



# Palgrave Studies in Modern European Literature

Series Editors

Shane Weller

School of European Culture and Languages

University of Kent

Canterbury, UK

Thomas Baldwin

Centre for Modern European Literature

University of Kent

Canterbury, UK

Ben Hutchinson

Centre for Modern European Literature

University of Kent

Canterbury, UK

Linked to the Centre for Modern European Literature at the University of Kent, UK, this series offers a space for new research that challenges the limitations of national, linguistic and cultural borders within Europe and engages in the comparative study of literary traditions in the modern period.

More information about this series at  
<http://www.palgrave.com/gp/series/14610>

Edmund Birch

Fictions of the Press in  
Nineteenth-Century  
France

palgrave  
macmillan

Edmund Birch  
Churchill College  
University of Cambridge  
Cambridge, UK

Palgrave Studies in Modern European Literature  
ISBN 978-3-319-72199-6      ISBN 978-3-319-72200-9 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-72200-9>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018932360

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2018

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover illustration: Bibliothèque nationale de France

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature  
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG  
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

## PREFATORY NOTE

Unless noted, translations throughout the book are my own. In the case of all nineteenth-century material, citations are quoted in the original French and followed by an English translation. With regard to more recent critical writing in French, I have chosen to include English translations only. All references to Balzac's *La Comédie humaine* are to the Pléiade edition, edited by Pierre-Georges Castex and others, 12 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1976–1981). Volume and page number are noted parenthetically in the text.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book has its origins in a PhD dissertation, submitted at the University of Cambridge in December 2014, and I should like to begin by thanking my supervisor, Nick White, for his tireless enthusiasm, engagement and generosity. His support proved invaluable at every stage. I am also deeply grateful to those friends and colleagues who offered advice and assistance at numerous moments and to those who read portions (or even the entirety) of the manuscript: Anne Costa de Beauregard, Andrew Counter, Polly Dickson, Colin Foss, Nigel Harkness, Owen Holland, Robert Lethbridge, Adrian May, Max McGuinness, Cathy Nesci, Kate Rees, Richard Riddick, Tom Rowley, Bradley Stephens, Becca Sugden, Michael Tilby, Alex Tranca, Claire White and Jenny Yee. All mistakes, of course, are my own. I completed my doctoral dissertation at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge and continued to work on the project over the course of a Research Fellowship at Emmanuel College, Cambridge; I should like to express my thanks to both institutions and to the École Normale Supérieure de Lyon, where I first began to study the relationship between literature and journalism in 2008. My postgraduate research would not have been possible without awards from the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Newton Trust; I thank both for their support. And I am grateful to colleagues and students in my current post at Churchill College and Selwyn College, Cambridge. Elsewhere, Peter Vantine was kind enough to share his recent thesis on the early works of the brothers Goncourt, and I would also like to take this opportunity to thank colleagues in France and Canada, in particular Marie-Ève Thérénty and Guillaume Pinson, for their generous invitations to seminars and conferences on the history of

journalism in France. Thanks are also due to Vicky Bates and Tomas René at Palgrave Macmillan. With regard to permissions: as part of Chap. 3, 'Keys: Press and Privacy in the Goncourts' *Charles Demailly* is reproduced from *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* with permission from the University of Nebraska Press; copyright 2014. Parts of Chap. 4 were published by the MHRA in *Modern Language Review* (2014); I am grateful to the editors for permission to reproduce the material here.

Finally, my deepest thanks go to Shadia Nasralla (a real journalist) and to my family—my parents, Georgina and Nick, and my siblings, Olivia and Guy; this book is dedicated to them.

# CONTENTS

1	Introduction	1
2	Newspaper Fictions, Newspaper Histories	13
3	A Sentimental Education: Balzac's Journalists	59
4	The Brothers Goncourt and the End of Privacy	115
5	Sleight of Hand: Maupassant and <i>Actualité</i>	163
6	Conclusion	207
	Bibliography	217
	Index	233



## CHAPTER 1

---

# Introduction

*Lord, what a fuss about an old newspaper!*  
*Henry James, The Reverberator*<sup>1</sup>

Julien Sorel's first steps must number among the most inopportune of literary beginnings. About to embark on a new life with the Rênal family, the protagonist of Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* passes an idle moment of reflection in a local church. Like so many heroes of nineteenth-century fiction, Julien sets out to make it in the world; and yet here, in the town of Verrières, he encounters, as if by chance, a misplaced fragment from a newspaper:

Sur le prie-Dieu, Julien remarqua un morceau de papier imprimé, étalé là comme pour être lu. Il y porta les yeux et vit:

*Détails de l'exécution et des derniers moments de Louis Jenrel, exécuté à Besançon, le...*

Le papier était déchiré. Au revers, on lisait les deux premiers mots d'une ligne, c'étaient: *Le premier pas*.

– Qui a pu mettre ce papier là, dit Julien? Pauvre malheureux, ajouta-t-il avec un soupir, son nom finit comme le mien... et il froissa le papier.<sup>2</sup>

[Julien noticed a scrap of printed paper spread out on the stool, left there as though it were intended to be read. Casting an eye over it, he saw:

*Details of the execution and final moments of Louis Jenrel, executed in Besançon the...*

The paper was torn. The first two words of a line were legible on the back, and these read: *The first step*.

‘Who can have left this paper here?’ said Julien. ‘Poor wretch,’ he added with a sigh, ‘his name ends just like my own’, and he crumpled up the paper.]

Before too long, Julien will find himself back in this church, revolver in hand, preparing to fire on Mme de Rênal; his execution will swiftly follow. But the cataclysm of his ending is unknown to the hopeful protagonist in this, his beginning; and indeed, Julien only partially acknowledges the scarcely concealed portent of his fate, apparently ignorant of the anagrammatic reference which binds Louis Jenrel to Julien Sorel. In these first steps, the narrative already knows what will befall its hero and employs the newspaper as some thinly veiled harbinger of an ending already written, seemingly beyond the control of any fictional protagonist (however dynamic). Such determinism draws us back to the novel’s origins in the newspaper, recalling, in particular, the Berthet Affair, reported in the *Gazette des Tribunaux* over December 1827. As numerous critics have noted, Antoine Berthet’s attempted assassination of Mme Michoud de la Tour mirrors the story of Stendhal’s Julien.<sup>3</sup> In this displaced newspaper, then, we encounter the troubled history of fiction and journalism in nineteenth-century France; its incongruous presence prompts us to question, as Peter Brooks has: ‘How do we read the newspaper in the novel?’<sup>4</sup>

What is at stake in fictional representations of the press? This is the question this book will endeavour to answer, tracking the depiction of newspapers and journalists in works by Honoré de Balzac, Edmond and Jules de Goncourt and Guy de Maupassant. At first glance, the nineteenth-century novel suffers few illusions about the workings of the press. As Balzac’s Claude Vignon puts it in *Illusions perdues*: ‘Les journaux sont un mal’ (V, 404) [Newspapers are an evil]. Pessimism is rife in nineteenth-century reflections on the press, a point underscored not only in fictional works but across an array of writings depicting and commenting on the state of contemporary journalism. And yet newspaper and novel become inseparable in this period; Stendhal’s decisive ‘morceau de papier’—dubbed a ‘mortal intertext’ in Brooks’s reading—comes to reflect the newspaper’s ever-increasing centrality, emblematic of a phenomenon we will encounter time and again in this study: fiction borrows from the press, the twists and turns of its various plots inextricably bound up with the news.<sup>5</sup> Evident in Julien Sorel’s ill-fated example are the ways in which the

newspaper threatens to reconfigure not simply the object of literary representation, but the shape of fictional plots. My intention here is to trace a particular history of reading, to explore the ways in which the novel interprets the newspaper: a history of reading, that is, from the perspective of the novel itself. This, after all, was the ‘century of the press’, an era in which novels were published in newspapers and novelists worked as journalists.<sup>6</sup> It was also, as scholars such as Martyn Lyons and James Smith Allen have explored, an era of new readers: literacy rates were shifting and new technologies brought the printed word before an ever-greater public.<sup>7</sup> Robert Darnton, in his ‘First Steps Toward a History of Reading’, offers a timely reminder of the inevitably historical character of reading:

We may enjoy the illusion of stepping outside of time in order to make contact with authors who lived centuries ago. But even if their texts have come down to us unchanged—a virtual impossibility, considering the evolution of layout and of books as physical objects—our relation to those texts cannot be the same as that of readers in the past.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, the fact of the novel’s frequent publication in the newspaper represents only the first consideration in assessing the material transformation of the nineteenth century’s various literary legacies. Yet the point is instructive. Today, few in search of a novel would instinctively turn to the pages of a daily newspaper.<sup>9</sup>

We cannot hope to understand the nineteenth-century novel in France without first considering its myriad connections with the newspaper. The story of the press at this time is one of rampant expansion, with circulation multiplying by a factor of forty between 1830 and 1880.<sup>10</sup> The scope of such upheaval becomes evident in two nineteenth-century representations of the printing press. The opening lines of Balzac’s *Illusions perdues* (1837–1843) identify in the press an emblem of provincial society’s technological inadequacies: ‘À l’époque où commence cette histoire, la presse de Stanhope et les rouleaux à distribuer l’encre ne fonctionnaient pas encore dans les petites imprimeries de province’ (V, 123) [At the time this story begins, the Stanhope press and rollers for the distribution of ink were not in common use in the small printing shops of the provinces]. Balzac’s now famous description of the press privileges precisely the processes of reproduction which align novel and newspaper. *Illusions perdues*, after all, is a narrative of paper, concerned with the materiality of texts (from articles, to novels, to letters).<sup>11</sup> In the image of this outmoded press,

indeed, we find a particularly nineteenth-century symbol of innovation. By the end of the century, and the publication of Paul Brulat's 1898 novel of journalism, *Le Reporter*, the press has undergone something of a metamorphosis. Brulat's protagonist, Pierre Marzans, is a hero with Balzacian illusions. Wandering the streets of Paris in the early hours of the morning, he strikes on a printing press and loses all sense of time contemplating the hypnotic movement of the machines:

Les cylindres, longs et minces, courts et puissants, tournaient, roulaient avec une rapidité qui, par instants, semblait s'accroître avec le bruit. Trente-six mille exemplaires à l'heure! A mesure que cette heure avançait, l'activité se faisait plus formidable; les machines, comme excitées par leur propre vacarme, paraissaient précipiter d'elles-mêmes leur mouvement, se hâter. Les piles de journaux s'élevaient, l'atelier soufflait; sur le plancher, un pêle-mêle d'épreuves froissées traînaient, piétinées sous le va-et-vient des ouvriers, portant l'empreinte des talons.<sup>12</sup>

[Long and thin, short and powerful, the cylinders turned, spinning with a rapidity which, at times, seemed only to increase with the noise. Thirty-six thousand copies every hour! As this hour went by, their activity became all the more formidable; the machines, as though excited by their own racket, seemed to quicken their pace all by themselves, to be in a rush. The piles of newspapers grew tall; the workshop exhaled. An array of crumpled proofs littered the floor, trampled beneath the comings and goings of the workers, and bearing the imprints of their boots.]

Brulat's machine offers a vision of the transformed technology of reproduction on the eve of the twentieth century. This book will focus on the gulf which divides Balzac's provincial press from this diabolical creation, a naturalist metaphor in the style of the train of Émile Zola's 1890 novel, *La Bête humaine*. Brulat's printing press is responsive less to the efforts of attending workers than to some impulse for continual propulsion.

What has changed in the years separating Balzac from Brulat is not simply the technology of reproduction but the culture of journalism. *Le Reporter's* printing press emphasises both rapidity and volume of production, the mechanical emblem of a society refashioned by the newspaper's inexorable rise. Nineteenth-century commentators were sensitive to such refashioning. In fact, so swift was the pace of change that by 1877 Zola reflected that a golden age of journalism under the July Monarchy had been lost amid skyrocketing subscription figures and supposedly populist

concerns: ‘Le journal cessa d’être l’organe d’une certaine opinion pour raconter, avant tout, les faits divers et les détails de la vie quotidienne’ [The newspaper ceased to be the organ of some particular opinion and came to recount, above all, the *faits divers* and the details of everyday life].<sup>13</sup> And yet while literary criticism has long suspected the importance of the press for writers of this period—not least in the case of Zola, whose 1898 article, ‘J’Accuse’, remains one of the most influential in the history of French journalism—only in recent years has the study of journalism risen to due prominence, particularly in the Francophone world.<sup>14</sup> Literary scholars and cultural historians, notably Marie-Ève Thérenty, Alain Vaillant, Dominique Kalifa and Guillaume Pinson, have redrawn the critical map of nineteenth-century studies, sensitive to the continual crossover, overlap and exchange which bind literature and journalism in this period.<sup>15</sup> Building on the work of an earlier generation of French historians (not least that of Claude Bellanger), these scholarly endeavours stress the newspaper’s foundational role in nineteenth-century society in an approach which glosses the era as *la civilisation du journal* (or as the civilisation of the newspaper).<sup>16</sup> I shall reflect on the work of Thérenty and her colleagues throughout this study, one of the objectives of which will be to analyse, explore and develop the intellectual foundations of this novel project, and I shall highlight, as a consequence, theoretical approaches outlined by Pierre Bourdieu (*Les Règles de l’art*) and Marc Angenot (*1889. Un état du discours social*). Both represent crucial points of reference in this rich vein of Francophone scholarship.

Such critical focus has, in the main, received scant attention in the Anglophone world. Where British and North American research has been particularly successful in the study of the nineteenth-century French press, it has sought to consider the connections between press and power, notably in the case of Richard Terdiman’s *Discourse/Counter-Discourse*, a work which conceives of journalism as the vehicle of a form of dominant discourse.<sup>17</sup> Such arguments concerned with the relationship between media and power find a critic in the work of Jeremy Popkin, however, whose history of the press in Lyon under the July Monarchy privileges the heterogeneous character of nineteenth-century journalism.<sup>18</sup> The sense that the development of the press is bound up with particular political impulses emerges, to different effect, in Benedict Anderson’s writing on nationalism, not least in the argument that the newspaper comes to represent a critical emblem of the ‘imagined community’ of the nation. Crucial to this argument is the idea that the press becomes the means by which seemingly

disparate individuals imagine the possibilities of (nationalist) connection, a point Anderson tracks with reference to the representation of the press in the work of the Indonesian writer Mas Marco Kartodikromo. In what Anderson dubs the newspaper's 'profound fictiveness', moreover, lies the idea that the media fabricates, constructs, organises a certain version of the everyday, the coherence of which must ultimately be imagined (or, rather, experienced in imagination) by the reader.<sup>19</sup> In this, Anderson's sense of the 'newspaper-as-fiction'<sup>20</sup> bears some connection with Clifford Geertz's equally significant attempts to refocus the discipline of anthropology in his discussion of 'thick description': 'anthropological writings', Geertz notes, 'are themselves interpretations'. And he continues: 'They are thus fictions; fictions, in the sense that they are "something made", "something fashioned"—the original meaning of *fictiō*—not that they are false, unfactual, or merely "as-if" thought experiments.'<sup>21</sup> In these concerns for the newspaper as *fictiō*—a text constructed and organised—lies one of the senses of the 'fictions' in my title, for the newspaper, as we shall see, will seek to construct its own reality, to make the world (and not simply to make it up). After all, central to both Geertz and Anderson is the notion of imagination, and it is precisely this faculty which the most detailed analysis of nineteenth-century depictions of the press brings to the fore. Guillaume Pinson's *L'Imaginaire médiatique* traces the development of journalism and its representation in France across diverse genres, with a particular sensitivity to the various ways in which the newspaper was imagined over the course of the century.<sup>22</sup>

My own argument will explore the ways in which the novel of journalism conceives of the newspaper as a force which threatens to reconfigure the nature of social intercourse, the bounds of public life. It is the contention of this book that fictional reflections on the press offered nineteenth-century writers a way of commenting on, even of condemning, the newspaper's capacity to script the very terms of contemporary debate. The idea that the modern newspaper strays from some notionally descriptive role and comes to shape the fate of society itself, from politics to the nature of private life, was a notion at the very heart of the nineteenth-century novel of journalism—a notion, of course, with which we live still. Central to my approach here is the sense that not enough critical attention has been paid to the complexities which the French novel of journalism brought to the analysis of the press, not least regarding the imagined scope of the newspaper's influence. An exploration of the nuanced and often ambivalent ways in which works of fiction grasped the rise of the

media promises to enrich our understanding of the new regime of reading born with the advent of the mass press. Equally crucial, moreover, are a set of questions about the ways in which the newspaper threatens to alter the nature, the reach and the limits of common knowledge. Novels of journalism, indeed, will tirelessly stress the fact that the world is somehow other than newspapers would have their readers believe. And this sense of misrepresentation will lead various of the fictions discussed here to privilege plots of political manipulation and chicanery, plots in which vested interests will strive to shape the news agenda. If Anderson's sense of the newspaper's 'profound fictiveness' transforms the press into a crucial touchstone in the elaboration of the imagined community of the nation, then I shall seek to define the nature of such 'fictiveness' in rather different terms: for to conceive of the newspaper as some point of social connection, or as a seminal discourse in the construction of a given community, is to begin to tread a path outlined in so many fictions of the press. It is the novel which all too often transforms the newspaper into the arbiter—or even the author—of everyday life.

What emerges from this study is the idea that the nineteenth-century novel found innovative ways to assess the status (or the validity) of the news. A number of epistemological questions emerge from this concern. What are the foundations on which social knowledge rests? And what are the limits of public confidence in those foundations—or, rather, what *should* those limits be? In approaching these questions, each chapter of the present study will explore a different problem or anxiety articulated by novelists about the rise of the press: the relationship of journalism and narratives of education in the 1830s; the invasion of private life around 1860; the question of media corruption and colonial politics in the 1880s. These three historical moments prompt discussion of the radically shifting political culture of this age of revolutions—from the July Monarchy to the Second Empire and beyond, to the Third Republic. I will first outline (in Chap. 2) the historical and theoretical context crucial to *Fictions of the Press*, exploring in greater depth certain of the critical arguments briefly sketched here. My analysis will subsequently proceed with reference to these three distinct moments in the history of the French press, each tied to what are often considered the century's seminal novels of journalism: Balzac's *Illusions perdues* (1837–1843); the Goncourts' *Charles Demailly* (1860); and Maupassant's *Bel-Ami* (1885).<sup>23</sup> On Balzac, Chap. 3 will explore the connections between journalism and education in the literary culture of the July Monarchy, both highlighting recent critical approaches

to *Illusions perdues*—that foundational and often-discussed nineteenth-century novel—and considering other of Balzac’s fictions of the press, *Une fille d’Ève* (1838–1839) and *Les Employés* (1837). If *Illusions perdues* has proved something of an enduring presence in discussions of nineteenth-century journalism, my analysis here will aim to situate that text alongside lesser-known works from *La Comédie humaine*. At various junctures, moreover, I will be concerned with the legacy of that seminal novel, a point crucial to Chap. 4. On the Goncourts, this chapter takes as its subject the understudied *Charles Demailly* and considers the ways in which this text imagines the threat to privacy posed by the rise of the *petite presse*. On Maupassant, Chap. 5 evokes the question of journalistic corruption in an era of apparent press freedom, the Third Republic. Discussing the French occupation of Tunisia in 1881, the chapter explores *Bel-Ami*’s sense of the news and the notion of public opinion with reference to Angenot’s writings on social discourse.

The works of Balzac, the Goncourts and Maupassant are not simply discussed as isolated emblems of the nineteenth century’s distaste for the rise of the newspaper, however; crucial, rather, is their reintegration into the journalistic debates of the age. The study therefore explores an array of contemporary material relevant to its particular thematic concerns, from novels (such as Zola’s *L’Argent* or Brulat’s *Le Reporter*), theatre (Delphine de Girardin’s *L’École des journalistes*) and memoirs (notably the Goncourts’ *Journal*, but also Hippolyte de Villemessant’s memoirs) to popular nineteenth-century histories of the press (Edmond Texier’s *Les Journaux et les journalistes*). The rise of digitisation, moreover, has transformed the accessibility of newspaper archives throughout the world, not least in France, and *Fictions of the Press* will draw on such material at numerous junctures, returning, in conclusion, to the ways in which the emergence of new media threatens and promises to modify our readings of old media. In such debates, the question of our present moment and its relation to the nineteenth century cannot be ignored. Indeed, discussions of the nineteenth-century press invariably provoke some comparison with the twenty-first-century news industry, a point glossed by Matthew Rubery in his important study of Victorian fiction and the news: ‘many of the questions asked by today’s media studies were first asked by the Victorians’.<sup>24</sup> In the age of twenty-four-hour news, of tweets and blogs, we might be forgiven for writing off the newspaper. Blighted by ever-dwindling sales and rocked by an array of media scandals, anxieties persist

surrounding its future. But if it is still too soon to proclaim the death of the newspaper in our own time, the precise contours of its history continue to demand critical attention. Traces of nineteenth-century debates do indeed linger in modern analyses of the press; and yet rarely (if ever) do fictional works occupy such a privileged space in modern newspapers as they once did. The media, we might say, has its own nineteenth-century history, both reflective of and quite distinct from our prevailing concerns.

Fiction—today, at any rate—appears to have taken its leave of the press. But even such leave-taking seems occasionally exaggerated: trainee journalists at Reuters, I have learned, are frequently encouraged to read Tom Wolfe's *The Bonfire of the Vanities*—a portrait of the interconnected worlds of finance, politics and the press. The inclusion of Wolfe, the self-styled heir to Balzac and Zola, in that particular journalistic education serves to remind us of the enduring potential of novels as pedagogical tools. Fiction and the press, moreover, might not be bound up in so oppositional a relation after all. For literary criticism, such lessons are worth retaining. Like Stendhal's Julien Sorel, we disregard the newspaper at our peril—'et il froissa le papier.'

## NOTES

1. Henry James, *The Reverberator, Madame de Mauves, A Passionate Pilgrim, and Other Tales* (London: Macmillan, 1922), p. 146.
2. Stendhal, *Romans et nouvelles*, ed. by Henri Martineau, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), I, 240.
3. For details of the original *Gazette des Tribunaux* reports of the Berthet case, see Stendhal, *Romans et nouvelles*, I, 715–730. For a discussion of the influence of this case on Stendhal's novel, see Ann Jefferson, *Reading Realism in Stendhal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 67–72.
4. Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 83.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 82–84 (p. 83).
6. Note the title of Christophe Charle's *Le Siècle de la presse, 1830–1939* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).
7. See, for example, Martyn Lyons, *Readers and Society in Nineteenth-Century France: Workers, Women, Peasants* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 1: 'On the eve of the French Revolution under half (47 per cent) of the

- male population of France, and about 27 per cent of the French women, could read. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, functional literacy had become almost universal for both French men and women.’ See also James Smith Allen, *In the Public Eye: A History of Reading in Modern France, 1800–1940* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).
8. Robert Darnton, ‘First Steps Toward a History of Reading’, *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 23 (1986), 5–30 (p. 5).
  9. For one example of this phenomenon, see the publication of Maupassant’s *Bel-Ami* in *Gil Blas*, from 6 April to 30 May 1885.
  10. Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 118. In these figures, Terdiman is referencing Claude Bellanger et al. (eds), *Histoire générale de la presse française*, 5 vols (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1969–1976), II, 18, 24, 120, 259, and Theodore Zeldin, *France 1848–1945*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973–1977), II, 540.
  11. On this point, see Christopher Prendergast, *The Order of Mimesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 111–118.
  12. Paul Brulat, *Le Reporter: roman contemporain* (Paris: Perrin, 1898), p. 92.
  13. Here, Zola proves an adept historian of the periodical press, stressing the newspaper’s transformation in an 1877 article for the St Petersburg monthly *Le Messager de l’Europe*. See *Zola journaliste: articles et chroniques*, ed. by Adeline Wrona (Paris: Flammarion, 2011), pp. 222–255 (p. 226). Popular, miscellaneous but often brief articles, the *faits divers* were a common feature of the nineteenth-century French press.
  14. See, for example, Eric Cahm, *L’Affaire Dreyfus: Histoire, politique et société* (Paris: Livre de poche, 1994), pp. 97–146.
  15. These interests are emphasised in the recent publication of selected journalism by various leading nineteenth-century writers. See, for example, *Balzac journaliste: articles et chroniques*, ed. by Marie-Ève Thérénty (Paris: Flammarion, 2014); *Hugo journaliste: articles et chroniques*, ed. by Marieke Stein (Paris: Flammarion, 2014); *Baudelaire journaliste: articles et chroniques*, ed. by Alain Vaillant (Paris: Flammarion, 2011).
  16. This dynamic field of study has produced an array of texts exploring the nineteenth-century French press, not least *La Civilisation du journal. Histoire culturelle et littéraire de la presse française au XIXe siècle*, ed. by Dominique Kalifa, Philippe Régnier, Marie-Ève Thérénty and Alain Vaillant (Paris: Nouveau monde, 2011). Thérénty’s work in particular has proved critical to such endeavours: see *La Littérature au quotidien. Poétiques journalistiques au XIX siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2007); *Mosaïques. Être écrivain entre presse et roman (1829–1836)* (Paris: Champion, 2003); Thérénty and Vaillant, 1836: *L’An 1 de l’ère médiatique: étude littéraire et*

- historique du journal La Presse d'Émile de Girardin* (Paris: Nouveau monde, 2001); Thérenty and Vaillant (eds), *Presse et plumes: Journalisme et littérature au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Nouveau monde, 2004); Thérenty and Vaillant (eds), *Presse, nations et mondialisation au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Nouveau monde, 2010). See Corinne Saminadayar-Perrin, *Les Discours du journal: rhétorique et médias au XIXe siècle (1836–1885)* (Saint-Etienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Etienne, 2007). See also Guillaume Pinson, *La Culture médiatique francophone en Europe et en Amérique du Nord: De 1760 à la veille de la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Quebec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2016). Note, finally, the website Médias 19, a crucial platform for new research in this field: <http://www.medias19.org> [accessed 1 September 2016].
17. See Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse*, pp. 117–146. For further Anglophone scholarship on the French press, note Dean de la Motte and Jeannene M. Przyblyski (eds), *Making the News: Modernity and the Mass Press in Nineteenth-Century France* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999); David H. Walker, *Outrage and Insight: Modern French Writers and the 'Fait Divers'* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1995). On Victorian journalism, see Laurel Brake, Bill Bell and David Finkelstein (eds), *Nineteenth-Century Media and the Construction of Identities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000); Matthew Rubery, *The Novelty of Newspapers: Victorian Fiction After the Invention of the News* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
  18. Jeremy Popkin, *Press, Revolution, and Social Identities in France, 1830–1835* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), see pp. 1–22.
  19. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn (London: Verso, 2006), pp. 30–33 (p. 33).
  20. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
  21. Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 3–30 (p. 15).
  22. Guillaume Pinson, *L'Imaginaire médiatique. Histoire et fiction du journal au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2012), p. 10. Note also Thérenty, 'Le journal dans le roman du XIXe siècle ou l'icône renversée', in *Le Roman du signe. Fiction et herméneutique au XIXe siècle*, ed. by Andrea Del Lungo and Boris Lyon-Caen (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2007), pp. 25–38.
  23. Thérenty, *La Littérature au quotidien*, p. 19.
  24. Rubery, *The Novelty of Newspapers*, p. 18. Rubery goes on to outline the connections between the Victorian period and the modern news industry and points to the central concerns of his own research: 'Journalists of the

nineteenth century raised the very question underpinning these chapters—“what is news?”—that continues to preoccupy editorial staffs in their efforts to reach “the million”, that mythic number of readers initially sought by the Victorian press and long ago surpassed by modern media enterprise.’ At certain junctures of this argument, I too shall be drawn to this question ‘what is news?’—a point central to *Bel-Ami*’s reflection on the limits of *actualité*.



## CHAPTER 2

---

# Newspaper Fictions, Newspaper Histories

*Si la presse n'existait pas, il faudrait ne pas l'inventer.*  
[If the press did not exist, it would be necessary not to invent it.]  
Balzac, Monographie de la presse parisienne

In 1867 Émile de Girardin, the famous journalist and newspaper entrepreneur, published a collection of *Pensées et maximes*, ‘perhaps hoping’, as one critic has put it, ‘to rival Pascal and La Rochefoucauld in one fell swoop’.<sup>1</sup> The collection brims with Girardin’s commentary on the state of his trade and the politics of his society, and his musings take the reader in different directions. At one juncture in this work, for example, he remarks: ‘Le journalisme, impuissant à vaincre les peureux, impuissant à les rassurer, ne sert le plus souvent qu’à en grossir le nombre’ [Powerless to overcome the fearful and powerless to reassure them, journalism often serves merely to increase their number].<sup>2</sup> This aphoristic speculation strikes a rather different note from Girardin’s staunch defence of his own newspapers, not least *La Presse*, launched in 1836. But the idea of the newspaper’s powerlessness was a theme to which he would return throughout much of his writing. As we shall see, it is an idea contested in a great deal of nineteenth-century commentary. Alain Vaillant once remarked that Girardin appears to us now as a character from a popular novel or as the distant ancestor of media moguls such as Rupert Murdoch or Silvio Berlusconi.<sup>3</sup> There can

be no doubt that his life was an eventful one: from the drama of his duel with fellow journalist Armand Carrel (who would ultimately die from the wound sustained during this confrontation) to his tireless quest for influence, Girardin lived in a world transformed by the rise of the periodical press.<sup>4</sup> Born in 1802, he would live to see numerous moments of political upheaval before his death in 1881.

We will return to Girardin throughout this chapter as something of a guiding thread in our consideration of the historical and theoretical contexts central to the present study. What I propose to explore here are the forms of language—the vocabularies, the motifs, the metaphors—given to describe the press in the nineteenth century. The history of journalism is not only a matter of subscription figures, nor can it be confined to the political affiliations of journalists and newspapers. The chapter will proceed by outlining three tensions critical to discussions and depictions of journalism over the course of the nineteenth century. Firstly, we shall consider the overlapping relationship of novel to newspaper, the ways in which nineteenth-century writers and commentators sought to distinguish between them (or, conversely, to blur the line dividing one from the other). Secondly, we shall explore the play of referentiality and reflexivity in depictions of the press, noting the ways in which representations of journalism consider the status of facts in the newspapers as well as the presence of copy. Thirdly, we shall see how a number of nineteenth-century discourses transformed the press into an authority, a means of marshalling, and even scripting, the terms of contemporary debate. With this approach, my aim is not only to reflect on an array of responses to the rise of the press—reactions which cut across diverse genres—but to consider in detail recent critical writings on this subject. What emerges from the study of such material is the enduring power of certain images and motifs in representations of journalism, a set of ideas about authorship, authenticity and the status of literature, which surface and resurface throughout the century.

### NOVELS AND NEWSPAPERS

In its opening lines, George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871–1872) sets up an opposition, one we will find stressed time and again in this study. The declaration of Eliot's narrator turns on the relationship of protagonist to community: 'Miss Brooke', we learn in this iconic moment of narrative fiction, 'had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by

poor dress'. Indeed, the novel's formulation of this central dichotomy—Miss Brooke and her 'poor dress'—finds a metaphorical outlet in the play of the literary and the journalistic, thrown together in the kind of analogy doubtless favoured by the protagonist herself. The effect is jarring:

Her hand and wrist were so finely formed that she could wear sleeves not less bare of style than those in which the Blessed Virgin appeared to Italian painters; and her profile as well as her stature and bearing seemed to gain the more dignity from her plain garments, which by the side of provincial fashion gave her the impressiveness of a fine quotation from the Bible,—or from one of our elder poets,—in a paragraph of to-day's newspaper.<sup>5</sup>

The various analogies deployed to stress such social distinction lead, in the brilliance of this sentence's syntax, to the daily newspaper—repository, we assume, of the common, the ordinary, the mundane. Nothing, it appears, could be so stark as the difference between 'our elder poets' and the periodical press, a dichotomy we will find evoked—though perhaps not with such dextrous irony—throughout nineteenth-century culture. And yet, in this *siècle de la presse*, the persistence of that dichotomy proves difficult to maintain. That the literary field of the age was one bound up with the rise of the newspaper is a point stressed by numerous critics. F. R. Leavis, for one, points to the continual overlap of such apparently distinct realms in his 1924 PhD thesis: 'Hardly any writer of the nineteenth century was not in some way implicated in journalism.'<sup>6</sup> And the issue takes on a certain poignancy in France. Indeed, Leavis's sensitive reading of the overlapping histories of journalism and literature in English culture recalls a question raised by Albert Thibaudet just one year earlier: 'le journalisme', as he put it, 'est-il de la littérature?' [journalism—is it literature?].<sup>7</sup>

The fact that such debates rose to prominence in both France and England points to what these societies share in their reflections on the culture of journalism. Researchers in French studies might be surprised to learn of Leavis's insightful reading of the connections between literature and the press. Often linked with the construction of a tightly regulated canon of literary elites alongside a continual emphasis on the practice of close reading, the literary-critical moment associated with Leavis is frequently characterised both by the brilliance of its leading lights and by the apparently dated moralising which it brought to the forefront of scholarly practice. Leavis's early research, however, stresses the ways in which writers responded to particular reading publics, identifying in Defoe, for

example, a continual overlap between his work as a journalist and that as a novelist.<sup>8</sup> This pioneer of Cambridge English owes something to a French scholarly tradition, drawing on Abel Chevalley's *Le Roman anglais de notre temps* and electing to conclude his study with reference to Sainte-Beuve.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, while Leavis greatly expands the confines of the term 'journalism'—exploring, for example, the connections between periodical writing and literature in the Elizabethan period—the origins of that very term draw English studies back to a set of French connections: 'journalism' was a relatively late addition to the English language, borrowed from the French during the first half of the nineteenth century. In the *Westminster Review* of January 1833, Joseph Gibbons Merle, an English journalist working in Paris, highlighted the need for such a term: "Journalism" is a good name for the thing meant; at any rate it is compact, and when once in circulation is incapable of equivocal meanings.' As Merle goes on to point out: "Newspapers", and "newspaper-writing", not to mention that they have a bad odour, only imperfectly describe the thing intended.<sup>10</sup>

In the history of the terminology, at the very least, English and French literary and journalistic cultures intersect. The (near) century which separates Merle from Leavis saw the rise of the periodical press, its growing influence in social, political and cultural matters—a history which runs alongside, and occasionally collides with, the development of journalism in France. Indeed, Matthew Rubery's analysis of Victorian literature and its relation to the news charts the ways in which literary works borrow from, exploit, even rival, the discourse of the newspapers. And yet, research in the field of French studies has often highlighted the particularly gallic qualities of French media history. Crucial to a range of critical and historical writings, from the work of Thomas Ferenczi to the studies of Marie-Ève Thérénty, for example, is the centrality of literature for nineteenth-century journalism *à la française*. Lurching between political commitment and literary expression, Ferenczi identifies the history of French journalism as one caught between politics and literature: 'Since the birth of the French press,' he writes, 'literature and politics were the quasi-exclusive subject matter'. And he continues this line of reasoning, noting that nineteenth-century journalists fell into two camps: 'either literary men or political men'.<sup>11</sup> Thérénty also emphasises the specificity of 'a very literary journalism' which emerged in France over the 1830s as a counterpoint to Anglo-Saxon models, and goes on to stress Girardin's development of the *roman-feuilleton* or serial novel, evidence of a culture which, increasingly, places literature at the very heart of the press.<sup>12</sup>