has made. "Ce grain de mysticisme, qui vous effare, est tombé de son cerveau dans le mien, comme le fruit d'un arbre puissant dans l'humble terre sur qui son ombre s'épand."⁴³ She then recounts that, when Vallès was ill, he had been visited daily, for six weeks, by a priest who, admiring Jacques Vingtras, had come by of his own accord to talk with the author. She concludes with her usual dash by saying "Et maintenant déclarez, ô jésuites rouges, que j'ai essayé de faire de Vallès un cléricafard!"⁴⁴

Some of her strongest ammunition was reserved for Maurice Barrès in 1914. He had turned down an invitation to the inauguration of a monument to Vallès. Conceding that Vallès "est un des maîtres de la prose française," Barrès charged that Vallès's work "prend place dans la série des oeuvres libératrices Je repousse cette liberté qu'il m'apporte. Je dis: Tu ne jugeras ni ton père, ni ta mère." And he terminates: "j'aime mon père et ma mère et j'aime le Louvre, que votre ami voulait brûler."⁴⁵ Séverine answered his attack just as methodically as she had done with others thirty years previously. To Barrès's suggestion that Vallès would not have wanted him present in any case, she is shocked: "Vallès intolérant? Vallès sectaire?"

⁴³Originally in L'Eclair, August 13, 1892; reprinted in Pages Mystiques, "Le Copain de Vallès," p. 143.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 145.

⁴⁵Volonté Nationale, February 7, 1914.

Voilà, vraiment, un Vallès inédit, un Vallès que je n'ai point, que personne n'a connu. Il n'était pas l'homme des excommunications."

She congratulates Barrès for having loved his father and mother. "Cela prouve qu'ils furent bons Non, non, à chacun selon ses oeuvres. A chacun la récolte de ses semailles. Aux bons parents, les enfants soumis; aux mauvais parents, les enfants rebelles."⁴⁶

She informs Barrès that the man who as a child had been beaten by his parents had assumed the task of protecting children from torture by their parents. "C'est sa gloire, Ce fut la pensée maîtresse de sa vie."

In 1925, writing in Le Petit Provençal she defended Vallès against Jean Richepin, Mâle and Abel Hermant, of whom she asked "sans méchanceté, ne peut-on gagner l'Académie qu'en y entrant à reculons?"⁴⁷

Séverine's portraits of Vallès's old Communard friends also serve to bring Vallès to the forefront. In her August 3, 1885 article in Le Cri du Peuple, for instance, she wrote about the mother of Gustave Maroteau, one of Vallès's friends.⁴⁸ "Je ne l'ai pas connue, moi, mais Vallès m'en avait tant parlé."

⁴⁶Séverine in Gil Blas, "Le Droit de l'enfant," February 19, 1914.

⁴⁷Quoted in Lecache, op. cit., p. 235.

⁴⁸A well-known Communard.

The associated recollection of Vallès is a particularly touching one; for Vallès speaking about the Mater Petrolosa, as Maroteau's mother was called, sighed: "Maroteau, c'était tout de même une veinarde, petite! Une mère comme ça--ah! si je l'avais eue!"⁴⁹ The emotional deprivation of a lifetime is there in those few words.

Another portrait of a Vallès friend in which she can pay tribute to the Master is that of Antoine Arnaud. Here is Vallès, announcing to her that Arnaud is coming to dinner: "Eh, citoyenne, j'ai quelqu'un ce soir, il s'agit de mettre les petits plats dans les grands!"--Introducing her to the former Communard, he says: "Petite, voici Arnaud, un vieux copain à moi. En tant que jacobin, je l'abomine, en tant que camarade, je l'estime et je l'aime bien. Donnez tout de suite la main à ce proconsul d'un autre âge . . . qui a voulu me faire fusiller."⁵⁰

By virtue, then of her unceasing defense,⁵¹ her painstaking answers to criticism, her insistent expression of sincere and profound affection, and the cumulative effect of her tender reminiscences and quotations, she has her way: the Vallès who emerges is considerably softer both personally and politically than the one encountered either on reading the Trilogy or other

⁴⁹Le Cri du Peuple, August 3, 1885.

⁵⁰Ibid., August 20, 1888.

⁵¹Though Gille does not believe they had much effect. See op. cit., p. iv of Introduction.

of his works, or from generally held public opinion concerning his role in the Commune.

Vallès emerges from her descriptions as a personally quite warm, jovial and amusing man given to large amounts of argot. Although Séverine shows his fits of anger, she reveals a tender side of him suspected by very few. When, for instance, shortly before his death, a representative of Le Matin showed him a telegram the paper had received after the Ballerich Affair,⁵² vilifying Séverine,

Il m'appela près de son lit, et me prenant les mains, "Oh, ma pauvre petite, comme on vous calomnie! Ils savent bien, les gueux, que je n'ai plus la force de vous défendre--ni de me défendre! Oh, les laches coquins." Il y avait des larmes dans la voix de ce brutal qui fut un tendre et un affectueux. Il me regarda de ses bons yeux de chien fidèle en me serrant bien fort les mains⁵³

The political picture she offers is also less severe than that commonly drawn. In the article on Arnaud, she reports the latter as saying:

"Oui, Vallès, vous avez dit tout à l'heure que j'avais voulu vous faire fusiller. C'est vrai, et j'ai trahi la Révolution en ne le faisant pas! Ce sont vous autres, les respecteurs de vie humaine,

⁵²As a result of an article in Le Cri that slandered their mother, the two Ballerich brothers stormed into the paper's offices, in February 1885, shooting at the staff. In the ensuing battle, one of them was killed. This scandal gave the conservative Paris press an opportunity to attack the Cri.

⁵³"Jules Vallès et le Matin," Le Cri du Peuple, March 16, 1885.

qui jouez le jeu de l'ennemi. A votre insu, je le sais bien. Mais il n'en est pas moins vrai que ce sont ces hésitations et ces pitiés-là qui empêchent les insurrections d'être fécondes. Artiste que vous êtes, qui voulez faire de la terreur platonique, et ne faucher que des roses sous la guillotine! Girondin! Girondin!"⁵⁴

She repeatedly recalls his support of a free press during the Commune. In "Le Vrai Vingtras," she quotes him as supporting "la liberté sans rivages"; he was against the censorship of Le Gaulois and Le Figaro, "eussent-ils dû encore rire de nos canons et nous appeler des pillards."⁵⁵

When she first thought of leaving Le Cri du Peuple, Séverine announced that she was taking Vallès's name with her for "J'ai pris la garde de sa mémoire et ne me reconnais le droit de la confier à personne."⁵⁶ It seems evident that, if she had done nothing else in her life, she could have been satisfied that she had amply fulfilled that promise.

But her defense of Vallès was to be only a small proportion of the immense amount of work she was to produce during her lifetime. And in that, Vallès's influence was also to be paramount.

Closing a letter to him dated September 22, 1881 (consequently not too long after they met again in Paris), she says "et maintenant au revoir mon ami. Je n'oublierai aucun

⁵⁴Le Cri du Peuple, August 20, 1888.

⁵⁵Pages Rouges, p. 89.

⁵⁶Lecache, op. cit., p. 57.

des conseils que vous m'avez donnés avant l'heure du départ. Je les ai deviné [sic] si sincères, je les ai senti [sic] si persuasifs que mon esprit en a gardé l'empreinte; une impression si vive qu'il me semble parfois les entendre encore."⁵⁷ And so it was to be in spite of their comparatively short association, the communion between them was so close, so all-pervasive that for the rest of her life Séverine was to be ruled by Vallès's ideas. His influence is apparent in almost every one of her ideas and attitudes.

Frantz Jourdain describes Séverine as she was when she met Vallès:

Dans cette fille de bourgeois, aucun atavisme, aucunes réminiscences familiales, aucun jalonnement cérébral, aucun germe oublié ne laissaient prévoir, soupçonner l'artiste, l'écrivain, le penseur, le poète, le philosophe que nous aimons aujourd'hui.⁵⁸

Vallès had put it more poetically in the dedication to La Rue à Londres.

Soon after falling under Vallès's sway, the "fille sans atavisme" was able to free herself from the bourgeois restrictions under which she had chafed as a child, and which she would describe with such humor in Line. Madame Chanal describes Vallès as saying "si vous asphyxiez, cassez les vitres."⁵⁹ In all

⁵⁷Letter from Séverine (Caroline Rehn) to Vallès, September 22, 1881.

⁵⁸Revue Illustrée, loc. cit. (unpaginated).

⁵⁹Conversation with Madame Chanal, September 3, 1970.

likelihood it was this kind of exhortation that made it possible for her to pursue her apprenticeship in the face of the family's reluctance and also--much later--to leave Dr. Guébard.

He became so closely involved with her personal liberation that she even called on him to perform a very delicate service. In the period between her separation from Montrobert and her association with Dr. Guébard she had been indiscreet enough to write some letters to a man who then treated her indifferently. In March 1882 she requested the return of those letters, saying "J'ai chargé de cette négociation Vallès, qui est l'ami des miens, mon guide et quelque peu mon tuteur."⁶⁰

Politically and ideologically, Jules Vallès was an independent, "inclassable." While he undoubtedly thought of himself as a Socialist, he "ignorait à peu près tout du socialisme scientifique," says Lucien Scheler in the Preface to La Rue à Londres.⁶¹ Alexandre Zévaès, long-time Socialist and writer on Socialism, and a great admirer of Vallès, answering the question, "du point du vue socialiste, que vaut-il? Comment le classer dans l'histoire des doctrines et des diverses fractions socialistes?" states "Il échappe à toute classification

⁶⁰Séverine (Caroline Rehn), letter to unknown, March 1882. The "Refractaire's" acceptance of this mission would seem to indicate a certain reciprocity of feeling for her.

⁶¹Ed. Lucien Scheler (Paris: Les Editeurs Français Réunis, 1951), Preface, p. xiv.

car il n'est l'homme d'aucune école, aucune conception déterminée."⁶²

It is certain that Vallès was not a Marxist in its present sense. His Socialism, if it had any theoretical basis, was probably founded on Proudhon.⁶³ Zévaès points out, however, that, although on the best of terms with the Proudhonians Longuet and Passedouet, Vallès was also in the confidence of Blanqui, the head of another wing of the party. And Zévaès concludes "il appartient à ce groupe de journalistes qui sont indépendants de toute doctrine et théoriquement inclassables."⁶⁴

Like Vallès, Séverine also called herself a Socialist. She too was probably a Proudhonian, if she was anything. Lecache says "Elle aimait Proudhon sans le suivre."⁶⁵ With her, though it would appear that Socialism was more a stance, an attitude, the outward sign of her departure from the bourgeois camp. She took no doctrinaire point of view, strove always to harmonize factional differences, differing openly with them all on occasion, and repeatedly stressing that she was with no one group. In this unwillingness to be classified, it is easy to see Vallès's influence. And it would seem that in this case

⁶²Jules Vallès (Paris: La Nouvelle Critique, 1932), p. 83.

⁶³Conversations with Gaston Gille, 1970.

⁶⁴Zévaès, op. cit., p. 84.

⁶⁵Lecache, op. cit., p. 51.

his example fell on receptive ears. There seems to have been a predisposition, developed over the years, to remain apart from any group affiliation, no matter how worthy the cause or how much she would work for it.

Not only her separate attitudes, but her whole outlook upon life was formed by Vallès. Montorgeuil's assertion that "elle absorbait en lui sa personnalité naissante et en recevait une empreinte indélébile. Idées--tendances, convictions,"⁶⁶ seems well justified. On the twenty-fifth anniversary of Vallès's death Séverine confirmed this herself. "Il a laissé une fille--celle-là n'a fait, à son modèle, et selon l'engagement pris, qu'aimer les pauvres et les nobles révoltes . . . et payer en fleurs à cette tombe, pendant un quart de siècle, un peu de ce qu'elle doit au grand écrivain qui fut son guide, d'exemples et d'enseignements."⁶⁷

Given the circumstances of her literary apprenticeship, how could Séverine have failed to be influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by Vallès's remarkable style? François Coppée, in a review of Pages Rouges says "voilà le père nourricier qu'a eu Séverine, et il ne l'a pas élevée au petit lait, je vous en réponds. Il lui a donné tout de suite le pain des forts, la moelle latine."⁶⁸ Zévaco says "A ce compagnonnage, fertile, à

⁶⁶ Georges Montorgeuil in Le Temps, April 24, 1929.

⁶⁷ L'Intransigeant, February 17, 1910.

⁶⁸ Le Journal, June 22, 1893, p. 1.

ce rude travail, Séverine gagna de briser la coquille des vieilles formules littéraires. Elle apprit à chercher et à trouver le mot juste qui colore toute une phrase, soulève une impalpable poussière d'idées, éclate au milieu d'une page comme la dominante d'une notation musicale. Elle apprit à planter une période sur ses pieds, ainsi que le dessinateur 'campe un bonhomme.' Elle apprit enfin à échafauder un article solidement construit et à le parer de chatoyantes couleurs!"⁶⁹

Vallès's style was individual, different from the classically elegant French turn of phrase. Victor Margueritte, reviewing in 1930 a book by Vallès along with Lecache's Séverine, recalls his original appraisal of Vallès's style: "D'étincelantes chroniques par un style violent, haché, haut en couleur, avaient éclairé d'un reflet de forge ce rude marteleur de mots."⁷⁰

The short harsh sentences, the "epithets that shock," in the words of Michel Simon,⁷¹ are sometimes found in Séverine's prose, but to a lesser degree. Gille agrees with Simon that Séverine had taken "la saveur forte de sa prose, ses audaces, ses reliefs, ses tons brusques, le heurt de ses épithètes," but qualifies Simon by adding that she had a much stronger liking than Vallès for popular expressions and argot. In his view,

⁶⁹Zévaco, op. cit., p. 6.

⁷⁰Victor Margueritte, "Au fil de l'heure," in La Volonté, December 28, 1930.

⁷¹Etudes et portraits littéraires, p. 177, quoted in Gille, op. cit., p. 519.

Séverine's prose, "haletante et chaude, ne possède ni la densité, ni l'âpreté, ni l'éclat de celle de Vallès."⁷²

Nevertheless, there were unquestionably occasions when Séverine "faisait du Vallès," both in ideas, and in style, worthy to be compared with the master's prose. When she left Le Cri du Peuple, for instance, the end of her explanatory article "Adieu" is, everyone agrees, "du meilleur Vallès."

Un dernier regard en arrière, une dernière étreinte aux fidèles . . . et adieu!

Mais mon bagage est plié dans un mouchoir rouge. Quand je voudrais que l'on sache où je suis, je casserai une branche sur la route et je le mettrai au bout . . . les amis me suivront des yeux.⁷³

And her dedication to Line: "Pour tous ceux-là que la révolte baisa au front dès le berceau" is clearly modeled on that of Vallès's Le Bachelier, "A ceux qui, nourris de grec et de latin sont morts de faim."

The quality of her own that she put into her writing is her "sensibilité." "Elle écrit avec ses nerfs et avec son coeur,"⁷⁴ as Gille puts it.⁷⁵

⁷²Gille, op. cit., p. 519.

⁷³Pages Rouges, p. 52.

⁷⁴Gille, op. cit., p. 519.

⁷⁵Séverine's style will be analyzed fully further on.

A final question is the actual extent of Séverine's contribution to Vallès's work. In an interview in L'Echo de Paris a few days after Vallès's death, she had stated: "Je l'aidai dans l'exécution du Bachelier, dans le feuilleton de La Dompteuse, et dans les deux premières parties de L'Insurgé, que je me propose de terminer grâce aux notes et aux indications que m'a laissées mon maître."⁷⁶ Frantz Jourdain confirms part of this, saying "elle travailla un peu au Bachelier, davantage à La Rue à Londres et collabora effectivement à L'Insurgé, dont plusieurs pages sont de sa main."⁷⁷ Gaston Gille points out, however, that since Le Bachelier had already appeared, under the title of Mémoires d'un révolté beginning in 1879, thus before the meeting of Vallès and Séverine, she could not have contributed very much. Perhaps she corrected proof and perhaps changed a few details. But not more than that, since the two texts are almost identical.⁷⁸ On the other hand, says Gille, she probably contributed more to La Dompteuse. Such a collaboration adds little to her glory, however, for the work, in his opinion, is "rocambolesque et boursouflé."⁷⁹ As for L'Insurgé, here Gille concedes that the problem is more

⁷⁶ Interview February 18, 1885 with Labruyère, L'Amie de Vallès, and quoted by Gille, op. cit., p. 517.

⁷⁷ Jourdain, op. cit.

⁷⁸ Gille, op. cit., p. 518.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

complex, since the work was published only 15 months after the death of the author. Gille believes the parts with which Séverine helped must be those portions of L'Insurgé that appeared in the Nouvelle Revue in August 1882. To this she added Chapters XX to XXIII of the book, found in Vallès's notes, and she restored the real names of the participants, once Vallès was gone. But, says Gille "il ne semble pas que l'influence de Séverine ait été heureuse: deux anecdotes plutôt vulgaires (à Caen et à Ste. Pélagie), une tendance au bavardage et à la sensiblerie dans quelques passages, plusieurs traces d'argot parisien, voilà sans doute ce qui trahit l'apport de la secrétaire collaboratrice."⁸⁰ He adds his belief that, if Vallès had lived, the prose would have been "plus sobre."

Gille is probably justified in this last statement. Judging by Séverine's samples of the master's daily conversation, however, amply illustrated above, he seems to have been very much addicted to argot; and she was not yet sufficiently mature as an artist to muster the strength to prune his prose, or to control her own.

As noted above, Gille agrees that Vallès owed much to Séverine in connection with meeting the deadlines for his articles and re-publishing the Cri. He would certainly not agree with Montorgeuil's statement that "elle faisait du Vallès à ce point qu'on ne distinguait plus le pastiche de l'original

⁸⁰Ibid.

et que les feuilles où écrivaient Vallès publiaient des Arthur Vingtras⁸¹ qui n'étaient que des Séverine insoupçonnées."⁸²

Somehow this latter assertion seems doubtful, especially if a malicious little anecdote in a recently published book called La Presse indiscrette can be believed. Jean-Paul Lacroix, the author says that Vallès "finit par tomber sous la coupe de Séverine Elle corrigeait ses articles derrière son dos." One day, says Lacroix, Vallès's real secretary came in, trembling, to say that he has crossed out two useless words in Vallès's article. When Vallès looked the text over he said "rayonnant . . . Viens m'embrasser! C'étaient les deux seuls qui n'étaient pas de moi."⁸³

Although probably apocryphal, the anecdote probably shows that Séverine did not write Vallès's articles for the newspapers, but worked only on the books.

As the years passed and Séverine, in the thick of the mêlée, threw herself into cause after cause, expressing her attitudes and thoughts in her editorials, did she always follow the "détestables enseignements" (as she ironically calls them)⁸⁴ she had received? Would Vallès have approved her subsequent

⁸¹A Vallès pseudonym.

⁸²Montorgeuil, loc. cit.

⁸³(Paris: Julliard, 1967), p. 75.

⁸⁴Pages Rouges, "Adieu," p. 51.

actions and writings? It is difficult to draw any definite conclusions, but certainly one can speculate.

In the early years of the nineties Séverine passed through a mildly religious and mystical phase, the most striking feature of which was a long interview with Pope Leon XIII. Her series of articles was attacked by both the right and the left, the latter claiming that Vallès would never have endorsed such a deviation. To counter the charges, Séverine wrote "Le Copain de Vallès," quoted above,⁸⁵ in which she described the pleasure Vallès had taken in the company of a country curé. Despite her article, it does seem that, as Gille says, "elle résiste aux excès de l'anti-cléricalisme plus encore que Vallès."⁸⁶

What the master would have thought of her extremely equivocal attitude vis-à-vis General Boulanger is harder to decide, as he died before the General came on the political scene. Perhaps it is safe to say that, whatever his political reaction to the General, he would have been amused by Séverine's extremely romantic response to the deaths of the General and his lady friend. And in all likelihood, he would not have been a follower of the General.

Vallès's possible reaction to Séverine's short-lived association with the notorious anti-Semite, Drumont, is even

⁸⁵See p. 35.

⁸⁶Gille, op. cit., p. 519.

more difficult to assess. As George Lichtheim has pointed out, anti-Semitism was fairly common among the French Socialists;⁸⁷ Vallès, however, seems not to have shared or expressed such feelings.⁸⁸ In any event, a cartoon in Le Revue de Poche of 1895,⁸⁹ entitled "Les beaux esprits se rencontrent," shows Drumont and Séverine as bride and groom in "I Promessi Sposi." They stand hand and hand front center. Behind them stands a figure, labeled Jules Vallès, hand on forehead and a puzzled expression on his face. If the cartoon had any basis in truth, then Vallès's approval cannot be taken entirely for granted.

Vallès's judgment on Séverine's tardy but eventually wholehearted espousal of the Dreyfus cause is probably easier to judge. In view of his anti-clericalism, at least, it is probably safe to assume that he too would eventually have been found in the Dreyfus camp. Many of his old friends were also Dreyfusards.

Séverine did definitely veer from the course taken by Vallès on one or two important issues. Partially as a result of her own experience she was, like Vallès, anti-intellectual. In one instance she rails against her bourgeois upbringing,

⁸⁷George Lichtheim, "Socialism and the Jews" in Dissent, July-August, 1968.

⁸⁸Conversation with Gaston Gille, 1970.

⁸⁹No. 6, 1895.

which had forever spoiled her enjoyment of classical literature. Her late participation in the Dreyfus affair, however, eventually brought her into close contact with the intellectuals who were striving to reverse the judgment against the captain. In Vers la lumière, her book on the Affair, there is a respectful and admiring article entitled, "Les Intellectuels."

Vallès had carried his anti-intellectualism to considerable lengths. When he learned of the Goncourts' decision to found their Academy, he inveighed against it in thundering terms. Comparing the Goncourt Academy-to-be with the Academy of Richelieu, he says that the Goncourt would be "un vampire qui boirait le sang des vivants au lieu de manger la chair des morts."⁹⁰ Séverine, however, although turning down its presidency, served for many years on the Prix Femina Jury.

Lastly, it is obvious that Séverine went in the opposite direction from the "patron" when she ardently supported the feminist cause. On November 14, 1881 Vallès had opposed the creation of a girls' lycée.⁹¹ In this instance he was definitely a Proudhonian. Although Séverine was never an official in any feminist organization, she was one of France's most prominent and most effective contemporary feminists. Perhaps she might eventually have converted the maître to her way of thinking;

⁹⁰Cf. Zévaès, op. cit., p. 72.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 73.

but it is clear that her ideas on the subject of women were not absorbed from his.

It is interesting to speculate as to her possible development had her cherished "patron" not died so soon. But it is equally fascinating to consider that the butterfly Séverine, the magnetic figure, the powerful talent, the responsible journalist might never have emerged from the cocoon of Caroline Rémy Guébhard had the latter not been accidentally introduced to Jules Vallès in Brussels in 1879.

CHAPTER III

SEVERINE AND JOURNALISM--GENERAL REMARKS

In Bernard Lecache's happy formulation, "Le 23 novembre 1883, Line entra dans le journalisme, la mort seule l'en acquitta."¹ The full title of the ORTF December 1969 broadcast was "Séverine, Journaliste et Femme Libre." In 1893 the Revue Illustrée published the answers given by several well-known literary figures to some personal questions it had asked. Séverine, one of those queried, answered the question "Quelle est votre occupation préférée?" by "Mon métier."²

These three separate statements are different ways of stressing that the profession of journalism Séverine had entered so easily and casually, through a door held open by both her husband and Jules Vallès, became an integral part of her. The many other activities in which she participated seem to have been filtered through a journalistic lens: she became fundamentally and intrinsically a journalist. Urbain Gohier, a colleague who fought many campaigns with her, sometimes on the same, sometimes on the opposing side, paid her the following

¹Lecache, op. cit., p. 44.

²L'Echo de Jarnac, February 5, 1893.

tribute after her death: "Journaliste, elle l'était uniquement, passionnément."³ The sense of this statement was echoed a year later by a feminist journalist who was not always uncritical where Séverine was concerned. "Séverine fut par dessus tout une journaliste. Sa gloire est là Elle eut le génie du journalisme."⁴ And it must not be forgotten that the title of Cazes's study is "Une Princesse du Journalisme."

In an article written from her sickbed in 1899 for L'Eclair, Séverine says she believes the public has been kind to her because it felt "que la profession était pour moi mieux et autre chose que noircir du papier, satisfaire la gloriole ou gagner ma vie." And she thanks her readers for having realized "Que le devoir professionnel m'était joie; et que la 'corvée' m'était plaisir." "Ce dont je suis certaine à n'en pouvoir douter, c'est de m'y être dépensée toute, chair et âme, dans un élan que ni le temps ni l'habitude n'ont pu encore assagir." She loved every aspect of her work, down to the "papier mouillé, l'encre d'imprimerie."⁵

So inseparably bound did Séverine become to even the physical aspect of her profession that, in later years, when speaking in public, she gestured only with her hands and fingers,

³La Nouvelle Aurore, June 28, 1930.

⁴Jane Misme writing in Minerva, February 22, 1931.

⁵"Passionnément," in L'Eclair, April 13, 1899.

as though continuing the writing process.⁶

In order better to assess the nature of Séverine's accomplishments and her contributions to the profession, it is worthwhile perhaps to see what the journalistic world was like at the time she entered it. After years of repression and censorship, which had alternated with short periods of freedom, the press was enjoying relative security and ease, was in fact burgeoning, in 1883.

Napoleon the First had suppressed all but a few newspapers during his reign. Following his regime, the press began to forge ahead, but with each change of government it came face to face with new regulations. During each revolutionary period, it flourished freely (at least for a while), but with the advent of an authoritarian government, it was again adversely affected. Such had been the case with the Second Republic: there had been a profusion of new papers in 1848; but after the Coup d'Etat Louis Napoléon had put a strong clamp on the press. Through a system of financial guarantees decreed necessary to found a paper, the imposition of fines, outright suppression of journals, and even prison sentences,⁷ he had succeeded in keeping the press subservient and ineffectual. In fact, one history of journalism of the

⁶Conversation with Yvonne Schwitza-Montrobert, another of Séverine's grandchildren.

⁷As in the case of L'Evénement, Victor Hugo's paper.

nineteenth century speaks of "l'avilissement" (by both the government and high finance) of the press from 1850 to 1860.⁸ The few political papers that continued to exist favored the Emperor. In 1868, however, a more liberal press law was passed by the Government, as a result of which a spate of political newspapers came into being--140, in one year, according to one authority.⁹ The most popular of these was without any doubt Henri Rochefort's La Lanterne, which the reading public devoured. Because of its merciless attacks on the Emperor, it could not be published in France, but was published in Belgium and then smuggled into the country. In spite of all the difficulties, La Lanterne achieved a circulation of 120,000 to 170,000.¹⁰

During the Commune a number of new revolutionary papers were created, most successful of which was Vallès's Le Cri du Peuple, with a circulation of 100,000.¹¹ As the Commune continued, it, too, was guilty of suppressing newspapers, in spite of the disapproval of men like Vallès. Two of the papers so banned were Le Figaro and Le Gaulois. Some of the revolutionary editors suffered severe and harsh punishment with the arrival

⁸Histoire générale de la presse (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969), Vol. II, 1815-1871, p. 258.

⁹Claude Bellet, Presse et journalisme sous le Second Empire (Paris: Armand Colin, Collection Kiosque, 1967), p. 66.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 312.

¹¹Histoire générale de la presse, p. 371.

of the Third Republic. Some, like Rochefort, were exiled. One or two were even executed. Shooting would probably have also been Vallès's fate, had he not succeeded in making his escape as described at the end of L'Insurgé. But, otherwise, in the Third Republic the press became "un élément de la vie quotidienne aussi indispensable que le pain, le sel, et le vin,"¹² and the number of newspapers continued to grow.¹³

Newspapers had increased not only in number, but also in circulation. The growth was made possible by a combination of political, demographic, technical, and personal factors. One important reason was the advent of universal suffrage; another the growth of provincial urban populations. Industrialization of the newspaper industry itself also made larger press runs possible. But the greatest measure of the credit for this transformation must be attributed to a newspaper genius who, although neither a great writer nor a great editor, wrought a basic change in French newspaper publication policy. This man was Emile de Girardin, "un homme né journal,"¹⁴ says one of his biographers. In 1836, Girardin, who for a number of years had dreamed of a "mass" audience, founded La Presse.

¹²Raymond Manevy, La Presse française de Renaudot à Rochefort (Paris: J. Foret, 1958), p. 216.

¹³From 900 in 1869 to 1540 in 1885 and 1998 in 1891. Raymond Manevy, La Presse de la 3^e République (Paris: J. Foret, 1955), p. 12.

¹⁴Maurice Reclus, Emile de Girardin (Paris: Hachette, 1934), p. 52.

whose price, three sous, represented a drastic reduction compared with that of other newspapers of the period. But by simultaneously accepting advertising he recouped his losses; and by also offering the public feuilletons by well-known authors, he could further increase his readership. In this way he achieved his goal. In 1855 the circulation of La Presse was 40,000.¹⁵ In spite of great opposition to Girardin on both personal and business grounds (in his aggressive ways he was often compared to an American), the traditionalist French newspaper owners were forced to follow suit. Some like Le Siècle, founded at the same time as La Presse, sold even better. A decade later, however, the circulation of all of these papers was far exceeded by Le Petit Journal, which sold for only a sou. In 1866 that paper had 260,000 readers.¹⁶ It was not a very edifying journal, however, for it was neutral and relied principally on le fait divers, a policy, which incidentally, also helped it to keep clear of the government.

All of these changes had therefore made the press a powerful and prestigious force already at the time Séverine made her debut. In spite of the censorship that, although less rigorous, persisted, it continued to flourish. As Aurélien Scholl, the famed editor and humorist said, in arguing against censorship, "La presse est l'instrument de l'enseignement

¹⁵Bellet, op. cit., p. 313.

¹⁶Ibid.

politique, l'erreur même y est instructive."¹⁷ During the century's final decade, the period when Séverine was at the height of her activity and influence, the press' power and prestige were particularly great. In fact, according to one literary historian, at the very end of the decade, during the two years that elapsed between Zola's "J'accuse" and the Rennes trial, the book publishing industry underwent a "crisis" because "le public ne voulait que des journaux."¹⁸

From the press of that period there emanated a different quality from that of today's newspapers. Almost every paper had a particular personality of its own, most often impressed on it by its owner who was often also the publisher. Girardin had perhaps been the one to establish the pattern, and Villemessant had continued with Le Figaro, to be followed by Vallès and Le Cri, and others. The Gaulois's tone, for instance, was set by the royalist preferences of its owner, Arthur Meyer. This paper is frequently mentioned in Proust's work, since it chronicled in greatest detail the activities of the social group in which the author was interested. Gil Blas also followed society's goings and comings, but apparently its readers were drawn more from the demi-monde. Furthermore, one writer about the press asserts that its columns

¹⁷Le Matin, August 13, 1892, "Théophraste Renaudot."

¹⁸Albert Thibaudet, Histoire de la littérature française (Paris: Stock, 1936), p. 421.

were a cover for blackmail;¹⁹ and, read in that light, some short articles that are otherwise meaningless might indeed be so construed! On the other hand Le Rappel, Auguste Vacquerie's paper, and Le Voltaire are what would nowadays be called straight liberal, left-of-center organs. The other papers to which Séverine contributed regularly at different periods during the decade were L'Echo de Paris (1892 to 1898); L'Eclair (1890 until 1903); Le Figaro (1890 to 1894); La Fronde (1897 to 1901); Le Jour (1890 to 1891); Le Journal (1892 to 1902); and La Libre Parole (1893 to 1896).²⁰ No matter how different the coloration of the newspaper (with perhaps the slight exception of La Libre Parole), she did not change her style or her opinion. She remained herself always. As she said when she bade goodbye to Le Cri du Peuple, "défendant toujours les idées qui me sont chères, mais les défendant seule."²¹

Perhaps what was most striking about the newspapers of that period was their personal tone and the fact that they permitted public feuding on their pages. It would seem impossible for today's press, in either France or the United States, to afford the spectacle of two prominent journalists attacking each

¹⁹André Lajeune Vilar, Les Couloises de la presse (Paris: A. Charles, 1895), p. 259.

²⁰A full list of all the newspapers and magazines to which Séverine contributed will be given in an Appendix.

²¹Pages Rouges, pp. 51-52.

other as viciously and as cuttingly as did Séverine and Rochefort in 1895 and 1896, in La Libre Parole and L'Intransigeant respectively. Moreover, while the last decade of the nineteenth century was a particularly muddy one in France, notable for its ugly scandals as well as the Dreyfus Case, the forthright language comes as a shock. On the other hand, it is also not unusual to see two journalists praise each other fulsomely in print. Edouard Drumont strongly supported Séverine in his editorials while she was writing for his paper. And Séverine, after criticizing and castigating him, lauded him excessively after she joined La Libre Parole.

During her long career, Séverine established a number of precedents. She was the first woman "directeur" of a newspaper. Since this status was more or less inherited from Vallès (although she did not take the position over until 1887, two years after his death), little personal credit can be claimed for her. Much more important, all historians of the press seem to agree that it was she who invented the on-the-spot reportage, now considered an indispensable part of every reporter's task. Perhaps her most significant achievement of all is the fact that, from the outset, she made her way to the top of a profession which, as easily observed from reading the press of that period, was almost totally preempted by men. In so doing, she eased the way for other women to follow. "Elle a ouvert aux femmes la carrière du journalisme en se l'ouvrant à elle-même

trionphalement," said Jane Misme.²² Before her, there had been Delphine Gay, George Sand, and Daniel Stern, but their newspaper work was only incidental to their literary creations. Like her, however, they did not confine themselves to purely feminist subjects.

Even during and after Séverine's time the number of important women journalists remained limited. Of her direct contemporaries only the names of Gyp, Rachilde and Juliette Adam come to mind. The latter was better known as an editor and when she did write, at that time, confined herself to feminist subjects. The other two were primarily novelists; furthermore, Gyp, as an outspoken and outstanding anti-Semite, cannot be considered the overall force for good that Séverine was. During the life of La Fronde (1897-1902), a few other women journalists came into prominence, among them Judith Gautier, Daniel Lesueur, Judith Cladel, Madame Catulle Mendès, and Clémence Royer. Most of these women were specialists in one field or another, however, and their interests were narrower than Séverine's. Actually, until the present time, when a fair number of Frenchwomen successfully practice journalism, the only other woman journalist of perhaps comparable talent and reputation seems to have been Geneviève Tabouis; but neither the latter nor Françoise Giroud, most prominent contemporary French woman journalist, can compare with Séverine in versatility, nor is their style noteworthy.

²²Minerva, February 22, 1931.

Séverine practiced almost every kind of journalism and wrote in almost every mood. Her first article, published in Le Cri du Peuple on November 23, 1883, was signed "Séverin." It was, characteristically, an attack on colonialism and war. A second article carried the same by-line, but after that she became "Séverine" permanently. (Although her Gaulois articles were signed "Renée" and those in the Gil Blas "Jacqueline," in honor of Jacques Vingtras, the ladies' identity seems to have been known to all.) Soon she had a bi-weekly column in Le Cri called "Notes d'une Parisienne," in which she discussed whatever subject interested her. She was apparently permitted complete freedom in expressing her ideas. The column covered a wide range of topics, from reviews of books she had read and plays she had attended to her vigorous opinions on current politics. There were portraits of current political figures and old Communards. The forthright polemical and emotional style was soon in evidence, as well as the interest in the poor and the passion for justice that were to be her trademark. Two of the early articles, for instance, attack François Coppée and Alphonse Daudet because of the "false" way she believes they portray the poor and collégiens. Coppée showed admirable tolerance, it would seem, in overlooking this early lack of proportion when he so warmly praised Séverine in the article cited above.

In 1887 Séverine accomplished her first reportage, when she described the scene at the Opéra Comique after the fire

that had gutted the building and killed over 200 members of the audience.²³ First refused permission to enter the ruins because of her sex, she persisted and, by showing her journalist's card, was finally allowed to enter. Her descriptions of the horrible sight, the clarity of her explanations, and her call for punishment of the guilty make for extremely effective reporting. Her subsequent reportages were carried out after she left the Cri. In most cases they were based on ideas that she herself suggested to her different editors, which they then subsidized.

Séverine had already begun to write editorials for Gil Blas and Le Gaulois in 1888, just before leaving Le Cri du Peuple, in order to help offset the continuous loss that paper was to her and Dr. Guébard. It was in this kind of writing, which was basically just a continuation of "Notes d'une Parisienne," that she was to specialize during the remainder of her career.

Séverine also wrote "portraits"--interviews, or "profiles" of important contemporary figures in the world of letters, the arts, or politics. Sometimes her whole column was given over to such a "portrait." Often shorter, but equally

²³In reporting on the 1970 night-club fire near Grenoble, the New York Times mentioned the Opéra Comique disaster, because of the comparably huge number of casualties. Interestingly, in both incidents the large number of deaths was due to the fact that doors and windows were barred, making it impossible for those inside to escape.

incisive sketches, are only incidental to a larger reportage, as in her story on Pope Leo XIII or her reportages on the Dreyfus trials.

Séverine even undertook a series of articles that required painstaking historical research. Becoming interested in Naundorff, the man who claimed to be the lost Louis XVII, she devoted a number of articles to him, which were published in Gil Blas in August and September of 1889. These articles are well organized and dramatically and effectively presented.

An appeal for funds that Séverine launched in Le Gaulois in conjunction with her reportage on a mine disaster near St. Etienne in 1890 was brilliantly successful, bringing in 49,000 francs.²⁴ Its effect caused her to broaden this kind of activity. Hoping to alleviate the deepest core of poverty, she initiated her Carnet, where she would describe the "neediest" cases and request funds to remedy the distress. A volunteer corps of helpers completed the preliminary investigation for her. The Carnet, carried out in addition to her other journalistic work, appeared in a different newspaper for each day of the week (from 1893 to 1895): Sunday, La Libre Parole; Monday, Le Figaro; Tuesday, Le Journal; Wednesday, L'Eclair; Thursday, L'Echo de Paris; and so forth. In one year, she collected

²⁴Reported by Séverine in Pages Rouges, p. 145.

50,000 francs and contributed 10,000 of her own.²⁵ She gave the Carnet up after it came under ugly attack from Henri Rochefort, and notwithstanding repeated encouragement from Clemenceau.

There does not seem to be any kind of journalistic activity that Séverine did not successfully attempt. The most important categories will be analyzed in depth in later chapters.

Séverine did not reserve any one type of article for any one newspaper. All types appeared in all papers. The portraits of political men, for instance, appear in Gil Blas as "Silhouettes Parlementaires," as "Nos Députés" in Le Gaulois. Sometimes she discusses the same subject in more than one paper. The only time she seems to have contracted with a paper for a campaign on just one subject was from 1890 to 1892 with Le Rappel. Her editorials there were devoted solely to preventing the holding of bull fights in the city of Paris proper. They achieved her and the paper's goal.

Whether learned from Vallès or acquired through her own experience and temperament, Séverine's conception of the journalistic profession and mission was a noble one. "Le journalisme . . . un sacerdoce, gai ou grave suivant la cible, mais toujours au service d'une idée,"²⁶ she wrote in one of her articles

²⁵Lecache, op. cit., pp. 135-136.

²⁶Le Matin, August 12, 1893, "Pour la Corporation."

combatting censorship. "Notre métier a cela de bon, qu'au milieu d'un fatras d'inutilités, nous attirons l'attention des indifférents sur les points qui leur demeuraient inconnus; nous dégageons les causes, nous précisons les résultats, nous faisons, à notre insu ou inconsciemment, besogne utile."²⁷

Even earlier in her career she had developed an idealistic image of what the journalist's goals should be, which she expressed in lyrical prose:

Lutter pour des idées généreuses ou hardies; défendre les pauvres, parce que leur souffrance a toujours raison contre la joie; célébrer tout ce que l'art a de consolant, tout ce que la science donne d'espoir à l'humanité; se pencher sur les geôles pour regarder s'ils'y commet quelque injustice et la dénoncer hautement; veiller à l'éducation des petits, vouloir le repos des vieux; épier, pour les affamés, la pousse des gerbes et le mûrissement des grappes; être la bouche de lumière qui clame au monde les paroles de vérité et de justice, qui annonce les découvertes, qui prêche l'évangile des temps nouveaux; . . . est-ce que ce n'est pas le plus admirable rôle qu'il soit permis à un être humain de rêver remplir?²⁸

The press, however, is no longer what it was in the days about which Vallès used to reminisce. Even in 1889 she condemns the kind of language and the epithets found in newspapers:

"J'en ai gros sur le coeur à trouver tant de boue au fond de

²⁷L'Eclair, April 27, 1893, "Avant la Grève."
With Chincholle of Le Figaro, Séverine founded a "Refuge de la Presse." And when she died, she left her house as a rest home for female journalists.

²⁸Gil Blas, January 22, 1892, "La Gifle."

nos encriers!"²⁹ Not only that, but journalists do not even bother to sell themselves. "Ils se louent."³⁰

But no matter how infamous some journalists are, or how abusive their language, Séverine opposes any kind of censorship.³¹ "Je ne reconnais à personne le droit de toucher à la liberté de la presse."³² She is at her fiery melodramatic best when she warns against muzzling the press. "Ne laissez pas toucher à la plume, que son bec grince ou glisse, qu'elle soit d'acier rouillé ou d'or fin."³³ When the editor of Gil Blas was condemned because of an article by Camille Lemonnier that had appeared in the paper, Séverine attacked the Minister of Justice in both Gil Blas and Le Gaulois. In neither paper did she temper her own language, incidentally, the Gil Blas article is entitled "L'Obsédé," that in Le Gaulois "Conspuons Ferrouillat." When Michel Zévaco, the anarchist journalist, was indicted, and the press joined in the attack, Séverine, outraged, wrote "C'est une honte, cela, qu'il se soit trouvé des journalistes pour demander qu'on musclât, qu'on baillonnât la presse, dont ils vivent, à laquelle ils ont l'honneur

²⁹Gil Blas, April 26, 1889, "L'Injure."

³⁰Ibid., July 26, 1888, "L'Enlèvement."

³¹Not only of the press, but of all the arts.

³²Gil Blas, April 26, 1889, "L'Injure."

³³Le Matin, August 12, 1893, "Pour la Corporation."

d'appartenir! Nous avons nos canailles, nous avons nos héros; sapristi, on se serait bien passé des rénégats."³⁴

She is astounded that deputies who are also practicing journalists did not spring to the press's defense when it was attacked for venality in the Chamber of Deputies. She defends the practice of taking advertising on the fourth page of the paper, because she believes the fourth page helps to put the "beaux vers" and "les généreuses pensées" on the first page.³⁵

All in all, she considers that the press has more to its credit than against it.³⁶ Calling it one of the four elements that comprise the nation's intellectual capital (the others being Art, Science and the Nation's youth), and admitting it is "dirigée en partie par des coquins," she still asserts that its "apport en bien dépasse singulièrement le passif en mal." In the same article she scathingly attacks Ferdinand Brunetière "pour avoir témoigné à la Presse une exécution si manifestement rageuse, un dédain si comiquement hargneux."³⁷ (The possibility that her dislike of Brunetière also stemmed partly from his attack on Vallès should not be discounted.)

³⁴Quoted in Lecache, op. cit., p. 120.

³⁵Gil Blas, July 8, 1890, "La Rançon."

³⁶La Libre Parole, March 3, 1895, "Le Cas de M. Brunetière."

³⁷Ibid.

As to Séverine's own journalistic integrity and incorruptibility, in spite of the various attacks against her there seems little reason to doubt it. Edouard Drumont stated in 1892 (before they became such good friends!) that "Madame Séverine fait partie d'une bande de journalistes stipendiés." Journalists then had the right to defend themselves in print and it was Séverine's practice always to reply methodically to every remark directed against her. In this instance she wrote a letter of protest to the editor of Le Matin, published on June 30, 1892, categorically denying Drumont's allegation. There is no evidence of other similar accusations against her.

Undoubtedly, however, her association with Labruyère left her open to personal attacks like Rochefort's. Séverine successfully defended herself against the charge that she had accepted money to stop writing about Lebaudy. In an article in L'Echo de Paris she related the receipt of such an offer by the paper's editor and concludes simply "Je tiens seulement à ce que les lecteurs sachent pourquoi--une fois encore--je les ai entretenus de M. Max Lebaudy."³⁸

It was at the end of 1895 and the beginning of 1896 that Séverine and Henri Rochefort carried on their loud public vendetta. He attacked her for claiming earlier that Labruyère was associated professionally with her, thus enabling the latter

³⁸L'Echo de Paris, November 1, 1895, "Avant la Conclusion."

to fight the duels provoked by her articles; but for claiming currently they were no longer bound by contract, now that he was being charged with blackmail in the Lebaudy affair. He also accused her of misusing the funds she had collected through her Carnets, as well as appropriating with Labruyère the money she had received for Padlewski's escape. By bringing in accountants, Séverine was able to prove the complete integrity of the Carnets. In a very long article in La Libre Parole she refuted Rochefort's charges and counterattacked; but her reply seems less successful, since it is largely ad hominem. Actually, with Padlewski himself dead, there was no way either to prove or disprove Rochefort's statements. Yet, after reading all the various unpleasant charges brought against Labruyère, it does seem that at least some of them were founded, so that, although Séverine herself was honorable, her reputation was tarnished by her association with Labruyère. But not for long--for after all, she has gone down in French journalistic history as "la grande, la bonne Séverine."

The promoters who hoped to put bullfights on in the city of Paris itself are also said to have tried to bribe Séverine with 50,000 francs not to oppose them.³⁹ They were greatly frustrated. Not only did Séverine write a series of articles in Le Rappel in 1890-1891 for the sole purpose of opposing these bullfights, but she succeeded. The promoters

³⁹Conversation with Yvonne Schwitza-Montrobert, in the Summer of 1969.

were never permitted to bring the corridas to the Rue Pergolèse, as they had hoped.

Thus Séverine, entering a man's world, proved to have great gifts for her profession. Through her ability and her enormous capacity for work, she became the first woman journalist to achieve solid success as a journalist. And through her courage and imagination and creativity, she brought luster to the profession she loved and respected.

CHAPTER IV

SEVERINE AS REPORTER

If, as was written recently, journalism is "the art of the immediate,"¹ then Séverine learned to exercise that art to a consummate degree. She was, of course, not the first writer to describe events personally witnessed. The mediaeval historians, for instance, had also recorded the details of battles at which they had been present; but, not being under pressure, they frequently spent years polishing their accounts before offering them to the public. Séverine's situation was different. She had first to decide whether an event was worthy of description, then take herself to the site of that event for the express purpose of observing and reporting it. She had to judge what was "newsworthy" and significant, then immediately find the correct expression and form that would best catch the public's imagination. In Albert Cazes's words "le métier de reporter . . . cet art très difficile qui consiste à tout voir, à tout entendre, et à tout suggérer par la notation et la

¹Newsweek, December 21, 1970, p. 85, quoting Erik Erikson's answer to a young journalist requesting an interview.

mise en valeur habile de quelques traits essentiels."² In fact, in her reportages Séverine achieved an almost uniformly high artistic level of writing and presentation. Even those who criticized her editorial style praised her reporting. Adolphe Brisson, who found fault with her "Quand elle quitte le document pour l'invention," admitted that "Séverine a des dons d'écrivain de premier ordre, surtout lorsqu'elle est amenée à décrire des choses qu'elle a observées; elle produit alors des pages excellentes, parfois supérieures et quelques-unes qui sont des chefs-d'oeuvre d'éloquence et d'exactitude pittoresque."³

Critics and biographers agree that Séverine was the first French journalist to do on-the-spot reporting. Speculating as to the beginning of this aspect of her career, one might guess that it too came about accidentally. Since the Opéra Comique, scene in 1887 of a tragic fire, was situated quite near Séverine's office on the Rue Montmartre, it seems normal to assume that Séverine wandered by to witness the fire and returned later to report on the gruesome aftermath. The great success of these first articles may then have inspired the subsequent reportages. These were not all of the same type and were not published in the same newspapers. In some her own actions either made or were part of the news. In others she merely reported, and denounced what she saw. The only

²Albert Cazes, op. cit., July 1930, p. 112.

³Quoted in Cazes, op. cit., p. 109.

time she seems to have had a regular assignment was in connection with the various Dreyfus trials, which she reported for La Fronde. The one common denominator in these different types of reporting was her ability to hold the public's interest with her powerful writing.

Séverine's two articles on the Opéra Comique disaster, originally published in Le Cri du Peuple and later reprinted in Pages Rouges, are written with great sobriety and accuracy, but also with high emotional intensity. The first article finds her outside the ruins of the building, describing what she sees first to the right, then to the left, then straight ahead. The pictures are clear and convincing. At the left are the "deblayeurs" (who are not heroes because they arrived when everything was over). "Ils font leur devoir aussi, pourtant, humblement, obscurément, parmi la chute brusque des pierre géantes Ils sont couverts de fange, encroûtés de suie; ils ont la nuque et les reins trempés par l'eau glaciale qui égoutte des frises, ils ont la plante des pieds roussie par les décombres fumants."⁴

Magistrates are taking evidence about the disaster in the open air under a glass overhang which used to shelter the audience from the rain. The overhang, Séverine reminds her readers, was shattered on the night of the fire "à coups de

⁴Pages Rouges, p. 16.

genou, de poing ou de crâne," by people jumping on it from a stone balcony above. Then comes the sudden shock and the surprise (one of Séverine's trademarks) "Et quelqu'un qui l'a vu m'a dit, qu'après les chutes, sept ou huit feuilles de cet éventail transparent étaient soudainement devenues pourpres comme des vitraux d'église."⁵

Having obtained permission to inspect the interior, Séverine is escorted from floor to floor. As she progresses, she skillfully connects the present scene to what happened during the fire. Her figures of speech help evoke the sight. "Par endroits, les alvéoles des loges restent béantes, comme si l'on avait collé au mur un gâteau de miel monstrueux où seraient demeurées les abeilles."⁶ Or, "On dirait en effet que l'on se trouve dans la poitrine d'un squelette géant. Le thorax et l'épine dorsale s'élèvent tout droits sans accidents horizontaux, tandis que les côtes s'arrondissent en demi-cercle, de chaque côté."⁷

The reader is spared none of the horror. Séverine learns that a door she had observed and had thought used by the public for escape had in reality been barred. A workman describes the scene he came upon: "Nous avons trouvé un homme et seize jeunes filles asphyxiés, carbonisés en ce cloaque. Elles étaient toutes

⁵Ibid., p. 18.

⁶Ibid., p. 25.

⁷Ibid.

debout, les mains en avant pour repousser la flamme, avec le joli geste des frileuses devant les grands brasiers. Le feu avait cuit partie du groupe, et, quand on en prenait une, il fallait arracher la peau de la voisine, qui se détachait tout le long, avec un bruit d'étoffe qu'on déchire."⁸

Methodically she goes through all the doors now opened and describes what she sees on each floor. In the last room her guide tells her: "Si vous voulez vous faire une idée de la panique, rappelez-vous ce que je vais vous dire. Ici, deux hommes dans toute la force de l'âge se sont brûlé la cervelle . . . pour échapper au supplice. Là on a relevé deux femmes, fauchées à coups de couteau par ceux qui étaient derrière . . . et qui voulaient passer!"⁹

The articles end with Séverine's statement that, now she has seen everything, she must send forth a cry for truth and justice. "Qui a tenu les portes closes? Qui est l'assassin?"¹⁰

Séverine's next, perhaps most useful, exploit was her series of articles in August 1890 reporting on the mine explosion at Villeboeuf near St. Etienne. The explosion, due to a "coup de grisou" (fire-damp) had taken 150 lives. After learning about the disaster, Séverine had begged the editor of

⁸Pages Rouges, p. 28.

⁹Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁰Ibid.

Le Gaulois, Arthur Meyer, to send her down, in order to organize the help for the wounded and the living. Séverine had previously written two powerful and compassionate articles about life among miners. These preface the other seven she wrote while at Villeboeuf; all nine form a long chapter in Pages Rouges called "Au Pays Noir."

In the opening article of the new group, Séverine describes her arrival at St. Etienne and her first sight of all the coffins, extending as far as the eye can see. To induce the Gaulois readers to make larger contributions, Séverine decided to go down into the mine, in spite of her fear of the dark. Her descent is described in the second article. Over her clothes she puts on the miner's garb. "Au revoir, disent les femmes, avec le grand signe de croix qui salue les trépassés. Et la cage plonge, tombe plutôt, avec une rapidité vertigineuse. Du noir, et du noir, et du noir Un vacarme effroyable nous assourdit; une pluie glacée nous inonde les épaules."¹¹

The description of the mine's upper galery is effective: "Un escarpement de grenaille charbonneuse, qu'il faut gravir en rampant sur le ventre, tant le plafond est près du sol; un chemin de taupe où l'on perd l'haleine, la vue, l'ouïe, tant il vous entre de poussière subtile dans les poumons, dans les yeux, dans les oreilles C'est atrocement douloureux!

¹¹Pages Rouges, p. 156.

La sueur nous ruisselle des tempes; les habits se collent à la peau, comme trempés d'eau bouillante; et la température, soudain, devient ardente, intenable: 40° minimum."¹²

Séverine learns that the men who work there earn 5 to 6 francs daily. And reflects that "C'est pour cela qu'ils acceptent cette vie souterraine, ce labeur horrible, de danger permanent, cette atroce mort! Et les mutilations pires!"¹³

The return is equally unpleasant; and she ends by pointing out that a miner's life is composed entirely of hours like the three very unpleasant ones she has just spent. The article ends with a characteristic question. "La foudre chôme donc, là-haut?"¹⁴

The third article tells of the wounded "Des hommes! Ce sont des hommes--ces monstres, ces scories, ces êtres sans nom! Ils n'ont plus de nez, plus d'yeux, plus d'oreilles! Rien qu'une croûte noire, qui suppure, et que strient, par places, de sanglantes rougeurs!" When Séverine asks the doctor how many of them can be saved, he replies, "La moitié . . . peut-être!"¹⁵

¹²Pages Rouges, p. 158.

¹³Ibid., p. 159.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 161.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 164.

After Séverine's visit to Villeboeuf, two additional explosions had occurred. She hurries back and a third one takes place as she arrives. The crowd becomes threatening and there is a danger that the prefect will call out troops. In his sermon that day, Séverine reports, the pastor has suggested that people must be generous to the point of imprudence. Her last line is "Soyez imprudents, ô mes chers lecteurs!"¹⁷

The fourth article explores the Pélissier mine, where the accidents have taken place. Séverine does not hesitate to put the blame for the latter on the mine owners. The fifth article describes two individual funerals, unlike the mass ceremony described in the first. She takes the toll of the deaths the mines have caused over the years and calls for the end of the miners' "martyrdom."

Séverine was too ill to write on August 12, and the Gaulois informed its readers accordingly, adding "Nous la remercions ici publiquement d'avoir aussi noblement rempli son mandat . . . en dehors de tout parti politique."¹⁸ After her recovery, she published her sixth article, in which she told of a young boy who had appeared in the mine offering to show the commission of inquiry around. Although he jeopardized any future work in the mines for himself in so doing, he indicated

¹⁶Pages Rouges, p. 167.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 174.

¹⁸Quoted in Lecache, op. cit., p. 93.

to the commission all the dangers the owners had attempted to hide. Séverine's seventh article calls for quick remedies to the situation, suggests that the State force the Companies to abide by the contracts they have signed. She describes some of the injustices they have perpetrated. She urges everyone to defend "ces humbles, ces ignorants, ces parias, dont on ne soupçonne même pas l'infortune--tant elle est inimaginable C'est parce que je les aime que je ne veux pas qu'on les saigne, qu'on les supplicie." She concludes by asking paradoxically, "luttons pour le droit en haillons, la justice en guenilles, la fraternité nue et meurtrie . . . ces trois vertus théologiques de notre misérable humanité."¹⁹

The last two articles provide a welcome change of tone, describing as they do two well-operating experiments "au pays noir." One is a temporary home for unemployed miners, the other a mine abandoned by the owners, taken over as a cooperative by the miners, and now functioning and profitable. The miners have named one of the pits "Le Puits Séverine" in honor of "la petite Mère des Mineurs."

When the physical and emotional stress Séverine underwent during the period in St. Etienne is realized, as well as the short time she had for composing the articles, the high caliber of the writing is even more remarkable. The fact that the writer is a woman does not stop her from describing even the most un-

¹⁹Pages Rouges, p. 197.

pleasant sights. Perhaps it endows her with greater sensitivity to others' suffering. In any case, she possessed the ability to communicate the same feelings of pity to her readers; for her public, the aristocratic monarchist reader of Le Gaulois was so moved by her articles that in seventeen days, they poured out 49,000 francs to aid the victims.

Sixteen months later, Séverine did a similar reportage of four articles for L'Eclair on an explosion in another mine in the same area. The descriptions there are equally poignant.

Only a few months after the St. Etienne series, at the end of 1890, Séverine was the "brains" of a daring plan whose success further increased her notoriety. In November of that year the former chief of the Czarist police, General Seliverstoff, was assassinated in a Paris hotel room. Paris buzzed, but the police were unable to find the assassin. On December 14, a special edition of L'Eclair featured "How I Helped Padlewski Escape," by Georges de Labruyère. Reading the article, the public learned that after Padlewski's first search for help had proved fruitless, a revolutionary friend had thought of asking Séverine for help. Séverine not only collected money immediately to finance the escape, but also designed the eventual escape plan, whereby Labruyère publicly announced he was leaving for Italy to fight a duel, then took Padlewski with him disguised as his doctor. When the police came to arrest Labruyère following the publication of his article, Séverine demanded to share his fate, saying "J'ai été la pensée, et Monsieur de

Labruyère a été le bras."²⁰ Her wish was not granted, but Labruyère spent only a short time in prison.

Perhaps Séverine's most famous exploit was her interview with Pope Leo XIII, printed in the August 4, 1892 issue of Le Figaro. Anti-Semitism was very pronounced at that time in France. Séverine's feelings on the issue were quite ambivalent;²¹ she nevertheless conceived the idea of interviewing the Pope on the question. Securing the backing of Le Figaro, she wrote the Pope's secretary and after receiving a more or less favorable reply, traveled to Rome. Pope Leo XIII has gone down in history as a liberal pontiff, so that his willingness to receive a woman journalist labelled "Socialist" might possibly have been anticipated, nevertheless Séverine's courage and "cran" seem all the more admirable.

In an introduction Séverine explains that, as a Socialist, she is not interested in matters of belief or origin, "ne reconnaissant d'autre ennemi que l'Accapareur: youtre ou goym. Il est le voleur des pauvres . . . et cela me suffit!"

"Et tous les pauvres sont miens! Lamentables Hébreux errant dans la steppe . . . misérables spoliés par les financiers catholiques de là-bas, comme sont spoliés ici, par leurs co-religionnaires richissimes, les paysans et les travailleurs de

²⁰Quoted in Albert Cazes, op. cit. in Grande Revue, June 1930, p. 578.

²¹The subject will be analyzed in detail below.

la chrétienté."²²

After an unnerving wait in the Vatican, Séverine is taken in to the Pope. After giving her general impression of him, which she follows by a finely drawn portrait, she reports on her questioning of His Holiness. The Pope tells her that Christ sacrificed himself for all men, without exception, and the Church has the mission which he willed to it of bringing the unbelievers back into the fold, not through persecution, but persuasion. The words, "Guerre" and "Religion," says the Pope, "ne vont pas ensemble," and all races are equal before the Lord. Yet, he adds, it does not follow that unbelievers are to be preferred. The Church must defend itself against every attempt at suppression. And now, following so many other evils, the reign of money is here. But no one can dominate the Church or the people through money! When Séverine poses the question, "Alors, Saint-Père, les grands Juifs?," the Pope replies, "je suis avec les petits, les humbles, les dépossédés, ceux que Notre-Seigneur aima,"²³ Séverine does not pursue the subject any further (possibly because her own thoughts on it are identical!). The interview turns to a discussion of France, with the Pope asking Séverine what the French people think about him, and ends with the Pope's statement that the Church does not mix into politics.

²²Pages Mystiques, p. 117.

²³Ibid., p. 124.

At the end of the interview Séverine feverishly wrote her story, which she then submitted to the Pope's secretary. It was approved with only minimal changes and exactly as it was to appear in Le Figaro. Feeling on the subject of anti-Semitism was running so high that the interview created a huge stir in not only the French press, but abroad as well. Séverine was attacked by both right and left, so much so that she felt constrained to write another article explaining the circumstances under which the interview had taken place. Anti-Semitism continued, but, as one of the critics has written, "elle avait exprimé son sentiment en termes magnifiques. Ce fut un des plus beaux succès de sa carrière du journalisme."²⁴

On July 30, 1891 Séverine's story on the railroad explosion at St. Mandé-Tourelle appeared in L'Eclair. Although this story, called "Autour du Charnier," offers less novelty, because she had already reported other catastrophes, it is perhaps the most tautly written, the most free from excess verbiage, of all her reportages.

For an article in the first number of Le Journal in 1892, Séverine attempted another kind of reportage, one that is often practiced today. The woman workers in a sugar factory had gone on strike and, at their suggestion, Séverine put on workclothes and tried to get work, in effect "strikebreaking." She was promised an assignment for the next day; and meanwhile,

²⁴Cazes, op. cit. La Grande Revue, June 1930, p. 582.

had the opportunity to observe working conditions, not only of the striking "casseuses de sucre," but also of the men who work at the furnaces melting the sugar.

The article begins with an explanation of her motivation, goes on to state that she has spent almost a whole day with "ces pauvres filles" and then assures her readers she can now tell them "en toute connaissance ce qu'est cette grève et combien elle mérite d'intérêt et de sympathie."²⁵ The author then carefully and accurately describes the work of the "casseuses," who, she explains, should really be called "rangeuses." It is "du travail à la chaîne," and the women do not have a minute free all the day long. "Les six rangeuses d'un mouvement continu, incessant, mécanique lui aussi, saisissent une file, se retournent, la déposent; voltent, recommencent encore, toujours, éternellement, de sept heures du matin à six heures du soir, sans jamais s'arrêter, sans jamais se reposer, sans jamais s'asseoir, sauf dix minutes pour la collation et une heure pour le déjeuner."²⁶ As a result of their work "elles n'ont plus d'ongles, elles n'ont plus de dents: les uns usés jusqu'à la chair, par le maniement du sucre; les autres écaillés, perdues, effritées par les poussières qui s'en dégagent."²⁷ For this work they were earning 60 centimes for

²⁵En Marche, p. 28.

²⁶Ibid., p. 29.

²⁷Ibid., p. 30.

100 kilos, or from 3 francs 25 to 4 francs daily. Two weeks ago, they had been told they would henceforth be paid only 50 centimes per kilo, "take it or leave it," with the result that they had struck. Séverine goes to a meeting with them, has an opportunity to observe the fine new machinery, recalls the magnificent château of Vaux she had visited, owned by the proprietor of this very factory, learns that he has just refused even to split the difference and pay the "rangeuses" 55 centimes. This time her last lines comment ironically: "Sur l'indigence de votre maître, pleurez, nymphes de Vaux! Elle fait en pleurer bien d'autres, cette indigence qui rogne les salaires et loge en des palais"28

Séverine did many other reportages, including visits to hospitals, shelters, the Chamber of Deputies, and court-rooms. Those described above, however, were her most spectacular. Certainly she thought them among her best written, since she chose them for inclusion in her books.

The most striking characteristic of all of these different types of reportages is immediacy. Séverine describes the event she is observing in such a way as to convince the reader that he too is present. She achieves this sense of participation for the reader through three different means: the almost continuous use of the present tense; the presentation, without squeamishness, of shocking and sordid details; and the

²⁸En Marche, p. 37.

frequent interposition of her own presence as a link between the reader and the event.

In every one of the reportages, as soon as Séverine has provided the necessary introduction and is face to face with the event, she changes immediately into the present tense. After giving the background of the sugar strike, she recounts her meeting with the strikers and her decision to join them for a day. "La secrétaire . . . m'avait dit: 'A demain!' Mais elle avait ajouté un 'Vous ne pourrez jamais, Madame' qui m'avait piquée au vif Aussi, me voilà qui débarque chez l'une d'elles à l'heure dite. En un tour de main, j'ai enlevé gants, voilette, chapeau, manteau, et me voici nu-tête, les cheveux tirés--si pareille à toutes qu'elles s'extasient, amusées."²⁹

Even when she slips into another tense, her base remains the present. "Nous sommes descendues dans la rue de Flandre . . . afin de savoir si on n'embauche. Je me glisserai dans le tas des renégates, quitte à être un peu 'attrapée', par les grévistes que je viens défendre."³⁰

At the beginning of the St. Etienne series, Séverine describes at length a happy and serene countryside. Suddenly the reader realizes he is on the train with her, "Soudain, à droite, sur un versant de coteau, la première mine Ah,

²⁹En Marche, p. 31.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 31-32.

je te reconnais, sol maudit L'astre s'obscurcit de plus en plus. Les maisons tout à l'heure trapues . . . se font géantes maintenant St. Etienne! crie-t-on sur le quai."³¹

Through the use of the present tense, Séverine carries the reader along with her. "Il faut aller à Villeboeuf maintenant. Nous y accédons par l'escalier qui monte au Cours. Ensuite, il n'y a plus qu'à traverser la chaussée Au moment où j'arrive à la 'recette,' à l'issue des cages, un coup de canon semble éclater sous terre, et une bouffée de fumée s'échappe du puits Misère de nous! C'est une troisième explosion!"³²

The reader's sense of being present at the disaster is never more acute than during her ride to St. Mandé after learning of the explosion. "Mais qu'est ceci? Dans la blême obscurité qui précède l'aurore, des formes entrevues courent, galopent plutôt vers Paris. Pas un mot, pas une exclamation, pas un appel. Une fuite silencieuse d'êtres perdus, les bras encombrés de paquets, traînant des enfants"³³

Jules Vallès, in his Trilogy, had demonstrated utter control of the art of moving back and forth between tenses. Séverine undoubtedly absorbed this stylistic trait during the

³¹Pages Rouges, p. 147.

³²Ibid., p. 171.

³³Ibid., p. 258.

time she spent as secretary to the Master. She seems to have been an exceptionally apt pupil!

Séverine never hesitates to present details that make the reader's gorge rise, if in so doing she clarifies his vision of the event. In the St. Mandé explosion, she describes the workmen's activities as they clean up. "A quelques-uns, au moyen d'un cric, ils ont soulevé une énorme plaque de bois. L'homme en question se penche, regarde dessous. Et, finalement, il crie:

--- Un linge, donnez un linge!
 --- Pourquoi, demande un autre.
 --- Il y a du déchet!

Le déchet, c'est un oeil, des doigts, des bouts de peau qu'on entasse dans une serviette et qu'on enlève vite, vite!"³⁴

Or again, in the same story, "Le sergent de ville m'écarte, se baisse, ramasse quelque chose presque sous mes talons.

Ah! bien, fait-il, ah! bien!

C'est un bas vide de la jambe, mais où le pied est resté!"³⁵

The pathetic disfiguring of the sugar workers has already been quoted, as well as some of the horrors Séverine found in the hospitals at St. Etienne. Possibly her most graphic description of what she saw is reserved for additional suffering she witnessed at the latter. "Ils ont l'air de

³⁴Ibid., p. 261.

³⁵Ibid., p. 262.

nègres suppliciés, avec leurs cheveux que le grisou a crépus, sur le cuir carbonisé; avec leur lèvres énormes, boursouflées, et qui suintent pourpres; avec leurs moignons de ouate qui s'agitent faiblement, comme des pattes d'animal écrasé!"³⁶

"Celui-ci semble avoir servi de touche à Néron. Sa figure est à peine atteinte; mais son corps est à vif. Il ne lui reste que le dernier des sept épidermes, qui forment l'outre humaine, empêchent le sang de couler. De la tête aux pieds, il est dépouillé comme une anguille; la souffrance lui arrache des cris atroces, il se convulse dans ses draps, qui, par endroits, rougissent, là où la toile écorche sa mince peau."³⁷

This insistence on the painful physical details of the victims' suffering was undoubtedly partly due to Séverine's hope of obtaining, through their description, more money from Le Gaulois readers. It also stemmed from the honest and overwhelming pity the sight inspired in her. It is not surprising that the articles achieved their purpose, for even the contemporary reader, hardened from many years of reading similar stories, cannot help being greatly affected by them.

The third device used by Séverine to achieve immediacy is present in all her work and will accordingly be described in greater detail in the chapter devoted to a discussion of her

³⁶Pages Rouges, p. 164.

³⁷Ibid., p. 170.

style. Since, however, it is so effective in these reportages, it must also be touched on here. This device is her subjective approach. Almost without exception the reportages start from her and then radiate out to the event she will describe. From time to time in the course of the articles she will either revert to herself and her reactions, or emit a personal statement which, even though childish, acts as a sort of link between the public and the phenomenon. In one of the last articles in the St. Etienne series, she begins by saying "J'ai parlé souvent de l'initiative privée, de sa puissance A St. Etienne même j'ai vu un rare exemple de ce que peut la tenace volonté de faire le bien."³⁸ Later on in the same article she writes "Et, cependant, aujourd'hui, grâce à leur courage, à leur persévérance, à leur énergie, dix-huit mille ouvriers--dix-huit mille, vous entendez bien! ont traversé cette maison; tous les vêtements ont été soumis à l'épuration; soixante mille rations ont été distribuées.--C'est vraiment beau!"³⁹

A final example of interposing herself is found in Séverine's interview with the Pope. It begins "Alors que l'Antisemitisme passionne le monde, il m'a semblé d'un puissant intérêt d'aller voir, à ce propos, le chef suprême de l'Eglise."⁴⁰

³⁸Pages Rouges, p. 198.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 200-201.

⁴⁰Pages Mystiques, p. 115.

And concludes, "Je m'incline pour prendre congé; la longue main pâle se pose doucement sur mon front:

--Allez ma fille, et que Dieu vous garde!"⁴¹

Through these techniques then Séverine created a new form of journalism, whose effectiveness was proved by the results, and whose value seems obvious even at the present time.

⁴¹Pages Mystiques, p. 126.

CHAPTER V

SEVERINE AS PORTRAITIST

Most of Séverine's full-fledged portraits were written early in her career for publication in either Gil Blas or Le Gaulois. For Gil Blas she did two continuing series: "Nos Artistes" and "Silhouettes Parlementaires." For Le Gaulois a political series was called "Nos Députés." But other portraits had appeared as part of "Notes d'une Parisienne" in Le Cri du Peuple. Occasionally a Portrait would appear in another newspaper, as was the case with her venomous sketch of Emile Massard in Jeune République. Still other descriptions figured normally in her reportages, as for instance the Pope's portrait in her interview with him, and that of Esterhazy and other personalities in the Affaire during her reporting of the trials.

In discussing Séverine's "galerie contemporaine," Lecache lists the names of thirty-one important actors, writers, and artists, declaring that their portraits were "traced with a chisel and written in corrosive ink," but that they were not really mean.¹ Sarah Bernhardt and the two Coquelins were the

¹Lecache, op. cit., p. 76.

most famous among the actors, for there were other dramatic artists not yet in the star category whom Séverine hoped to help through presenting their portrait. Lucien Descaves, Dumas Fils, Léon Cladel, and Octave Mirbeau were the better-known of the writers. And among the artists Lecache lists Monet, Renoir, Degas, Rodin,² and Forain. Lecache omits the political portraits; perhaps the best of them was the one of General Boulanger; Pages Rouges includes portraits of Louise Michel, Felix Pyat and Jules Joffrin; and En Marche presents the anarchist Jean Grave.

The portraits feature the same general format as the editorials, and use much of the same style as found in the reportages. There is an opening section in which Séverine either describes a personal reaction to the subject or discusses some personal tie with him or her. A passage may follow that provides some insight into the spiritual or intellectual quality of the subject. Always there is a physical description, an aspect at which Séverine truly excelled. Through simile or metaphor and her ability to perceive and transmit clearly the physical traits, the reader receives a camera-like image. Following the description, Séverine often relates part of the subject's life story (if it is not too commonly known), then essays a judgment on his work. As always, the end has a shock quality, sometimes stronger, sometimes attenuated.

²Séverine was among the first to defend Rodin's statue of Balzac.

General Boulanger's portrait follows this pattern almost entirely, except that by eliminating herself in the first part and describing the reaction of the Chamber as he enters, she succeeds in rendering the situation's inherent drama much stronger.

Que s'est-il donc passé?

Rien--un homme est entré.

De taille moyenne, plutôt grand, l'allure pesante du cavalier, les épaules très larges, comme fatiguées par un invisible joug, le député du Nord, Georges Boulanger, monte lentement les gradins de gauche
Je crois, dans les Parlements, au triomphe des infimes minorités.

Il y croit aussi, celui-là, et c'est ce qui lui prête cet aspect d'insolence tranquille, de sérénité suprême, qui affole ses collègues contre lui. . . .

La tête est curieuse, autrement qu'on ne le supposerait d'après les portraits qui encombrant les vitrines.

Moins bien--et mieux!

Des cheveux châtons, très drus et coupés ras; le teint hâlé; une barbe à reflets de cuivre; des sourcils épais sous lesquels l'œil est comme embusqué; le front têtu et audacieux; la mâchoire tenace . . . cela semble constituer, au premier abord, une belle silhouette de haut aventurier

Mais il y a l'âme de ce visage: une physionomie si profondément déconcertante qu'elle échappe à l'observateur.³

In presenting Alfred Naquet, the Senator who was responsible for pushing through the law on divorce, Séverine follows the same format. She begins "De celui-là je ne dirai pas de mal--ah! mais non!"⁴ And thus she leads into a

³Notes d'une Frondeuse, pp. 45-46.

⁴Gil Blas, December 21, 1888, "Alfred Naquet."

description of Naquet's labors on behalf of the divorce law, her recollection of herself weeping in London as she opened an English paper, recognizing his name, but unable to understand because she knew no English.

Her description of him is masterly and always compassionate. She never once alludes to the well-known fact that Naquet was a hunchback.

Regardez-le un peu, voulez-vous?

Un masque curieux, hébraïque⁵ et faunesque; superbe dans la colère, comme la face auguste d'un prophète d'Israël, sensuel dans le rire comme le visage mortel des demi-dieux à pied fourchu dont Corot a peint les rondes au centre des clairières, parmi les bois profonds.

La voix aussi présente les mêmes oppositions et les mêmes parentés; très grave dans les dissertations austères, avec des notes de basse qui soulignent sévèrement la pensée; amollie et comme berceuse dans la causerie mondaine avec un rire doux, presque câlin.

A portrait of Antoine begins by explaining that he has been much maligned recently. "C'est l'occasion que je saisis, d'ordinaire, pour dire le bien que je pense des gens."⁶ In describing Antoine physically, Séverine compares him with Watteau's "Gilles." Then she gives an evocative description of his voice: "Et cette voix d'Antoine, brisée, cassée, voilée, avec des éclats soudains de corde qui se rompt--rauquement, avec cette sourdine éternelle qui transpose en mineur et vers et

⁵Naquet was Jewish.

⁶Gil Blas, April 3, 1891, "Antoine."

prose, sans qu'arrive jamais la fatigue de l'oreille, sans que naisse la monotonie, la tueuse d'impressions, cette voix est toute la caractéristique du tempérament, du talent, des origines de celui qui voulut rénover le théâtre de son temps--et le rénova!"-- Antoine's life and with it the story of the Théâtre Libre follows the description.

In the case of Jean-Louis Forain, after describing him and talking of his early life, Séverine discusses his art. As some of the comparisons above indicate, she had an astute eye for painting and was a sagacious critic.

Aussi, je trouve, chez Forain, la cruauté du vivisecteur, et jamais l'"amabilité" du pornographe. Il opère, il ampute une illusion, démontre le mécanisme des passions humaines, ne donne jamais ombre d'idée voluptueuse, de frisson charnel.

Ses nudités font rire, quand elles sont grotesques, d'un bon rire loyal, sans arrière-pensée déshonnête; et, quand elles sont lamentables, elles vous emplissent le coeur de pitié.⁷

The portrait of Louise Michel begins with a "shocking" statement. "Louise Michel--une chrétienne à rebours."⁸ She then illustrates her thesis. Here she gives very little physical description, because she says that Louise Michel is "disgraciée comme la misère, décharnée comme la faim, désexuée comme la douleur."⁹ This is done for effect, however, for then, changing

⁷Ibid., April 11, 1890, "Jean-Louis Forain."

⁸Pages Rouges, p. 41.

⁹Ibid., p. 43.

her mind she admits she was unjust and goes on to say "Non, on n'est pas disgraciée avec ce clair rayon dans les yeux, avec ce bon sourire, avec cette expression ironique et tendre, avec ce pétilllement d'intelligence et de malice!"¹⁰ Then using as a transition an incident on a bus in which Louise Michel had demonstrated her mischievous qualities, Séverine goes on to describe Louise Michel's home, humble and spartan. She terminates by insisting again that Louise Michel is a Christian and remembers the fact, and repeats the words of a nun who had known Louise Michel. "--Ah, madame, comme nous avons eu du chagrin quand elle est partie! C'est bien malheureux qu'on l'ait détournée jadis En voilà une qui avait la vocation!"¹¹

Her portrait of Emile Massard proves Cazes's assertion that she possessed a "burin impitoyable."¹² In this, the only one available in which Séverine attacked her subject, Séverine retaliated for all the miseries she had suffered at Massard's hands at Le Cri du Peuple and subsequently. Innocently at the beginning, she says she would not ordinarily do a portrait of someone for whom she feels "une estime restreinte," but that since he is presenting himself to the voters and she knows him

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., p. 46.

¹²Cazes, Grande Revue, July 1930, p. 111.

so well, she feels it is her duty to do so.¹³

She maintains that she will simply recount facts, not give opinions. Here she gives the lie to Lecache's assertion that there was no "vraie méchanceté" in these portraits. First declaring that she will stick to the physical description "pour rien au monde je ne consentirai à visiter l'intérieur,"¹⁴ she says that when he was a republican, he had some hair on his skull. "Je ne lui fais pas un reproche d'avoir perdu ses cheveux; photographe impartiale, je constate seulement qu'ils ont suivi ses convictions."¹⁵ Continuing his physical description, she explains that everything about him is round. By enumerating the different features that are round, she succeeds in thoroughly making fun of Massard, and sums it up by declaring that "Cette rondeur de la face, la manière dont les oreilles sont plantées, la lourdeur des paupières--tout donne à M. Massard l'aspect d'un chat de crèmerie subalterne."¹⁶ Moving on to his capacities she denigrates him as a journalist ("J'ai rarement rencontré autant de persévérance jointe à si peu de vocation"), as an orator, as a witness in a duel, and finally --much more damaging--as an associate in a fight. She reveals

¹³Jeune République, September 16, 1889, "Emile Massard."

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

that when the Ballerich Brothers had invaded the Cri offices, Massard had not fought back, although he had a revolver in his pocket, but had let his colleague Duc-Quercy fight them alone and be severely wounded. Predicting that, if elected, Massard will abandon the poor's cause just as he has done with the Socialist groups to which he successively belonged, Séverine ends by saying that a few days previously Massard had written an article entitled "Bas les Masques." "Il est servi."¹⁷

Cazes is correct in saying "elle a le don du trait net et décisif, à la Saint-Simon, ou même, si l'on veut, une acuité toute barrésienne, du Barrès de Leurs Figures."¹⁸

Séverine had a remarkably acute capacity for physical perception and gift for observation. But perhaps her greatest attribute in doing these portraits was her ability to make the reader feel some of the subject's spiritual quality through her description of his physical traits.

Here is the beginning of her Portrait of the Pope:
 "Très pâle, très droit, très mince, à peine accessible à la vue, tant il reste peu de matière terrestre en cette gaine de drap blanc, Le Saint-Père siège, au fond de la pièce, dans un vaste fauteuil adossé à une console que surmonte un Christ douloureux.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Cazes, Grande Revue, July 1930, p. 111.

"La lumière . . . tombe d'aplomb sur cet admirable visage de prélat latin, en fait ressortir les méplats, les finesses de modelé, la structure 'primitive,' au sens pictural du mot: vivifiée, animée, galvanisée, pour ainsi dire, par une âme si juvénile, si vibrante, si combattive pour le bien, si compréhensive des misères morales, si pitoyable aux détresses physiques, que le regard étonne . . ."¹⁹

Perhaps her best example is the portrait of Esterhazy during his trial:

Voici l'accusé. Marie-Charles-Ferdinand Walsin-Esterhazy.

Une physionomie étrange, pas laide, pire peut-être, de condottiere florentin. Un animal de proie, à coup sûr; une tête d'oiseau, au grand nez en bec, aux cheveux courts et plats ramenés en avant, à l'ossature saillante--l'oeil embusqué profondément dans l'orbite, sous l'auvent d'épais sourcils.

Il n'est pas grand, cet oeil, sans éclat et sans expression; mais d'une vivacité de mouvement tout à fait bizarre. Il va, vient, furette sans cesse, aux aguets sous la paupière baissée, ou comme tapi derrière les cils, inquiet, au sens nerveux du mot

. . . .²⁰

There is sometimes a danger in employing this procedure, for the correlation is not always so neat. But Séverine seems to have judged correctly almost consistently. Sometimes too well for her own purposes! For in her description of General Boulanger, without meaning to do so, she revealed the General's inherent vacuity.

¹⁹Pages Mystiques, p. 120.

²⁰Vers la Lumière, pp. 7-8.

"Ce regard-là, il est impossible de le préciser. Il s'estompe à volonté quand il plaît à la pensée de rester méconnue Je les ai vus parfois vides, ses yeux, vides incommensurablement; et donnant, avec leur nuance d'azur, cette sensation que ferait éprouver une lorgnette-jumelle braquée sur le ciel et reflétant l'infini de l'éther"21

The style in these portraits is similar to that Séverine used in her reportages, clear, clean, and revealing a meticulous sense of observation expressed in a remarkably varied vocabulary. The use of the present tense is of course mandatory in a "Portrait." But, as in all her work, Séverine again uses herself as the link between the reader and the subject, and again, the sense of immediacy she achieves is a tribute to her unusual journalistic powers.

²¹Notes d'une Frondeuse, p. 47.

CHAPTER VI

SEVERINE AS EDITORIALIST

By far the largest proportion of Séverine's production even in the years until 1900--during which she carried through her most important reportages and sketched her most interesting portraits--was concentrated in her editorials. In them she discussed a broad spectrum of problems, ranging from general political and social themes to concrete cases of injustice she hoped to alleviate. This chapter will examine Séverine's views in the most important categories treated in the editorials.

It will be remembered that the years under discussion, roughly 1883 to 1900 but principally the century's final decade, were an ugly and venal period in French history--ridden by scandal, threatened by dictatorship, punctuated by anarchist violence and colored by the strong anti-Semitism that culminated in the Dreyfus Case. In many ways it bears a lively resemblance to the contemporary period, and the arguments in today's newspapers on the subject of violence are sometimes reminiscent of the discussions in the press of that era.

In all those years Séverine was to write on a plethora of subjects, but the articles divide themselves fairly easily into those relating to socialism, anarchism, feminism, "mysticism," the Boulanger Affair, anti-Semitism, and the Dreyfus Case, and, always of course, to the oppressed. Her thoughts about the arts of her time are also worthy of mention, if only in passing. It should be stressed again that Séverine wrote in her own manner, expressing her own opinion, in every newspaper for which she was an editorialist. She was not subject to censorship. Sometimes an article might be refused; she then offered it, intact, elsewhere.

A. Socialism

In the early part of the nineteenth century a number of French thinkers--among them Fourier, St. Simon, Louis Blanc and Proudhon--made highly personal observations and proposals regarding the problems and misery created by the Industrial Revolution. Their ideas, called "Utopian Socialist," made a deep impression on many thousands of workers at the time. Under Louis Philippe, these men and others continued to state their ideas, and socialism even entered the literature of the period with the works of George Sand, Eugène Sue, Lamennais and Pierre Dupont.¹ The 1848 Revolution burst out in reaction against the

¹Alexandre Zévaès, Le Socialisme en France depuis 1871 (Paris: Fasquelle, 1903), p. 5.

conditions the Socialists had sought to alleviate; although it did not last long, the idea of "The Organization of Work" it fostered made considerable headway and "left a tradition emphasizing the possibility of social transformation."² The strength of these ideas was great enough to enable them to survive the Second Empire, during which they were forced underground, and to emerge, after the 1870 defeat, in the Paris Commune.

At the Commune's end many Socialists were killed in reprisal by the Thiers Government. Others either were deported or (like Vallès) went into exile. The battered ranks were painfully rebuilt during the next decade. It was then that a new and powerful force made itself felt--Marxism. The Communist Manifesto had been issued in 1848, and in 1866 the Congress of the First International had met in Geneva; but Marxist ideas had had little or no influence on developments in the Commune. It was not until the 1870s that they took hold in France. Marx's French disciples, headed by Jules Guesde and Paul Lafargue, Marx's son-in-law, repeatedly stressed the fact that their socialism, as opposed to the French brand (from which, however, Marx had borrowed many ideas) was "scientific."

Almost from the outset there were two currents of thought in the Socialist movement, a revolutionary (Marxist)

²Harry W. Laidler, History of Socialism (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, Apollo Edition, 1968), p. 278.

and a reformist.³ The antagonism between the two sets of ideas resulted in the creation of different factions within the movement during the 1880s and 1890s. Different splits and shifts took place among the various groups before the formation in 1905 of the United Socialist Party.

In 1883, when Vallès began republishing the Cri du Peuple, there were three main groups of Socialists: the Parti Ouvrier Français, the Marxists, who maintained that the workers must be provided with a clear and precise program, based on Marx's "scientific socialism," the Fédération des Travailleurs Socialistes (known as "possibilistes" from an epithet scornfully applied to them by Guesde), who believed in an evolution toward Socialism, and were consequently more tractable and less rigid, and did not arbitrarily refuse to cooperate with the Government, and the Comité Révolutionnaire Central, who were the followers of Auguste Blanqui, the great revolutionary martyr. After Blanqui's death the Comité remained independent for some years, but eventually merged with the P.O.F. (The Anarchists had become separated from the Socialists in 1880. Their ideas will be discussed in the following section.)

³ Most of the material for this segment comes from different works by Alexandre Zévaès: L'Histoire du Socialisme et du Communisme (Paris: Editions France-Empire, 1947); Le Socialisme en France depuis 1871 (Paris: Fasquelle, 1903); and De l'introduction du Marxisme en France (Paris: Marcel Rivière et Cie, 1947); and Jean Maitron, Histoire du mouvement anarchiste en France (1880-1914) (Paris: Société Universitaire d'Édition et de Librairie, sec. ed., 1955).

Vallès hoped somehow to unite all the different groups. His editorial for the opening number of the Cri on October 28, 1883 said "Social, humain, perlé de larmes ou pailleté de rire, ouvert à tous, tribune libre, voilà ce que veut être Le Cri du Peuple."⁴ Thus he envisioned an eclectic newspaper, like himself, close to the people but "en soldat libre, sans numéro de régiment à mon képi."⁵ And, "Je ne vais pas m'enfermer dans un bivouac quand j'ai devant moi tout le champ de bataille révolutionnaire."⁶

In Zévaès's opinion, Vallès, essentially an artist, did not enjoy the study of economics required to get at the root of Marxist socialism. His socialism was "vague et sentimental."⁷ While he and Guesde had had their differences, after only a month Vallès asked the latter to write for the paper. Soon Guesde brought in a number of other collectivists and, little by little, according to Zévaès, the paper lost its eclectic character and became a really revolutionary Socialist organ.⁸ Vallès, whose condition was steadily worsening, found

⁴Zévaès, De l'introduction du Marxisme en France, p. 142.

⁵Ibid., quoting from Vallès's Lettre-Préface for Malon's book Le Nouveau Parti, p. 142.

⁶Quotation from the same Lettre-Préface given in Zévaès, Le Socialisme en France depuis 1871, p. 81.

⁷Zévaès, De l'introduction du Marxisme en France, p. 142.

⁸Ibid., p. 144.

it difficult to control them, and Séverine was still too much of a neophyte to cross swords with them. The doctrinaire attitude the paper was assuming disturbed Vallès and he wrote an article to that effect on April 11, 1885, which at the last minute he decided not to publish.⁹ Although Vallès died in 1885, according to Zévaès, the paper's influence on the working class remained considerable between 1885 and 1886.¹⁰

After Vallès's death things were quiet on the paper for a while, but in 1887 Séverine and the Guesdists fought openly over the attitude of the latter toward an Anarchist named Duval.¹¹ After Duval had committed robbery and then arson, Guesde had condemned his action in Le Cri. Séverine then published her own, fiery, editorial on the subject. While not defending robbery, she insisted that Socialists' paramount task is to defend the people, and to those who condemned them she gave the name of "Pharisiens de la Sociale." Leaders cannot dissociate themselves from the actions of those in the ranks, she maintained, but must also hold themselves responsible for them. This was the article that ended with Séverine's perhaps most unforgettable formula, "avec les pauvres, toujours."¹²

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Zévaès, Le Socialisme en France depuis 1871, p. 82.

¹¹This episode has been mentioned above,

¹²Pages Rouges, p. 14.

Guesde retaliated in Le Cri; and as described above, Séverine first decided to leave, then thought better of it; and it was Guesde and the collectivists who departed instead. In their place Séverine brought in several "Possibilists," who later resigned because of Séverine's attitude on Boulangism. (After Séverine left, the paper at one point came into the Blanquists hands, then went out of existence entirely on January 30, 1889.¹³)

As described above, Séverine's socialism was taken over entirely from Vallès, who had brought her into the camp of the "poor and disinherited." She always referred to herself as a Socialist, and Lecigne remarks "Socialiste, elle l'est jusque dans la moelle de ses os et les gouttes de son sang."¹⁴ In her good-bye article for Le Cri she announced she would be going "de droite ou de gauche, suivant les idées qui me sont chères," but had added, it will be recalled, that her things would be wrapped in a red handkerchief so that she could be recognized easily.¹⁵

But if Vallès's socialism was "sentimental," how much the more so was Séverine's, adopted not out of emotional need or formal educational experience, but simply absorbed haphazardly from a master himself unscientific, then filtered through her

¹³Zévaès, Le Socialisme en France, note, p. 82.

¹⁴Revue de Lille, April 1902, p. 502.

¹⁵Pages Rouges, p. 52.

own impulsive, undisciplined personality. She herself put herself in the category of "les révolutionnaires qui ne sont pas des théoriciens."¹⁶ And Lecigne says in this connection, "Elle n'est pas une révolutionnaire par théorie, comme un Proudhon ou un Lamennais; elle l'est plutôt par instinct."¹⁷ And he continues "Madame Séverine a peut-être réfléchi, mais je serais bien étonné qu'elle eut jamais étudié Non, ne lui parlez pas de système" ¹⁸

When she became Directrice of Le Cri, Séverine, like Vallès, stressed the need for unity among the Socialists and echoed his hope that the paper would be a forum for all the different groups. Interestingly, she added the Anarchists, who were no longer considered part of the Socialists, to the list of those she would like to see represented.¹⁹ She had already given an interview to Le Matin, soon after Vallès's death, to the same effect: the paper would not be the organ of any one doctrine but would permit all the different doctrines to be put forth and defended, in imitation of Le Matin's own formula whereby Vallès had been able to publicize his ideas.²⁰ Thus, the Cri would alternately be the interpreter of Henri

¹⁶Le Cri du Peuple, March 30, 1886, "Pour L'Anarchie."

¹⁷Revue de Lille, April 1902, p. 509.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 510.

¹⁹Le Cri du Peuple, March 30, 1886.

²⁰Le Matin, November 30, 1885.

Rocheport's "radicalisme réformiste," up through anarchism (the anarchism of Kropotkin and Elisée Reclus, not "celui des rues") and taking in collectivism, possibilism and Blanquism.

In spite of her sentimental approach, Séverine apparently devoted a good deal of thought to the problem of factionalism among the Socialists, and looked on it as a real threat to progress in combatting the issues that interested her, like poverty. In 1888 she said in a letter cited by Réforme Sociale, "Tant que les chefs du socialisme n'auront pas senti le péril de ces divisions qui, comme la gangrène, envahissent peu à peu tout le parti, tant qu'ils n'auront pas abdiqué leurs haines, comme jadis les nobles abdicèrent leurs privilèges dans la nuit du 4 août, tant qu'ils mettront leur individu au-dessus de leur idée, leur intérêt personnel au-dessus de l'intérêt commun, leur 'moi' au-dessus du 'nous,' l'état social restera le même, les pauvres resteront sans espoir--et sans pain!"²¹

Yet, notwithstanding her persistent calls for Socialist unity, after the departure from the Cri of the Parti Ouvrier Français's representatives, Guesde and Emile Massard, Séverine quarreled openly with them in her column. Moreover she seems

²¹Réforme Sociale (2^e série, t. VI), quoted in Georges Weill, Histoire du mouvement social en France (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1911), p. 365.

to have harbored a considerable amount of rancor toward Paul Lafargue, and at least two of her articles were strong attacks against him.

Séverine's grievances against Guesde and Massard were of both a personal and a political character (although the personal stemmed from the political). Some sort of charges had been trumped up against Séverine for alleged misconduct in a park with Labruyère, and Guesde and Massard had repeatedly urged her to defend herself in court. Shortly after their departure, Séverine's article reports that Millerand and Laguerre (two well-known non-P.O.F. Socialists), have dissuaded her from following their advice, because both believe that such action will result only in further damage to her reputation. "Ils y tenaient trop."²²

Séverine's accusations were probably justified; however, to be fair to Guesde, she must have been a terrible thorn in his side. With all his faults, "suspicious, dogmatic, convinced both of his rightness and his righteousness,"²³ he was devoted to the cause of Marxism, which had advanced as a result of his efforts. His fundamentally rigid temperament ("le mécanisme d'un Guesde,"²⁴ says Maitron; the metronome "qui fonctionne en

²²Le Cri du Peuple, March 21, 1887, "Procès Inutile."

²³Denis W. Brogan, The Development of Modern France (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1967), p. 292.

²⁴Maitron, op. cit., p. 24.

sa poitrine,"²⁵ remarks Séverine) must have been under deep stress from association with Séverine, not only "the boss," but so different from him, so unsystematic and unscientific, so unpolitical, so influenced by her heart rather than her head.

On the other hand, Séverine objected to Guesde and Lafargue because of their mechanical adherence to theory, and their lack of true interest in the suffering poor. In "Les Méchants Socialistes," published in Le Cri in May 1888, but written six weeks previously and then held back, she says "Je n'ai jamais rien vu de sec, de féroce, de profondément inhumain comme le coeur de certains meneurs de foule.

Ils prêchent la liberté et sont des autoritaires. Ils prêchent l'égalité, et ont le mépris des pauvres, ils prêchent la justice, et s'abritent derrière elle pour ne point pratiquer la charité.

Quant à la fraternité, bonsoir."²⁶ In "Lafargue & Cie," she hit out against Guesde and Lafargue after the election following the slayings at Fourmies, when the Marxists, along with the other Socialists, gained seats in Parliament. She dared them to answer which eventuality they would have preferred: no Fourmies or no election of Marxists. "C'est qu'ils ont le

²⁵Pages Rouges, p. 320, "De Profundis Clamavi ad Te."

²⁶Le Cri du Peuple, May 19, 1888, "Les Méchants Socialistes:"

dédain du peuple, ces politiciens, à un point qu'on ne saurait imaginer."²⁷ They consider the people only an instrument through which they can eventually come to power. "Le peuple-moyen, et non le peuple-but." She is very critical of their hatred of the other branches of Socialism. "C'est qu'ils veulent vaincre le Capital; mais le vaincre seule, d'après leur personnelle formule, leur unique procédé, le Manuel du parfait marxiste."²⁸ "Lafargue et Cie" is more of an attack on Guesde, "barnum et moteur de M. Lafargue,"²⁹ than on Lafargue himself, who is a "sous-Guesde."³⁰ But Séverine did attack Lafargue directly in a scathing and telling article in Gil Blas. Lafargue, born in Cuba, seems to have had dual nationality, and to have taken advantage of this fact to avoid military service in 1870, while pushing "la guerre à outrance"--for others, as she points out.³¹

Séverine, like many Socialists of that period, who had lived through 1870, was suspicious and "revanchist" toward the Germans. One of her grievances against the Marxists was that their "savior" was German. She makes the point very clear in "Lafargue et Cie." Why haven't they, like the anarchists,

²⁷Pages Rouges, "Lafargue et Cie," p. 252.

²⁸Ibid., p. 253.

²⁹Ibid., p. 254.

³⁰Ibid., p. 253.

³¹Gil Blas, November 20, 1891, "L'Outrancier."

attempted to erase the idea of "patrie," rather than "d'en déplacer l'axe, de transporter les dieux lares du socialisme français sur l'autre rive du Rhin, en Prusse--chez l'ennemi."³²

Nevertheless, although she called herself a "Socialist," it is not possible to place Séverine within the ideological confines of any one of the Socialist groups. She differed with each of them on at least one, sometimes more than one, of the main issues on which the factions took stands. In the matter of religion, she differed with them all, of course, for at that time, all of the groups were hostile to organized religion. On Boulangism, she seems to have agreed only with the Guesde group which said "Ni la Rue de Sèze, ni la rue Cadet," meaning they were for neither Boulanger nor La Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, which had been formed to fight the General. They actually meant what they said, however, while Séverine's statement, it is felt, was not a true reflection of her feelings at the time. Some Socialists and Blanquists joined the General, but the rest fought him.

In the Dreyfus Case, Séverine was in the fight on the Captain's side before any of the other groups, except the Allemanists (a Socialist faction founded first to oppose Boulanger), decided the issue was important enough to warrant their support. Here as always, it was the injustice to an individual that caught her interest.

³²Pages Rouges, p. 254, "Lafargue et Cie."

Séverine seems to have disagreed with all the Socialist factions, except the Allemanists, regarding the usefulness of Parliamentary representation. Proudhon's expression "la pourriture parlementaire," figures twice in her books. The Parliamentary maneuvering disgusted her. Probably one of the main attractions of Boulangism for her was the likelihood that the deputies would all have meekly followed the General (if indeed Parliament had continued to exist).

Although Socialists did not always favor the vote for women, fearing possible undue influence on them by the Church, they did propose improvement of working conditions for them at the various Party Congresses. And in 1885 the first Socialist Parliamentary group's program advocated "progressive emancipation for women."³³ On this issue, therefore, Séverine was not in the Socialist line, even though the intensity and the extent of her preoccupation with the whole problem went far deeper.

Nationalism is a delicate issue for Socialists, and the range of the different groups' attitudes was therefore wide. The Brussels International Congress of 1891 had declared that there must be no antagonism or combat of race or nationality, only the class struggle of the proletarians of every race against the capitalists of every race.³⁴ However, as previously stated,

³³Zévaès, Le Socialisme en France depuis 1871, p. 87.

³⁴Harold Weinstein, Jean Jaurès (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), p. 23.

many Socialists remembered 1870. In 1896 Millerand stated in a speech that he was ready to rally in defense of "la patrie."³⁵ And Jean Jaurès, the leading Socialist of the time, attempted to reconcile socialism and patriotism. He said in one of his articles, "Le socialisme et le prolétariat tiennent à la patrie française par toutes leurs racines."³⁶ Surprisingly, the Parti Ouvrier Français, with Guesde, supported a nation's right to defend itself. And its October 1893 Congress program stated "La France attaquée n'aurait pas de plus ardents défenseurs que les socialistes du Parti Ouvrier."³⁷

Séverine's various statements on the subject were even more contradictory than on other issues. Child of the 1870 war, she harbored a fierce resentment against the Germans, which emerged whenever there was the slightest stimulus to arouse it. In 1891, when the Germans declared the work of a French author, Paul de Kock, immoral, she rose up in fury, recalling the days when the Prussian soldiers took home everything French they could lay their hands on, she reminds the blonde feminine symbol of Germany in popular language, "Tu sais, toi,

³⁵G.D.H. Cole, A History of Socialist Thought (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1956), Vol. III, Part 1, p. 341.

³⁶Jean Jaurès, "Socialisme et Liberté" in La Revue de Paris, December 1, 1898 (collected in Vol. VI of Oeuvres de Jaurès [Paris: Editions Rieder, 1933], p. 92).

³⁷Alexandre Zévaès, Les Guesdistes (Histoire des Partis Socialistes en France) (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1911), p. 94.

là-bas, la blonde . . . tu aurais vraiment raison de ne pas tant nous la faire à la vertu! . . . On en sait de tes histoires, de tes sales histoires de moeurs; . . . et des scandales, et des concussions, et des tripotages, et des dégoûtations à remuer la pelle!"³⁸

But she was to evolve more in this area than in any other. In 1894 she was already predicting that, although it would not happen in her lifetime, or even in her children's time, one day frontiers would be abolished.³⁹ She agrees that "La Patrie; nous l'avons dans les veines,"⁴⁰ but adds that people who can see clearly can sense that one day ~~La Paix~~ La Paix, comme une aube, se levant lumineuse à l'horizon, effaçant les frontières, unissant les mortels, dans un immense élan de fraternité et d'amour."⁴¹

So great was her evolution that her complete and utter pacifism during the first World War, a period outside the chronological limits of this work, was perhaps less surprising than it might otherwise seem.

The only Socialist group with which Séverine seems to have been in accord on more than one issue was the short-lived

³⁸Gil Blas, December 22, 1891, "Histoires de Prussiens."

³⁹Pages Mystiques, pp. 202-203.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 204.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 205.

Parti Ouvrier Socialiste Révolutionnaire (known familiarly as the "Allemanists" after their leader Jean Allemane). Although they differed profoundly with her on the Boulanger issue, since the group was founded with the express mission "de mettre la classe ouvrière en garde contre le boulangisme,"⁴² they, like her, did not favor parliamentary representation,⁴³ in spite of the fact that the group had representatives in the Chamber. Like her, too, they became Dreyfusard at an early date.⁴⁴ They were also against militarism and "false patriotism."⁴⁵

As the days of her association with Le Cri receded, Séverine devoted fewer articles to Socialism or Socialists. She still thought of herself as a Socialist, however, and the dedication of a book published in 1896 indicates she was still considered as such. Serge Fidélis, the author of Le Devoir socialiste, made his dedication "A l'amie des pauvres, au continuateur attendri de Vallès, au Maître Ecrivain Séverine, cette oeuvre de foi et d'amour est humblement dédiée."⁴⁶

⁴²Zévaès, Le Socialisme en France, p. 98.

⁴³Maurice Charnay, Les Allemanistes (Histoire des Partis Socialistes en France) (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1912), p. 84.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 93.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 61.

⁴⁶Serge Fidélis, Le Devoir socialiste, 2nd ed. (Paris: Chamuel, 1896).

While her activity on behalf of individual victims of the social organization never wavered, her interest in the political manifestations of Socialism dwindled. Toward the century's end she was preoccupied with other issues, in particular feminism and the Dreyfus Case. After World War I, her interest revived briefly when she joined the Communist Party. But essentially it seems evident that she was neither interested in nor persuaded of the usefulness of political action.

B. Anarchism

A Frenchman, Pierre Proudhon, is the acknowledged intellectual father of anarchism. Not only did he give the word "anarchy" its precise meaning, "état sociétaire harmonieux résultant naturellement de la suppression de tout appareil gouvernemental,"⁴⁷ but many of the Anarchists' basic theories stem from his thinking. There was, however no effective anarchist "movement" in Proudhon's time, and it was not until the formation of the First International that the first anarchist groups emerged as a result of the conflict that opposed "authoritarians" against "anti-authoritarians." It was only in 1876 that Bakunin's disciples adopted the definitive name

⁴⁷Maitron, op. cit., p. 18.

of "anarchists."⁴⁸

For a short period the Anarchists were integrated into the Socialist movement. In 1872, however, the followers of Bakunin, the movement's Russian spokesman, were expelled from the First International.⁴⁹ In November 1880 the definitive break came between French socialists and anarchists at the Le Havre Party Congress, and the rupture became official in 1881.⁵⁰

The fundamental creed of anarchism is individual liberty, combined with hatred of authority. "Anarchism as a philosophical doctrine sets out from a root-and-branch opposition to all forms of society which rest on a basis of coercive authority."⁵¹ Nevertheless, within the framework of this basic doctrine there were still two sorts of anarchists: "the individualists who wanted to do without social organization as well as without the State, and the collectivists who believed in the virtues of non-coercive association and cooperation."⁵² Both groups believed the present State must disappear.

In the 1880s and 1890s France was the principal center of anarchism. Because of its insistence on liberty and freedom

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 20.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 44.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 108.

⁵¹Cole, op. cit., Vol. III, part 2, p. 337.

⁵²Ibid.

from authority, anarchism was not a "coherent political or philosophical movement,"⁵³ and there was no centralized party. The various groups were autonomous, and there was no national organization until the eve of World War I.⁵⁴ But the doctrine had both its theoreticians, those who believed in "passive waiting for the millennium,"⁵⁵ and those who, inspired sometimes by the latter's writings, or by their own ineffably miserable existence, practiced "propaganda by the deed," or terrorism. There was a great gulf between the two groups. Actually, terrorism was never the belief of any large numbers,⁵⁶ and police records of the time show, in all, only 1,000 Anarchist militants and 4,500 sympathizers.⁵⁷ But there were 100,000 more, who were prepared to support the Anarchists passively.⁵⁸ Among these were many artists and literary people who, though not Anarchists, were drawn by the emphasis on freedom inherent in the anarchist ideology.⁵⁹

⁵³James Joll, The Anarchists (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964), p. 173.

⁵⁴George Woodcock, Anarchism (Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1964), p. 296.

⁵⁵Daniel Guérin, Anarchism, From Theory to Practice (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), p. 76.

⁵⁶Cole, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 317.

⁵⁷Maïtron, op. cit., p. 124.

⁵⁸Cole, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 317.

⁵⁹Woodcock, op. cit., p. 275.

Anarchism's various implications were "explored in France "with a passion and a logical extremity rare elsewhere."⁶⁰ From Proudhon until 1881 the theoretical basis was set forth, and the anarchists moved from Proudhon's mutualist ideas to Bakunin's collectivism. After 1881, when the separation with the Socialists became final, anarchism had its own press and through its spokesmen, like Prince Kropotkin, Elisée Reclus and Louise Michel, the Commune's "Vierge Rouge," became well-known. From 1892 to 1894 "c'est une véritable épidémie terroriste qui se développe en France,"⁶¹ in a "period of dramatic gesture and the cult of romantic violence."⁶² There was a series of sensational terrorist acts culminating in the assassination of the French President, Sadi Carnot, in June 1894. Eleven explosions by dynamite had taken place, killing nine persons and wounding more, as well as four assassinations.⁶³ A wave of fear swept over the country, somewhat similar but more intense than that experienced around 1970 in the United States. The police and the courts attempted to deal with the anarchists, the former often torturing them and the latter meting out very heavy sentences.⁶⁴ Laws were passed, so repressive

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Maitron, op. cit., p. 201.

⁶²Woodcock, op. cit., p. 297.

⁶³Ibid., p. 306.

⁶⁴See chart on Maitron, op. cit., p. 202.

they were known as "les lois scélérates,"⁶⁵ and the government put thirty Anarchists and sympathizers on trial in August 1894. The jury failed to convict them, however.

The terrorist acts were always performed by individuals and were never the result of group decision. The perpetrators were almost never motivated by personal revenge, but acted either to avenge general persecution of Anarchists or harsh judgments against those who had performed the terrorist acts.⁶⁶ Thus, Emile Henry avenged Vaillant's dynamiting of the Palais Bourbon by throwing a bomb into the Café Terminus. And to avenge his and Vaillant's execution, Caserio assassinated Carnot.

The Anarchists met with complete hostility from the Socialist groups, particularly during the terrorist period.⁶⁷ Violent incidents occurred at the Congresses when the anarchists tried to attend, and they were expelled from several of them.⁶⁸ Goguel says that the Anarchists' theory of "propaganda through the deed" was completely foreign to the Socialists.⁶⁹ Although Jules Guesde had once been an Anarchist himself,⁷⁰ he attacked the terrorists in very strong invective, characterizing

⁶⁵Woodcock, op. cit., p. 314.

⁶⁶Cole, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 334.

⁶⁷Maitron, op. cit., p. 271.

⁶⁸Guérin, op. cit., p. 76.

⁶⁹Goguel, op. cit., p. 103.

⁷⁰Maitron, op. cit., p. 271.

Vaillant's bombing at the Palais Bourbon, for instance, as "monstrueux, tout simplement. C'est l'acte d'un fou."⁷¹

After Carnot's assassination, the terrorist aspect of the Anarchist movement died down. Beginning in 1895, the Anarchists found a way to put some of their ideas into practice through "syndicalism," thus "diverting the currents of anti-State opinion into more constitutional channels."⁷²

Trade Unions had arisen after 1870 simultaneously with the Socialist groups, but had insisted on maintaining their independence.⁷³ In 1895, a year after the assassination of Carnot, the Confédération Générale du Travail was formed.⁷⁴ Furthermore, now, under the leadership of the Anarchist Fernand Pelloutier, who headed the Bourses du Travail, a trade union organization devoted to self-help and education, the Anarchists who were collectivist joined the trade unions and gradually took over the leadership.⁷⁵ (In fact, Jaurès accused the Anarchists of having transformed the trade unions into revolutionary anarchist groups.⁷⁶) The movement, called syndicalism

⁷¹Ibid., p. 223, quoting Le Journal of December 10, 1893.

⁷²Cole, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 336.

⁷³Ibid., p. 329.

⁷⁴Barbara W. Tuchman, The Proud Tower (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 96.

⁷⁵Cole, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 329.

⁷⁶Guérin, Anarchism, p. 76.

after the French word for trade union, reached its height in the decade between 1900 and 1910.⁷⁷

The trade unions were opposed to the Socialists' parliamentary policy and in its stead favored a more revolutionary industrial stand and direct action, especially in the form of the general strike.⁷⁸

According to Cole, the great single influence in the trade unions was Proudhon.⁷⁹ And since many general Anarchist ideas are also attributable to Proudhon, it is now relevant to examine the substance of his ideas and their application insofar as they relate to Séverine's thinking and activity.

Proudhon's statements are frequently contradictory, so that it is difficult to fix on one basic ideology. It does, however, seem unquestionable that he was averse to political action, and in its place stressed the need for action in the social and economic area.⁸⁰ For him, "Le vrai problème à résoudre n'est pas en réalité le problème politique, c'est le problème économique."⁸¹ Consequently, Proudhon advocated

⁷⁷Cole, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 329.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 134.

⁸⁰Maurice Prélôt, L'Evolution politique des socialistes français (Paris: Editions Spes, undated but 1938 or 1939), p. 63.

⁸¹Proudhon, Du Principe fédératif, quoted in Maitron, op. cit., p. 37.

absention from voting, indeed opposed universal suffrage.⁸²

The anarchists also favored abstention from voting and rejected universal suffrage. In fact, this was the crucial point that, according to Bakunin, "sépare les socialistes révolutionnaires non seulement des républicains radicaux, mais encore de toutes les écoles des socialistes doctrinaires et autoritaires."⁸³

It is obvious that, for the same basic reason--belief in the unimportance of political action--the Anarchists refused to put up candidates for Parliament.

The same attitudes were dominant in the trade unions.⁸⁴ In fact, the latter put their entire emphasis on direct action. Moreover they too opposed the Socialists' parliamentary policy (in 1905, when the Parti Socialiste Unifié was created out of the merger of the different Socialist groups).

The Anarchists' proposals in the realm of economics stem in good part from Proudhon's mutualist ideas, which were also adopted by the trade unions.

Proudhon's statements about patriotism and nationalism are also contradictory. Although he was a "convinced internationalist" and "a hater of states and frontiers," he was also "passionate regionalist" who loved its land and its traditions."⁸⁵

⁸²Prélot, op. cit., p. 40.

⁸³Quoted in Maitron, op. cit., p. 457.

⁸⁴Cole, op. cit., Vol. III, part 1, p. 356.

⁸⁵Woodcock, op. cit., p. 109.

Although violently antagonistic to the State, the anarchists acknowledged that love of one's native country is a completely natural sentiment.⁸⁶ They questioned the ends to which it has been put, however: patriotism has become the cult of the state, "un reflet du culte divin."⁸⁷ For that reason they were anti-militarist, and on several occasions they formed anti-war groups that also opposed the army and bourgeois patriotism. With regard to military service, they counseled either desertion or, if conscription was accepted, disobedience on the conscript's part.⁸⁸ (In spite of a history of complete opposition to war, characterized by various manifestos calling for insurrection if war were declared, the anarchists were utterly powerless in 1914.)⁸⁹

But the Anarchists did not always take the path marked out by Proudhon. Again taking into account the contradictory character of his utterances, Proudhon changed his mind about the desirability of revolution. In a letter to Marx he stated his opposition to bringing about social reform through revolutionary action.⁹⁰ In this attitude he was not followed by the

⁸⁶Maïtron, op. cit., pp. 346-347.

⁸⁷From Bakunin's "Lettre aux Internationaux du Jura," quoted in Maïtron, op. cit., p. 347.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 348.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 353.

⁹⁰Prélot, op. cit., p. 40.

Anarchists who, like the Marxists, believed the existing State must be overthrown. Nor did they agree with his ideas on religion. Although he believed in separation of Church and State, Proudhon was a Deist, even, in a certain sense a Christian.⁹¹ Like all the Socialists and Marxists, however, the Anarchists opposed religion and the Church as an instrument of exploitation. Furthermore, Proudhon had an extremely low opinion of women's capacities. "Il n'est guère d'écrivain, sauf peut-être les docteurs en théologie qui aient, plus que Proudhon, rabaissé la femme."⁹² According to Proudhon, since woman was unproductive by nature, her role was to be man's slave. Here too, the Anarchists did not follow his precepts. Through his discussion of the Anarchists' various ideas, Maitron implies that the Anarchists favored equality of the sexes; one of their reasons for opposing marriage as an institution was the enslavement of the woman to her husband that it authorizes.⁹³

Jules Vallès, Séverine's political mentor, does not seem to have made any direct statements himself with regard to the Anarchists. Séverine, however, in an article published in Le Cri du Peuple about a year after his death, stated that Vallès had believed the Anarchists worthy of his respect and

⁹¹Ibid., p. 34.

⁹²Maurice Dommanget, Proudhon (Paris: Société Universitaire d'Édition et de Librairie, 1950), p. 46.

⁹³Maitron, op. cit., p. 468.

assistance.⁹⁴ A recent study of Vallès's political vocabulary would seem to indicate a predisposition in the author toward anarchism in his "dislike of authority, his refusal to play the political game, and his individual combat in the social area."⁹⁵ In addition, a preeminent authority on Vallès is of the definite opinion that Vallès's thinking was Proudhonian rather than Marxist.⁹⁶

While there is little concrete evidence for Vallès, a good deal of material is available regarding Séverine's attitude toward anarchism and the anarchists. Almost all the articles in En Marche are about Anarchists or anarchism. There are portraits of Jean Grave, Elisée Reclus, and other lesser-known Anarchists both French and foreign. One whole section is devoted to l'Année Rouge (of terror). Pages Rouges, Séverine's earlier book, includes a portrait of Louise Michel, and a long final article in which Séverine tried to come to terms with the terrorism after the dynamiting of the Restaurant Véry. Furthermore, although socialism as a political movement seemed to interest her less after she left the Cri du Peuple, the same was not true of anarchism. En Marche was published in 1896;

⁹⁴Le Cri du Peuple, March 30, 1886, "Pour L'Anarchie."

⁹⁵Roger Bellet, "Vallès à la recherche de son vocabulaire politique" in Europe, June-July-August 1968, p. 124.

⁹⁶Private conversations with Gaston Gille in 1970 and 1971.

and besides the articles it contains, she wrote others on the subject of anarchism that she did not include in the book. Finally, she continued to write, think, and act on behalf of Anarchists throughout her life.

It will be recalled that Séverine hoped to include the Anarchists among the contributors to the "Tribune Libre" she hoped to make of Le Cri, in spite of the split between the groups that had taken place in 1880. Early in 1886 she published "Pour L'Anarchie," in which she put forward the same idea. One of Le Cri's editors had publicly denied that Le Cri was an anarchist paper. Contradicting him, Séverine says that anarchism is "une des quatre grandes fractions du parti auquel nous avons l'honneur d'appartenir," and claims that (as Vallès had said), "cette opinion proscrite . . . a droit à notre appui et à notre respect."⁹⁷ She explains that, although she is only a woman, her instinct puts her on their side. The Cri is Anarchist, she insists, just as it is Collectivist with Guesde, Blanquist with Goullé, Republican with Maunier, and Independent with Massard and others. If the Possibilists consent, she hopes the paper to become Possibilist too, and she would be happy if Kropotkin (one of the chief Anarchists would consent to write for it, too.

A year and a half later Séverine, in an article called "Anarchie" describes the last hours of the four Chicago

⁹⁷Le Cri du Peuple, March 30, 1886, "Pour L'Anarchie."

anarchists. This article becomes the "Préambule" for En Marche, minus a paragraph summing up the fate of Anarchists who have suffered for their beliefs that ended "Je te salue, ô doctrine qui fournit le monde de captifs et de martyrs."⁹⁸

Séverine frankly admired the Anarchists. In a Gil Blas article of 1890, she admits to having known a great many of them over the past five years, including all those who have recently been put in jail. Of all the Socialist groups, it is this handful of men of which she has the best memories and for which she has the greatest respect. Why? Because of the sincerity of their beliefs and the evidence of their courage. They deserve more than the ignorant scorn they receive, she maintains, for they want nothing for themselves, don't wish to run for office, will not be led by anyone. Perhaps so as not to frighten off her readers, the rest of the article is humorous. Séverine explains that one reason for her liking the Anarchists is because of the profound terror they inspire in the other Socialists, who know they are different. As a result orthodox Socialists have invented a way of dealing with the anarchists: "Pour tout bon marxiste, qui dit anarchiste dit mouchard." Her article ends with an account of a visit from an Anarchist, who, thinking to please her, came with "des pommes de terre un peu brunes, mais appétissantes tout de même." It turned out, though, they were not potatoes, but bombs.

⁹⁸Le Cri du Peuple, November 15, 1887, "Anarchie."

Terrified, Séverine ordered him to take them away. "Il remet-tait ses pommes de terre dans sa poche et s'en allait, pas fâché, mais un peu vexé." By her use of language, she has succeeded in turning the would-be terrorist into a harmless little boy, and so diminishing the threat. She ends "Pauvres anarchos! On les boucle, on les bouscule, on les dénigre, on les traque, on les condamne à tire-larigot--mais c'est tout de même des bons garçons!"⁹⁹

Her admiration is more direct and earnest when she speaks of the two Anarchist leaders to whom she devoted articles in En Marche, Jean Grave and Elisée Reclus. Of Grave she says that his dominant traits are "Simplicity and Sincerity." Although he is an atheist, he is closer than many orthodox Christians to the evangelical doctrine, says she, because he will fight only to avenge the suffering of another. "Ce mécréant est un juste."¹⁰⁰ Of Reclus she says he is "une âme probe."¹⁰¹

In the articles on these men, as well as in those devoted to other anarchists--some unjustly condemned like the Spaniards in Barcelona, and Cyvoct, the Lyonnais journalist imprisoned for a deed he did not perform, just for his opinions--others, terrorists like Vaillant and Henry, Séverine attempts not only

⁹⁹Gil Blas, May 2, 1890, "Anarchos."

¹⁰⁰En Marche, pp. 254-255.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 192.

to give the public an insight into their reasoning but also to rebut the public's false opinions about anarchism in general. She never does so directly, but always in an off-handed way. In the Reclus article she asks who are these people, what are their thoughts. It is difficult to find out. "De là, cette exécution instinctive contre tous les êtres d'élite, contempteurs de l'ordre établi." Saying that France has no better geographer than Reclus, yet prefers to have his chair empty than him in it, she concludes "Après tout, peut-être ont-ils raison, ces pleutres! Quand on a envisagé cette face d'apôtre, écouté cette sereine parole . . . les esprits les plus prévenus . . . pensent soudain que c'est là un anarchiste--et restent songeurs!"¹⁰²

In "Leur Pitié," dedicated to Laurent Tailhade (he who invented a superb, admiring quip on hearing of the Palais Bourbon incident, then lost an eye in the bombing of the Restaurant Foyot), she talks of the recent terrorism in Barcelona. And tells her opinion of Anarchists, explaining that anarchism is liberty, that "le propre de la doctrine est, justement, de laisser à chacun l'indépendance de son tempérament, de son caractère de son jugement." That, she claims, gives it its remarkable power and mysterious attraction. "De là, ce personnel chaotique, où les éléments les plus divers, les forces les plus contradictoires, les courants les plus

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 195.

opposés, se rencontrent, s'assemblent, se combinent"103

In her article about Henry, Séverine denies that the anarchists are utopian. "Pourquoi? Savez-vous qu'à être si péremptoire, si hostile à toute conciliation . . . vous leur donneriez presque raison à ces désespérés."¹⁰⁴ She refutes the notion that the answer to the terror is "repression by terror." The anarchists are not afraid to die. "Voyez, dans tous les Etats d'Europe, les récentes suppressions d'anarchistes, pas un qui ait demandé grâce ou lâchement fini!"

In addition to giving the reason she admires them and shows why public opinion is wrong about them, Séverine calls attention to the harsh treatment, even torture, the anarchists receive at the police's hands, when under questioning, as well as the outrageously severe sentences they receive in court. In "Pour un Lapin," she tells of an anarchist who had been caught poaching a rabbit and who was sentenced to death.¹⁰⁵ She often compares, giving exact facts, the much harsher sentences anarchists receive with those meted out to non-anarchists for the same type of offense.

Quite a few articles, or parts of articles in En Marche detail the miserable conditions under which people live and which, in Séverine's opinion, give rise to these acts of terror.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 112.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 187.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 87.

The remedy for anarchism is not to cut off heads, but to try "d'autres choses: d'un état social plus humain plus juste; de concessions à la faim des pauvres; d'une répartition moins arbitraire des biens--de ce que Jésus le subversif, Jésus le supplicié, appelait tout uniment l'amour du prochain."¹⁰⁶ She asks for pity towards all of the criminals, particularly for Vaillant, who deserves to be pardoned. "Désormais, dans cette lutte entre la bombe et la guillotine, ne répétez pas, ne dites jamais qu'il n'y a plus de place pour la pitié."¹⁰⁷

At the beginning of the terroristic period, when the Restaurant Véry was bombed, Séverine had to come to terms with the fact that people had died as a result of the deed. In an article entitled "De Profundis Clamavi ad Te" she tries to decide what should be her attitude. "Pour la première fois me voici hésitante, troublée, craignant l'erreur, indécise jusqu'aux larmes devant les innocentes victimes qu'on ramasse . . . Aujourd'hui il y a du sang versé. Et je n'ose plus, je ne sais plus . . . Mon maître est mort . . . je suis sans guide et sans boussole."¹⁰⁸ As she agonizes, different voices speak to her out of the shadows: suffering children, suffering women, suffering old people, men crippled and mutilated by the machinery where they worked, and the young and healthy unemployed.

¹⁰⁶En Marche, p. 190.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 182.

¹⁰⁸Pages Rouges, p. 321.

Finally, those in power speak, telling the people there is no after-life, there is no eternal soul. "La Matière est tout, la Matière est Dieu."¹⁰⁹ And Séverine's last comment is "Alors?" The decision she has come to is apparent in the dedication, the same with which she ended her article on Duval "Avec les pauvres toujours, malgré leurs erreurs, malgré leurs fautes . . . malgré leurs crimes."

Having reached that decision, Séverine then devotes a good part of En Marche to attacking the hypocrisy of those who wring their hands over the bloodshed and death wrought by the terrorists. She cites the many instances in the past, including the Revolution, when the use of terror by those in power has been sanctioned.

Séverine attempts to explain to the public why the terrorists perform these acts. "Et le but des compagnons, je le distingue nettement, même dans cette affaire du Terminus, incompréhensible au premier abord. Ils escomptent la pression de l'opinion sur les pouvoirs publics, pour contraindre ceux-ci à améliorer le sort des misérables. La compassion demeurant sans effet sur l'égoïsme des masses, ils en appellent à la terreur."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 326.

¹¹⁰ En Marche, p. 182.

A particular target is the bourgeoisie, "Les Satisfaits":¹¹¹ And she takes special satisfaction in pointing out that the leaders of the revolution to come will be the sons of the bourgeoisie. "Comment en sont-ils venus là? Qui les y a poussés? Ils ont, sans qu'on sache pourquoi, renoncé à leurs prérogatives, à leurs privilèges--étranges adolescents" ¹¹² The parallel with the situation in France in May 1968, when the leaders in the "events" were predominantly sons of the bourgeoisie is striking. For the first time Séverine here includes herself among those attracted to anarchism. "Saisissez donc cela! Saisissez donc le vent qui nous pousse, nous, génération en pleine force, nous, qui avons un cerveau et un coeur, vers l'enfer des miséreux." . . . "Nous avons la foi autant que les premier chrétiens Nous croyons que le monde est mal fait Eh! bien, nous autres qui n'avons pas faim; qui n'avons pas froid . . . nous entendons rester, quoi qu'il arrive, quoi qu'on risque. Ouvrez vos codes et vos geôles . . . nous sommes prêts. Notre pensée restera libre et marchera de l'avant."¹¹³

Séverine has been polemical before, but the style in En Marche, and especially in this article, is more revolutionary, more apocalyptic, than in her other works. At the

¹¹¹Ibid., pp. 71-72.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 169.

¹¹³Ibid., pp. 168-169.

same time, as has been pointed out by her critics and mentioned above, it is more metaphoric, wordier and more difficult to comprehend.

As Séverine herself said, she wrote with her "nerves," so that it is not possible to say whether she was really an anarchist. In all probability, since besides being a disciple of Vallès who refused to wear any badge on his cap, she tended through her own character to be completely independent, she was not. Nevertheless, it seems clear that the anarchists were the group with which she felt the closest ties, and whom she most resembled in thinking and temperament. Not that she shared their opinions on all the important issues. But on the fundamental point, contempt and scorn for political action in favor of emphasis on economic and social action, she did see eye to eye with them. Her aversion to the vote and to parliamentary representation and action ~~was shown below~~ in the section on feminism. Again in En Marche, she quotes Proudhon on "La pourriture parlementaire."¹¹⁴

Séverine's brand of patriotism was acceptable to the anarchists. Eventually she came around to their thinking about the need for the disappearance of frontiers. "C'est l'avenir cela, croyez-le Alors, pourquoi tant de fureur contre qui annonce cette ère bénie."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴En Marche, p. 9.

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 103.

Like the anarchists, Séverine called for a revolution without ever specifying how it would come about. She repeated that the fruit was rotten and would eventually fall.

In the matter of conscription, she did not, as the anarchists did, counsel desertion or disobedience, but she did devote many of her columns to the difficulties faced by individual recruits during their army service, and request help for these young soldiers.

While the anarchists eventually came into the Dreyfusard camp, Séverine preceded them considerably in her support for Dreyfus.

The only issue on which she differed basically from the anarchists was the matter of religion. She believed firmly in God, and frequently wrote admiringly in her column of various clerical personalities of the day.¹¹⁶

Although Proudhon thought God was evil, he did acknowledge His existence. So that on this question Séverine is closer to Proudhon than to the Anarchists. Of course there was a great gulf between them on the subject of feminism. But the two were temperamentally alike, it seems, in being able to contain within themselves the essence of many contradictions.

Although none of the critics writing about Séverine has stressed this aspect of her thinking, Lecache does report that the editor of Le Journal Fernand Xau (Vallès's old friend)

¹¹⁶See section on "mysticism" as well as Séverine, Pages Mystiques.

"craignait les coups de boutoir de 'l'anarchiste.'"¹¹⁷ Lecache also prints a delightful exchange of letters between Séverine and Zola with regard to the Anarchists. Zola reproached Séverine for leaving out the last two lines of an article on the terrorism in which he had written: "Mais elles sont abominables, ces bombes qui tuent les pauvres bougres Ainsi, il m'est défendu d'avoir un cri de pitié? Vous m'étonnez." To which Séverine replied; agreeing that the poor were victims of these attacks. "Les grands, les bourgeois restent à l'abri, les bombes ne les atteignent jamais, et c'est pourtant contre eux que les anarchistes prétendent les diriger. Coppée a raison de le dire, c'est à la fois un crime et une bêtise."¹¹⁸

In the last analysis Séverine belonged to the group described by Cole: "many Anarchists who would never have resorted to killing were prepared to justify it theoretically as a means of protesting against the entire authoritarian system."¹¹⁹

Although Séverine was really not in favor of terrorism, it might be said that she, like the anarchists had her own "propaganda by the deed." This was her magnificent charitable effort, her own version of the "Neediest Cases," her Carnet.

¹¹⁷Lecache, op. cit., p. 167.

¹¹⁸Ibid., pp. 124-125.

¹¹⁹Cole, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 317.

It was individual action in the social area of the kind so highly prized by the Anarchists. But Séverine did not destroy, merely tried to build on what was already existing.

G. Feminism

In 1914 Séverine was to declare during one of her speeches that she considered her life "like a great tapestry, the four corners of which represented the struggles against alcohol, prostitution, war, and misery, especially female misery. In the chronological period under analysis, however, the four corners had not yet emerged. The only one already as visible as it was to remain was the struggle against "la misère" and its subdivision, "la misère féminine."

In fact, feminism in all its aspects was one of Séverine's deepest concerns, inter-related with her ideas on socialism and anarchism, and closely involved with her feelings about all the oppressed. Her ideas on the subject were in some cases possibly among her most original. Certainly they had their roots deepest in her own bitter personal experience, and were the direct fruit of her own observations on the life of her time. They are not easily pigeon-holed as "progressive" or "reactionary," however. On the economic and social issue history is just now catching up with her; on the political aspect, her stand was more timid, for two reasons possibly. One is that editorialists are seldom

very bold, for they cannot frontally attack the beliefs and prejudices of the public. The second, and by far the more important in the case of Séverine, who showed so much courage elsewhere, is that on the issue of feminism, as on the political issue, she was influenced by the ideas of Proudhon and the anarchists.

It must always be kept in mind, however, that there are contradictions in the work of an editorialist. Journalists follow day-by-day events, as well as their own impulses, with the result that the editorials reflect the changeability and variability of a personality. In the case of an editorialist with a long literary life, there may be wide differences of opinion and an evolution of thought in the work produced at different times of his life.

By now it is a truism that women have been a "minority group" since the beginning of time. The history of French women has several paradoxically interesting points to distinguish it. On the one hand, noble women were not discriminated against in feudal times. Some fought alongside their husbands during the Crusades. Those who stayed home administered the domains. Some women were even allowed to be delegates to the Provincial Assemblies.¹²⁰ In the age of chivalry it was women who presided at the courts of love where complicated questions of love and

¹²⁰Léon Abensour, Histoire générale du féminisme (Paris: Delagrave, 1921), p. 100.

honor were debated. Simultaneously women like Eleanor of Aquitania were at their courts sponsoring the creation of great literary works in which, unlike the earlier Chansons de Gestes, women and love had an important place.--On the other hand, at the same time, women at the other end of the social and economic scale had no rights.

As early as the twelfth century France had its first celebrated female writer in the person of Marie de France. By the fifteenth century the poet Christine de Pisan was able to earn her livelihood through her writing and thus become France's first woman of letters. Christine was France's first feminist; in various works she defended her sex against the calumnies generally heaped on it, and she also spoke out vigorously in La Cité des Dames on behalf of education for women,¹²¹ for which she claimed they were as apt as men.

In contrast to literature for the nobility, throughout the Middle Ages literature for the middle and lower classes portrayed women in an unfavorable light. Nor were Montaigne and Rabelais in the sixteenth century very well disposed toward women. Surprisingly, Montaigne's adopted daughter, Mademoiselle de Gournay, had strongly feminist ideas, expressed in two essays. In Griefs des Dames, Mademoiselle de Gournay railed at men because they would not discuss with women under pretext of

¹²¹Alice K. Welch, Of Six Mediaeval Women (London: Macmillan & Co., 1913), p. 139.

courtesy nor even read works published by women. In L'Egalité des Hommes et des Femmes she demanded equal education for men and women and also insisted on the right of women to fill any position. The right to vote, however, was not included.¹²²

In the seventeenth century women opened literary salons. The discussions of literature and other matters that took place were part of an enterprise by women for refinement of the males and the subduing of their desires and urges. Some of the précieuses were determinedly feminist. One need only read Molière however, to be aware of the derision the "femmes savantes" encountered. Yet two of the most illustrious writers of the century were women: Madame de Lafayette and Madame de Sévigné.

High-born ladies of the eighteenth century continued to hold their salons where the great literary men of the period met. At least one of them, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, was feminist in outlook. But on the whole the philosophers of the Enlightenment were not ardent feminists. With the exception of Rousseau, however, they recognized the injustice of women's situation. One of Voltaire's disciples, the celebrated mathematician Condorcet, put forth the first argument in 1790 in favor of political rights for women in his work L'Admission

¹²²Anna Adele Chenot, "Marie de Gournay, Feminist and Friend of Montaigne" (Poet Lore, XXXIV [Boston, 1923], 66).

des Femmes au droit de la Cité.¹²³ In his work Condorcet successfully refuted all the prejudices of the preceding centuries concerning women's basic inequality, and argued that women have the same qualities as men and should therefore enjoy the same rights as men.

Yet, in spite of Condorcet's appeals and the fact that the Revolution liberated French men, the Constituante granted no corresponding change to women.¹²⁴ During the Revolution, however, for the first time bourgeois and working women began to act on their own behalf in the different "Clubs."¹²⁵ In spite of the natural timidity and shyness of French women, a pattern for the future began to be set. And in the early nineteenth century the feminist movement was to receive impetus through the ideas of the Utopian Socialists Saint-Simon and Fourier, both of whom made a predominant place for women in their new society. Nevertheless, because both of them advocated free love, feminism became associated with immorality in the minds of many.¹²⁶ Proudhon in particular

¹²³See "The First Essay on the Political Rights of Women," a translation by Dr. Alice Drysdale Vickery of this work by Condorcet (Letchworth: Garden City Press, Ltd., 1907).

¹²⁴Abensour, op. cit., p. 197.

¹²⁵Ibid., pp. 200-201.

¹²⁶Marguerite Thibert, Le Féminisme dans le Socialisme (Paris: Marcel Giard, 1926), pp. 218-229.

criticized their ideas in Le Pornocratie. Unlike the other Socialists, Proudhon was rabidly anti-feminine. Convinced of women's basic inferiority, he had even worked out the exact ratio of their worth in relation to man's: 8 to 27!¹²⁷ Two women were bold enough to attack him for his ideas: Jenny d'Héricourt and Juliette Lamber (the latter was to become Juliette Adam, the well-known feminist and influential editor).

The cause of women was advanced in the early nineteenth century by three women writers and by several active feminists. At the turn of the century Madame de Staël was one of the precursors of the romantic movement in France. That movement proclaimed "le droit à l'amour" and justified passion per se. This idea was clearly exemplified in the works of George Sand. Madame d'Agoult, writing under the name of Daniel Stern, was the author, of among other works, an excellent Histoire de la Révolution de 1848. Yet none of the three were actively feminist. Madame de Staël, while deploring women's lack of civil and social rights, was not a militant.¹²⁸ George Sand's feminism as expressed in her novels was based on her personal experience and was limited to claiming women's right to be freed from an onerous marriage and to lead a free sentimental

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 178.

¹²⁸ Madelyn Gutwirth, "Madame de Staël, Rousseau, and the Woman Question" in PMLA, LXXXVI (January 1971), 101.

life.¹²⁹ She had little feeling for the difficulties of the working woman. When she was invited by La Voix des Femmes to run for office in 1848, her refusal was cutting.¹³⁰ Although Madame d'Agoult was not a militant either, she (unlike George Sand)¹³¹ did have contact with Flora Tristan, as well as with Jeanne Deroin, two activists.¹³²

The Second Republic's Constitution also refused women the vote. In 1849 Jeanne Deroin, a former school-teacher, and a happily married woman, braved scorn and ridicule by campaigning for election to the Assemblée Législative.¹³³ After much difficulty she succeeded in having her name placed on the voting list, but garnered only fifteen votes in all.¹³⁴

Flora Tristan was both a feminist and a Socialist.¹³⁵ Constantly turning over in her mind the two different questions of how to emancipate women and how at the same time to improve the lot of the working class, she finally synthesized

¹²⁹Thibert, op. cit., p. 265.

¹³⁰Ibid., p. 275.

¹³¹Ibid.

¹³²Ethel Sanieel Brook, The Social and Political Ideas of Comtesse d'Agoult (Daniel Stern), Columbia University Doctoral Dissertation, 1969 (unpublished), pp. 171-172.

¹³³Abensour, op. cit., p. 220.

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 221.

¹³⁵Thibert, op. cit., p. 280.

the two. Her solution was to uplift the working class through the rehabilitation, on all levels, of the working woman.¹³⁶

In some aspects of her life and thought Flora Tristan reminds one of Séverine. She too was beautiful and had an unhappy marriage. She too knew the isolation of what she called the "paria" (the woman alone, without a legal protector, deprived of her rights). There the similarity ends, for Flora Tristan was much more of a theoretician than Séverine. She traveled throughout France and also abroad extensively lecturing and seeking the answers to the problems she observed. One authority on feminism and socialism believes that, if Flora Tristan had not died prematurely, the French labor unions might have developed differently. If, as she had intended, they had taken in women as well as men, the women workers would not have been paid such low wages that in themselves constituted a threat to the men in the unions.¹³⁷

Thus, up to this point, France was not very innovative in legislation in favor of women. On the other hand, women played a considerable role in French history and a number of them had expressed a distinctly feminine point of view.

Women were shy, however, about claiming a role in politics. Deep down they accepted men's contention that to demand a bigger role, to go into politics to claim it, is

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 298.

¹³⁷Ibid., pp. 311-312.

vulgar, goes against feminine charm and refinement. Men claimed that women's means of action should be through love and sex, and through motherhood, that women's role is to be an angel of tenderness, pity, and mercy. And it was a long while before women rejected that image of themselves.

During the Second Empire feminist activity--along with all political activity--went into a decline. It was not until the last years of the Empire that organized feminist activity revived. When it was finally in full swing during the Third Republic it moved in two separate directions, the political and the social and economic, with different leaders in each of the areas.¹³⁸

In 1868, Léon Richer, a man who devoted his life to the cause of feminism, founded a weekly newspaper called Le Droit des Femmes. He and Maria Deraismes, the first woman admitted into Freemasonry, consistently advocated, in the magazine and in the parent organization, the cause of civil rights, social justice and better education for women. The magazine never demanded the vote for women. It is given credit for several feminist achievements, including the law on secondary education for women in 1881 and the divorce law in 1884. It was the first to suggest a law on the "recherche de la paternité" (first introduced in 1870, but finally voted only in 1912!).¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Abensour, op. cit., p. 263.

¹³⁹ Evelyne Sullerot, La Presse féminine (Paris: Armand Colin, 1963), p. 31.

There were other groups, considered extremist, who were working equally vigorously for political emancipation. Hubertine Auclert was France's first suffragette, refusing to pay taxes because she was denied the right to vote. Her weekly magazine, called La Citoyenne, was founded in 1881. The journal is said to have been responsible for women being permitted to sit on the "conseils des prud'hommes" and on juries. It called, among other things for the end of legalized prostitution--a courageous act, since prostitution has always been a taboo in the women's press.¹⁴⁰ Hubertine Auclert always maintained that political rights are more important in women's emancipation than civil rights.

As in every extremist movement, there were eccentric figures among the feminists whose appearance and behavior gave rise to ridicule. Séverine's "feminine" appearance and moderation in presenting her ideas was frequently the object of praise. In 1909 an issue of Les Hommes du Jour was given over to a biography of Séverine, text by Flax, cover drawing by Delannoy. Talking of most feminists with repugnance, Flax distinguishes Séverine: "C'est l'honneur de Séverine de n'avoir rien de commun avec ce monde charivaresque. Elle . . . a toujours su rester la femme, conservant la douceur exquise, la sensibilité, l'émotion, tous les dons précieux, toutes les qualités savoureuses de la femme, elle qui, cependant est

¹⁴⁰Sullerot, op. cit., p. 35.

ardemment féministe parce qu'elle rêve avant tout d'émanciper ses compagnes."¹⁴¹

In the nineties there was a proliferation of journals and magazines, sponsored by both the political parties and the church. The crowning achievement in this domain was, as mentioned above, the publication and appearance for six years (1897-1903) of La Fronde, every one of whose tasks was performed by a woman.

Although at the time French women enjoyed almost no rights, it is possible to note various steps marking their progress. In 1886 women were permitted to take the examination for medical school. Some years later the first woman was permitted to practice law. In 1909 three young women obtained the architect's diploma.¹⁴² Three Feminist Congresses were held, one in 1878 and two in 1889. In 1900 a fourth, more important one, was held "Le Congrès de la Condition et des Droits de la Femme," this time partially sponsored by La Fronde.

In spite of growing recognition of the problems, the condition of a great number of French women was unenviable. Deprived of political rights, working women also suffered economically. It occurred more and more, as the industrial revolution and the ever-rising cost of living forced not only working-

¹⁴¹Les Hommes du Jour, April 12, 1909.

¹⁴²Thérèse Pottecher, "Le Mouvement Féministe en France" in Grande Revue, January 25, 1910, p. 376.

class women, but women of the lower bourgeoisie into the labor market. Here they faced a good deal of resentment from men because they depressed salaries, as they were paid lower wages than men. Moreover, the situation of wives abandoned by their husbands, or that of women alone, was often desperate. Even when families were together, the large number of children often made it impossible to eke out existence on the father's pitifully small earnings.

Séverine had great empathy for women and their problems. "Nothing feminine is alien to me," she had stated many times. However, in keeping with her generally independent attitude and her specific refusal to admit the usefulness of political action, she belonged to no feminist group at that time, nor did she write for any feminist publication. Nevertheless, many of the articles intended for her larger public were devoted to women's situation. In 1895, writing for L'Echo de Paris, Séverine stated that in seven years of journalistic activity more than 200 of her editorials had concerned the situation of women. "N'est-ce donc rien?"¹⁴³

Since the feminist cause was being fought in either the political or the economic and social arena, those interested in

¹⁴³February 11, 1895, "La Cause des Femmes." Frequent reference will be made to this article, since it very clearly sums up Séverine's ideas until that time on all aspects of feminist activity and aspiration. Paul Ginisty recognized its worth by including it in his Anthologie du journalisme (Paris: Delagrave, 1924).

the political struggle soon invited Séverine to join them in their efforts. In August 1885 Séverine was one of nine women (among the others were Louise Michel, Hubertine Auclert, Maria Deraismes), solicited by the Fédération Républicaine Socialiste, a women's group, to run for deputy. The full text of Séverine's reply is given:¹⁴⁴

Chères citoyennes,

Je vous suis infiniment reconnaissante de l'honneur que vous voulez me faire, mais je me trouve forcée de le décliner pour trois raisons.

La première est que je suis restée trop "femme" pour n'être pas de beaucoup au-dessous d'une tâche qu'une citoyenne plus virile accomplira certes mieux que moi.

Le second motif est que je ne fais et ne ferai jamais partie d'aucun groupe, ni d'aucune organisation. J'ai trop l'amour de mon indépendance pour l'engager en quoi que ce soit, et envers qui que ce soit.

Enfin, la troisième raison--et la dominante, celle-là--est que si je ne répugne pas à l'idée de martyre, je ne me sens point du tout le goût de la candidature.

Il y a longtemps que, dans la lutte sociale, j'ai choisi mon poste de combat.

Je préfère être à l'ambulance qu'à la tribune, je ne réclame de la Révolution que ma part de dévouement, de douleurs et de dangers.

Recevez, citoyennes, avec l'assurance de mes regrets, l'expression de ma sympathie très cordiale.

Séverine.

¹⁴⁴Le Cri du Peuple, August 13, 1885. The graciousness of Séverine's reply, albeit negative, contrasts very favorably with the insulting tone of George Sand's reply to the same sort of invitation.

In 1893 Séverine was again invited to run for office, this time by the group called "La Solidarité des Femmes." Her refusal was equally decisive. In her reply she made clear her preference for the economic side of the struggle and gave additional reasons for not choosing the political battle.

Le groupe La Solidarité des femmes, ayant proposé à Mme Séverine d'être candidate, notre collaboratrice a répondu par la lettre suivante!

Paris, le 9 janvier 1893.

A Madame Potonié-Pierre, secrétaire du groupe La Solidarité des femmes.

Madame et citoyenne,

Mille grâces de l'offre; mais il y a méprise, mon refus de 1885 vous en était garant.

Sur le terrain économique,--c'est à-dire la défense des intérêts et des droits féminins en ce qu'ils ont de sérieux et de sacré,--je suis votre homme! Sur le terrain politique, je persiste à méconnaître les délices du suffrage universel, quel que soit le sexe qui y doive participer. Ce n'est pas quand la pomme est pourrie qu'il y faut mordre?

Donc, trop "arriérée" comme femme, fière du rôle abnégatif et maternel que la nature m'a dévolu, aucunement tentée de déchoir aux masculines ambitions; donc, trop "avancée" comme bas-bleu, plutôt gouailleuse quant à l'efficacité du vote, je ne me sens mûre que pour l'abstention.

Recevez, Madame et citoyenne, mon fraternel salut.

Séverine.

On both occasions Séverine's reason for refusing was the same: why should women wish to become involved in political

machinations, in themselves worthless? She was to use the image of the wormy apple twice, here and in "La Cause des Femmes." There she said "Sous l'arbre de science, Eve, son tour venu, réclame à Adam la moitié de la pomme Seulement la pomme que tient Adam est pourrie; rongée au coeur par les parasites Je n'ai pas le goût à ces dinettes-là."¹⁴⁵

Over the years under discussion, especially the early ones, she expresses the same attitude, sometimes more humorously, sometimes more harshly. In 1888 she had dealt with the question by saying "je n'éprouve le besoin de voter pour personne" and that she would be "abominablement vexée si quelqu'un, de par le monde, avait le droit, et me faisait la mauvaise farce, de voter pour moi."¹⁴⁶

In 1891 she used strong invective in the same newspaper. Writing that there were times when she was proud of her sex, she added:

Pas quand des folles-commesi ce n'était assez des hommes, grand Dieu, pour la jolie besogne à laquelle nous assistons! dévorées du prurit parlementaire, revendiquent l'électorat et l'éligibilité, le frisson des candidatures, l'ivresse d'être conseillère, la volupté d'être sénatrice, notre part de mélasse, notre portion de gâchis. Non, ah!, mais non!¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵Ginisty, op. cit., "La Cause des Femmes," p. 369.

¹⁴⁶Gil Blas, December 14, 1888, "Pas Avocate."

¹⁴⁷Gil Blas, May 6, 1891, "Les Expiatrices."

She was at her harshest in a portion of the article she wrote for Le Matin commenting on her refusal of La Solidarité's invitation. Although predicting now that eventually women will win the fight--which she still does not think worth the trouble--her characterization of some of the women involved in the political battle seems excessive. Noting that there are some eccentrics who by their behavior harm the very cause they are fighting for, and stating that their path had been marked out for them by the wisdom and courage of the very erudite, very gifted and very persevering predecessors, she said:

Il est arrivé de notre sexe comme de l'autre-- les politiciennes, fléau, ont surgi. [With heavy irony she points out that] leur idéal à celles-là c'est de voter; on ne les en sortira pas. Le régime actuel ne les dégoûte point, il les tente! --Les plus sales corvées de la politique, toutes ces promiscuités, ces compromissions, ce déballage de linge sale, se traduit pour elles en envies,¹⁴⁸ en fringales! Ah! si elles pouvaient en être!

Her judgment of politics was at its lowest in the Echo de Paris article: "Etre député actuellement--si nul mérite particulier à l'individu ne réhausse la fonction--c'est être zéro . . . un zéro toujours suspect, souvent nuisible."¹⁴⁹

This contempt for political action undoubtedly bears the stamp of anarchist influence. And, unfortunately, it diminished Séverine's potential for leadership, which she

¹⁴⁸Le Matin, January 13, 1893, "Madame le Député."

¹⁴⁹Ginisty, op. cit., p. 368.

possessed in large measure. Like the anarchists, Séverine-- in spite of her tremendously useful and purposeful activity-- was "passively awaiting the millennium." She failed to realize that all action must ultimately be political in order to obtain the goals seen as right, like equality in a given profession or equality of salary.

As important a factor in Séverine's opposition to political action for women as her contempt for parliamentary maneuvering and the run-of-the-mill deputy, was her basic conception of women's nature and capacities. Talking once of Vallès who had shaped her brain "à son gré," she added "Femme, je ne pouvais guère être autre chose; nous avons, je crois, le don d'assimilation, le pouvoir inspirateur, mais pas la force créatrice."¹⁵⁰ How not to see in these words some influence of Vallès as well as the latter's master Proudhon?

Séverine's every statement in connection with her feelings about political action revealed her belief that woman's role is to heal, her mission to console. Women's special characteristics are tenderness and pity. In 1885 she had written she preferred to be "à l'ambulance qu'à la tribune." And she by her words elsewhere in the letter implied that a "womanly" woman would be less able to be a deputy than a more "virile" woman. In her 1893 letter she speaks of being proud of the "rôle abnégatif et maternel que la nature m'a dévolu."¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰La Libre Parole, June 23, 1895, "Du Côté des Pécuteurs."

¹⁵¹See above, p. 159.

In "La Cause des Femmes" she speaks of: "le rôle tendre et miséricordieux que la nature nous a assigné."¹⁵² In another instance she said "nous avons des bras pour bercer, des mains pour panser, des lèvres pour consoler."¹⁵³ And she expresses herself in a way that would not be out of place in a ladies magazine of some years ago when she says "Je suis de celles qui préfèrent, qui auraient préféré, pour la femme, seulement le titre de compagne, le rôle d'ombre doux et câlin, volontiers effacé, derrière le maître à tous redoutable, par soi-seule asservi."¹⁵⁴

One important concept associated in Séverine's mind with woman's role of healer and consoler, is that she must be pacifist. When war between France and Italy threatened after the assassination of Sadi Carnot by an Italian anarchist, her article "A Bas La Guerre" is addressed particularly to women, her "alliées naturelles": "Colombes de l'arche, apôtres de la paix, femmes, mères, soeurs, filles, amantes, fiancées. Soyez impérieuses, soyez douces, soyez éloquentes, soyez câlines, mais triomphez du spectre qui nous guette" And the article ends with an eloquent and pathetic "O femmes, entendez-moi!"¹⁵⁵ And Lecache says categorically that according to

¹⁵²Ginisty, op. cit., p. 371.

¹⁵³Quoted in Lecache, op. cit., p. 114.

¹⁵⁴Le Journal, January 9, 1897, "Le Duel des Sexes."

¹⁵⁵L'Eclair, June 28, 1894.

Séverine feminism had to be pacifist or not exist at all.¹⁵⁶

"Il n'existe pour nous pas d'autre politique que la politique de la pitié."

Not that Séverine is gentle in discussing men or the war between the sexes. In one of a remarkably frank series of articles about herself and her early life, describing the days after her separation from her first husband, she says "Partout, toujours, l'ennemi, l'homme égoïste et cruel; si pénétré de son droit, si convaincu de son omnipotence, qu'aujourd'hui, comme à l'âge de pierre où les Troglodytes guettaient à l'issue des cavernes, beaucoup essaient de prendre la femelle par la faim."¹⁵⁷

Although not a scientific Socialist, she is astute enough to realize that there is an economic basis for the hostility that male law students showed toward the first woman to receive a law degree and courageous enough to chide them for their attitude. "C'est un élément nouveau qui entre en scène, bien faible encore." "La guerre des sexes, voyez-vous . . . porte un nom déjà très connu; elle s'appelle la lutte pour la vie!"¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶Lecache, op. cit., p. 114.

¹⁵⁷Gil Blas, September 2, 1892, "Journal d'une Femme."

¹⁵⁸Gil Blas, July 12, 1892, "Les Affranchies."

There were those who criticized Séverine for her negative opinion on the need for political action. When she left Le Cri du Peuple, La Citoyenne, Hubertine Auclert's paper, commented "elle était encore, hélas, de ceux qui croient que la femme a d'autant plus de puissance morale qu'elle a moins de pouvoir politique."¹⁵⁹

In 1914 Séverine was to change her mind completely and to support the vote for women with her customary energy and dynamism. But even before then she was slowly to evolve. In "La Cause des Femmes," she admits having "blagué des politiciennes," but it depended on which ones. "Hubertine Auclert, Paule Minck, Madame Potonié-Pierre m'ont toujours paru des courageuses et des dévouées."¹⁶⁰ She became more tolerant toward the ~~eccentric ladies~~ in retrospect and showed an understanding of their cause she did not possess in the early days. At the end of 1899 she was reproaching Ledrain, the editor of L'Eclair, for having called some of the feminists "écolâtres." She explains to him that they are the victims of a dream and the necessarily sacrificed generation. Like bees, "elles savent bien qu'elles travaillent pour autrui; que les petites soeurs de demain profiteront de l'effort . . . et elles ne se

¹⁵⁹Quoted in Li Dzeh Djin, La Presse Féministe en France de 1869 à 1914 (Paris: L. Rodstein, 1934), p. 128.

¹⁶⁰Ginisty, op. cit., p. 370.

lassent pas."¹⁶¹ And during the Congress of 1900 Séverine in her speech paid tribute to the "anciennes qui ont bravé le ridicule."¹⁶² But of course it was only years later that she was to present a full bouquet of her compliments to their memory. "A travers des obstacles sans nombre elles ont frayé, meurtries, saignantes, déchirées aux ronces, le petit chemin devenu la grande route par laquelle nous passons aujourd'hui."¹⁶³

Eventually then, Séverine did get closely involved with the political side of the feminist struggle. But, as she was to explain it, even that late association stemmed from her realization that "tant que les femmes ne l'auront pas (le suffrage) elles resteront non seulement sous la dépendance de l'homme, mais encore livrées sans défense à toutes les exploitations économiques."¹⁶⁴ Perhaps because of her anarchist point of view, perhaps because of her own history, it was the economic and social side of the story that had her warm support and interest from the outset. And it was in that area that she contributed some novel and startling ideas.

Daily she observed the pitiable condition to which many women were reduced. For the same reasons that induced her to found her Carnet, she seized on every practical idea or

¹⁶¹L'Eclair, December 3, 1899, "L'Effort."

¹⁶²La Fronde, September 13, 1900.

¹⁶³Pour la Femme (Geneva), January 20, 1914.

¹⁶⁴Le Journal, March 14, 1914.

suggestion that might better their condition. That is why she said in "La Cause des Femmes" "Je suis de tout mon coeur, de toutes mes forces, avec les créatures sensées, intelligentes, pratiques, qui s'efforcent d'améliorer économiquement le sort de la femme, à l'affranchir de ce que sa condition présente renferme de subalterne, d'inique et de dégradant."¹⁶⁵

One of the first articles about their degrading condition she wrote was called "Choix de Mortes" concerning the massacre at Fourmies. In her article she fulminated against Le Temps which was less shocked at the slaughter than it might have been because some of the victims were "de moeurs fort légères." Boldly she said that "la société fait des prostituées, pour que les femmes chanceuses, dites 'honnêtes femmes,' puissent s'offrir la vertu, puissent traverser la voie publique sans subir l'assaut des mâles.--Chaque pavé de nos rues est un coeur de misérable sur lequel passe, fringant, joli, pomponné, l'équipage des riches."¹⁶⁶

The audacity of these statements in a journal of wide circulation seems as noteworthy in its way as was the attempt to run women for office.

In the same newspaper, in two iconoclastic articles that followed within ten days of each other, Séverine defended

¹⁶⁵Ginisty, op. cit., p. 369.

¹⁶⁶Gil Blas, May 15, 1891.

abortion as necessary. In "Le Droit à l'Avortement"¹⁶⁷ et "La Mort-aux-Gosses"¹⁶⁸ she argued that abortion was a misfortune, not a crime. In both the articles, while discussing all the different classes of women who had to resort to abortion, she singled out working women for her greatest sympathy, above all the married ones. She insisted that these women "sont des victimes, pas des coupables, des victimes d'une organisation sociale qui, désireuse de repopulation, couronne les rosières et excommunie les filles-mère; dit aux pauvres: Croissez, multipliez; et laisse leur postérité nombreuse crever de faim!"¹⁶⁹

In putting the responsibility on society, Séverine reveals her Socialist orientation. And when one thinks that these articles were written sixteen years before separation of Church and State in France, the author's temerity and courage still seem exceptional.

It is because she was so imbued with the practical side of help for women that Séverine--although she deliberately does not "demand" rights for women--asked for help for women who were soon to become mothers and urged for passage of the law on "la recherche de la paternité." Once these good laws were passed, she predicted, there would be less of the "depopulation"

¹⁶⁷Gil Blas, November 4, 1890.

¹⁶⁸Gil Blas, November 14, 1890.

¹⁶⁹Ibid.

that was worrying the nation. (And the surge in population in France, after 1945, when the Fourth Republic provided so much assistance for acceleration of the demographic growth, is one justification of Séverine's theory.)

Séverine's bias toward the practical was so great that it influenced her reaction to two of France's best-known intellectual figures, Bernard Palissy and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. A monument to the former had just been erected, and Séverine is impelled to reflect on the life led by his wife. "Elle m'intéresse, moi, parce que, dans ce drame qui finit en comédie, elle représente la souffrance humaine, le martyr féminin . . . parce qu'elle incarne, le sort, trop commun, hélas, des mères, des soeurs, des filles, des épouses sacrifiées à la Chimère."¹⁷⁰

A man she detested for more concrete reasons, chiefly for his attitude toward the women in his life and his children, was Rousseau. Calling him a "pion," Séverine begins "Je le hais, ce Rousseau, dont on vient de célébrer au Panthéon la laïque béatification."¹⁷¹ One of her main objections to him was his "kiss-and-tell" technique. "Je ne sais rien de plus répugnant à lire, au point de vue féminin, que les Confessions. . . . C'est simplement écoeurant." Her ending, admittedly

¹⁷⁰Le Jour, July 8, 1891, "La Femme de Palissy."

¹⁷¹Gil Blas, February 8, 1889, "Le Pion."

unjust, is still remarkably effective. Inveighing against him for having put his children into an orphanage, she evokes the image of "un être louche qui se glisse dans la nuit, tenant noué dans un torchon comme un paquet de conscrit un pauvre petit tas de chair humaine . . . que Jean-Jacques, l'humanitaire, porte à la Grande Maison et qui est son enfant! . . . Il a fait trois fois le voyage, celui qui avait écrit Emile."¹⁷²

In this diatribe against Rousseau Séverine was either unaware of or deliberately ignoring, Rousseau's fundamental disapproval of women writers, or his basically low opinion of these in general. Here again she concentrated on those aspects of his personality and ideas that related to the practical.

It is interesting to contrast her bold assertions with Madame de Staël's two Introductions to her "Lettres sur J.J. Rousseau," studied recently (1970). It took twenty-six years, from 1788, to 1814, for Madame de Staël to express even a "mitigated revolt," a "muffled feminine protest,"¹⁷³ since Rousseau was her Master. Yet, while Séverine did not have the idealized concept of love or marriage held by Madame de Staël, she too, as we have seen, would have preferred to be the self-effacing companion. In this similarity of goal, in spite of difference of temperament and personality and the time gap, can

¹⁷²Gil Blas, February 8, 1889, "Le Pion."

¹⁷³Madelyn Gutwirth, "Madame de Staël, Rousseau and the Woman Question," PMLA, p. 108.

be seen striking evidence of the "cultural determinism" being so heatedly discussed at present.

In Séverine's opinion the best way for women to achieve equality was by accomplishment and example. On several occasions she indicates her admiration for those who have laboriously shown the way: Jeanne Chauvin, Blanche Edwards, those in the arts, in the theatre. "Les voilà, les vraies libératrices."¹⁷⁴

By the same token, Séverine points out, she has been in the fight for a long time, "assez longtemps pour que les renforts ne me distinguent plus."¹⁷⁵ Always in her own fashion, admittedly, but nevertheless "où qu'une de mes soeurs ait crié à l'aide . . . j'ai noté la plainte et remonté aux causes du mal en faisant ressortir l'injustice de notre destin. Je crois à l'école des faits"¹⁷⁶ (underlining mine). Like those whom she admires, Séverine has through her example proven that a woman can succeed--in her case, in journalism. "Tout de même, grâce au précédent, quand une petite femme tremblante arrive dans une rédaction, avec son article noué d'un fil, on ne juge sa collaboration ni si ridicule ni si impossible . . . De cela, ma foi, je suis très fière."¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴Le Matin, January 13, 1893, "Madame le Député."

¹⁷⁵Ginisty, op. cit., p. 369.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., p. 370.

¹⁷⁷Ibid., p. 371.

Jane Misme, rather sadly, comes to more or less the same conclusion, even while judging her very objectively. "Séverine ne fut jamais une militante du féminisme. Si elle a servi la cause de l'égalité des sexes, c'est qu'elle lui a fourni en sa personne, par son talent, son courage, son activité, un argument souverain; c'est qu'elle a protesté ardemment contre la détresse féminine partout où elle l'a rencontrée et contribué ainsi à créer une atmosphère de pitié favorable aux revendications."¹⁷⁸

How then to give an overall appraisal of Séverine's brand of feminism? Although she was a bold and courageous innovator in connection with the social and economic aspect of women's life, she showed surprisingly unexpected timidity in the political domain. She somehow failed to realize that all the changes she wished to bring about required organization and concerted action. This way of thinking must be attributed to the anarchist influence. Her ideas on women's basic role must be ascribed to both her bringing up and to her tutelage by Vallès. In this connection, incidentally, the point on which she stands fast, biological determinism, is still being debated. While Simone de Beauvoir and Kate Millett and their followers do not believe there is any inherent "nature féminine,"¹⁷⁹ there

¹⁷⁸Minerva, February 22, 1931.

¹⁷⁹Taken from a review of "Le Malentendu du Deuxième Sexe" by Pierre-Henri Simon, Le Monde Hebdomadaire, February 12-18, 1970, p. 11.

are still reputable anthropologists who maintain that there is a significant biological basis for differences between the sexes.¹⁸⁰

In a way, Séverine's attitude is just the opposite of that held by present-day women's liberation groups. It is reverse "sexist" thinking: even though women suffer unduly, it is their role to be better, to comfort men, to watch out over humanity.

Although Séverine was more timid here than some of her contemporaries, than Madame Juliette Adam, for instance, or Nora in the work of Ibsen whom she admired so much, her ideas in the area of feminism have the virtue of being consistent and more firmly based than in other areas. And in her most admirable idea, to oppose war as mothers and wives, although she did not follow through on the necessary political aspect, she did perhaps justify Frantz Jourdain's statement "elle n'a qu'un parti--l'Humanité."¹⁸¹

D. Anti-Semitism

In 1791 the Jews living in France were granted citizenship and the rights associated with that privilege.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰"Male Dominance? Yes, Alas. A Sexist Plot? No." Lionel Tiger in The New York Times, October 25, 1970.

¹⁸¹Revue Illustrée, July 1, 1890.

¹⁸²Solomon Grayzel, A History of the Jews (New York: Mentor Books, 1968), p. 493.

In the century that followed, taking advantage of the freedom under the new "cosmopolitan, secular, individualistic system,"¹⁸³ many of them were able to prosper.

It is not the purpose of this work to discuss the psychological or sociological foundations of the phenomenon known as anti-Semitism. Nevertheless, a very brief summary of the political and economic factors that made France peculiarly vulnerable to the disease during the era under study seems relevant, together with an account of the principal anti-Semitic agitation at the time.

The nineteenth century, with its many changes and various forms of government, was politically unstable. The Third Republic had come about almost by default, and democracy was as yet not the form of government desired by the French people as a whole. The 1870 defeat at the hands of the Germans, the loss of Alsace-Lorraine, the bitter civil war that had terminated the Commune, all had exacerbated the divisions among the different classes. Economically, the country was still under the effects of the Industrial Revolution, which was responsible for the existence of abject poverty side by side with enormous wealth.

The period 1880 to 1900, which is being studied here in connection with Séverine, was an era of intense anti-Semitism.

¹⁸³Robert Byrnes, Anti-Semitism in Modern France (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1950), p. 76.

Under the new capitalistic system, which liberated people from the old feudal ties and "unshackled the market economy,"¹⁸⁴ there was "an unprecedented orgy of the crudest kind of individualism."¹⁸⁵ This process suited the emerging bourgeoisie of which the Jewish community was an important component.

Characteristic of every beginning made by the Jews is the fact that, when successful, they are conspicuous, for the fields of activity accessible to them are those most easily visible to the public, such as commerce, trade, finance, and the arts. In nineteenth-century France, for instance, the name most synonymous with great as well as unscrupulous use of wealth was Rothschild. Therefore, as one very astute observer points out, it was inevitable that part of the emotional reaction against the rampant individualism and the flagrant wealth "should be directed against the Jews--an unpopular community which seemed to have derived an altogether disproportionate advantage from the collapse of the ancien régime."¹⁸⁶

The crack of the Union Générale in 1882 was generally attributed to the baneful influence of the Rothschilds and other Jews. In spite of the fact that Naquet, one of Boulanger's principal advisers, was Jewish the Boulangist movement flirted

¹⁸⁴George Lichtheim, "Socialism and the Jews" in Dissent (July-August 1968), p. 316.

¹⁸⁵Ibid., p. 317.

¹⁸⁶Ibid.

dangerously with anti-Semitism. The involvement of several Jewish bankers in the Panama Canal scandal confirmed the general uneasiness that had been intensified by the appearance in 1886 of La France Juive by Edouard Drumont. Crystallizing all the primordial religious and social fears of the "outsider," La France Juive was a monumental book, the second volume of which, illustrated lavishly, might have served as the model for Streicher's Der Stürmer of Hitler's time. In it Drumont purported to show that the Jews had completely invaded French life and were causing France's downfall. La France Juive had a prodigious success: Drumont's preface to a new publication in 1912 indicated that this was the 115th edition! Drumont followed up his success with other books of a similar nature, and in 1892 he founded a newspaper, La Libre Parole, from which he continued to pour out the same kind of vulgar, inflammatory and lying abuse that had filled La France Juive. The paper was also successful, especially in the beginning. Goguel states that 30,000 priests subscribed to it.¹⁸⁷ But the success leveled off. At about the time Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish army officer, was accused of spying, the Drumont fortunes were low.¹⁸⁸ Drumont saw his chance and it seems to be a fact that by his articles and threats, he forced the army to pursue the case.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷Goguel, op. cit., p. 138, quoting Albert Thibaudet.

¹⁸⁸Byrnes, op. cit., p. 337.

¹⁸⁹See, e.g. GordonWright, France in Modern Times (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1960), p. 321.

The Dreyfus Case does not require recounting here, except insofar as it bears some connection to Séverine. It is sufficient to recall that the Captain was sentenced originally in 1894, that everybody but his family and friends believed him guilty, that it took years before the course of injustice could begin to be reversed. Zola's J'Accuse was the preface to the beginning of the end. A series of trials culminated at Rennes, where Dreyfus was again found guilty, and he was pardoned later. In the century's last days, the entire country was rent by the struggle between the two sides, and the Republic's fate hung in the balance. The Affair's aftermath extended until 1905, when the definitive separation of Church and State took place.

It might have been expected that an important ally in the fight against anti-Semitism would be the newly-revived Socialist parties and the Democratic liberals. Regrettably, this was not the case.

A number of Socialist theoreticians before and after 1870 were anti-Semitic. Proudhon had been virulently so.¹⁹⁰ Fourier, Toussenel and even Pierre Leroux had been tainted, each in his own fashion. Leroux, for instance, though sharing the opinion that the Jews were the very incarnation of the commercial spirit, nevertheless rejected anti-Semitism as a

¹⁹⁰ See quotations from Proudhon's Notebooks quoted in Lichtheim, op. cit., p. 322.

racial doctrine.¹⁹¹ After 1870, Benoit Malcon's Revue Socialiste took an anti-Semitic line. According to Lichtheim, Malon was on cordial terms with Drumont, and also with another notorious anti-Semite, Auguste Chirac.¹⁹²

The newly launched Cri du Peuple, while not strongly anti-Semitic, often carried anti-Rothschild articles, as well as others containing stereotyped remarks about the Jews. In fact, the presence of such remarks inspired a letter to the paper, which Lafargue answered personally in a lead column. The letter had asked why the financiers' names were always preceded by the word "juif," and had continued "ouvrier chapelier, je connais beaucoup de juifs qui sont comme moi, ouvriers . . . alors pourquoi englober dans vos attaques toute une classe" Lafargue explained in his reply that "les socialistes n'ont ni haine de race, ni haine de nationalité." Personally he admires the Jews greatly, for their history is one of the "most grandiose dramas of all humanity." But the Socialist party distinguishes only between capitalists and Socialists, and all those who wish to preserve the present social order "are its enemies."¹⁹³ Although this statement can certainly not be called favorable, it does make it quite clear that the anti-Capitalist and the anti-Jewish themes were

¹⁹¹Ibid., p. 321.

¹⁹²Ibid., p. 324.

¹⁹³Le Cri du Peuple, October 2, 1886, "Juifs et Socialistes."

intertwined, and that--in Lafargue's opinion--~~the issue is~~ not racial.

Séverine's attitude on the question of anti-Semitism is even more bewilderingly ambivalent than on Boulangism. She made pro and anti-Semitic statements almost simultaneously! Although she had been so concerned about anti-Semitism that she went to Rome to interview the Pope on the subject, she wrote for La Libre Parole for three years! On the other hand, she was one of the first to be persuaded of Dreyfus's innocence, and her articles reporting on the various trials were eagerly read and added greater luster to her reputation.

When Séverine was with the Cri there is no evidence that she ever objected to the anti-Semitic statements of her colleagues, as she did in the case of Guesde's statement on the anarchist Clément Duval. Even when, after leaving the Cri, Séverine tried to dampen anti-Semitism, she could not help include clichés indicating her own conventional prejudices. For instance, an article whose purpose was, seemingly, to criticize the Socialists for their anti-Semitism and to show the public the historic reasons for their instinctual anti-Semitism, begins "J'ai peu de sympathie pour le race juive-- elle aime trop l'argent." And she reasons that only pious Christians are logical in hating the Jews. "Ceux qui traversent notre vie les yeux fixés au ciel, ceux-là ont le droit de prononcer l'anathème contre les crucificateurs."¹⁹⁴ Her inter-

¹⁹⁴Gil Blas, January 24, 1890, "Israël."

view with the Pope stressed His Holiness's sympathy for the poor. When she had said "Alors, Saint Père, les grands Juifs?," he had replied "Je suis avec les petits, les humbles, les dépossédés, ceux qui Notre Seigneur aime."¹⁹⁵ Somehow the language of His Holiness carries a Séverine stamp, and here merely echoes the Socialist theme associating the Jews with great wealth.

When Dreyfus was first accused Séverine, like everyone else, took his guilt for granted. She did, however, indicate in an Eclair article that there were unresolved questions that had to be answered.¹⁹⁶ A few months later, when Dreyfus was gratuitously struck and wounded by an officer, on the eve of his departure for Devil's Island, she reacted with indignation and compassion. Asserting that every prisoner must be safely guarded, she added "celui qui l'insulte est un voyou, celui qui le frappe est un lâche, and concluded "Quoi que ce soit, c'est dégoûtant."¹⁹⁷

Encouraged by this article, Dreyfus's wife requested an interview. This Séverine refused. In Vers la lumière she gives her reasoning for doing so: "ayant alors commis la cruauté prudente de ne pas recevoir madame Dreyfus, comme je la commettrais encore peut-être. Il y avait, il y a, trop

¹⁹⁵ Pages Mystiques, p. 124.

¹⁹⁶ L'Eclair, November 8, 1894, "Il Faut Parler."

¹⁹⁷ L'Eclair, January 24, 1895, "Un Lâche."

d'argent dans leur maison.--Mais femme, mère, je la plaignais comme je la plains, et compris son effort en faveur de l'absent."¹⁹⁸

This might indeed have been Séverine's reaction, but it is possible to make a comparison of her different response in a very similar situation. The mother of Emile Henry, the dynamiter of the Café Terminus, requested an interview in order to obtain Séverine's assistance for her son. Knowing that there was nothing to be done for Henry in view of his militant attitude, and that no newspaper editor would accept an article about him, Séverine did nonetheless agree to see Madame Henry, and did in fact talk with her "doucelement, longuement, lorsqu'elle vint frapper à ma porte."¹⁹⁹ Perhaps the reason behind her opposite response truly was the contrast between the Dreyfus wealth and the Henry poverty. But the suspicion is inevitable that "in the warmest of hearts there's a cold spot for the Jews."²⁰⁰ Séverine did possess the warmest of hearts and soon, much earlier than almost any other public figure, she was to realize that a "judicial error" had been committed, and began to work actively for its reversal.

The most curious and unpleasant aspect of Séverine's attitude on the issue of anti-Semitism was her close association, lasting with some interruption over a number of years, with

¹⁹⁸Vers la lumière, p. 35.

¹⁹⁹En Marche, p. 184.

²⁰⁰Quoted by Irving Howe in an "Op. Ed." editorial, The New York Times, March 13, 1971.

Edouard Drumont. They had long resided in the same building. Lecache reports that, after she resigned from L'Eclair in anger over their treatment of Mermeix, she literally went down the stairs and asked Drumont whether he would accept her articles. He of course agreed. "Politique mise à part, tous deux sympathisaient," Lecache is forced to admit.²⁰¹ At that period Séverine remained with the paper only a short time; and after her departure continued attacking Drumont for his ideas. "Monsieur Drumont, dans ses livres, a élevé l'outrage à la hauteur d'une institution!"²⁰²

Late in 1893, however, she returned to La Libre Parole. Lecache remarks "aussi étrange que, rétrospectivement, cela paraisse, elle avait cédé aux sollicitations de Drumont, s'était laissée inscrire parmi les collaborateurs de la Libre Parole."²⁰³

The Séverine-Drumont relationship was bizarre and is particularly difficult to elucidate at such a distance in time. It seems clear that Drumont was infatuated with her. One of Drumont's closest collaborators declares in his memoirs that if, in 1895, Drumont had had to choose a successor as the paper's

²⁰¹Lecache, op. cit., p. 132.

²⁰²Quoted in ibid., p. 133.

²⁰³Ibid., p. 145.

editor, he would have chosen Séverine.²⁰⁴ Moreover, Drumont dedicated his collection of articles De l'Or, de la Boue, et du Sang" to her. A twelve-page Lettre-Préface has a frontispiece showing "a melancholy Séverine dreaming on a gothic balcony" and begins "Ma chère Séverine, Je vous dédie ce livre pour une raison qui me paraît excellente, c'est qu'il ne pourrait être dédié qu'à vous" ²⁰⁵

Drumont stood by Séverine in the difficult period when, as a result of the young Lebaudy's death and Rochefort's attacks, she found herself without friends. He warmly defended her in his columns, and permitted her all the space she needed in which to defend herself.²⁰⁶

Séverine's attitude is more difficult to fathom. She showered praises on Drumont on his return from Belgium, where he had gone to avoid imprisonment.²⁰⁷ She took up his defense even in the columns of the Voltaire, a paper owned by a Jew.²⁰⁸ These statements might conceivably be considered expressions of gratitude. Regrettably, however, the French proverb "Dis-moi qui tu hantes et je dirai qui tu es" became noticeably

²⁰⁴ Alfred Gendrot, Drumont, La France Juive et La Libre Parole (Paris: Société Française d'Éditions Littéraires et Techniques, 1935), p. 211.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 214.

²⁰⁶ Lecache, op. cit., pp. 149 and 153.

²⁰⁷ La Libre Parole, February 5, 1895, "Bienvenue."

²⁰⁸ Le Voltaire, January 3-4, 1896, "Trop de Zèle."

applicable in the case of Séverine and La Libre Parole. While many of her articles were no different from those she wrote for the other newspapers, quite a few use the same ugly terminology so characteristic of Drumont and his newspaper. In 1899, Séverine, being interviewed about the Affaire, flatly denied ever having been anti-Semitic. "J'ai collaboré à La Libre Parole, mais vous n'y trouverez pas une ligne de moi qui soit un acte d'antisémitisme."²⁰⁹ The unpleasant truth is rather that some of her articles²¹⁰ are scarcely distinguishable from Drumont's vicious maunderings. These articles were not frequent, but excerpts like the following are saddening when one realizes the depth to which this otherwise noble woman fell --for even a short time.

In the course of a long and effusive article about Gyp's book Les Gens chics, for instance, Séverine says "Les Gens chics, c'est toute la pourriture de la haute gomme et de la haute banque; tout ce que les Youtres et les rastas ont introduit de corruption dans le beau sang français."²¹¹ On the anniversary of Fourmies she discusses a book written by the former sous-préfet Isaac in which the latter puts a large part of the blame

²⁰⁹Journal de Maurice, July 5, 1899.

²¹⁰Byrnes states outright (op. cit., p. 328) that she gave her articles to Drumont free. This is extremely doubtful, and he supplies no proof.

²¹¹La Libre Parole, September 15, 1895, "Les Gens chics."

on his "co-religionnaire Vel-Durand préfet du Nord Cet Israélite, en effet, répond à ce Youtre." No matter what M. Isaac does she says he will always be remembered for what he did at Fourmies, "celui que Drumont a stigmatisé pour jamais en des pages justicières."²¹²

There were other articles of the same nature, but once the point has been made, it does not seem necessary to expand further on them.

In Séverine's favor, both Gendrot and Lecache feel that she hoped to convert Drumont to her way of thinking. It is natural for Lecache to wish to believe this, and therefore such an idea carries more weight when Drumont's associate makes it. He does so in the form of a question. "Séverine n'aurait-elle pas songé à entraîner Drumont et son journal, déjà socialisants, vers le parti de la révolution, mais de la révolution qui épargne et sauve les juifs, au lieu de les attaquer." And he concludes "L'antisémitisme était la barrière qui devait séparer un jour ces deux êtres."²¹³

Perhaps it was. Séverine resigned from the paper very soon after Drumont made a speech to a Woman's Group telling them that the only way to improve their lot was to inspire hatred of the Jew in their sons, and to go home and to make "de petits

²¹²La Libre Parole, May 5, 1895, "Trop Tard."

²¹³Gendrot, op. cit., p. 212.

Antisémites."²¹⁴ Lecache says that while Drumont had been kind to the woman in distress "au-dessus d'elle Séverine voyait l'idée."²¹⁵ In any case, Drumont and Séverine were in absolute opposition on the Dreyfus Case. "Ils devaient durement s'oublier," says Lecache.

La Fronde, the all-woman's newspaper, for which Séverine was to shine during the journal's existence, was in utter contrast to La Libre Parole. At the top of the first page the date was given in four different calendars, including the Hebrew! Possibly because of the paper's influence, possibly in response to her own change of heart, the evolution of Séverine's ideas on anti-Semitism is obvious. In one of her early "Notes d'une Frondeuse," she makes it clear that she no longer associates the idea of Jews only with wealth.²¹⁶ At a later date she gleefully informs Gyp that as long as the latter insists on writing anti-Semitic material, she is not acceptable to La Fronde.

The pendulum had come full swing. The reason for the change probably was her immersion in the Dreyfus Case and her association with the devoted band with whom she fought the fight. She tells us that Bernard Lazare had half persuaded her personally of Dreyfus's innocence, and she became totally

²¹⁴La Libre Parole, April 13, 1896.

²¹⁵Lecache, op. cit., p. 161.

²¹⁶La Fronde, December 26, 1898.

convinced after observing Esterhazy in the witness box.²¹⁷ Far ahead of the Anarchists and the Socialists, she threw herself into the cause of revision with her usual energy and passion. As La Fronde's correspondent at the various trials, she wrote articles that are models of clarity and nobility of thought. Cazes believes that Vers la Lumière bears favorable comparison with Jaurès's and Clemenceau's books on the Affaire.²¹⁸ In any case, Joseph Reinach, in his monumental history of the Dreyfus Case, relies at least partially on her articles on the Rennes trial for a description of the atmosphere.²¹⁹

Séverine's change of heart in the Dreyfus Case is perhaps more revealing of her profound respect for justice and truth and her concern for the fate of the Republic than an actual lessening of anti-Semitism. In this she was no different from the Socialists who, when they finally took a stand on the issue of "revision" in 1898, found common ground "only to the extent of declaring that the Jewish aspect of the Affaire was irrelevant."²²⁰ But it is to the credit of both Séverine and the Socialists that they were willing to battle

²¹⁷Cazes, Grande Revue, July 1930, p. 110.

²¹⁸Ibid., p. 111.

²¹⁹Joseph Reinach, Histoire de l'Affaire Dreyfus (Paris: Editions de la Revue blanche, 1901-1911).

²²⁰Lichtheim, in Dissent, p. 225.

for such abstractions. And when her middle-class upbringing is considered, together with the fact that she received no enlightenment in the Socialist camp on the issue of anti-Semitism, perhaps another French proverb, "tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner" is applicable.

We know of Bernard Lecache's devotion and her attachment to him, evidenced by the fact that she made him her literary executor. And it was Henri Guernut of La Ligue des Droits de l'Homme who delivered one of the eulogies at her funeral. It seems fair to conclude that she was eventually really able to divest herself of prejudice.

E. Boulangism

Séverine published many editorials on General Boulanger, both during the period when the Boulangist movement was at its height, and also after the General's fall from popularity. A number of these articles are to be found in Notes d'une Frondeuse, published in 1894, which comprises her choice among her editorials "de la Boulange à Panama." These articles do not radiate the feeling of absolute certainty that emanates from Séverine's other work, for fundamentally her attitude toward Boulangism was ambivalent.

To understand why Séverine wavered on the question of Boulangism, it is necessary to review briefly what the movement

meant at that time. Between 1886 and 1890 French political life was dominated by the tide of feeling--either positive or negative--aroused in the French people by General Georges Boulanger. Within this short period, the General's fortunes first rose impressively high; he was simultaneously elected Deputy from four different areas. Indeed there was good reason to fear that he would attempt a coup d'Etat; that he did not is attributable solely to the General's strange character. Subsequently, however, as a result of a combination of factors: the Government's tactics, Boulanger's personal weakness, and a form of cowardice in him that made him flee the country when he was threatened with arrest, his following dwindled to almost nothing. Two years later Boulanger committed suicide in Brussels, shortly after the death of his mistress.

The most fascinating aspect of the Boulanger story to an objective observer at the present time, is the evolution of the different parties' attitude toward the General within those four years. It is generally conceded that Boulanger, a regular army general, was forced on the Freycinet Cabinet in 1886 by the Radical party, headed by Clemenceau. He became a popular figure, but Boulangism as a political movement was triggered only after the onset in 1887 of the scandal around Daniel Wilson, the son-in-law of France's President.²²¹ The General's

²²¹ François Goguel, La Politique des partis sous la Troisième République (Paris: Aux Editions du Seuil, 1946), p. 76.

legislative successes and the idolatry he inspired alarmed the moderates and the Government, and he began to lose some support. At the same time, the General--from every account a vain, not very intelligent and an essentially empty human being--secretly received the financial backing of the conservatives and the royalists, giving them to understand that he would support the return of the royalists to power. So that by 1889 it was from the right side of the political spectrum that Boulanger was receiving his main support. After September 1889 when, following the General's flight, the final crushing electoral defeat was suffered, the various factions that had supported him began to be disaffected. From August to October 1890 Le Figaro published Les Coulisses du Boulangisme, whose author "X" was in reality Jean Mermeix, one of the General's closest and most trusted aides. In divulging Boulanger's royalist machinations, Mermeix created a scandal and caused tremendous shock among the Republicans who had supported the General. Gradually Boulanger and his mistress were left isolated on the Island of Jersey, where they first lived, and later in Brussels. Although over 150,000 persons attended the General's funeral, very few of those who had backed his political fortunes made the trip to Brussels.--The story was told graphically by Maurice Barrès in his fictionalized account L'Appel au Soldat.

The enormous, almost hypnotic appeal of General Boulanger to the French people can be attributed to several factors.

a) The rising dissatisfaction of the workers; very little was

done for them during this period when the "opportunists" headed the government, by way of either social reform or economic industrialization;²²² b) the humiliation under which many French still smarted because of the 1870 defeat by the Germans. The General seemed to hold out some hope of "revenge" for them, particularly since Déroulède, one of his chief supporters, was a strong "Revancharde"; the ordinary "dull grayness of Ferry's regime";²²³ and finally, the presence in many French of love of things military, and a tendency to admire "strong men," what the French call "l'esprit cocardier," so that, even though the General's program included no social or economic reforms,²²⁴ many French were attracted because of his good looks, uniform and his public appearances on horseback. One historian of the movement summed up the General's appeal by stating it was to all those who were against the regime, on either right or left, who possessed an authoritarian temperament.²²⁵ This interpretation would explain the presence of both Blanquists and, eventually, monarchists and Bonapartists among the General's adherents.

²²²Gordon Wright, France in Modern Times (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1960), p. 310.

²²³Ibid., p. 296.

²²⁴Ibid., p. 313.

²²⁵Adrien Dansette, Le Boulangerisme (Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1938), p. 376.

Goguel believes that the General, with his vague platform of "Dissolution, Constituante, Revision," could appeal simultaneously to the "écho profond dans la masse"²²⁶ of an explosion of nationalism as well as to "le mécontentement croissant des masses laborieuses contre le régime."²²⁷ These two main currents of opinion were both present in Séverine. As one who had suffered through the 1870 war and defeat she, in contrast to Vallès, was strongly patriotic. And with her concern for the poor, she was also attracted by the second aspect of Boulanger's appeal.

The authors of the few larger studies of Séverine--i.e. Lecache, Cazes, Lecigne--as well as those who mention her in passing--i.e. Billy, Flax et al., concur that Séverine was a Boulangist. Although they do not always agree on the extent of her involvement, they all affirm that it had its origin in her romantic and sentimental nature and with her hope that the General would bring about social (rather than political) reform (although her reason for thinking so remains obscure, in view of the absence of this aspect from his platform). Cazes begins his section on Boulangism "De même, Séverine ne serait pas Séverine, si elle n'avait pas été boulangiste."²²⁸ Lecigne believes that "elle se jeta bien--et à corps perdu--dans l'aventure

²²⁶Goguel, op. cit., p. 78.

²²⁷Ibid., p. 81.

²²⁸Cazes, Grande Revue, June 1930, p. 378.

boulangiste . . . Le général représentait à ses yeux le souci des besoins populaires, des réformes en faveur des masses, l'antithèse de l'égoïsme parlementaire et des marchandages panamistes."²²⁹ (Both these writers praise Notes d'une Frondeuse, the latter calling some chapters "exquis, pleins de gaieté, de rire léger et d'enthousiasme."²³⁰) Lecache is far less categorical, saying first that she was not a Boulangist, but then talking about her "flirt" with the movement. Then he says she was "de plus en plus favorable au Boulangisme."²³¹ Since Lecache, her most partisan defender, would undoubtedly have been anti-Boulangier, he is obliged to add "il eût été en vain de reprocher à Séverine le désordre de ses idées."²³²

Actually, both Séverine's writing and her actions on the score of the General, at least before his loss of popularity, were extremely equivocal, and she seems not to have been entirely candid when referring subsequently to the period. In the spring of 1888 Georges de Labruyère left Le Cri du Peuple to found a new paper, La Cocarde, which was to support General Boulangier. Two sources, admittedly more of the scandal sheet or gossip column than the scholarly type, state that Séverine

²²⁹Lecigne, Revue de Lille, April 1902, p. 506.

²³⁰Ibid., p. 507.

²³¹Lecache, op. cit., p. 67.

²³²Ibid., p. 68.

was one of the paper's founders. Etienne Chichet does it by insinuation in Feuilles Volantes (40 Ans de Journalisme)²³³ saying "M. de Labruyère passait pour être plus qu'inspiré par Séverine." The second source states flatly that La Cocarde was founded by Georges de Labruyère, Madame Séverine and Pierre Denis.²³⁴ Whether or not she was actually one of the paper's founders, it is a fact that Séverine gave the newspaper its name.²³⁵ And she also seems to have permitted the newspaper to use her apartment as an office in its early days. Moreover, we have her own word for it that she also gave the movement its emblem, the red carnation.

The article that described how Séverine had suggested "La Cocarde" as a name goes on to state, however, that "Séverine n'a jamais été boulangiste, elle avait même souvent combattu le général adulé de tous, le triomphateur, dont elle ne voulait pas qu'on fit un César."²³⁶ Since the article's author, who signed "Le Cocardier," was probably Labruyère, it may very well be that this statement was made in accordance with Séverine's later wish to dissociate herself from the movement. This desire would also explain the statement in the ORTF broadcast of

²³³Etienne Chichet, Feuilles Volantes (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1935), p. 41.

²³⁴A. de Chambure, A Travers la Presse (Paris: Th. Fert, Albouy et Cie, 1914), p. 105.

²³⁵La Cocarde, September 25, 1893, "La Marraine de la Cocarde."

²³⁶Ibid.

December 1969 that "Labruyère faillit l'égarer dans l'aventure boulangiste, dont elle comprenait si bien les causes mais aussi l'utopie"²³⁷ (underlining mine).

In 1889 Labruyère left La Cocarde to found a republican Boulangist newspaper, Jeune République. In its first issue, May 7, 1889, the paper gave as its program "Ce journal est fondé pour que le grand mouvement d'opinion qui s'est développé en France depuis plus d'une année et qui a pris pour formule de combat le nom du général Boulanger, profite à la République et aux idées républicaines."²³⁸ The issue prints a letter from Séverine on Page 2, telling Labruyère she was with him in his project of founding a republican and socialist newspaper. But on May 14 she wrote again to say that she was not one of the paper's founders, and was responsible only for her signed articles. (Incidentally, Jeune République grew progressively more anti-Boulangist.)

Certainly Séverine never seems to have been wholeheartedly Boulangist. In her article on Boulanger in Le Cri du Peuple of January 7, 1888, she is described as being "partagée entre sa raison et son coeur."²³⁹ Although Le Cri had attacked the General

²³⁷ ORTF Broadcast, op. cit., p. 31.

²³⁸ Jeune République, May 4, 1889.

²³⁹ Jacques Néré, Le Boulangisme et la presse (Paris: Armand Colin, Collection Kiosque, 1964), p. 99.

three days before, Séverine begins by saying she does not hate him. "J'ai envers votre jeune popularité de l'inquiétude." Astutely she tells him he has with him "cette masse irrésolue et vivante qui crie vive celui-ci, vive celui-là." Not wishing to be unjust, she admits he also has with him those who are tired of the present state of affairs: "Les petits boutiquiers menacés de faillite, les politiciens menacés de liquidation, les femmes . . . et aussi les exaltés du patriotisme." Even though he fought against the Commune, he has compensated for it by his recent generosity in the Decazeville strike and, too, he is penniless, as everybody knows. She then tells him straightforwardly "Si jamais, mon général, la fantaisie vous prend de ficher la Chambre à l'eau, ne vous gênez pas pour les socialistes --les socialistes ne vous gêneront pas On s'expliquera après, voilà tout." She ends by explaining that at shooting galleries at fairs she prefers to shoot at one big fat plaster rabbit than at hundreds of tiny pipes. There are 500 "glaireux" at the Palais-Bourbon. "Tandis qu'un seul homme Soyez le lapin, mon Général." This article is certainly more than less favorable to the General. According to Néré, Séverine defended the General again on March 6 and 16, and finally the anti-Boulangier staff resigned.²⁴⁰

Alexandre Zévaès, a careful judge of events and people, states that Le Cri (Séverine) was favorable to the General in

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 101.

1887.²⁴¹ It should be pointed out, however, that at that time the General was democratizing the army. For, as Dansette puts it, during his first ministry, General Boulanger "s'était élevé comme une incarnation de la République."²⁴² But after the anti-Boulangists left, an article, signed Jacques Dest, appeared praising Boulanger and urging "Pars donc, aventurier, pour l'aventure! Les révolutionnaires sont prêts à marcher avec toi ou contre toi!"²⁴³ On April 15, after his election, Séverine continued to have big hopes for him, because "c'est l'homme qui mettra à la raison la 'députaille'"²⁴⁴ (but it is interesting to see that when she did an editorial on Boulanger for her Le Gaulois series "Nos Députés," discussed in the chapter on Portraits, it is marked by the same ambivalence).

In reality there is good reason to think that Séverine's hope in Boulanger was founded on her yearning to improve the lot of the working man. In the Lettre à Ranc²⁴⁵ she said "Le pain est à quatre sous la livre. La France, est, je vous le jure, à quiconque rognera ces quatre sous-là de moitié." And "vous qui

²⁴¹Alexandre Zévaès, Au Temps du Boulangisme (Paris: Gallimard, 1930, Collection "Sous la Troisième"), p. 55.

²⁴²Dansette, op. cit., p. 56.

²⁴³Néré, op. cit., p. 102.

²⁴⁴Quoted in Cazes, op. cit., p. 578.

²⁴⁵Notes d'une Frondeuse, pp. 20-21.

voulez tuer le boulangisme, abaissez la taxe de la boulangerie."²⁴⁶

If the economic side was what most interested her, it does seem probable that she would have opposed a coup d'Etat. Lecache quotes a letter she sent to La Justice on April 24, 1888. Denying that Le Cri is a Boulangist paper (it should, however, not be forgotten that the anti-Boulangists had just left and that a number of pro-Boulangier articles had appeared), she affirms that the Cri "a été, est et restera socialiste." She does not see the need for people to defend either Ferry or Boulangier, "quitte à intervenir--et à intervenir énergiquement--si, par la faute de l'un ou de l'autre, la République se trouve en danger."²⁴⁷

Given Séverine's impulsive and sentimental nature, it was probably to be expected that she would be most loyal to the General after his defeat. Political loyalty, an almost non-existent quality anywhere at any time, was very important to her. A Gil Blas article coinciding with the last part of Les Coulisées du Boulangisme bears the title La Fidélité Politique. Admitting she is a "sentimentale," she continues: "la fidélité politique consiste à bien mourir, si l'heure est aux épopées tragiques, à se taire, si le silence est la suprême dignité des vaincus; ou à dire

--Oui, mais c'était mon chef! . . . Je préférerais me

²⁴⁶Ibid., p. 21.

²⁴⁷Quoted in Lecache, op. cit., p. 68.

faire arracher la langue ou trancher le poignet que vendre ses secrets, alors qu'il est vaincu!"²⁴⁸

But she had reserved her harshest and most implacable language a month previous for the author of Les Coulisées. With epithets that shock even today, she flayed "X." First proving that X could not be Mermeix, she then proceeded to talk about him as "le dernier des misérables."--"Non, l'homme n'est pas fou. Il est l'écume, la scorie, la charogne que les phénomènes physiques ou politiques laissent derrière eux . . . l'épave des cataclysmes sur laquelle les chiens vont pleurer de mépris."

"Le nom d'X . . . ne le cherchez plus! Il s'est appelé Judas, dans la chrétienté, Deutz, dans la seconde chouannerie. Il a livré Maximilien à Queretaro, Gordon à Kartoum Notre temps, moins individuel, infligé à cet anonyme un surnom anonyme; celui que lui donna le proscrit dont il confirme et justifie la condamnation--il l'appelle l'Ordure, tout simplement!"²⁴⁹

As a consequence of this article, Mermeix and Labruyère fought a duel. Labruyère "a revendiqué une part de collaboration et de responsabilité dans l'article de Séverine."²⁵⁰ (Incidentally, this was the duel for which the feminists criticized

²⁴⁸Gil Blas, October 3, 1890, "La Fidélité Politique."

²⁴⁹Gil Blas, September 5, 1890, "L'X."

²⁵⁰Zévaès, op. cit., p. 206.

Séverine because she did not fight it herself, and about which Rochefort taunted her later.) Séverine spent long hours discussing Mermeix with Boulanger. She was present at Madame de Bonnemains' bedside when the latter died, and sped immediately to Brussels on hearing of the General's suicide. She wept over them both, and thrilled sentimentally to the power of love. At the General's funeral, reports Zévaès, "Séverine, toujours sentimentale et poétique, effeuille sur la tombe un bouquet d'oeillets rouges."²⁵¹ And when the General's possessions were auctioned off, Séverine faithfully reported all the proceedings to her readers. She made the pilgrimage to the General's and Madame de Bonnemains' tomb a year later.

In its 1893 article La Cocarde explained the fierceness of Séverine's attack on Mermeix. "Quand elle se trouve en présence de quelque victime d'une lâcheté ou d'une trahison, elle ne se contente pas de la plaindre--elle fait mieux, elle la venge!"²⁵²

And Lecache explains that "elle ne soutint pas Boulanger triomphant. Elle le soutint dans la défaite, alors que ses meilleurs amis le lâchaient. Elle défendit en lui le plébéien."²⁵³ This is the conclusion also reached by Lecigne, who says "elle

²⁵¹Ibid., p. 226.

²⁵²La Cocarde, September 25, 1893.

²⁵³Lecache, op. cit., p. 68.

fut fidèle aux malheurs du Général."²⁵⁴ And Cazes concludes his section on Boulanger "La position prise par Séverine en présence du boulangisme n'a rien de déconcertant pour quiconque sait qu'elle a toujours été prête à tendre la main au malheur."²⁵⁵

It is understandable to those who have read many of Séverine's pages that she should have been sympathetic to the General in his hour of defeat. But, even conceding the overriding importance to her of the economic area--it is difficult to accept the fact that she was a Boulangist--and there seems no doubt that at one period she was. And when it is realized that Boulanger had no economic program, her sympathy for him seems even more bewildering. She never seems to have realized the man's fundamental mediocrity, instability, and political immorality. In fact the whole episode shows a total lack of political acumen, disconcerting in one who wrote so frequently on politics. Perhaps it was the result of her fundamentally anarchist outlook combined with her sentimental nature. On her behalf it must be said too that many intelligent men, politicians and journalists, like Clemenceau and Barrès, were also taken in.

In 1899 Séverine, writing about the Dreyfus case in La Fronde, affirmed that in her opinion there would have been

²⁵⁴Lecigne, Revue de Lille, April 1902, p. 508.

²⁵⁵Cazes, op. cit., Grande Revue, June 1930, p. 580.

no Affaire Dreyfus had Boulanger been in the War Ministry, since he would have controlled the Generals for the benefit of both Army and Country. Thinking back about the Boulanger period she said--and perhaps this was her fundamental reason for sympathizing with Boulanger--"Car ce fut un mouvement d'amour! On aimait quelqu'un, on acclamait quelqu'un--à tort ou à raison--mais enfin le coeur y était."²⁵⁶ So Séverine listened to "les raisons du coeur," instead of seeking political wisdom. In this instance, she followed, rather than led, the people.

F. Mysticism

For a short while in 1891, after the Padlewski affair subsided, Séverine passed through a "mystical" phase. Discussing it, Lecache says, "Credo remplaça Renée," adding "Son christianisme d'antan se rendait maître, subtilement et inconsciemment, de son esprit."²⁵⁷ Although the period was itself short-lived, Séverine continued in her columns either to discuss aspects of the Church that interested her or to describe Church personalities she admired. Her choice of these articles, together with her interview of the Pope and other, more personal and lyrical, less

²⁵⁶La Fronde, October 6, 1899.

²⁵⁷Lecache, op. cit., p. 107.

revolutionary columns, she collected into her second book, Pages Mystiques.

The word "mystiques" is clearly a misnomer. A more fitting choice would probably have been "religieuses" or "catholiques." For it is doubtful whether Séverine ever had any truly "mystical" experiences. The very quality of her faith is debatable. Lecache says "durant quelques semaines elle fut toute ferveur envers un Dieu qu'elle ne vérifiait pas."²⁵⁸ Séverine herself yearned for blind, unquestioning faith, as several remarks, public and private, attest. In 1893, playing the parlor game referred to above in the chapter on Journalism,²⁵⁹ she answered the question "ce que je voudrais être" by "une paysanne ayant la foi."²⁶⁰ Again, in "Notre-Dame de Bon-Secours," an article reprinted in Pages Mystiques, she repeated the wish. "Je regarde ces prunelles candides, où l'espérance allume son phare, ces lèvres sincères, toute cette ingénue croyance. Et, fille du siècle où l'on doute, je les envie--oh, oui, je les envie! ces marins, ces laboureurs . . . ces simples!"²⁶¹

Was there a contradiction between her "Socialism" and her "mysticism?" Séverine herself obviously saw and felt none.

²⁵⁸Ibid.

²⁵⁹See above, p. 56.

²⁶⁰L'Echo de Jarnac, February 5, 1893.

²⁶¹Pages Mystiques, p. 93.

Vallès too had been a Socialist who was not unfavorably disposed toward the Church. Through him she had been won over to the side of the poor. The Socialists appeared to share her concern and to be those most interested in improving the latter's fate. The articles in Pages Mystiques devoted to Catholic personalities feature those who, like Cardinal Manning of London, or Soeur Rosalie, had given tangible signs of their attachment to the poor. And in one article--the one that bears most evidence of theoretical reflection--La Blouse et la Soutane--Séverine looks forward to the day when Socialists and Catholics will work together. "Et je me disais--au risque d'être traitée de pétroleuse par les dévots et de bondieusarde par les athées--que ces deux grandes forces: L'Eglise et le Socialisme, se rencontreraient un jour: feraient cause commune contre l'ennemi commun."²⁶² She points out that many noted Catholics are even now working for the people, and indicates that the Pope's new Encyclical will have a social orientation. She believes that the Socialists should have defended the priests and nuns who were turned out, and that it is retribution that they in turn were expelled. She denounces the present Government because of the Fourmies massacre. The only two groups who were heroic at Fourmies, she says, were "les deux alliés de demain: la blouse et la soutane--le prêtre et

²⁶²Pages Mystiques, p. 8.

l'ouvrier!"²⁶³ Although certainly Séverine did not think so deeply, she did anticipate the prêtres ouvriers movement of some years ago (which, incidentally was interrupted by Rome because the priests in the movement apparently became too emotionally involved with the workers they were supposed to influence).

But in pushing for the rights of religion against the present government, Séverine did sometimes find herself in opposition to noted Socialists. One of the many reasons behind her hatred of Jules Ferry seems to have been his anti-clerical laws. When Paul Brousse, a noted "possibilist," denounced some priests who had placed a plaster statue of the Virgin in the Meudon forest, Séverine answered him with a homily on what it means to be a "libre penseur"; "c'est vouloir la fin de toutes les persécutions . . . c'est être toujours avec le faible contre le fort, avec l'opprimé contre l'opresseur . . . et, dans nos temps plus civilisés saluer,--n'en déplaise à M. Ferry-- les proscrits de l'Article 7"²⁶⁴

Brogan notes that in the generation coming of age around 1890, there was not merely a "more lively and intellectual faith among those who had remained Catholic, but a certain sympathy with Christian ideas among those who had lost their faith, or

²⁶³Ibid., p. 11.

²⁶⁴Quoted in Lecache, op. cit., p. 85.

never had any."²⁶⁵ Although Séverine was not, of course, of this generation. Lecigne points out that she shared their point of view. He quotes from her letter to the Pope requesting an interview. "Qui je suis--une femme qui fut chrétienne et s'en souvient pour aimer les petits et défendre les faibles; une socialiste qui, si elle n'est point en état de grâce, a gardé intact, dans son coeur meurtri, le respect profond de la foi, la vénération des vieillesses augustes et des souverainetés captives."²⁶⁶

This aspect of Séverine interests Lecigne, a churchman, very much, and he devotes almost the entire second part of his work on her to it. He believes that "le sentiment religieux" was the one permanent feeling at the bottom of Séverine's changeable and varying soul. Although he considers the title of Pages Mystiques somewhat arrogant, he points out how unusual it is to see a "prêcheuse d'anarchie qui était aussi une prêcheuse d'Évangile."²⁶⁷ She admires and loves all priests and there is a parade of "soutanes" in Madame Séverine's "beau livre." The most important element of Séverine's "mysticism" (the wrong word, he too concludes) is her awareness of the Catholic church's social role and mission. He compares Séverine to the woman in a picture of the Crucifixion by J. Béraud.

²⁶⁵Brogan, op. cit., pp. 266-267.

²⁶⁶Quoted in Lecigne, Revue de Lille, May 1902, p. 581.

²⁶⁷Ibid., p. 580.

Standing alone, veiled in black with folded hands, she is a member neither of the group that believes or the group that blasphemes. Since Séverine knows that all the heroes and heroines she paints in Pages Mystiques have been inspired by faith, he predicts that after writing all those "Pages Mystiques" she will end up writing "une belle page simplement chrétienne, la plus belle de toute son oeuvre et de toute sa vie"268

Canon Lecigne, with his great admiration of Séverine (although she is an "easy mark" she is "sublime!")269 wanted to believe she would ultimately be reconverted. It does not seem that she ever was. And on the other hand almost at the same time she defended "L'Eglise Libre" and called for the liberation of priests.270 Lecigne was correct perhaps in saying that she belonged "neither entirely to God, nor entirely to the Devil."271

Although Séverine was perhaps not imbued with faith as she and Canon Lecigne would have preferred, there is no question that she possessed a deep and sincere religious feeling. In all likelihood her very powerful instinct to help the weak and the poor stemmed from the fact that she found it justified in both

268 Ibid., p. 589.

269 Ibid., p. 590.

270 Lecache, op. cit., p. 113.

271 Lecigne, op. cit., p. 590.

Christianity and in Socialism. But even if that were not the case, Séverine had somewhere within her the power to resolve contradictions that would have created strong neuroses in others.

G. The Oppressed

The preceding sections summarize and attempt to analyze Séverine's writings in important ideological areas: politics, feminism and anti-Semitism. These areas account for a large part of Séverine's published work and a fair proportion of her newspaper writing that was never collected into a book. No formal content analysis of Séverine's work has been made; however, an informal appraisal would seem to indicate that the greater part of her whole output was concerned, not with these areas, but with the oppressed. For the latter category with Séverine does not include solely the poor and the dispossessed; into it must also be reckoned women, animals, and the suffering and unjustly treated of all species and classes.

Séverine revealed very early her enormous empathy with the suffering. For instance, "Le Petit Jahn" and the series on both the Opéra Comique and the mine disasters are all found in her first collection, Pages Rouges. But other articles in the same book give evidence of her huge capacity for pity:

"Julius Lieske," a young German condemned to death by the Bismarck Government for a crime he did not commit; or "Un Imagier," the story of Eugene Rapp, the talented artist who died at the age of 26.

Pages Mystiques, Séverine's second collection, starts off with an article entitled "La Pitié." "Elle élève et divinise le coeur des hommes, cette pitié sainte qui efface les discordes de la triste humanité, supprime ses haines, absout ses crimes."²⁷² She explains that into the category of "pauvres" she puts "tous ceux qui, de par le monde, sont dénués d'aide, de protection, d'assistance."²⁷³ And she knows exactly how pity should be granted: "l'accorder sans parcimonie, sans mesure, sans restrictions, sans espoir de retour, surtout."²⁷⁴

In the section on "feminism," mention was made of Séverine's hope of assisting women in difficulty. She devoted many articles to individual cases of women unjustly treated by their husbands, or abandoned by them or their lovers, women left with children and no means of support.--Animals of all kinds also aroused her special interest. "Les bêtes, ça console des gens,"²⁷⁵ she said. Many a delightful article recounts life

²⁷²Pages Mystiques, p. 1.

²⁷³Ibid., p. 3.

²⁷⁴Ibid., p. 5.

²⁷⁵Lecache, op. cit., p. 195.

with her menagerie, or tells of her acquisition of each individual member. Her successful struggle to keep bullfights away from Paris has already been mentioned.²⁷⁶ Séverine received the Prix du Président de la République for her work on behalf of animals²⁷⁷--and eventually, in spite of her basic distaste for organizational work, became a member of the Société Protectrice des Animaux. Yet her interest in animals never superseded her feeling for human beings, as it often does with devoted animal-lovers.

Séverine's compassion also extended to domestic help (surely badly treated in those times), the old, the infirm, penniless dramatic artists or journalists, waiters, workers in match factories, impecunious school teachers, people buried alive, etc. etc. In the political field, during this period she devoted many columns to suffering Armenia, the Transvaal, etc.

But in addition to these broader categories, Séverine's interest extended to individual cases of trouble, no matter what the class of the person involved. She fought just as hard for the Royal Duke who came back into France illegally to take his military service as for the poor woman brutally ousted by an unfeeling landlord. In particular, as said above, she sought to draw public attention to the unjust treatment often encountered

²⁷⁶See above, p. 69.

²⁷⁷Lecache, op. cit., p. 195.

by army recruits.

For all of this Séverine received her share of ridicule. "Elle se lève tous les matins en se demandant qui elle va défendre."²⁷⁸ Lecigne comments on the vast amount of imagination she employs in telling her stories. Although he generally admires her effects, he does say "Vous me direz qu'il y a bien quelques fleurs de rhétorique dans cette page."²⁷⁹ He too is impressed by Séverine's empathy, for he comments that her success in communicating this sort of scene to her readers is "le triomphe des âmes qui sentent très vivement."²⁸⁰

It is apparent that Séverine lavished as much care on each of these individual stories as she did on her reportages, her portraits, or her political pieces. Despite the gibes, her public must have realized and appreciated her skill, or her Carnet would not have met with so great a response, nor would she personally have enjoyed so great a prestige.

²⁷⁸Quoted in Lecache, op. cit., p. 137.

²⁷⁹Lecigne, op. cit., p. 579.

²⁸⁰Ibid., p. 577.

CHAPTER VII

SEVERINE AS A WRITER

Journalistic literary style is not totally congruent with purely literary style. Unlike the novelist, the journalist does not have unlimited time or space for conveying to the reader either a fact observed, or an opinion of whose truth he is determined to convince him. The journalist cannot therefore be satisfied with simply stating the facts in linear order, and letting the reader conclude for himself. He must select the essentials quickly and "find the concrete image that will summarize them."¹

To bring him closer to the reader, the journalist employs a style that is a "half-way house," a compromise between written and spoken language, diverging in both syntax and vocabulary from the former, but nevertheless more elegant than the latter. The polished and perfect construction characteristic of literary prose is often replaced by a series of rapid short sentences, whose function is to create a deeper sense of participation in the reader. Familiar and popular

¹Pierre Schneider discussing a journalist's book about General de Gaulle, New York Times, January 11, 1971.

expressions are brought into the more literary language. Not the least important, the journalist's subjective presence is never far away, since by keeping the reader aware of his own reactions he somehow brings about a more direct and immediate communication with him.

In a sense Séverine's writing is a paradigm of this journalistic style, for she was partially responsible for its evolution. Yet in some ways her writing transcends it. Even when it is journalistic, it is so highly charged both emotionally and stylistically as to make the end result extremely personal. It is almost always possible to recognize a Séverine editorial, for it is suffused with impassioned subjective feeling, either on behalf of or against a person, action, or institution. The feeling is conveyed at least partly through the use of certain stylistic traits. On the other hand, in some of her editorials, particularly those concerned with nature, Séverine achieves an authentic literary style.

Almost from the outset of her career, even before leaving Le Cri du Peuple, Séverine developed the basic structure of her editorials. Although at the time there does not seem to have been any compulsion to string her work out, so as to earn more money, the articles are almost all fairly lengthy. Ranging from 1000 to 1500 words, they generally occupied two columns on the front page. The typical editorial has an introduction, not too long, but rather provocative,

furnishing very little, if any, clue as to the direction of the main discussion, but whetting the reader's appetite. Then, after a series of asterisks, Séverine plunges into the heart of her story or argument. This may cover another section, even two more, following which there is a final portion, usually terminating with a surprise or shock to the reader, indicated by a question mark or an exclamation point.

The choice of samples illustrating Séverine's style was not an easy one, for her range was broad. Finally, three samples were chosen for analysis, one illustrating her violence, another her tenderness and compassion, and the third an "eclectic" style combining several kinds of writing.

The first sample, "Ferry-la-Honte" was selected because, although it is unusually short, it is complete in itself. It was an early attack on the Minister, dating from Le Cri du Peuple of December 3, 1887. It was not Séverine's only, or her most bitter attack on Ferry. Perhaps her most virulent assault on him was her article in Le Journal on March 18, 1893, immediately after Ferry's death. This she prefaced with a quotation from Vermorel "La mort n'est pas une excuse."

The occasion for the article in question was the possibility that Ferry would be named President of the Republic, since Grévy was stepping down. Here is the entire editorial, "Ferry-la-Honte."

1 Il y a eu aujourd'hui de l'efferves-
2 cence dans les rues de Paris, il n'y a
3 pas eu émeute. La population s'est
4 agitée, le peuple est demeuré calme, et
5 de cela nous sommes profondément
6 heureux. Mais la situation reste la
7 même, grave, à la merci des caprices
8 séniles de M. Grévy, à la merci de la
9 triste majorité qui demain tiendra le
10 sort de la France entre ses mains.

11 A six heures, le Président devait
12 rester; à minuit, on apprenait qu'il
13 allait partir.

14 Et nous voici dans la même situa-
15 tion qu'hier: la poigne de Ferry s'a-
16 battant sur la France, et le spectre
17 de Bismarck à l'horizon . . .

18 Et surtout, oh! surtout, pour nous
19 autres, l'Idée sociale meurtrie, ligot-
20 tée, perdant son sang par de sales
21 blessures, réduite au mutisme et à
22 l'impuissance!

23 Cela ne sera pas, cela ne peut pas
24 être! Je ne sais point au juste comment
25 est faite l'âme d'un député, le cerveau
26 d'un sénateur; mais ce que je sais
27 bien, c'est qu'il faut y faire pénétrer
28 de gré ou de force cette pensée: Qui
29 ils voudront--sauf Ferry!

30 Le peuple se moque que ce soit tel
31 ou tel; sa détresse n'a rien à perdre
32 ou à gagner à celui-ci plutôt que ce-
33 lui-là. La misère sera la même, la vie
34 aussi chère à gagner, le pain aussi dur
35 à conquérir.

36 Mais tout ce qu'il y a en lui de
37 sain, de fier, d'honnête se révolte à
38 la pensée de Ferry devenu son maître,
39 et, comme disent les bonnes gens,
40 à cette idée, son sang ne fait
41 qu'un tour.

42 C'est qu'ainsi que je l'écrivais hier,
43 il l'a vu à l'oeuvre, ce Ferry. Depuis
44 l'Empire, toujours et toujours contre
45 lui, le décimant par la famine, par
46 la mitraille, et, hier encore, lui arra-
47 chant ses petits pour les envoyer cre-
48 ver là-bas, comme des chiens, sous
49 le soleil torride, dans les marais
50 puants.

51 Qui ils voudront--sauf celui-là!
 52 Qu'ils prennent leur Freycinet, leur
 53 Goblet, leur Floquet; qu'ils laissent
 54 même en place, si telle est leur fan-
 55 taisie, le vieux soliveau qu'ils ont dé-
 56 raciné comme des imbéciles sans se
 57 soucier de ce qu'ils mettraient dans
 58 le trou béant, mais pas Ferry!
 59 Au nom des affamés du siège, pas
 60 Ferry! Au nom des assassinés du 22
 61 janvier, pas Ferry! Au nom des morts
 62 du Tonkin, pas Ferry!
 63 Non, mais voyez-vous ce Français
 64 qui, à l'étranger, si on lui demandait
 65 le nom du Président de sa République
 66 serait forcé de répondre, en baissant
 67 le nez:
 68 --Ferry-la-Honte!

SEVERINE.

With the exception of the first paragraph and one other, in the article's center, "Ferry-la-Honte," consists of only short paragraphs, themselves composed of short sentences or parts of sentences, not a few punctuated by exclamation points. The net effect is one of harshness and brutality. It would be difficult to believe the author is a woman except perhaps for the repetition on line 18 of "surtout, oh! surtout, pour nous autres," etc.

The tone of hatred, scorn and contempt is intensified by the author's choice of construction. She at no time prefaces the Minister's name with Monsieur, referring to him only by his last name. In line 43, she underlines her contempt by putting him at the end of the sentence, prefaced by "ce." In lines 52 and 53 her contempt for the entire Chamber is made very plain by her use of the word "leur" in front of the three different possibilities for the Presidency: "leur Freycinet," "leur Goblet,"

"leur Floquet," capping it off with her rude characterization of the incumbent President as "ce vieux soliveau."

Séverine frequently uses repetition for effect. "Qui ils voudront, sauf Ferry," is said twice. And the words "pas Ferry" end each sentence or each part of a sentence in the next to the last paragraph.

Yet, within these short hard sentences or constructions, there is a good deal of "forme ternaire" of the kind used by Chateaubriand and Hugo, three words, or three groups of words in succession. In line 33, "la misère sera la même, la vie aussi chère, le pain aussi dur à conquérir," in line 37, "de sain, de fier, d'honnête." There are also balanced antithetical constructions: "Il y a eu de l'effervescence dans les rues de Paris; il n'y a pas eu émeute. La population s'est agitée, le peuple est demeuré calme," occurring at the very beginning.

Frequently she omits connectives: "Cela ne sera pas, cela ne peut pas être" in line 23; "l'âme d'un député, le cerveau d'un Sénateur" in lines 25 and 26.

One of Séverine's means of achieving her tone of unmitigated contempt is through her choice of epithets and constructions. In line 15 she uses the popular expression "La poigne" of Ferry to emphasize the hold that the Minister would have. She uses another popular expression in lines 40 and 41 describe what the reaction of the people would be (quoting Béranger, "les bonnes gens") to the naming of Ferry, "son sang ne fait qu'un tour."

There are two metaphors in this passage. One very successfully carries through the idea of the "vieux soliveau" being uprooted with nothing to place in "le trou béant." The other is mixed, less successful as a metaphor, but effectively achieving its purpose. In line 18, she talks of "l'idée sociale meurtrie, ligotée, perdant son sang par de sales blessures." This could be called a "prosopopée," since it gives life to an inanimate object; and at the same time it shows just how real the "idée sociale" was to her.

Séverine's mention in Line 17 of "le spectre de Bismarck à l'horizon" is an interesting illustration of the patriotism and anti-German feeling of the Socialists who had taken part in the 1870 war.

While Séverine's subjective presence is not felt so strongly as in others of her editorials, it nevertheless remains close at hand. Sometimes she disguises herself under the expression "nous autres," although at other times the "nous" refers to the country in general (as in line 14).

The article is admittedly exaggerated and partisan, even hysterical. But it is the work of a committed individual, one with a definite point of view. And while the article may not give a fair picture--and probably does not--it is nevertheless a startlingly effective piece of writing.²

²It is possible that Séverine's grudge against Ferry had its source in the fact that during the Commune Ferry had not been very kind to Vallès. (See Roger Williams, The French Revolution of 1870 [New York: Norton, 1969], p. 102.)

The second sample, taken from "Le Petit Jahn," originally published in Le Gaulois on June 29, 1890, then reprinted in Pages Rouges, illustrates Séverine's immense fund of pity for the unfortunate. The portion selected for analysis is the middle section of the article. In the first two sections, Séverine meditates on the reasons underlying adolescent revolt against society, for "tout débit, toute faute, toute erreur vient, par d'invisibles racines, aux débuts."³ She relates that, learning of the arrest of the youthful anarchist Jahn, because of a "violent" speech he had delivered at a public meeting, she had conceived the idea of telling "en toute impartialité" how he had become an anarchist. Coming from a very poor family, he had never had enough to eat from infancy on. Aged eleven, he had been sent out by his family to work. Eventually he became a telegraph delivery boy. Running errands was a source of dreadful suffering for him, since he had been born with deformed and very delicate feet. He was constantly reprimanded and punished for being slow. More and more desperate and angry, the boy took the political path and it was he who organized the telegraphers' strike, where Séverine had come to know him. Immediately preceding the excerpt to be analyzed, she has recounted an amusing episode where the boy had made an outrageous gesture toward a very important person during a strike meeting. Now the tone changes.

³Pages Rouges, p. 122.

on his arrival, that the job was taken. Managing to drag himself to the railroad station he crept into the animal car of the train back to Paris. But he was discovered and arrested and sentenced to a fine and three months in prison for FRAUD. Séverine's sense of outrage is so great she italicizes the whole sentence and puts the alleged crime in capital letters. The final paragraph in the excerpt, also short, and terminating in a question mark, implies that, while Jahn may have been technically guilty before the law, he is innocent before eternal justice.

The short paragraphs that characterized the first example are also present here. There are also a number of examples of sentences without subjects. Particularly effective are the combination of adverb and infinitive "comment rejoindre Paris?, comment revenir? (line 18) by which she conveys Jahn's anxiety to the reader.

Here too there is repetition, "qui couche je ne sais où, qui mange je ne sais quoi" (line 4); or "pas un sou pour manger, pas un sou pour voyager" (line 22). The lack of connectives is noticeable here too. "Il se met en route, se traîne, arrive" (line 14).

The "ternaire" construction is also present: "On le découvre, on l'arrête, on le livre à la police" (line 30).

The relative absence of adjectives here is striking, and it is counterbalanced by an abundance of verbs, so plentiful that the net result is a rapidity of action that is almost

cinematographic.

The whole picture Séverine tells is matter-of-fact. She uses her imagination only twice, once to describe Jahn's feet after his walk, which "ne le soutiennent plus, tout saignants dans leurs bandages et chiffons," and once to picture the good animals in their railroad car watching out over the unfortunate young man, an almost Christ-like figure in his refuge. The two pictures she draws are no doubt sentimental, what André Billy would call "de la sensiblerie." Nevertheless, Séverine's reactions do not seem motivated by dishonesty. Her pity is authentic.

There is something of Zola in this story of the young man who is the victim of Society, who somehow cannot escape his fate.

Séverine's presence is more obvious in this excerpt than in the first example. Five times she uses the "je," and elsewhere she asks direct questions of her readers, or calls on them to listen to something she has to say. "Je me suis hâtée à rire," says she in the very first sentence. At the beginning of the third paragraph she speaks directly to the reader after the exclamation "ah! écoutez ceci, c'est un des incidents les plus navrants et les plus odieux que je connaisse."

Even in this short excerpt from a longer story Séverine has succeeded in evoking in the reader and in communicating to him her own immense feeling of compassion for "le petit Jahn."

The third sample contains portions of "Les Papillons Rouges," published in Gil Blas of April 8, 1892. The anarchist Ravachol had just been apprehended as a result of his own unbelievable carelessness in returning to a café and so being recognized. And a grateful government had just decorated the Police Commissioner who had arrested him, and rewarded the café owner who identified him. The article purports to be Séverine's answer to a reader inquiring about her reactions to the Legion of Honor.

Unlike the previous examples, this one is not all of a piece. Séverine shows a mastery here of several moods and styles, as well as an unusually far-ranging and rich vocabulary, popular as well as academic. From an ironical, lazy, and lyrical beginning, she moves into a consideration of the nature of the present society and the possibility of another revolution. The style evolves along with the ideas. The passage follows, but only those lines which are numbered will be discussed.

LES
PAPILLONS ROUGES

1 Alors, vraiment, monsieur E. L. . . . ,
2 lecteur inconnu que je voudrais connaî-
3 tre--car sa lettre révèle, pour un "vul-
4 gaire bourgeois", un état d'esprit qui
5 est juste l'antipode soit de l'un, soit de
6 l'autre--alors, vraiment, vous souhai-
7 teriez mon avis sur la décoration du com-
8 missaire Dresch?
9 La drôle d'idée! . . . Par ce beau temps,
10 avec cet avril tout en fleurs, cette nature
11 tout en fête, vous prenez souci de ces
12 choses . . . administratives (j'emploie à

13 dessein le plus affreux mot connu!)
 14 Moi, nenni!
 15 J'ai en tête de bien plus gentils rêves,
 16 qu'entre le grillage d'or de mes cils
 17 trempés de soleil je regarde voleter
 18 dans le gai midi. Ils sont prismés com-
 19 me des aurores, ailés comme des libellu-
 20 les, jaseurs comme des fauvettes--il en
 21 est qui se pavanent, ainsi que des dan-
 22 seuses, juponnés d'une fleur de liseron;
 23 d'autres, colletés à la Médicis, d'un ca-
 24 lice de mauve haut tuyauté; d'autres
 25 corsetés d'émeraude, revêtus d'espoir
 26 --et quelques-uns pourpre qui saigne,
 27 flamme qui vole, braise qui danse, les
 28 gemmes incarnadines, les rubis incan-
 29 descents, couleur de baisers!
 30 Cela, et d'autres songes bien autre-
 31 ment beaux encore parce que bien au-
 32 trement graves et humains, voilà qui
 33 est intéressant! Mais la décoration de
 34 M. Dresch! . . . Vous voulez, sérieuse-
 35 ment, mon cher correspondant, qu'à
 36 coups d'éventail, Japonaise par occasion,
 37 je mène au souffle de mon caprice ce
 38 gros papillon de moire ponceau, officiel,
 39 cossu, tout battant neuf! Il est bien
 40 lourd; et mon éventail est bien fragile;
 41 et mon caprice est bien ailleurs! . . .
 42 Cependant, je désire vous plaire, et
 43 vais faire effort . . . C'est entendu, vous
 44 tenez absolument à savoir quel a été
 45 mon "état d'âme", la commotion reçue,
 46 le choc éprouvé, la "petite secousse"
 47 intellectuelle, ce que ça m'a fait enfin,
 48 quand j'ai appris la distinction honorifi-
 49 que dont M. Dresch était l'objet?
 50 Penchez-vous, je veux vous le dire
 51 tout bas, car, enfin, cette confidence
 52 pourrait être scabreuse . . .
 53 --Ça m'a fait rire!

* * *

Oh! mais, rire de bon coeur, à tire-la-
 rigot, à gorge déployée, comme disaient
 nos aieules, dont les corsages galants
 justifiaient amplement la locution.

Non que j'aie rien de personnel contre
 le susdit magistrat; pas plus d'ailleurs
 que le lecteur qui m'écrit et affirme
 être, envers M. Dresch, "sans haine et

sans crainte" à la façon des bons jurés. Il se peut même qu'on ait saisi l'occasion--on a saisi tant de choses!--de récompenser d'antérieurs services.

Mais cette croix qui tombe sur le tableau de droite, tandis que les gains de Lhérot tombent sur le tableau de gauche, alors que le hasard seul tient les cartes, avouez que c'est rigolo! En conscience, vous savez, c'est Ravachol qui aurait dû ramasser le tout, car, sans son inconcevable imprudence, les "toiles" de Lhérot se toucheraient encore, et la boutonnière de M. Dresch n'aurait pas été doucement violée par M. Carnot.

Voilà une idée que personne n'a eue --et cependant, qui, de l'arrestation de Ravachol, est responsable, sinon Ravachol lui-même? En fait de récompense, on l'a "pilé", salement pilé même, paraît-il, car la petite fête se serait prolongée bien après sa résistance. Ce sont là vilaines lâchetés! Qu'il s'agisse d'un homme ou d'un fauve, je comprends qu'on l'abatte, je n'admets pas qu'on le frappe quand il est ficelé, hors de nuire --et de riposter!

Voyez-vous, cette décoration, d'une part, et, de l'autre, cette outrance de tendresse envers Lhérot, tout cela provient du même sentiment. Reconnaissance? Non! Tous les jours, des gens en font autant, sinon plus, pour l'actuelle société, qui les laisse crever de misère ensuite--car elle n'a pas senti trembler ses bases!

54 Il faut bien le dire, et le dire carré-
55 ment: les gains fabuleux du troquet, la
56 croix du commissaire, c'est une explo-
57 sion en sens inverse de la frayeur géné-
58 rale, l'apothéose de la frousse, la belle
59 frousse qui tient le vieux monde aux
60 entrailles et le rend actuellement capa-
61 ble de tout--même de générosité!
62 Comprendons-nous bien. Il est très
63 évident que M. Dresch a peut-être mé-
64 rité son ruban d'autre manière, puisque
65 ruban il y a; que des Parisiens résolus,

66 incapables de tremblotte, ont tenu à
 67 donner un témoignage de satisfaction
 68 à qui leur avait rendu service. Mais est-
 69 il un contradicteur de bonne foi osant
 70 jurer que l'emballement, le soulagement
 71 public, était d'origine héroïque?
 72 C'est cela qui me fâche, moi, fille des
 73 Gaulois n'ayant d'autre crainte que de
 74 voir le ciel tomber sur leurs crânes
 75 roux! . . .

Les anarchistes trouvent plus com-
 mode d'expédier leurs "clients" vers la
 nue, que de décrocher le plafond bleu,
 clouté d'or, sous lequel repose, depuis la
 première nuit de l'Eden, l'antique hu-
 manité. Et puis après? On ne saute
 qu'une fois, allez!

Si j'en parle ainsi à mon aise, c'est
 qu'il viendra bien une heure où je serai
 de la contre-danse. Toutes les révolu-
 tions se ressemblent: on commence par
 les invités, et ça s'achève entre soi.
 Alors, survient le "tyran"--et l'on en a
 pour un siècle!

Mais je ne voudrais pas que les invités
 d'il y a cent ans fissent trop honte à mes
 contemporains, les invités d'aujour-
 d'hui, qui, maintenant, font bien des
 manières pour prendre la suite de la
 clientèle à Samson. Le procédé à changé,
 mais le résultat est le même--identi-
 quement, celui qu'infligèrent les bour-
 geois aux patriciens et que prétendent
 infliger les plébéiens aux bourgeois!
 N'est-ce pas le jeu de la fortune, le tour-
 noisement de la roue, l'inéluctable loi à
 laquelle nul ne peut se soustraire--ce
 que les philosophes appellent: le juste
 retour des choses d'ici-bas?

Alors, pourquoi tant de façons? Les
 sang-rose ne valent donc pas les sang-
 bleu qui moururent si joliment, le chef
 poudré, une rose aux dents, envoyant
 des baisers, tout le long de la route, aux
 plus jolies des tricoteuses?

76 Hé! quoi, voilà un siècle que l'on
 77 jouit, que l'on profite, que l'on mange,
 78 que l'on boit--assis à la place de ceux
 79 qu'on a dépossédés, et quand les ventre-
 80 creux, ceux de l'autre bateau, du siècle
 81 d'après, réclament leur tour, on jetterait
 82 la serviette sans grâce et l'on laisserait
 83 voir quelque dépit?
 84 Fi donc!
 85 Allons, relevez la tête, fils des mon-
 86 des abolis . . . et s'il faut mourir, mourons
 87 galamment! Ne gâchons ni les derniers
 88 printemps, ni les ultimes orgueils en
 89 humiliantes--et inutiles--alarmes!
 90 Respirons plus ardemment l'haleine des
 91 calices; enivrons-nous de tout ce que la
 92 nature et l'art versent de divin; dépen-
 93 sons tout notre coeur en tendresse et
 94 miséricorde--et regardons venir la
 95 mort en souriant . . . ça la vexe!
 96 Le 1^{er} mai? Qui a calomnié le 1^{er}
 97 mai? . . . C'est le jour où les roses s'épa-
 98 nouissent toutes ensemble; où l'autel
 99 fleuri de blanc embaume, dans le clair
 100 obscur des chapelles; où les amoureux
 101 s'en vont par les bois, la main dans la
 102 main . . .
 103 On n'en a peut-être pas pour long-
 104 temps? . . . Mettez les baisers doubles!

JACQUELINE

The first two paragraphs, short as usual, are the
 provocative fillers. Line 14 is a one-sentence paragraph giv-
 ing her the opportunity to use one of her favorite expressions
 "nenni," an archaism, forcefully asserting the negative.
 Writing from the country she tells her reader she is much
 happier contemplating her dreams, which she describes in a
 series of metaphors taken from nature. This paragraph although
 not much longer than most, contains a very long sentence, and
 conveys a very different feeling from the writing so far

analyzed. It is lyrical and lazy. In the following paragraph beginning with line 30, she finally mentions M. Dresch, the decorated official, describing him as a "gros papillon moire ponceau, officiel, cossu, tout battant neuf," combining the metaphor with two familiar expressions. In the paragraph beginning with line 42, she draws out the suspense as to her feelings by giving a series of synonyms for them, and finally she tells her reader that "ça m'a fait rire!"

We see from the continuation that the slow and lyrical beginning was meant to be a contrast for the ugly things that are happening and also which she foresees in the future. She explains that the rewards received by the Commissioner and the café owner are the result of "l'apothéose de la frousse," an oxymoron combining a word reserved for glory with the popular word for fear. In the next paragraph, also short, she develops the idea, using another popular word "tremblotte" to express the Parisians' reactions. In line 70, she uses another familiar word "l'emballement" to characterize the popular reaction to the arrest.

In the next paragraph in the section, consisting of only one sentence, she boasts that she, "fille des Gaulois," is practically free from fear.

In the last section under analysis, she develops the idea of the possibility of another revolution. In hard thrusting sentences she points out that those who took over power a century ago have been enjoying the benefits since, and

she chides them for being ungracious now that another group is arriving which wants its chance, "fi donc." And from lines 85 to 95 her style changes again to longer sentences, wherein she urges her readers to "carpe diem." If one has to die, "mourons galamment." In another series of lyrical fragments, she praises the first of May, which has been calumniated, she maintains. And with her usual surprise ending she suggests humorously that since "on n'en a peut-être pas pour longtemps, mettez les baisers doubles."

Unlike the first two, this sample is not in one style, but combines several different styles and kinds of prose. Written later, it gives every evidence of a greater maturity of achievement and mastery of her craft. The irony and the lyricism of the first section are repeated at the end, and in the intervening segments there are the harsh, bitter and lively formations filled with strong feeling that are characteristic of Séverine.

There are many more metaphors, all of which seem to be original and successful. These occur particularly in lines 15 to 25 and 85 to 95.

Séverine's tone in this example is partly conversational, as she talks not only to the reader, but to her entire audience. Her subjective presence is very much present here: the whole first section is deliberately centered on her and even when she moves away from herself, she keeps returning in one way and another to her reactions and thoughts.

Although the three examples presented for analysis differ in length, purpose and tone, there is an identifiable common denominator of technique. Séverine employs short paragraphs composed, very frequently of short sentences or partial sentences. Often the construction is paratactical, lacking connectives or conjunctions. Within that basic construction, she often uses a classical "ternaire" series of adjectives, nouns, or groups of words, as well as antithetical constructions. She adds to the resources of a rich and ample vocabulary current, familiar and popular expressions, words of her own coinage, after the fashion of Vallès, and locations dating from the past. She frequently uses repetition. Most important, her subjective presence is always pervasive in lesser or greater amount.

Séverine is often given to metaphor, her use of which gave rise to the most criticism. Othon Guerlac, talking of Notes d'une frondeuse, speaks of "le fatras et le faux clinquant des métaphores, des épithètes et des images."⁴ Another whose remarks are in the same critical vein is the same Adolphe Brisson who praised her for her reportorial ability. "Quand elle quitte le document pour l'invention elle tombe dans le plus affligeant galimatias. C'est une orgie d'épithètes inutiles, de mots répétés, d'amplifications oiseuses, des

⁴Quoted in Albert Cazes, op. cit. "Une Princesse du Journalisme," Grande Revue, July 1930, p. 107.

enguirlandements de métaphores qui se poursuivent le long des pages et découragent l'attention."⁵

Albert Cazes himself, a great admirer of Séverine, and who forces himself in all fairness to quote the above criticism, agrees that certain of Séverine's pages are not exempt from "ce défaut de l'amplification verbeuse."⁶ He refers especially to the end of En Marche.

There is a certain tendency to wordiness in Séverine, but it seems to have developed late in the decade and to have become harmful to her style in the period beyond the scope of this study.

Others have emitted more favorable opinions about Séverine's style. Lecache, admittedly not objective, calls it "vivant et âpre," a seemingly reasonable judgment. Two critics have specifically praised the rhythm of her sentences. A history of twenty-five years of French literature published in 1925 says "Séverine a pris à son maître Jules Vallès le secret de l'ample phrase parfois volontairement brisée et ensemble harmonieuse et furieuse."⁷ From Léon Daudet there is a poetic description,⁸ a surprising source when one considers

⁵Quoted in ibid., p. 109.

⁶Ibid.

⁷25 Ans de littérature française sous la direction d'Eugène Monfort. Vol. II (Paris: Librairie de France, 1925), p. 333.

⁸From a review by Charles Bernard in Nation Belge, April 11, 1935.

that the two were on opposite political sides and that at one point she had publicly reprimanded him for a youthful escapade. (With her usual generosity, however, she had praised his Les Morticoles subsequently.) Daudet's comment is found in his Bréviaire du Journalisme. "Quel talent aussi, cette phrase courte, acérée, sans incidentes ou presque, souffletant la parade et le mensonge, courant au but comme l'assoiffé a la fontaine."

The short sentences that served Séverine for slashing at an opponent facilitated her creation of "catch phrases," concise statements so concentrated and distilled as to resemble adages. Her most celebrated "formula" defiantly concluded an article called "Les Responsables," in which she took the Socialist leaders to task for failing to support an anarchist who had stolen. "Avec les pauvres, toujours--malgré leurs erreurs, malgré leurs fautes . . . malgré leurs crimes."⁹ When she was attacked by both right and left after her interview with the Pope, Séverine washes her hands of both sides, saying "droit toujours, avec ma conscience pour guide . . . Là, où se croisent les flèches, est la voie de la vérité."¹⁰ In the editorial analyzed above, "Les Papillons Rouges," Séverine created a bitter catch phrase. Predicting that she would be

⁹Pages Rouges, p. 14.

¹⁰"Le Copain de Vallès" in Pages Mystiques, p. 142.

a victim in a coming revolution she wrote "Toutes les révolutions se ressemblent; on commence par les invités, et ça s'achève entre soi. Alors, survient le 'tyran' et l'on en a pour un siècle."¹¹ Perhaps her shortest catch phrase is the one cited by Lecache, which she coined at the time of a weavers' strike in Cholet: "Le Roi, religion morte, La Sociale, passion vivante."¹²

In the three samples analyzed, disparate as they are--there is also, even if unexpressed, an underlying unity of point of view. A vigorous self-confidence radiates from each of them, indeed from all of Séverine's writing. It is self-understood that what she says is worthwhile and she is persuaded of the validity of her opinions. Her subjective personality is present in the editorials, not because--as with the reportages and portraits--it is a means of bringing the event and the reader closer together, but because of the intrinsic positive value she places on her ideas.

What is the source of this certainty? What justifies the emphasis on herself--a technique common to all editorialists, but more marked in Séverine's case? The answer seems to be

¹¹Gil Blas, April 8, 1892.

¹²Lecache, op. cit., p. 63.

that latent in her writing is her feeling of a high sense of mission. Here is how she puts it in one of her early articles "Petit Squelette." The skeleton, a bibelot gift of a friend, talks to her in one of her moments of discouragement. It says, among other things: "Fais donc humblement, tenacement, ton oeuvre, ô femme. Défends les faibles, combats les forts"13

Thus Séverine writes not just for herself, but on behalf of a definite constituency: the poor and the weak and those who, no matter what their station in life, are victims of injustice. Corollary to the underlying acknowledgement of her mission is her notion that it must be transmitted. "Ne sont vraiment forts, allez, que ceux qui rappellent ou enseignent quelque chose, qui sèment dans les âmes la haine de l'injustice et l'amour de la vérité."14

It was this awareness of the cause for which she was fighting that provided the framework not only for Séverine's work, but for her very life style. She is known to have spent much time in the courts, tracking down cases of injustice, then devoting her column to the case. When this aspect of her work is considered in conjunction with the Carnet, by which she hoped to eradicate starvation, it is clear that Séverine

¹³Pages Mystiques, p. 104.

¹⁴Quoted in the ORTF Broadcast (No. 6740) of December 6, 1969, "Séverine, Femme Libre et Journaliste," p. 19.

marked out a whole, otherwise untouched area of French life as her special domain.

The kind of life she lived is additional proof of Séverine's genuine interest in her "constituency." Although she and Proust were in a sense contemporaries, although for a time she wrote in Le Gaulois, there does not seem to be any evidence that they ever met. Even though Proust was an ardent Dreyfusard and Séverine was so active a Dreyfus supporter, even though Proust indicates in the latter part of his work a great interest in diplomatic journalism . . . he does not seem ever to have mentioned her. They lived in different worlds. Séverine devoted her time to researching her stories, keeping up with the rest of the press, attending the theatre (often as a critic) and "finding causes to defend."

How did Séverine acquire her constituency, she who was born into the bourgeoisie? There is absolutely no question that her recognition of her role and her responsibility was absorbed from Jules Vallès. It will be remembered that Jacques Vingtras turned down the opportunity to marry a lovely and comfortably off young woman because she confessed she did not like the poor. To Vallès the poor were a living entity, in a sense a justification for his years of suffering. And during those years when Séverine was his secretary she imbibed all his ideas. The poor had already become her cause by the time Vallès died. The author had acknowledged her change of sides in his exquisite dedication to her in La Rue à Londres, cited

in full above. One of her turn-of-the-century critics, Michel Salomon, also agrees that "elle est devenue peuple. Elle le dit, elle le crie, elle se sent meilleure. Peuple elle l'est de style comme des sentiments."¹⁵ While Salomon is correct in claiming that Séverine is with the "peuple" in sentiment, his statement that she is with them in style seems a great exaggeration. There is too much conscious art in her writing, her range of styles was too broad, her vocabulary too rich, she is too much master of her material for her to be considered "du peuple." And as to attitude, even though she is heart and soul with the people, she is not always one hundred percent of them. Nevertheless, it was this self-image as the representative of the dispossessed that helped her go on, perpetually "dans la brèche," that gave rise to her nickname of "Notre-Dame de la larme à l'oeil," and that made people joke and say "Séverine gets up every morning and asks herself what cause is going to be defended today."¹⁶ And in the long run it was this sense of mission and constituency that gave unity to her diverse struggles, to the tears she shed over the victims and the scorn she poured out on the villains.

To sum up this appraisal of Séverine as a writer, she sought to capture the reader's interest right from the outset, by stimulating his curiosity, and attracting him through his

¹⁵Quoted in the ORTF Broadcast, December 6, 1969, p. 19.

¹⁶Lecache, op. cit., p. 136.

feelings or even his sense of sentimentality. She tried to lessen any possible "aesthetic" distance between herself and the reader that might cause him to lose interest, to merge as closely as possible with him. In her work she skillfully managed the progression of ideas and feelings, whereby the tone becomes more animated and even harsher towards the conclusion. And always she was the defender of the oppressed against those in authority, protector of David against Goliath.

The technical means by which she accomplished her aims were the use of a staccato syntax, full of short, hard-hitting sentences alternating frequently with more symmetrical, soaring prose. The latter too was composed of short words, preferably substantives, and may also have contained either popular or archaic vocabulary. And always the reader is aware of Séverine's subjective presence, as well as her self-assurance and her sense of mission.

CONCLUSION

One idea emerges clearly from the preceding analysis of Séverine's writing and thought: she adopted no ideology wholeheartedly, nor did she give herself wholly to any single group. She disliked the Socialists for their internal quarrels, their compromises and their anti-Catholic actions. Although she yearned for true faith, her political ideas differed from those of most convinced Catholics. A sincere and influential feminist, she nevertheless scorned a vital aspect of woman's struggle. The group whose thinking she most nearly approached was the Anarchists, but with them too she parted company, most importantly on the religious issue, but also with respect to their early acceptance of the Dreyfus side.

The twists and turns of Séverine's thinking and her successive metamorphoses reveal without any doubt whatever that she was an independent, a "maverick," an "inclassable." This fact should not surprise when it is recalled that Jules Vallès, whose disciple she proudly declared herself to be, was also "inclassable."¹ Cazes notes: "Séverine ne se laisse pas volontiers cataloguer."² Lecigne fears that her independence

¹See above, p. 45.

²Cazes, op. cit., April 1930, p. 572.

will eventually do her harm. "Et puis elle a le tort de rester indépendante, d'aimer plus que tout la guerre de partisans: elle flotte en marge de tous les partis."³ Lecache remarks that the editors for whom Séverine wrote allowed her to keep her "fière indépendance."⁴

Séverine herself gloried in her independence: "Je ne domestique point mon idée, je ne la plie pas aux exigences de tel ou tel maître, aux opinions de telle ou telle maison. Non, je pense d'abord librement, en toute sauvage indépendance, vaille que vaille!"⁵ She answered the reproaches that "rained" on her when she began to write for La Libre Parole, "Je suis Séverine, rien que Séverine, Séverine tout court, une isolée, une indépendante."⁶

But in her independence there was nonetheless a certain unity, stemming from the rock-bottom source of all her feeling and thinking (also inherited from Vallès): her compassion for the poor and the victims of injustice, and her wish to help them. "En dehors de tout esprit de parti et de toute considération d'école, elle reste toujours fidèle à elle-même et à son culte des malheureux,"⁷ says Cazes. "Fidèle seulement à

³Lecigne, op. cit., May 1902, p. 590.

⁴Lecache, op. cit., p. 201.

⁵From Le Jour, quoted in Lecache, op. cit., p. 97.

⁶Lecache, op. cit., pp. 145-146.

⁷Cazes, op. cit., April 1930, p. 578.

son idéal de justice et de charité,"⁸ notes Lecigne.

And in the last analysis it is to this "culte des malheureux" that the inconsistencies of her thought and her errors of judgment on political and social matters must be attributed. Because she believed Boulanger would help the poor, she favored his accession to power. Because she naively believed all Jews to be rich, she was anti-Semitic. Because she believed the economic aspect of women's difficulties more important, she rejected the political struggle (although here the Anarchist position must also be taken into consideration). To her enormous credit, in the long run she realized her mistakes and dramatically altered both opinions and actions.

Whatever her inconsistencies and contradictions, Séverine had very few critics. They have already been cited above in the chapter on her writing. In addition to finding fault with her style, however, both Othon Guerlac and Adolphe Brisson also commented unfavorably about the content and underlying spirit of her work. Guerlac paraphrases Vermorel (whom Séverine had quoted in her article on Ferry⁹), declaring "Le sexe non plus n'est pas une excuse."¹⁰ According to him, her writing is full of "de solennelles sottises, de prétentieuses prophéties, d'inconsciente

⁸Lecigne, op. cit., May 1902, p. 590.

⁹Le Journal, March 18, 1893, "Jules Ferry."

¹⁰Othon Guerlac, Trois Apôtres. Drumont. Rochefort, Séverine (Paris: Alcan Lévy, 1896), p. 24.

mauvaise foi, de déclamations froides et de pose théâtrale-- C'est de la littérature de femme nerveuse."¹¹ He believes, nevertheless, that these faults can be forgiven because of the "generous feeling, laudable intentions and real emotions" also contained in Séverine's prose.¹² Brisson also criticized her "nervosité féminine" and her "sensibilité malade," often responsible for "des stupidités exquises."¹³

After Séverine's death Clément Vautel, a journalist of the period, wrote an unpleasant article commenting slyly on Séverine's burial next to Dr. Guéhard when she had lived so many years with Labruyère.¹⁴ Emile Buré also wrote an unfavorable column at the time.

But, apart from these relatively few attacks in the course of such a long lifetime as a polemicist, one marked by great publicity and even scandal, Séverine seems to have been surrounded by a devoted circle of friends. Chief among them appear to have been the journalist Georges Pioch and Marguerite Durand, founder and editor of La Fronde. These two were the principal movers in the successful attempt to set out and name the Square Séverine. For many years after Séverine's death

¹¹Ibid., p. 29.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Quoted in Cazes, op. cit., July 1930, p. 109.

¹⁴"L'Envers de Séverine" in Cyrano, June 29, 1930, pp. 5-6.

Pioch gave talks about her and even wrote poetry in her honor.¹⁵ But she inspired poetry in others as well. A long poem by Maurice Rostand, written for the memorial service celebrated a year after her death, was printed in the May 1930 issue of Comœdia. The last verse follows:

Quelle est cette pudeur qui veut se contredire?
 Ce que tu fus pour nous, ce que tu fus pour moi,
 Je n'ai, quand tu vivais, pas osé te le dire;
 Je te l'ai dit, ce soir, pour la première fois.

The most remarkable and perspicacious tribute to Séverine seems to have been written by Léon Daudet. Since the two were on very opposite sides of the political spectrum, his appreciation of her seems to bear the ring of sincerity and truth.--He, too, was more a man of impulse and of passion than a strict reasoner, and when his political fanaticism did not come into play, he had real insight.

What should the final judgment be on Séverine as a writer.--The answer must be given in two parts. As a reporter she was unquestionably without a peer, and as a portraitist she had very few equals. André Billy, writing in L'Oeuvre after Séverine's death, equalled Léon Daudet in his estimate of Séverine's ability: "Pour moi, je ne vois en elle qu'un don merveilleux, unique certainement dans l'histoire du journalisme français. Disons-le hautement et proposons-nous de le répéter souvent: Séverine est la plus grande journaliste que la France

¹⁵Quoted in Elie Broida's article on Séverine in Cahiers des Amis de Han Ryner, March 1937, pp. 5-6. This and Maurice Rostand's poem as well as Léon Daudet's remarks will be given in full in Appendix A, pp. 245-248.

ait jamais eue depuis Madame de Sévigné."¹⁶ This appraisal seems completely justified, when the judgments of the other critics are also taken into consideration; for even those who disagreed with Séverine as an editorialist admired her as a reporter.

The editorials should be judged separately, of course, and here a different criterion must be applied: not only the level of writing but also the validity of the opinions expressed must be weighed. In this area the few who criticized her seem to have had some justification: She was sometimes sentimental, she did pose a bit, was occasionally pretentious. Moreover, she was inconsistent and she did not always tell the truth about her past opinions. Her style was sometimes too drawn out, too fiery to be easily readable. But on the other side of the scale, what an extraordinary capacity for feeling--both hatred and pity. (All the critics agree that "the heart" was the main principle with her.) Even more remarkable was her capacity to arouse these feelings, through her style and her imagination, in her readers. What a superb ability to give unendingly of herself in a cause she considered just. What an unusual capacity for hard, selfless work. She took joy in the battle itself, and loved tilting at windmills. (Her capsule description of herself, incidentally, mentions this last point: "Parente de Louise Michel par la sincérité, cousine de Déroulède par les moulins à

¹⁶L'Oeuvre, April 25, 1929, "Séverine Journaliste."

vent, rosse et mélancolique."¹⁷⁾

It seems regrettable now that she remained aloof for so long from the feminist political struggle. But, as both she and Jane Misme remarked, her success as a journalist in a field hitherto practically closed to women, made her a living example and facilitated the entrance of other women into the profession. Her courage was boundless. Her romantic, impulsive character, striking and frequent articles, and efforts on behalf of the poor made her an outstanding figure of the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Cazes sums up her life well by saying "une telle existence, toute de noblesse, de dévouement et de passion désintéressée, dont jamais, au grand jamais, aucun sentiment vulgaire ou médiocre ne vint ternir l'éclat."¹⁸ She graciously and humorously denied being the "Princesse des Femmes Ecrivains" that the readers of Simple Revue had voted her.¹⁹ But she would most probably have willingly accepted the title both Cazes and Gustave Hervé gave her: "Princesse du Journalisme."

¹⁷Lecache, op. cit., p. 109.

¹⁸Cazes, op. cit., June 1930, p. 562.

¹⁹Lecache, op. cit., pp. 183-184.

APPENDIX A

BALLADE A SEVERINE

de Georges Pioch

Intelligente à tout comprendre
 Et pardonnant d'avoir compris;
 Forte par sa raison et tendre
 Par son coeur de justice épris;
 Fidèle à son beau parti pris
 D'un combat que l'esprit affine
 Et dont le vrai seul est le prix:
 Tout était clair en Séverine.

Elle était amour pour entendre
 Aux plaintes de tous les esprits;
 Elle était pitié pour se rendre
 A tous ceux qui souffrent mépris;
 Dure aux puissants, chère aux proscrits
 Prouvant aux lois, à la routine
 Qu'il n'est bon bec que de Paris;
 Tout était droit en Séverine.

Aussi vers elle on a vu tendre
 Les purs, les humbles, les meurtris;
 Son coeur fervent à les défendre
 Et son toit leur était acquis;
 Bêtes et gens--les sots compris--
 Quêtant son accueil sans lésine
 Venus méchants partaient guéris
 Tout était bon en Séverine.
 Envoi

Toi qui l'aintaine nous souris
 Et dont notre esprit s'illumine
 Paix de l'homme, ô monde promis
 Je te salue en Séverine.

LA PRIERE A SEVERINE

Pierrefonds. . . Le chemin . . . Oui, oui, je me rappelle!
 C'est ici. Le silence est plus grand que les mots.
 Je te voyais hier, si vivante et si belle,
 Et je viens maintenant parler sur ton tombeau!

Du monde où nous vivons au monde où tu demeures,
 J'arrive, et présenté par tant de souvenirs,
 Je voudrais t'apporter des nouvelles meilleures,
 O toi qui, mieux que nous, croyais à l'avenir!

Je voudrais t'annoncer combien les hommes s'aiment,
 Que les soirs de justice et d'amour sont venus.
 Je voudrais te jurer que, revivant lui-même.
 Vallès, ton grand ami, ne s'insurgerait plus!

Je voudrais te jurer que les pays sont frères,
 Sans la ligne illusoire et pour laquelle on meurt
 Et qu'on ne verra plus l'astre rouge des guerres
 Dans un monde inédit qui ressemble à ton coeur.

Je voudrais te jurer que l'Europe nouvelle
 Bat au rythme infini dont ton rêve à battu,
 Que la Paix et tes yeux ont les mêmes prunelles.
 Je pourrais te le dire, hélas! me croirais-tu?

Les morts, loin de la fuite instable des secondes,
 Oubliés dans la nuit, veulent que plus souvent
 On vienne leur porter des nouvelles du monde . . .
 Mais on n'ose mentir, par pitié, qu'aux vivants.

Car les morts savent tout; c'est là qu'est leur revanche;
 Ils sont mêlés à nous par un secret pouvoir,
 Et, tout autour de moi, je sens, quand je me penche,
 Trembler tes cheveux blancs et brûler tes yeux noirs,

Dans l'ombre où tu rejoins Jean Jaurès et mon père,
 Il n'est rien d'ici-bas que l'on puisse ignorer.
 On ne doit pas mentir, si près de la lumière,
 Et, si je t'abusais, je t'entendrais pleurer . . .

Hélas! les temps sont durs ma grande Séverine . . .
 On parle encor de guerre . . . On admettrait qu'un jour
 L'Humanité encor refasse ces ruines . . .
 On se tuerait encor! Séverine, au secours!

Du fond de ce repos à quoi tu te résignes,
 Contre tout, contre tous, protège-nous encor.
 Si tes doigts sont glacés, ils font toujours des signes,
 Si tes yeux sont fermés, ton regard n'est pas mort.

Donne-nous ta ferveur, ta force sans colère,
 Pour faire triompher ce que tu nous dictas
 Car, mes mots d'aujourd'hui formant une prière,
 Je te prie en pleurant, toi qui ne priais pas.

Toi qui croyais ne pas prier! Courage, flamme,
 Mouvements généreux du coeur, divins émois,
 Elans d'âme où l'on voit une preuve de l'âme,
 Mais, personne, jamais, n'a prié comme toi!

Car, sans jamais pousser la porte de l'église,
 Sans messe, sans ave, sans même un angélus,
 Ton coeur universel où tout s'évangélise,
 Croyait, peut-être, en Dieu, mais d'abord en Jésus.

Ah! chère illusion cependant décevante . . .
 Je reste, je te parle et t'arrache à la mort . . .
 Oui, voici, peu à peu, que je te crois vivante,
 Cesser de te parler, c'est te quitter encor!

Tant que nous serons là, dans ce pèlerinage
 Incliné sur ce tertre aux émouvants contours,
 Nous serons avec toi, nous verrons ton visage . . .
 Comme tu vas mourir pendant tout le retour!

Ici, c'est plein de toi, ce chemin, cette grille,
 Cette ombre où tu pourrais apparaître soudain,
 On regarde grandir tes cinq petites-filles
 Et l'on entend pousser les fleurs de ton jardin.

Ah! puisqu'on m'a permis de te parler, trop vite
 Ne me rejette pas dans la vie et le noir,
 Ne m'abandonne pas, de grâce, tout de suite,
 Cesser de te parler, c'est cesser de te voir!

Séverine, pendant que ceux qu'on aime vivent
 On ne leur dit jamais tout ce qu'ils sont pour nous;
 Pudeur, timidité d'elle-même craintive,
 On ne parle vraiment qu'en parlant à genoux.

Quelle est cette pudeur qui veut se contredire?
 Ce que tu fus pour nous, ce que tu fus pour moi,
 Je n'ai, quand tu vivais, pas osé te le dire:
 Je te l'ai dit, ce soir, pour la première fois.

Maurice Rostand.

From "La Femme et l'amour"

Pour les journalistes du sexe exquis en notre pays le tour est vite fait.

Il y en eut une: Séverine. Je l'ai connue cette disciple de Vallès moins amère que son maître, délicieusement jolie (un pastel de Latour) et d'une simplicité charmante. Elle était révoltée dans l'âme, révoltée de gauche et ardemment, romantiquement révolutionnaire.

Je la voyais arriver au journal avec son paper dans sa petite main, rieuse, moqueuse, bonne camarade, toujours disposée à rendre service. Elle me taquinait sur mes tendances réactionnaires et je la taquinais sur son socialisme hugotiforme et teinté de Proudhon, l'ennemi des dames et des "femmelins."

Je l'aimais bien et quand on l'accusa de mettre dans sa poche l'argent de son carnet de charité (ce qui était une calomnie indigne) je me fâchai et faillis claquer l'imbécile qui colportait au journal cette saleté.

Au procès du jeune Lebaudy, elle fut parfaitement digne et calme, étant de façons très distinguées et aussi peu virago que possible.

Vu les gouffres qui nous séparaient, je ne la vis plus après l'affaire Dreyfus, que de loin en loin. Mais je la lisais toujours avec plaisir. Quoique dans la gêne, elle avait toujours un billet pour le camarade dans la purée et je crois bien qu'elle finit presque dénuée et ayant du mal à placer sa copie, à cause de ses opinions.

Elle savait écrire et remuer par des termes francs, celui qui la lisait. Il y aurait une anthologie à faire de ses meilleurs articles, ceux où elle s'émouvait et devenait frémissante comme l'eau d'un lac quand souffle le vent.

Moins éparpillée par la nécessité du pain quotidien, elle aurait dû écrire un beau livre sur la femme pauvre.

Ce fut un homme qui l'écrivit catholique et de franc parler, Léon Bloy.

Léon Daudet

APPENDIX B

NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES TO WHICH SEVERINE
CONTRIBUTED

- Le Cri du Peuple (1883-1888).
Le Gil Blas (1888-1892).
Le Gaulois (1888-1892), (1897).
La Nouvelle Presse (1888).
La Jeune République (1889).
Le Rappel (1890-1892).
Le Figaro (1890-1894).
L'Eclair (1890-1903).
Le Jour (1890-1891).
Tabarin (1890).
L'Egalité (1890).
La Presse (1891).
Le Petit Journal (1891-1892).
Paris Noël (1891), (1898).
L'Echo de Paris (1892-1898).
Le Journal (1892-1902).
Le Matin (1892-1894).
La Cocarde (1893-1894).
La Libre Parole (1893-1896).

- Le Journal des Etudiants de Lyon (1895).
Le Voltaire (1895-1896).
La Justice (1895).
Le Quartier Latin (1895).
L'Incorruptible (1897).
La Nouvelle Revue Internationale (1897-1898).
La Revue Philanthropique (1897).
La Revue Blanche (1897).
L'Ecole Nouvelle (1897).
La Fronde (1897-1901).
Le Petit Bleu de Bruxelles (1898).
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