The Labour of Literature in Britain and France, 1830–1910

Authorial Work Ethics

Edited by Marcus Waithe and Claire White

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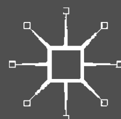

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The Labour of Literature in Britain and France, 1830–1910

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This volume is dedicated to the memory of John Hughes (1978–2014).

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Contents

Introduction: Literature and Labour 1
Marcus Waithe and Claire White

Part I Labour and the Ethics of Representation 23

'[A] common and not a divided interest': Literature and the Labour of Representation 27
Jan-Melissa Schramm

The Literature of Labour: Collective Biography and Working-Class Authorship, 1830–1859 43
Richard Salmon

George Sand, Digging 61
Claire White

Part II Material Labour, Metaphorical Work 79

Ruskin, Browning/Alpenstock, Hatchet 81
Ross Wilson

Flaubert's *Cailloux*: Hard Labour and the Beauty of Stones 97
Patrick M. Bray

Marian Evans, George Eliot, and the Work of Sententiousness 111
Ruth Livesey

Part III Work Ethics and Aesthetics 127

Baudelaire and the Dilettante Work Ethic 131
Richard Hibbitt

'Strenuous Minds': Walter Pater and the Labour of Aestheticism 147
Marcus Waithe

The Work of Imitation: Decadent Writing as Mimetic Labour 167
Matthew Potolsky

Part IV Working Conditions 183

Literary Machines: George Gissing's Lost Illusions 187
Edmund Birch

Worlds of Work and the Work of Words: Zola 203
Susan Harrow

Gender Difference and Cultural Labour in French Fiction from Zola to Colette 221
Nicholas White

Coda: Immaterial Labour and the Modernist Work of Literature 237
Morag Shiach

Epilogue: Work Ethics, Past and Present 253
Marcus Waithe and Claire White

Index 259

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Introduction: Literature and Labour

Marcus Waithe and Claire White

> La Bruyère discovered the world's erroneous estimate of literary labour: 'There requires a better name to be bestowed on the leisure (the idleness he calls it) of the literary character, and that to meditate, to compose, to read and to be tranquil, should be called *working*.'
>
> —Isaac D'Israeli, *The Literary Character* (1818)

In *The Literary Character*, a work that assesses not only the character of authors but also the nature of authorship, D'Israeli endorses Jean de La Bruyère's attempt to redefine literary endeavour: an appeal to recognize writing as 'labour' (127). La Bruyère's corrective bespeaks a recognition that things called one thing could in future be called something else: the question is not only what 'work' means, but what activities are known as 'work', and why. Further issues of nomenclature are introduced by D'Israeli's translations from the French. By loosely rendering 'l'oisiveté du sage' (La Bruyère, 124) as 'the leisure of the literary character'—more literally, 'the idleness of the wise man'—he begins to put the French philosopher's call for redefinition into practice. Otherwise distinct literary activities of thinking, meditation, reading, composition, writing, and translating are in this way gathered under the auspices of a generalized 'work'.

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This collection takes its bearings from D'Israeli's words, and asks questions prompted by his engagement with Francophone sources. Should writing 'be called *working*', as La Bruyère argued? What place can 'literary labour' occupy in a wider economy of values? How do the respective contexts of British and French literary and industrial culture change the valence of these questions, and how do they learn from each other? How, in short, have writers projected and problematized their own activity against a shifting and contested understanding of what it means to 'work'?

Concerned as they are with what things 'should be called', La Bruyère's observations might seem to rule out a basis for comparison across different cultures or language communities. D'Israeli's remarks are notable all the same for reaching out across these barriers. This in part reflects a shared problem, and an awareness of common European legacies. Even if unevenly received and transmitted, nineteenth-century attitudes to work were unavoidably implicated in a longer story, traceable to the Protestant Reformation, and more particularly to the Calvinist emphasis on demonstrable merit (which, though it could not be earned, paradoxically incentivized the effort required to manifest the appearance of election). Cross-border cultures of work have been studied before, but the focus of previous criticism has tended towards the Anglo-American tradition, with a corresponding emphasis on, among other things, the Puritan inheritance of New England literary culture, the frontiersman ideal, the Evangelical Revival, American Transcendentalism, and the Victorian cult of Industry.[1] Notwithstanding the Continental source of Calvinism, Lutheranism, and Idealism, the interaction between European cultures in this area has less often been the object of study. As Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever have shown, a strong case can be made for the importance of the Anglo-French literary connection, and of those 'processes of literary and cultural exchange that occurred across the English Channel' (2).[2] Indeed, what Cohen and Dever term 'the cross-Channel literary zone' entails the recognition that:

> The modern novel did not develop along two separate, nationally distinct trajectories; it developed through intersections and interactions among texts, readers, writers, and publishing and critical institutions that linked together Britain and France. (2)

The national literary traditions of Britain and France can be understood to rely on one another, as much as for what each assimilated as for what each repudiated. As Cohen shows elsewhere, 'British novelists […] integrated

foreign narrative poetics' (2012, 410) over the course of the nineteenth century: the origins of the Newgate novel can be found in Eugène Sue and Victor Hugo; those of adventure fiction in Alexandre Dumas; and the British novel looked to French incarnations of the '*Bildungsroman* pattern of self-development devised by Goethe'. Broader movements aside, lines of influence and exchange can be tracked via individual writers: in the present volume, Edmund Birch asks what George Gissing owes to Honoré de Balzac; and Marcus Waithe explores Walter Pater's recourse to Gustave Flaubert. Some of the chapters in this volume thus take an explicitly comparative approach. Without pursuing an impossible aim of complete coverage, it is hoped that the constellation of French and British writers under discussion, and the movement between them, will allow for broader patterns to emerge which clarify, and occasionally complicate, our vision of national literary traditions.

Navigating between literary cultures also entails invoking wider questions of social and political influence. Before Marx was widely read in Britain and America, labour movements in those countries derived their philosophies from the English Revolution, or Adam Smith's labour theory of value. But the more obvious and unsettling source for notions of worker sovereignty was of course the French Revolution. The victory of the bourgeoisie in 1789 spelled, as Marx sardonically put it, the victory 'of industry over heroic laziness' (2010, 1: 192–3); henceforth, work would stand at the foundation of all social order, allied to notions of civic duty and ethical responsibility. While Thomas Carlyle's interest in 'work' as an abstract value was derived from his reading of Goethe and Fichte (1899a, 297–8), his inspiration for comparing the 'idleness' of the elite to the labour of the masses was really owing to his own portrait of social schism in *The French Revolution* (1837; rev. 1857). Tracing these connections reveals the insufficiency of accounts that function in splendid isolation, either from other national contexts or broader social and political histories of work. It also discloses, and challenges, the enduring power of received opinion that governs perceptions of the relationship between France and Britain. A particular aim in this respect is to question the familiar view of France as a source of a 'leisure ethic', and of British writers as either rejecting or self-consciously mimicking French models. Thus, while a similar picture could be formed of relations, say, between British and German literary culture, the gains accruing to the more unlikely pairing of Britain and France are all the greater, not least because the comparison itself reinterprets and cuts across the foundational opposition of 'work' and 'idleness'.

Mindful of differences as well as correspondences, the date span of this study takes into account the staggered incidence of industrialization and political radicalism between Britain and France. It was the July Monarchy, installed in 1830, that oversaw the acceleration of French industrial expansion, long after Britain's own Industrial Revolution. Equally, the enduring aftershocks of the 1789 French Revolution were still being assimilated in the Britain of the 1830s, affecting its own struggle towards democratic reform, which reached a critical juncture with the 1832 Reform Act. By extending the franchise, the Act brought into focus matters of class, labour, and 'representation' that would have to be worked out culturally as much as politically. On both sides of the Channel, the 1830s witnessed the rise of bourgeois culture—in France under the reign of the 'citizen king', Louis-Philippe—and the establishment of work as a new kind of currency that gradually displaced aristocratic values. But the perpetually vexed question of labour rights produced new sorts of class tension. If 1789 staged the overthrow of an idle nobility by a useful 'Third Estate', the 1848 Revolution brought to a head a different class war: that of the people against the hegemonic structures of bourgeois individualism. At the end of the volume's date span, the rise of New Liberalism, Trade Unionism, and Fabian Socialism in Edwardian Britain, and in France, the Charter of Amiens (1906) and the beginnings of Syndicalism, complete the arc of this association between national contexts of work and class struggle.

In terms of aesthetics, the date span of this volume draws the focus away from Romantic notions of authorship, in particular its tendency to emphasize creative genius and meditative contemplation, towards works that openly asserted the more mundane, deskbound conditions of their own production, or sought out, more systematically, analogies with other types of labour. At the other end of our range, experimental fiction of the early twentieth century, especially the novel of the artist—best exemplified, in the French tradition, by Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–27) [*In Search of Lost Time*]—extended Romanticism's preoccupation with the dramas and crises of interiority, and in doing so brought a new degree of reflexivity to bear on the work in (and of) art. The kind of formal experimentation at work in Surrealist writing, meanwhile—namely, spontaneous invention and automatism—signalled a de-centring of the individual artist as an organizing consciousness. Stopping short of 'High Modernism', the volume largely refrains from probing the stakes of these new forms of literary self-awareness. But as the coda, by Morag Shiach, demonstrates, Modernist writing can be understood at once as a testing

ground for longstanding reflections on the artist's labours, and as a mode of work that speaks to later twentieth-century economic, sociological and cultural debates.

Aesthetic and contextual shifts of this kind are considered in the volume alongside accounts of personal industry, as our subtitle *Authorial Work Ethics* suggests. The 'work ethic' recalls on one level the unexamined sense of approved 'character', 'attitude', or virtuous habit. That original sense is itself a product of cultural encounter—an English rendering of the German compound word, *Arbeitsethik*. Derived from translations of Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), it entered ordinary usage as an individual or a national compliment, without quite losing its sociological ring.[3] In plural form, its meaning subtly shifts. This volume honours the sense of the simple plural: most chapters consider a series of 'work ethics', as examples of how different writers approached their work in the face of changing personal, economic, and social demands. Our contributors frequently draw on autobiographical material—on letters and memoirs—in order to reconstruct writers' working habits, as well as their published reflections on the strains, stresses, and rewards of the literary profession more widely. What returns across the volume is a sense of the routines, self-discipline, and daily grinds that underpin the writer's workaday existence, as if bearing out Elaine Scarry's observation that 'it is in its repetitions that [work] is what it is' (65). There also emerge various impressions of the writer's psychological and affective relationship to the rituals of work, which are, as Shiach has shown, bound up, in complex and often contradictory ways, with 'the articulation of selfhood' (2). A writer's internal struggles with his or her own work often shade into willed resistance or avoidance. When George Sand wrote to Gustave Flaubert on 11 February 1869, and remarked that 'pendant que tu trottes pour ton roman, j'invente tout ce que je peux pour ne pas faire le mien' (321) [while you are running around to get material for your novel, I am inventing all sorts of reasons not to write mine], she was not merely comparing a productive work ethic to a distracted one, but wondering aloud about what kind of industry actually makes novels: demonstrative 'running around', or faculties of invention, however 'unproductive' or poorly directed.[4]

A broader concern with 'ethics' is also implied by our subtitle, understood not only as a field of moral philosophy, but as a humane practice, according to which values, benefits, and responsibilities are weighed up. A 'work ethic' may imply a stance evacuated of judgement, value, or teleol-

ogy, while ‘work ethics’ suggest a more self-conscious relationship with the nature of work, referring to the stakes involved, and the value generated. The volume’s sustained reflection on ‘ethics’ foregrounds the social and political stakes of cultural ‘representation’, which can often be elided in accounts of literary labour. What were the ends to which the writer’s work ought to be put? What kind of values did literary labour carry, exemplify or impart? On what grounds was it likened to, or distinguished from, other forms of work? In mid-Victorian Britain, the relationship of literary labour to the didactic was concretized against the background of Evangelicalism and Carlyle’s puritanically stringent Gospel of Work. In mid-century France, the unhinging of this relationship between aesthetic work and moral utility is often seen to be connected to its particular history of revolutionary politics.

One of the most influential critical narratives on the French experience is Roland Barthes’s *Le Degré zéro de l’écriture* [*Writing Degree Zero*] (1953), which pivots around the 1848 revolution as a definitive turning-point in conceptions and articulations of literary activity. The bloody civil conflict of June 1848 signalled the indisputable social dominance of the bourgeoisie, and with it the collapse of the illusions of liberalism. In its wake, the writer was forced, Barthes argues, to renegotiate his own relationship to Literature as an institution. The revolution had given the lie to the bourgeoisie’s longstanding claims to represent the universal; and so, the bourgeois writer could no longer claim, in good faith, to speak in the name of all—left, instead, disillusioned, conflicted, and alienated from the very class to which he or she belonged. Where literary language was seen to have lost its value as a means of communication between writer and audience, it was supplanted in the first instance by a self-conscious investment in *form*—a pursuit of (aesthetic) autonomy in lieu of any moral or political utility: art, that is, for art’s sake. What Barthes terms ‘the “Flaubertization” of writing’ in the 1850s and 1860s refers to the writer’s self-immolatory urge to assume the role of a literary labourer (1967, 55). Flaubert and his notoriously punishing work ethic are seen to evoke a ‘problem of self-justification’, which causes ‘a whole class of writers’ to ‘put the work-value [une valeur-travail] of writing in place of its usage-value [la valeur-usage]’, in effect privileging work’s ‘cost’ over any concern about its wider purpose (1967, 52–3). Barthes locates this new authorial guise in ‘an image of the writer as a craftsman’, involved in a cottage-industry, a figure who ‘roughs out, cuts, polishes and sets his form exactly as a jeweller extracts art from his material, devoting to his work regular hours of solitary effort’.

It is Flaubert's tortuous fetishization of style that makes him emblematic of the writer's new condition. For the so-called 'hermit of Croisset', the endless labour of style, sought at the expense of living, is an irresistible form of suffering: 'J'aime mon travail d'un amour frénétique et perverti, comme un ascète le cilice qui lui gratte le ventre' (letter to Louise Colet, 24 April 1852; Flaubert 1980, 75) [I love my work with a frenetic and perverted love, as the ascetic loves the hair shirt that scratches his belly]. Immersed in the recursive, Sisyphean working and reworking of a single page, Guy de Maupassant, Flaubert's *protégé*, described the novelist straining 'sous la fatigue de son cerveau, il geint, comme un scieur de long' (1880) [under the mental effort, groaning like a man laboriously sawing wood]. But as Flaubert implies by his self-diagnosed 'perverted love', the sort of arduous, frenetic labour Maupassant perceives could also produce intense enjoyment: to Louise Colet, he described undertaking a kind of mental masturbation 'pour en faire éjaculer des phrases' [so as to ejaculate sentences] (see Flaubert's letter of 28 October 1853; Flaubert 1980, 459). The writer-artisan's 'solitary effort' (to reprise Barthes's terms) appears embodied in a way which is capable of combining pleasure and pain.

Barthes's narrative of the evolution of literary labour in France holds great sway in critical discourses on French literature, as does Pierre Bourdieu's own account in *Les Règles de l'art* [*The Rules of Art*] (1992) of the autonomization of the literary field in the wake of 1848.[5] But the connections these accounts draw between shifts in class consciousness, which are pinned to mid-century revolution, and an emerging formalism, are not easily translated in a British context. In Britain, the figure of the writer-craftsman is more clearly a phenomenon of late nineteenth-century aestheticism, and as such of a delayed French influence. This is apparent in Pater's sculptural metaphor of art as a 'removal of surplusage' (1913, 19), and in the marmoreal preoccupations of Poundian Modernism, where the poet serves an apprenticeship to the raw material.[6] By contrast, the mid-Victorian period's most prolific and industrious writers were characterized more exclusively by their physical and mental stamina. Darwin reported that writing *The Origin of Species* (1859) 'cost me thirteen months and ten days' hard labour' (1958, 122). Speaking of his work on *Frederick the Great* (1858–65), Carlyle complained of being 'crushed down' by 'overwhelming labour', 'at it night and day for 18 months past' (2007–16, para 2 of 3). A closer French analogue is supplied by the 1842 foreword to *La Comédie humaine*, in which Balzac referred to his gargantuan undertaking as 'cet effroyable labeur' (19) [this appalling labour].

Such accounts of the writer's exhausting and exacting work struck against Romanticism's language of inspiration. The shift that Barthes tracks at the middle of the century in France has a different inflection: what the writer's work now draws attention to is the artificiality of the form it hones. This is Flaubert's self-sustaining 'livre sur rien' (1980, 31) [book about nothing], the pursuit of autonomy through the perfection of form, which aligns him with the object-based agenda of Modernism. Or the gesture of the Parnassian poet, who captures his activity in the terms of a more weightily embodied medium—sculpture—as a wrestling with resistant material capable of figuring his own concern with the plasticity of words. Barthes's account of such investments in form is striking for the slippage it allows between the writer who is burdened by a punishing labour and the writer whose work resembles a pre-industrial craft practice. That slippage reflects Flaubert's own concern to demonstrate the taking of pains, and the experience of alienating work, even as he projects the aura of a specialist, possessed of a craftsman's aptitude. As such, it combines exhaustive effort with manipulative skill in ways that complicate the Anglo-French traffic of ideas, both in terms of content and timing.

Flaubert's restless work on words, submitting prose to the rigours of poetic composition, provides an exemplary manifestation of *l'art pour l'art*. But however much his valorization of effort differed from bourgeois pragmatism, it could still be subsumed by the 'work ethic' of that class. More widely, the figure of the aestheticist returns us to the nuance broached above between the singular 'work ethic' and the plural 'work ethics'. It might be thought of, in this perspective, as a tension between autonomous and committed conceptions of writerly labour. Does this displacement of 'use' by 'work' preclude, or alter, the writer's ethical engagement? In *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* [*What is Literature?*] (1948)—the literary history to which Barthes responds—Jean-Paul Sartre centres his examination of the modern writer's 'situation' on precisely this question of commitment, claiming that the function of a writer is, above all, to deal in communicative prose and to 'appeler un chat un chat' (281) [call a spade a spade]. While poetry, Sartre suggests, is characterized by opacity, play, and experimentation, prose *uses* language to represent and reveal the world. By this reckoning, the self-consciousness of Modernist literature is a sort of solipsistic malady that has infected the medium. Elsewhere, however, Sartre's fascination with Flaubert and Mallarmé as critics and rebels signals his awareness of a different sort of *engagement*. This would hinge, not on linguistic transparency, but rather, as Malcolm Bowie suggests, on the 'very ferocity of [the

writer's] devotion to the inner workings of language' and on his attempt to 'wage war on cliché and complacency' (274). Our own book addresses these different ethical inflections of literary labour, bringing into focus the complex relations between formal work and social responsibility.

The examples discussed so far associate writerly work with predominantly masculine metaphors of arduous industry, virility, muscular strength, and at the very least, physical stamina. If this study is not directly organized around questions of gender or women's writing, it is nonetheless undertaken with an acute awareness that a gendered ideology of work was fundamental to nineteenth-century conceptions of literary labour. Such questions are broached here in those contributions on Sand (Claire White), George Eliot (Ruth Livesey), and artistic collaborations between the sexes (Nicholas White). Given the sorts of prohibition that determined the middle-class woman's relationship to the public sphere of work and, above all, to manual labour, it was not always clear what place women writers could occupy within a system of literary values rooted largely in a semantics of physical exertion. Symptomatically, contemporary criticism of women's writing often betrayed a refusal to acknowledge the labours that subtended it. Sand's prodigious output testified to an almost disarming productivity, but her labours were repeatedly explained, or explained away, by an account of her prose style that underlined spontaneity and effortlessness.[7] While Baudelaire was contemptuous of Sand's prolixity—her 'fameux *style coulant*' (68) [so-called *flowing style*]—George Henry Lewes admired her apparent facility: 'Style, which in almost every writer is the result of infinite labour, is, with her, impassioned inspiration. […] Poetry flows from her pen as water from the rock' (1844, 281). In both cases, however, Sand's critics disqualify her craft as a writer, emphasizing, as Isabelle Naginski puts it, 'the uncontrollable nature of [her] writing which emerges without shape or style' (223).

The prevailing separation of spheres meant that nineteenth-century women's writing was often aligned with forms of 'women's work' that took place in the home. In *Novel Craft* (2011), Talia Schaffer explores the role of domestic handicraft as the ubiquitous form against which the Arts and Crafts movement developed its own agendas, and as 'the standard against which women's writing was constantly compared' (21). Its depiction in the Victorian novel thus provided, she argues, 'a way of making women's creative labor visible and of articulating the meaning of that labor' (22). Amateur handicraft exemplified a gendered division of labour in the nineteenth century, that is, at a time when, as Valerie Mainz and

Griselda Pollock put it, ‘work in a world reshaped by industrial capitalism signifies being in waged labour’ (5). To generate analogies between domestic activities and women’s writing was thus, more often than not, to point towards the occluded (or overlooked) work that underpinned one and the other, as well as their problematic place in a wider system of value.

Gender politics make manifest, then, the tensions that characterized an already uneasy, and often contradictory, relationship between writing, work, and money. Where there emerged new career possibilities for professional writers in the nineteenth century, these were viewed with varying degrees of wariness and confidence: ‘the Victorian artist-professional’, writes Jennifer Ruth, ‘underscored his position as market agent as often as he obscured it’ (401). Émile Zola firmly believed that the professional writer benefited from a new meritocracy of letters, liberated by profit from the indignities of aristocratic patronage. In his 1880 essay, ‘L’Argent dans la littérature’ [Money in Literature], he called upon fellow writers to embrace the literary marketplace, in spite of the hardships it brings:

> Si vous ne pouvez vivre avec vos vers, avec vos premiers essais, faites autre chose, entrez dans une administration, attendez que le public vienne à vous. L’État ne vous doit rien. Il est peu honorable de rêver une littérature entretenue. Battez-vous, mangez des pommes de terre ou des truffes, cassez des pierres dans la journée et écrivez des chefs-d’œuvre dans la nuit. (193)
>
> [If you can’t make a living with your poetry, with your first essays, do something else, get a job in administration, wait until the public comes to you. The State doesn’t owe you anything. It isn’t noble to dream of a world where literature is supported. Fight, eat potatoes or truffles, break stones in the daytime and write masterpieces at night.]

The commercial print market might install a Darwinian struggle for survival, but it was one in which, Zola argued, hard work and talent must ultimately win out.

Zola’s polemic was aimed, of course, at other authors and commentators who found this definitive association of writing, work, and profit problematic, whether because of the precariousness in which this new regime placed the writer, or because of the compromises on quality and vision it might entail. According to Walter Benjamin, the displacement of patronage produced a shift in attitudes that stigmatized those writers

whose work fell short of, or failed to be captured by, the demands of bourgeois productivity. In a reversal of D'Israeli's desired redesignation, Benjamin observes: 'in feudal society, the leisure of the poet is a recognized privilege. It is only in bourgeois society that the poet becomes an idler' (802). (Zola's article on the literary marketplace states it plainly: modern literature belongs not to the poet, but to the fiction writer, capable of adapting to commercial demands.) The extent to which literary creativity could either be captured in, or distinguished from, the terms of capitalist productivity is critical to this volume. For Hannah Arendt, in a modern society where all activities are subordinate to the imperatives of 'making a living', the artist alone is granted an exceptional status: 'strictly speaking, [he or she] is the only "worker" left in a laboring society' (127). Arendt's distinction recalls, and modifies, the disconnection of art from the realm of (material and economic) necessity valorized by many nineteenth-century writers and aesthetes. However, the economics of literary labour impinged on even the most ardent claims to undertake art solely for art's sake. To take up Pierre Bourdieu's influential account, 'This symbolic revolution, whereby artists emancipated themselves from bourgeois standards by refusing to acknowledge any master other than their art, had the effect of making the market disappear' (200–1).[8] And yet, this pursuit of pure art, which is 'anti-economic' in character, entailed a fundamental paradox: 'In short', Bourdieu writes, 'it was still (inherited) money that assured freedom from money' (201). Of course, the difference between those for whom writing is a genuine daily grind, and those who are able to depend on other income, cannot be overstated. The 'exacting conception of artistic work' (Bourdieu, 200) that aesthetes sought to embody can be understood as part of a wider apologetics, just as much as it served to stigmatize a 'literary proletariat', beholden to the supply-and-demand logic of the market.

That such anxieties about the autonomy of artistic labour emerge with the commercialization of literature—the mass production, and reproduction, of print—in this period is hardly incidental. In an 1839 essay, Sainte-Beuve famously declared a crusade against 'la littérature industrielle' [industrial literature], fearing the threats posed by a newly commercial culture to the public's capacity for taste and discrimination (1999, 25–43). In France, *cabinets de lecture* made popular literature available, for a small fee, to an ever widening public, while the foundation of the first 'modern' newspapers in 1836—*La Presse* and *Le Siècle*—ushered in a new era of novelistic production, and new conditions of literary consumption.

Serialized fiction—or the *roman-feuilleton*—was key to the survival of the popular paper: 'As business-minded editors like [Émile de] Girardin were to discover in the 1830s and 1840s, the success of a newspaper could be made or broken by the serial novel it happened to be publishing' (Gluck, 37).[9] In Britain, similar economic imperatives characterized the system of circulating libraries, whose methods of distribution imposed a 'triple-decker' format on the novel (Waller, 32–4). The first edition of Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891)—a novel that laments the artistic straightjacket entailed by monopolies of distribution—was itself housed in three volumes, a circumstance that offers both an ironical commentary on the writer's deprived agency in assembling their work, and a blank reiteration of commercial fact.

It was against the grain of such developments in print culture, and the business of writing, that the language of craft acquired a new critical leverage. Working independently, but from similar Romantic materials as those that nurtured Marx, John Ruskin insisted that the made object should express the imagination and intelligence of the person who created it.[10] Signs of human imperfection were seen as preferable to 'Greek' (Ruskin, 192) or modern manufactured finish. Literary labourers had less to fear, but anxieties about machine production informed the public's disappointment on learning of Anthony Trollope's daily writing quota (Trollope, 108), as well as Gissing's dark visions of a literary production line. Aestheticism and the Arts and Crafts Movement engaged with these anxieties from the perspective of an art capable of rescuing labour, either by asserting its autonomy without compromise, or by resigning its special status, and joining the applied arts, as craft. In the light of these precedents, it becomes clear that formal questions were also ethical ones.

Whereas literature had become, for some, a form of paid employment in itself, for others, the challenge was to pursue it alongside the business of 'making a living'. Maupassant initially developed his writing career alongside his position as a government clerk at the Naval Ministry in Paris. Desperate to escape the maddening tedium of office life, he wrote to his mother (on ministry paper) asking for good subjects for short stories, which he could work on in the interstices of his administrative duties.[11] For Trollope, it was the long train trips necessitated by his work as a postal surveyor's clerk, which afforded the dead time during which to embark on his career as a novelist. In both cases, the rites and experiences of professional life provided the writer with literary material; while Maupassant

parodied the lot of a government clerk in *Les Dimanches d'un bourgeois de Paris* [*Sundays of a Parisian Bourgeois*] (1880), Trollope was not above dipping into the 'lost-letter' box for inspiration.[12] Similarly, if T. S. Eliot's work as a bank clerk at Lloyds enabled his writing financially, it also lent a certain credibility to his comparison of commuting clerks to Dantean lost souls (1969, 62).

For the writer who spends the majority of his time earning his keep through a separate profession, writing could become precisely a strategy of work-avoidance, an activity distinct from (even when woven through) the routines of the 'job'. Often the writer's imaginative life appears to develop against the grain of the dulling effects and alienation of bureaucratic routine. It is one of the greatest ironies of nineteenth-century literary history that Joris-Karl Huysmans—whose novel *A rebours* [*Against Nature*] (1884) had as its anti-hero the leisured aesthete Des Esseintes—wrote much of his fiction at the desk of the Ministry of the Interior where he worked, and on ministry headed paper.[13] As the purported 'yellow book' of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), Huysmans's notorious work induces in the hero 'a malady of dreaming' with its 'curious jewelled style' (1985, 156). Huysmans imagines for his ascetic recluse an absolute immersion in the *vita contemplativa*. But just as the silent, invisible work of his two servants bankrolls this lifestyle, so too the Decadent novel's rejection of the prosaic belies the mundane, office-bound conditions of its composition.

However serious the economic and political concerns surrounding the evaluation of literary activity, there were authors who sent up their labours with an (often necessary and strategic) sense of humour, self-irony, and play. For many self-styled dilettantes of the *fin de siècle*, idleness was not simply a display of self-imposed alienation from a despised bourgeois order, but a humorously self-parodic posture.[14] Wilde mused mischievously that 'It is mentally and morally injurious to man to do anything in which he does not find pleasure' (2003, 1183). Jules Laforgue went further: he admired Baudelaire as the first poet to declare 'sa paresse, son inutilité ennuyée au milieu de ce siècle travailleur' [his laziness, his bored uselessness, amidst this hard-working century] (162). Laforgue, like T. S. Eliot after him, invented anguished and frustrated individuals ever ready to postpone 'all the works and days of hands' (1969, 14). Both explored creatively the rituals of procrastination—in its etymological sense, to be read, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman reminds us, as the act of 'plac[ing] something among the things that belong to tomorrow' (156).

In creative terms, procrastination could be at once a reason for self-scrutiny—as is the case with Sand's avowal to Flaubert of her invented distractions from writing—and a necessary preamble to the moment of production. It is the latter that Barthes insists on in his account of the writing process, which, he claims, can be divided into two periods. The first is one of ostensible idleness, 'a time for rambling around, one might almost say cruising around, cruising for memories, sensations, incidents that are allowed to flourish.' The second is one of focused productivity, 'a time of writing at one's desk (for Proust, writing in bed)' (1985, 343–4). Unlike La Bruyère and D'Israeli, Barthes does not call for the assimilation of those often intangible prefatory conditions of writing to the category of 'work', but restates the casual purposelessness of undirected mental 'rambling'. Something of this kind is suggested by Pater's resolution to expand the 'interval' between death and the present moment, by 'getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time' (1910, 238). The result is a 'quickened, multiplied consciousness', which, if not apathetic, remains in some sense watchful, or stilled.

In Barthes's schema, idleness is the condition in which memories and sensations rise to the surface (1985, 343). This first period of remembrance is, in Proust's terms, that of 'le temps perdu' [lost time]. The second period is a concerted effort to make one's mental and sensuous experience materialize. In their *Journal*, the Goncourt brothers articulated this effort through an arrestingly, and grotesquely, embodied image of the male writer not so much at work as in labour: 'La torture, le supplice, la peine de la vie littéraire est l'enfantement. […] De ce rien, de cet embryon rudimentaire qui est la première idée d'un livre, faire sortir le punctum saliens […], tout ce petit monde animé vous-même et jailli de vos entrailles, qui est un roman—quel travail!' (1989, 834) [The travail, the torment, the torture, of the literary life is in the birth pangs. […] Out of that oblivion, out of that rudimentary embryon [*sic*] which is the initial idea, to bring forth the *punctum saliens* […] the life of all this little world animated by you, spurting forth from your entrails, and becoming a novel—what work!] (1937, 121). Here, it is not the conception of the mental idea that appears miraculous so much as its prolonged gestation and actualization into a formal product.

The Goncourts' metaphorical appropriation of physiologically feminine travails gives a peculiar, though by no means singular, inflection to the discourse of 'body work' underpinning conceptions of literary production (above all, realist ones). The persistence of metaphors of childbirth in male writers' articulations of their own literary activity meant a particular type

of 'women's work' continued to signal the limits of conceivable effort. But the male artist's gestatory fantasy was also pinned to ideas about subjectivity, interiority, and intimacy in creative work. However much the Goncourts' stress on the arduous *process* of bringing the novel to fruition might indicate a broader reaction to Romanticism's contemplative or epiphanic model of work, their own analogy is still very much rooted in Romantic paradigms of the self-creating individual. At the close of our period, by contrast, Olive Schreiner's *Woman and Labour* (1911) expounds a vision of childbirth that suggests not simply personal literary power, but a unique female capacity to shape the next generation of human brains, in a curious mixing of professional realization, female emancipation, and eugenics (129).

Clearly, metaphors of exertion and toil, as they were deployed by writers in this period, necessarily invoke an identity politics based as much in class as in gender.[15] One of the main aims of this volume is to probe the cross-class identification between writer and worker that is often established across literary texts, correspondence, and other writings. The immediacy of labour politics and class conflict during the period led many writers to display in their own works an explicit social interest in the condition of the labouring populace. This underwrote a pervading concern to democratize the scope of literary fiction—to give the 'people', as the Goncourts put it in the preface to their 1865 novel of the maidservant, *Germinie Lacerteux*, a 'droit au Roman' [right to the Novel] (55). The representation of work and worker in fiction has been a significant source of interest for cultural critics[16]; and this book extends their insights by attending to the ways in which the 'literature of labour' more often than not returns us, in overdetermined fashion, to the writerly work that produces it, inviting us to contemplate the viability, or illegitimacy, of its own analogies.

Could the writer justifiably paint himself as a labourer? In his famous letter to Georges Izambard, written 13 May 1871 at the height of the Paris Commune, Arthur Rimbaud asserts his self-definition as a worker, but only as a deferred possibility: 'Je serai un travailleur: c'est l'idée qui me retient, quand les colères folles me poussent vers la bataille de Paris—où tant de travailleurs meurent pourtant encore tandis que je vous écris! Travailler maintenant, jamais, jamais; je suis en grève' [I will be a worker: this idea holds me back, when mad anger drives me toward the battle of Paris—where so many workers are dying as I write to you! Work now?—never, never, I am on strike] (370–1). This refusal of work, of the sort enshrined in the American tradition by Herman Melville's *Bartleby the*