It is easy to forget, in the twenty-first century, that the press was not always locked in crisis, racked by scandal, threatened by the rise of new technologies – or at least not in ways we might recognise today. For all the column inches devoted to the transformative potential of new media, there is another story – one of diminishing subscriptions and uncertain business models. The newspapers, we often hear, are in the grip of decline. But it was not always like this.

The present Special Number takes as its subject the connections between literature and the press in nineteenth-century France. By any standards, this was an era of radical growth for the newspaper industry. Historians point to an explosion in newspaper circulation, subject to a staggering increase of some 4000 per cent in the years between 1830 and 1880. And this was only the beginning. Judith Lyon-Caen captures the extent of such transformation when she evokes the life of Victor Hugo, contrasting the year of his birth with that of his death. In a single lifetime, the pace of change is scarcely conceivable: the Journal des débats’s 10 000 subscribers in 1802 are dwarfed next to Le Petit Journal’s 600 000 readers in 1885 (Lyon-Caen, 2011: 23-24). And the gap would only grow wider. The France of the Third Republic was, in this crucial respect, a very different place from the world of the Revolution and Napoleon’s Empire. Hugo’s was a life in step with the political upheavals of his age, with the revolutionary moments of 1830, 1848 and 1871. But a crucial part of the century’s transformation is to be found in the rise of the press, as Alain Vaillant has

The scope of the newspaper’s influence is everywhere apparent in the essays which follow. Yet our central concern pertains not simply to the manifest significance of the news in the public life of the nineteenth century but to the relationship between literature and journalism. For amid this ‘grande révolution culturelle’ – as Vaillant puts it – the place of literature in society was to prove intricately linked to the rise of the press. It was F. R. Leavis, in a Ph.D. dissertation submitted at the University of Cambridge in 1924, who remarked: ‘Hardly any writer of the nineteenth century was not in some way implicated in journalism’ (334). And the observation was not a particularly novel one, even then. The examples in the French context are legion. Whether we think of Maupassant’s columns in Gil-Blas or Le Gaulois, or even of Zola’s 1898 intervention in the Dreyfus affair, ‘J’accuse’ – surely the single most significant newspaper article of the nineteenth century – the period provides us with so many examples of the ways in which writers were drawn to the newspapers. The task of confidently extricating journalism from literature grows daunting even as we consider the biographies of era’s great writers. As Marie-Ève Thérenty, one of our contributors, explains in her Littérature au quotidien: ‘Il est [...] significatif de considérer les rapports entre les hommes de lettres les plus célèbres et le journal. À l’exception de Flaubert, qui a résisté – avec difficulté – à ses sirènes ensorcelantes, pratiquement tous ont été engagés à un moment ou à un autre par la presse’ (2007: 13).

But if writers could not escape the press at this time, the newspapers themselves could scarcely avoid literature. This, after all, was an age in which fictions
were published in the press, an age in which writers worked as journalists – and not only as journalists with a keen interest in matters of literary and cultural life but as reporters of what, today, we might consider to be ‘hard news’. The sense that literature and the press were bound together in a reciprocal relationship lies at the very heart of recent research into the culture of journalism in France. Indeed, this Special Number relates to a growing body of work from France and Canada on the history of journalism between the French Revolution and the First World War. In recent years, literary scholars and cultural historians have returned to the press, intent on developing new projects and approaches to the study of French culture in the nineteenth century. The writings of, among others, Thérenty, Guillaume Pinson, Alain Vaillant and Dominique Kalifa testify to a renewed engagement with the rise of the newspaper, and a crucial strand of this research rests on the conviction that literature and journalism were to prove irrevocably bound up with one another at this time. Across a range of publications, Thérenty and her colleagues draw out the sense of crossover or overlap critical to relations between literature and journalism over the nineteenth century. As she explains it in a refrain which will recur throughout this collection of essays: ‘Les rapports entre littérature et écriture journalistique au XIXe siècle restent globalement à éclairer, non seulement pour identifier les transferts qui s’opèrent du journal vers la littérature, mais surtout pour dévoiler que le journal au XIXe siècle est essentiellement composé de “littérature”’ (2007: 11).

Quite what we mean when we speak of ‘littérature’ in this context is not particularly straightforward. Paul Rowe, in his contribution to the present volume, stresses the historical contingency of terms like ‘littérature’ and ‘presse’ – precisely with the aim of reminding us that the meaning of such words is far from self-evident.
And part of the strength of the burgeoning field associated with Thérenty, Pinson, Vaillant and others lies in the fact that their reflections prompt scholars to reconsider the bounds of what constitutes ‘literature’ in a given historical context. The issue is raised in the introduction to the recent collection, *La Civilisation du journal*: ‘[...] malgré les apparences, l’histoire littéraire de la presse, précisément parce qu’elle bouscule nos habitudes (et le privilège arbitraire accordé au livre imprimé), nous ramène-t-elle de façon opportune et salubre à la sempiternelle question: “Qu’est-ce que la littérature?” (Kalifa, Régnier, Thérenty and Vaillant, 2011: 20). Whether we take the primacy of the printed book to be arbitrary or not, the point is a significant one: a familiarity with the nineteenth-century press leaves researchers profoundly conscious of journalism’s influence on various forms of imaginative writing (from fiction to prose poetry). And work in this field has a tendency to draw our attention toward a kind of fluidity characteristic of relations between fiction, poetry or theatre and journalism, pointing to the ways in which writers lived and worked between literature and the press in nineteenth-century France. Sensitive to what Thérenty dubs ‘une profonde circularité entre les formes littéraires et les formes journalistiques’ (2007: 18), such research proceeds along distinctly interdisciplinary lines, and proves significant in the context of so many scholarly debates about the porous boundaries separating notionally distinct academic fields.

Much ink has been spilled on the relations between literary studies and cultural history in the context of nineteenth-century French studies – but less familiar, in the Anglophone world perhaps, are the ways in which the writings of Thérenty, Pinson and their colleagues explore and develop the tradition of socio-criticism. The present field of study looks back, in various ways, to earlier scholarship – and notably to the work of Marc Angenot (whose monumental 1889, *Un état du discours social...*)
was recently published in a new edition on the website, Médias 19). Angenot’s is an investigation into the wealth of social discourses circulating in 1889, his chosen year of study and the centenary of the French Revolution. The scope of his work is vast, taking in (in Fredric Jameson’s words) ‘every text published in France during that period, including a systematic review of journals and periodicals, including the parliamentary debates, the Belgian press as well, a sampling of cookbooks, and so on and so forth’ (2004: 237). And one of the results is an analysis deeply sensitive to the rhythms of cultural life, to the minutiae of the everyday. When Pinson writes of socio-criticism and its ‘entreprise de décloisonnement de la littérature’ (2012: 8), he evokes the significance of Angenot’s research for studies of literature and the press – for, in 1889, Angenot comes to see works of literature as embedded in particular debates, as objects of historical enquiry alongside a string of related (although not necessarily literary) writings. The attraction of such an approach to scholars exploring the intertwined histories of literature and journalism is clear: the newspaper, after all, return us to the trials and tribulations of daily life, to a set of pressing political and cultural concerns so often lost to literary history.

Something of Angenot’s approach is evident in Thérénty and Vaillant’s research into Émile de Girardin’s La Presse (2001), a study of this influential newspaper over the course of its inaugural year, 1836. The story of La Presse is well known: Girardin cut subscription costs from 80 to 40 francs and sought to boost advertising revenue, aiming to attract readers to his newspaper through the publication of serial fictions. But Thérénty and Vaillant go deeper, nuancing our sense of this newspaper’s history in a series of readings which seek to explore ‘l’entité journal comme un objet littéraire à part entière – au même titre que le drame romantique ou que tel roman de Balzac’ (2001: 8-9). At stake, then, is not simply a return to the press
but an insistence on a distinctly literary mode of reading, an analysis that grasps both the newspaper’s scope and its qualities as a cultural object in its own right. In the title to this volume, Thérenty and Vaillant dub the year of La Presse’s launch, L’An I de l’ère médiatique, and the epithet suggests a critical point of discussion for this line of recent scholarship: the sense that the rise of the daily newspaper under the July Monarchy is emblematic of a schism, of some radical break in the course of cultural life. But critical writing in this field, as Thérenty’s contribution to the present Special Number underlines, is not simply focused on the France of Louis Philippe and Balzac: in conceiving of the nineteenth century as ‘la civilisation du journal’ such scholarship draws out the shifting fortunes of the press over this century of revolutions, and points to the influence of the newspaper on matters of social and political identity and allegiance. As the editors of La Civilisation du journal put it: ‘Un des enjeux majeurs d’une histoire culturelle de la presse consiste donc à évaluer le rôle des périodiques et de leur appropriation dans l’émergence des identités sociales, professionnelles, génériques, politiques, etc. dont le siècle accouche’ (2011: 13).

The focus on questions of identity suggests the influence of the work of Jeremy Popkin, whose Press, Revolution and Social Identities in France, 1830-1835 remains a crucial text in the field. Exploring newspaper culture in Lyon under the July Monarchy, Popkin considers the ways in which social identities – not least, issues of class and political affiliation – proved to be bound up with a wealth of different newspapers. It is the diversity of newspapers and their varied readerships to which Popkin draws his reader’s attention, and in this respect his history offers a counterpoint to the vision of the press sketched in another influential Anglophone work, Richard Terdiman’s Discourse / Counter-Discourse.6 Referenced in certain of the essays which follow, Terdiman’s analysis broaches the idea that the newspapers...
represented some hegemonic force in society, constitutive of a dominant discourse against which forms of literary writing – the works of Baudelaire and Mallarmé, for example – sought to define themselves. Terdiman’s argument about culture and power pulls the study of the nineteenth-century press in a rather different direction from more recent work in the field, sensitive – as he is – to the writings of Foucault, Bourdieu and others and to questions of authority and resistance. Where the present field draws out the relationship between literature and journalism it is often to stress the idea that the newspaper functioned as ‘laboratoire’ – a space in which new forms were sketched before their subsequent rise to prominence as part of the literary mainstream (Thérenty, 2007: 26).7

But whatever differences we might identify in the evolution of this field of study – its particular set of diverging lines of influence and critique – questions of authority and resistance can never be entirely banished from the stage, not least because so many nineteenth-century writers conceived of the relationship between literature and journalism in terms of antagonism and conflict. To work on literature and the news in this period is to be continually struck both by the vehemence of certain critiques of the press (Balzac’s Illusions perdues is the classic example) and by the sheer scale and complexity of relations between editors, journalists, novelists, playwrights and poets. We all know that research in this field has been greatly facilitated by the rise of various online archives – a development which makes possible a form of critical engagement with these complex relationships scarcely conceivable even twenty years ago. The consequences of the rise of internet resources should not be underestimated, for they offer scholars – and notably scholars outside France – a kind of immersion in an array of journalistic debates and discussions previously unimaginable beyond the walls of the Bibliothèque nationale. The
intertwined histories of literature and journalism, indeed, often come into sharper focus thanks to the proliferation of such material. As David F. Bell puts it in a discussion of the future of nineteenth-century French studies: ‘The moments when I want to consult an issue of *La Presse* or *Le Constitutionnel* from a particular date in the 1830s, for example, seem to multiply monthly. A very short while ago this was unthinkable. Our relationship with archives and our conception of how they work are changing rapidly as such digitizing projects progress’ (2016: 151).

Bell’s remarks form part of a recent piece in the journal *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* in which he and Catherine Witt reflect on the future of the field, drawing out various notable trends as well as exploring novel approaches to research in this domain. Bell and Witt offer their own assessments on such matters. Yet both insist on the significance of that strand of research led by Thérenty, Pinson, Vaillant and their colleagues, pointing, in Bell’s case, to the website Médias 19 as a crucial platform for the publication of collaborative projects on the history of journalism:

The site is an exemplary attempt to create a digital space for the work of a large group of collaborators interested in nineteenth-century media studies. It actively connects research clusters around the world, publishes annotated editions of essays and books that are not readily available to the general public, publishes an online journal of original interventions by researchers writing on media, and is also a growing encyclopedic collection of important information about nineteenth-century media figures. (2016: 149)

His comments give us a sense of the website’s diverse roles – at once journal and encyclopaedia, a forum for the publication of new volumes and the organisation of future projects. Witt’s discussion also lays emphasis on such collaborative forms of research, and highlights the ways in which work on the press in nineteenth-century France embraces an array of concerns from the literary to the sociological:

This approach to literature in the nineteenth century via an analysis of the rise and consolidation of the French press attends not only to the new kinds of
prose that emerged in the pages of newspaper – from *la chronique* and *la critique* to the new literary genres of the serial novel and the prose poem – but also to the cultural, economic, and political forces structuring the system of the press as well as the sociology of reading and writing. (2016: 156)

And it is, in a sense, to such diversity that the present Special Number aspires. The essays collected here add a further chapter to these endeavours, and bring together researchers from France, Britain and North America in a series of reflections which take us from the press trials of the Restoration to the literary field of the *fin de siècle*.

We begin with Marie-Ève Thérenty’s discussion of gender and the journalistic field over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This is the first time Thérenty’s work has been translated into English, and her essay explores how female journalists adopted the figure of Cassandra as a means of highlighting the pressures associated with their position in the world of the press. Her approach is complemented by Tim Farrant’s contribution to the present volume: broad in its historical scope, his article considers the impact of journalism on the work of various male authors of the nineteenth century – not least with regard to questions of brevity and fragmentation.

With Paul Rowe’s reflection on Benjamin Constant and the press trials of the Restoration, moreover, we turn to the first of three essays devoted to the relationship between press, politics and the law. While Rowe focuses on questions of literary style and the freedom of the press, Thomas Bouchet takes as his subject the political legacy of Charles Fourier and the *fouriéristes* under the July Monarchy, exploring the history of the newspaper, *La Phalange* (1836-43) – a critical arm of this political movement. Alexandra Tranca, by contrast, takes up the issue of journalism and politics in the context of 1848, and develops an analysis of the illustrated periodicals at this particular historical moment. Crucial here are the ways in which publications such as
*L’Illustration* sought write the history of the revolution as it unfolded, documenting a set of political developments still in flux.

Following Tranca’s analysis, we turn our attention to the relationship between newspaper and novel in the nineteenth century. The question of journalism and its fictional representation lies at the centre of three essays, devoted respectively to Dumas, Verne and Zola. While my own article considers *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*, and asks how we might read the pressures and rhythms of serial publication throughout this narrative, Kate Rees tracks the figure of the journalist in Verne’s fictions, *Michel Strogoff* and *Claudius Bombarnac*. Her discussion draws out the complications of sensory perception in these novels, and explores the ways in which lines of connection and communication come to be disrupted. Where Verne offers his readers a portrait of foreign correspondence, newspapers and journalists take on a rather different role in Zola. Nicholas White’s essay draws out Zola’s reflections on the press over the course of the late 1880s and early 1890s, recasting *La Bête humaine, L’Argent* and *La Débâcle* as a trilogy of novels according the newspapers a particular significance. And from here, we move decisively toward the twentieth century: Marieke Dubbelboer offers an account of the literary field of the *fin de siècle*, highlighting the financial pressures which drove so many writers to the newspapers. And Max McGuinness engages with Mallarmé’s *Divagations*, picking apart that much-discussed opposition between literature and ‘universel reportage’.

We conclude, then, with Guillaume Pinson’s reflections on quite what the rise of digitisation means for the field in which we work. With Thérerenty, Pinson is a founder of Médias 19, and thus well placed to consider the changing world of nineteenth-century French studies. It is surely curious to think that, as *dix-neuviémistes*, the newspaper holds our attention at the very moment in which its
continued existence appears to be in some doubt. But perhaps this is no coincidence. Whatever the future, the writings explored here suggest that literature and the press were not always locked in some antagonistic relationship. The following essays, indeed, trace a history of exchange between newspapers and novels, between journalists, lawyers, politicians and poets.
Bibliography


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Notes

1 On the challenges facing print journalism in the twenty-first century, see, for example, a recent article by the editor of the Guardian, Katherine Viner, entitled ‘How Technology Disrupted the Truth’ (2016).
2 On the radical increase in subscription figures, see Terdiman (1985: 118), referencing Bellanger (1969-76, 2: 18, 24, 120, 259) and Zeldin (1973-76, 2: 540).
3 See, for example, the following collaborative works: La Civilisation du journal. Histoire culturelle et littéraire de la presse française au XIXe siècle (Dominique Kalifa et al, eds, 2011); Presse et plumes. Littérature et journalisme au XIXe siècle (Thérenty and Vaillant, eds, 2004); Presse, nations et mondialisation au XIXe siècle (Thérenty and Vaillant, eds, 2010).
4 On this point, see also Lyon-Caen and Ribard (2010: 6)
5 This sense of being caught between different forms of writing comes to the fore in various titles in the field, notably in Thérenty’s Mosaiques. Être écrivain entre presse et roman (1829-1836) (2003). Note too Durand and Mombert’s edited volume on Alexandre Dumas, Entre presse et littérature: Le Mousquetaire, journal de M. Alexandre Dumas (1853-1857) (2009).
6 For further Anglophone work in the field, see Making the News: Modernity and the Mass Press in Nineteenth-Century France (Motte and Przyblyski, eds, 1999)
7 Note Thérenty’s remarks on this matter in her Littérature au quotidien (2007: 26): ‘Le journal a servi de catalyseur à une poétique du quotidien qui s’inspirait à la fois des modalités et des rythmes d’écriture du journalisme, de ses thèmes de prédilection (la rue, le crime) et de ses protocoles de narration. Il a formé un véritable laboratoire poétique où la littérature s’est convertie de l’historique au politique, de l’éternel au contingent, du macrocosme au microcosme, de l’univers à la nation, voire à la province.’