

# **Alfred Jarry (Critical Lives)**

Jill Fell

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Alfred Jarry's creation of the monster-tyrant Ubu was a watershed in theatre history: his play Ubu Roi (whose origins lie in his mercilessly ridiculed former schoolmaster) on the Paris stage in December 1896 brought him instant notoriety. This legendary event is set at the heart of Alfred Jarry, balanced with other achievements that this multi-talented and influential writer crammed into his short life, among them his self-invented science of pataphysics. The reader is steered through a minefield of Jarry anecdotes, tracing his childhood years in northwest France to Paris, where he rapidly made his reputation as a poet, playwright and social commentator. Jarry - surely the most memorable writer-bicyclist of the fin de siècle – also played a significant role in 1890s book design and was acquainted with an extraordinary cast of avant-garde characters, among them Gauguin, Rachilde, Wilde, Beardsley and Apollinaire. The quarrels that punctuated Jarry's life, the impulsive extravagances, and the chronic addiction to alcohol that drained his meagre resources, together form the backcloth to this portrait of an obsessive writer committed to his craft, undeterred by his worsening circumstances. Jarry's spirited life and inventions clearly emerged as both model and caution to many of his successors in twentieth-century theatre, art and literature, and this new biography will inform and delight readers wishing to learn more about a fascinating and wholly unconventional individual.



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