Publishing in the Nineteenth Century


Introduction

When Roger Chartier and Henri-Jean Martin were preparing the introduction to the first volume of their monumental *Histoire de l’Édition française* (History of French publishing), which they entitled *Le livre conquérant. Du Moyen Age au milieu du XVIIe siècle* (The Conquering Book. From the Middle Ages to the mid-seventeenth century), they encountered a problem – one might even call it an aporia. They explained their twin debt both to Lucien Febvre, the initiator of research into the history of the book,¹ and to Jean-Pierre Vivet, a journalist turned director of Promodis Publishing, who had expressed his desire to “see [the publisher] placed at the center of these four volumes,” which he had entrusted to them.² This outspoken directive implied that the figure of the publisher long predated the invention of printing, and that he had been performing the role of broker or mediator without interruption from the thirteenth up to the twentieth century, as is the case today. The two editors were very well aware that sustaining such a notion could prove risky, and so they added this further comment, which partly contradicted what had gone before:

The story we would like to tell is one in which the role of the publisher was gradually asserted and became more clearly defined; he was bold in the age of the conquering


² The original edition of the *Histoire de l’Édition française*, published by Promodis in four volumes between 1982 and 1984, was edited by Henri-Jean Martin and Roger Chartier “in collaboration with Jean-Pierre Vivet,” who was the real initiator of the project. Vivet was a professional journalist turned publisher, who boasted the Garnier brothers among his ancestors. He had envisaged that Henri-Jean Martin would produce a panoramic study illustrating the glorious role of the publisher. But he had to accept the more scholarly framework which Martin and Chartier gave to the project. As we know, it became a model and a reference point for teams in various countries, which were trying to construct their own national histories of the book, publishing, or print culture.
book, all-powerful in the centuries of the triumph of the book, under threat in the era when the book was challenged by its competitors.\(^3\)

This contradictory proposal seemed to be saying that the notion of the publisher was a historical work in progress, which had not yet made its appearance in the era when it was rather the stationer who put scribes, illuminators, and binders to work. But at the same time, it also suggested that the publisher was beginning to surface in the *scriptoria* of the Middle Ages or the printing shops of the fifteenth century.

It is true that manuscripts were published in ancient Rome and in the European universities of the late Middle Ages, either in the form of scrolls or later as codices, and it is also quite clear that authors soon showed an interest in the way their works were presented to the public.\(^4\) Without further study, however, this does not justify any assumptions about the publisher’s transhistorical character or exceptional longevity. We know that as early as the year 80 AD Secundus was selling copies of Martial’s *Epigrams* in a small format, which made them easy to hide under a toga. He was a bookseller, but this does not necessarily make him a publisher any more than it makes him the inventor of cheap paperbacks. Similarly, the Venetian printer Aldus Manutius prefigured several characteristics of the great book trade practitioners of the eighteenth century, but this did not transform him into the “impressive force” or the “magic talisman” or the “magnetic cable which served as a thought-conductor” – the terms in which Elias Regnault celebrated the publisher’s work in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* in 1839–41. He cannot really be compared to the notorious Dauriat in Balzac’s *Lost Illusions* and, unless we insist on worshipping the cult of Analogy, we cannot really claim that Louis Hachette, Michel Lévy, Bernard Grasset, and Gaston Gallimard were

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\(^4\) *Travaux de littérature* devoted two issues in 2001 (vol. 14) and 2002 (vol. 15), edited by François Bessire, to the question of the writer-publisher. The first volume began quite correctly at the end of the Middle Ages with the issue of “authorship” and the author’s signature, as in the cases of Marot, who was sensitive about the defense of his “honor” and his “person” in regard to the integrity of his “works” (pp. 93–118), and of Rabelais. See also “Auctor” et “Auctoritas”, *Invention et conformisme dans l’écriture médiévale*, ed. Michel Zimmermann (Paris: Bibliothèque de l’École nationale des Chartes, distributed by Champion and Droz, 2002).
his true descendants. We do not need to go quite as far as Pascal Durand and Anthony Glinoer in placing the birth of the publisher in the Romantic period;\(^5\) in my opinion we might find his origins in the admirable person of Charles-Joseph Panckoucke, the second bookseller of the *Encyclopédie*, because he was one of the first to overturn the logic of demand intrinsic to the Ancien Régime book trade and to privilege instead the logic of supply, which suddenly propelled the publisher into the center of the world of the professional book trades.\(^6\)

After, as it were, attending the birth of the publisher in Europe — and not just in France — in the years between 1770 and 1830, I will try to show the various forms that publishing took in the nineteenth century. Too often this is considered only in its literary aspects, but we should not overlook the extraordinary rise of educational books, or subsequently of “bookshops which did the classics” as they were then known, or of the legal and medical sectors of publishing which allowed characters like Désiré Dalloz, Jean-Baptiste Sirey, Jean-Baptiste Baillièrè, and Victor Masson to appear on an equal footing with and sometimes as acquaintances of people like Ladvocat, Charpentier, Curmer, Edmond Werdet, and others during the Restoration or the July Monarchy. At the same time, the emergence of what Sainte-Beuve stigmatized in 1839 as “industrial literature” introduced the book trade to the first dealers interested in providing reading matter for all ranks of society. Between the *cabinet de lecture* (commercial reading room) of the 1820s and the shop of Ernest Flammarion, the “Boucicault of the book trade,”\(^7\) in the Belle Époque, the provision of universal primary education helped to bring mass culture to France, and this depended on the development of cultural industries in which the book and the newspaper press played a major

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\(^7\) Translator’s note: Aristide Boucicault (1810–1877) founded the first modern department store, Le Bon Marché.
role. A “great baron of industrial feudalism” as Regnault dubbed him, or an entrepreneur in the spirit of Schumpeter, the publisher was gradually forced to give ground to the publishing “house” and then the “firm,” a limited company still specializing in books in the 1920s, becoming a finance company managed by pension or investment funds at the dawn of the twenty-first century, which perhaps marks the end of the publisher’s life-span.

European origins

In the chapter I wrote on Charles-Joseph Panckoucke in L’Argent et les Lettres, I attributed the birth of French publishing in its true sense to the arrival of this unusual character on the Parisian book trade scene. His activities are well known, thanks to Robert Darnton’s work on the Société typographique de Neuchâtel and Suzanne Tucoo-Chala’s thesis. He was not, as she described him, “the last great publisher of the Ancien Régime,” but rather the first in a long line of new men. Although some aspects of his personality made him an Ancien Régime bookseller, profiting from his position to obtain favors at court and from the authorities, he was nevertheless a new breed of publisher with a pioneering entrepreneurial spirit. He was adventurous enough to buy up the privilège (royal permission to publish) and the plates of a work, which, in spite of its high price, had already been extremely successful.
and apparently had little chance of continuing to sell well. But Panckoucke knew how to innovate, to dream up new industrial, commercial, and financial strategies, which would broaden the readership of the Encyclopédie, and this was his original contribution in the 1770s. By reducing the format from the prestigious in-folio to the more plebeian in-octavo, and by cutting the price of the collection – which fell from 1,200 to 225 livres – by hiring printers from outside France, by calling on foreign capital, and launching an unprecedented advertising campaign, he made his investment profitable. He brought the work of Diderot and his colleagues to a more varied public than the one André Le Breton had envisaged at the origins of the project.\(^\text{15}\) Soon he was the director of a stable of authors, and the proprietor of many journals, which he used to advertise his publications. By 1782, he was able to devote his energies to his Encyclopédie méthodique, which ushered in a new era.

Le Breton, too, had started with the idea of a French version of Chambers’ Cyclopaedia, but he had been quickly overtaken by the ambitions of Diderot and d’Alembert, considered today as the twin fathers of the Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers. Le Breton may well have mutilated their text on numerous occasions to mitigate its rebellious potential,\(^\text{16}\) but he failed to leave his mark on the volumes of which he was merely the “bookseller” and not the genuine “publisher.” Panckoucke, however, swung the balance of the author-publisher relationship in favor of the latter, gathering around him dozens of writers who saw him as their leader and patron, as well as their boss in a modern sense. Panckoucke turned himself into a pre-Schumpeterian publisher, an entrepreneur constantly in search of new ways of improving the quality of his products, and of making them indispensable to the greatest number of possible buyers. It is not stretching the argument too

\(^{15}\) According to Robert Darnton’s estimate, 24,000 copies of the complete Encyclopédie, in all editions both legal and pirated, circulated in Europe during the pre-revolutionary years.

\(^{16}\) Diderot’s letter to Le Breton of November 12th 1764 is unambiguous on this point. He wrote that he had “been deceived in cowardly fashion for two years on end,” and had “wept with rage” when he discovered how his thoughts had been travestied. See Denis Diderot, Correspondance (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1960), vol. 4, 300.
far to see Panckoucke as a man straddling two worlds: the *Encyclopédie méthodique*, which was not completed until 1832, can be considered as an authentic publisher’s creation, since none of its authors emerged to challenge the publisher’s paternity of the volumes. In addition, Panckoucke employed his own printers and used his own network of periodicals and journals as vehicles for promoting what he published. All these characteristics distanced him from the environment in which he was born, and brought into being a type of businessman who was hitherto almost unknown, playing a Janus-like role as a mediator between writer and public, pursuing his own intellectual project alongside his very real abilities as a manager and entrepreneur.

The French Revolution rapidly accelerated the process of the renewal of the French book trade, first of all by abolishing guilds and corporations, thus shattering the restrictions which constrained it, and then by allowing new men to emerge. Before 1789, the Parisian Booksellers’ Union (*Chambre syndicale*) mounted a tooth-and-nail defense of its Malthusian and endogamous conception of the profession, sheltering behind the system of royal privileges from which it had benefited by virtue of its proximity to the sources of power; but the legislation supporting this system was abolished *de facto* in 1789 and *de jure* in 1791–93. As a result, only a few book trade families managed to survive the decade of 1789–99 unscathed. When the Emperor Napoleon published his decree of February 5th 1810 re-organizing the book trade, only the Panckouckes, the Didots, the Dentus, and a few others were still in a position to dominate their profession. Nevertheless, the text of the Napoleonic decree testifies to the changes, which had occurred in the intervening period because, as well as recognizing the pre-eminence of printers who were now the most numerous and also the most closely supervised sector, it also introduced both booksellers and publishers, who had
been practically invisible under the Ancien Régime. This sector was completely renewed after 1780, by the appearance of “novelty booksellers” (libraires de nouveautés) – that is to say publishers of contemporary novels – on the right bank of the Seine, near the Palais-Royal whose shops were opened to the public in 1784. This was an open sector of the book trade, which produced the great publishers of the Restoration and the July Monarchy, including their leader Camille (François) Ladvocat.

This was the time when fiction was borrowed from cabinets de lecture or read breathlessly on the spot, and when the likes of Charles Gosselin, Louis Mame, Jean-Baptiste (Edmond) Werdet, Léon Curmer, and Gervais-Hélène Charpentier occupied center stage. Well might Balzac fume about his printers and publishers whom he often considered to be virtually illiterate or at least boorish, and well might Alexis de Tocqueville refer to Gosselin as “that big chubby fellow.” It did not alter the fact that they and their author colleagues now had to reckon with these “great barons of industrial feudalism,” whom Curmer could not ignore when he launched his eight-volume series Les Français peints par eux-mêmes (The French as they see themselves). The literary sociologist Pascal Durand interprets the publication of the Livre des Cent et un (The Book of the 101), which tried to mobilize several hundred authors to save a vulnerable publisher, in this case Ladvocat, as the surest evidence of the arrival of the modern publisher defined only by his relationship with an author. In developing his argument, Durand wrote:

17 In fact the decree of February 5th 1810 was quite ambiguous because it first distinguished printing from bookselling and thus printers from booksellers, who all had to apply for a license (brevet) from the authorities. But then in articles 26, 27, 41, and 42, it specifically spoke of “publishers” (les éditeurs) who sold or circulated authors’ texts. As the various articles of the imperial decree continued, they thus distinguished authors, printers, publishers, and booksellers, ratifying a state of affairs fully confirmed by future practice.
20 Jean-Yves Mollier, Michel et Calmann-Lévy ou la naissance de l’édition moderne, 1836-1891 (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1984), for another portrait of this group, completed in 1988 by the same author’s L’Argent et les Lettres.
The very principle of the *Livre des Cent et un* demonstrates the autonomization of the cultural field, because it constitutes the first collective manifestation *en masse* of French writers, acting as such, lending their relative symbolic power to support a cause, which clearly foreshadows the future indissolubility of literature and publishing.\(^{21}\)

If this was the first manifestation, the second was perhaps the creation of the Société des Gens de Lettres (Society of People of Letters) in 1838, this time on the initiative of the owner and publisher of a newspaper (*Le Siècle*). Although its achievements never quite matched its hopes and ambitions, this moment signified the coronation of the publisher in place of the author, whose reign had been a short one.\(^{22}\)

Moreover, it would be a mistake to confine our discussion to France or to overestimate the role of Romanticism in the emergence of the publisher. Martyn Lyons, after carefully studying the registers of printers’ declarations in the first half of the nineteenth century, has already made this point: in terms of titles and copies sold,

Romanticism does not seem an adequate concept to define the era. It appeared, rather, as an evanescent crest of surf on a deep ocean of classicism and Catholicism.\(^{23}\)

This startling assertion was based on cruel statistical reality which showed that this period preferred La Fontaine’s *Fables*, Fénelon’s *Télémaque*, Fleury’s *Catéchisme historique*, Florian’s *Fables*, Perrault’s fairy tales, and Racine’s plays to Stendhal’s *Le Rouge et le Noir* (*The Red and the Black*), the first edition of which was issued in a print-run of no more than a few hundred copies. Admittedly, the success of Lamartine’s *Méditations* and the works of

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\(^{22}\) Paul Bénichou, *Le Sacre de l’écrivain* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1985), developed this theme of the substitution of one regime for another at great length. Personally, I am more tentative about the importance of the regime of the man of letters since he was hugely dependent on his dealer. See Jean-Yves Mollier, “Le roi est nu ou la tragique impuissance de l’écrivain face à l’éditeur au XIXe siècle,” in the “Écriture du pouvoir et Pouvoirs de la littérature,” issue of *Lieux littéraires/La Revue* 3 (June 2001), Montpellier (Université Paul Valéry), 201–19.

Hugo softens the force of this conclusion, but does not invalidate the invitation to take account of all the publications produced in any period before trying to give it a label. From this perspective, Britain and Germany are very interesting because not only did they experience the early forms of Romanticism, but they were both countries where the book trade opened up and blossomed before France picked up the baton after 1850.

By 1800 London had become the world capital of the book, distributing fashionable publications to the empire, including of course novels like those of Richardson, as well as school books, religious works issuing from the dynamic presses of the missionary societies, and practical manuals which were eventually sold all over Europe. The publisher John Murray bound his travel guides in red covers, and Karl Baedeker in Germany and Louis Maison, the patron of Adolphe Joanne in France, followed suit, and these little red volumes carried henceforth by every railway passenger became visibly standardized in both form and content. Across the Rhine, Friedrich Brockhaus took over the Konversationslexicon from an ill-advised colleague, selling the pocket dictionary far beyond the frontiers of his native Prussia. France produced the model of the mass-produced school textbook in the Alphabet et Premier livre de lecture (Alphabet and reading primer), which sold over a million copies between 1831 and 1833. If we consider the European experiments of the years 1810–30 as a whole, we will better understand the emergence of an unquestionably new personality, that of the libraire-éditeur (bookseller-publisher) as French legislation described him, or the English publisher or German Buchhändler, whose sole aim was to encourage urban populations to read. Following Richardson, Goethe, and Rousseau, the public was gripped by a reading fever – the Lesewut – denounced by conservative authorities and by the Church, who grew

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anxious about the flood of printed matter or these “torrents of paper,” to adopt Loïc Artiaga’s apt phrase.25

In summarizing this first aspect of nineteenth-century publishing, we must emphasize its transnational character, which explains why we also encounter more or less the same kind of Schumpeterian book-trade practitioners in the United States, Italy, and Spain. They were men of action and quick decisions, always bubbling with energy, alert to the latest developments, shamelessly imitating each other (and they could do so with impunity until international copyright agreements took effect in 1852–54). They became the central hub of the book trade. They gradually shed their role as printers, which constituted a clear break with the past and most notably with the age of Aldus Manutius, and they gradually dropped their role as agents or booksellers. Instead, they devoted themselves completely to publishing, defining a new form of exchange between writers and the public. This is where they honed their talents, in the search for tomorrow’s successful author, and in building the right conditions for the increasingly widespread diffusion of their work. In fact the 1830s saw the appearance of many series of small-format, cheap, portable, and easy-to-handle books. Gervais Charpentier lent his name to what was called “the Charpentier revolution,” after the introduction of his “Charpentier Library” in 1838 showed that publishers could react positively when faced with a severe crisis, in order to put an end to foreign competition.26 The effective answer to Belgian publishing piracy was not to rant against the pirates, but to adopt new typographic formats, which could offer French literature to a mass reading public. This happened relatively quickly since Charpentier, who produced his volumes for 3.50 francs in print runs of 3,000, was rapidly overtaken by Michel Lévy, who in 1846 launched

Alexandre Dumas’s complete works for 2 francs, and then in October 1855 his own “Collection Michel Lévy” for 1 franc, with print runs starting immediately at 6,600 copies. With Hachette’s “Bibliothèque des chemins de fer” (Railway series) in 1853, it was clear that publishers could no longer afford to lose focus; they had to concentrate on their primary job, the search for authors.

**The diversity of nineteenth-century publishing**

As we have seen, neither political revolution nor technological change (the invention of the steam engine) can explain the emergence of the publisher in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, even though both of them facilitated its expansion. Technological revolution enabled publishers to substantially reduce the average price of books, but more was needed. France became literate in the half-century between the Guizot Law of 1833 and Jules Ferry’s educational reforms of 1881, not forgetting the work of Victor Duruy in-between. Moreover, the standard of living improved and railways, bookshops, and the newspaper press all expanded. Without these developments, political and technological changes would have been insufficient in themselves to bring about the kind of “silent cultural revolution” that was profoundly transforming the country at this time. In Britain, Sunday Schools tried to achieve the same results but the paper tax restricted newspaper sales until 1855 and, in Germany, the gap separating the educated elite from the masses was most evident in their rejection of *Schundliteratur* (pulp fiction) targeted at lower-class readers.

Publishing was extremely diverse, and it first showed its potential in the educational book sector, where it invented a market before the Guizot Law of June 28th 1833, which

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ordered the establishment of a boys’ school in every commune with more than 500 inhabitants.\(^{30}\) Louis Hachette grew rich from educational reform, but this was not because he received secret favors from François Guizot, as his detractors alleged, but because as early as 1828–29 he was producing elementary textbooks for a primary school system that was still just stumbling into existence. That is why in 1831 Montalivet awarded him his first big contract for school books – 500,000 copies of the *Alphabet et Premier livre de lecture* (Alphabet and Reading Primer) followed by 200,000 more in 1832 and another 300,000 in 1833.\(^{31}\) The French State, perfectly aware that the time for reform had come, had agreed on a substantial budget increase for the Ministry of Public Education.\(^{32}\) Educational books enabled Louis Hachette to occupy the high ground in 1826, followed by Pierre Larousse in 1852, Charles Delagrave in 1865, Armand Colin in 1871, Henry Vuibert in 1876, and then Fernand Nathan and Alexandre Hatier in 1881, and the field was organized in this way for over a century.

On top of this, however, the period saw the rise and development of another sector which would later be called peri- or para-scholastic, but which was then a part of the educational book trade. Most of the production of educational books and literature for the young originated in the measures taken by religious book dealers, traditionally organized around the church and seminary of Saint-Sulpice in Paris, to deal with a serious downturn after 1860.\(^{33}\) Books for the young then experienced very strong growth after 1875.\(^{34}\) The rise

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\(^{30}\) The Falloux Law of 1850 was to make the same provision for girls in communes with more than 800 inhabitants, but it favored the Catholic Church, and it fell to Duruy in 1867 to unify the legislation dealing with both sexes. It should be recalled that municipalities were obliged to pay the school expenses of poor children, and this helped in part to achieve the results obtained by compulsory schooling in 1882.


\(^{32}\) Ibid., 168. Statistics suggest that the Guizot Law was the outcome of a new attitude dating back to Vatimesnil’s stint as Minister for Education in 1828, rather than simply a decision taken by Guizot alone. The Ministry of Education’s budget had been raised to 100,000 francs in 1829 and 300,000 francs in 1830, even before the July Revolution further stepped up the effort with 700,000 francs allocated in 1831, one million francs in 1832 and 1.5 million in 1833.


of literature for the young was preceded by Pierre-Jules Hetzel’s early experiments under the July Monarchy, and was reinforced by his creation of the *Magasin d’éducation et de récréation* in March 1864. The sector benefited from the appearance of publisher Gautier-Languereau, but also of course from the introduction by Hachette & Co. from 1857 onward of book series directed specifically at young readers, such as the famous “Bibliothèque rose illustrée” (Illustrated pink library), dominated by the imposing presence of the Comtesse de Ségur. Hachette’s competitor at the end of the century was Bécassine in *La Semaine de Suzette* (Suzette’s Week), in the form first of cartoon strips and then albums. *La Semaine de Suzette* aimed to represent the Catholic face of illustrated books for the young, resisting the secular offensive of the Offenstadt brothers and their dynamic Société parisienne d’édition (Parisian Publishing Company), whose shining lights, *L’Épatant* and the *Pieds-Nickelés, L’Intrépide, Cri-Cri,* and *Fillette* enjoyed great success after 1904.

The establishment of these very dynamic sectors of French publishing was paralleled by the trade in law books, which went through some profound changes connected to the disappearance of Ancien Régime legislation and its replacement by a series of law codes promulgated under Napoleon. Two men in particular are associated with these changes: firstly Désiré Dalloz, whose name today conjures up an image of the law books in red bindings found in every courtroom; and secondly Jean-Baptiste Sirey, whose company was taken over in 1964 by Dalloz. Dalloz made his entry into Parisian circles by virtue of a fortunate marriage, which enabled him to link his fate to that of Panckoucke, and his *Jurisprudence Générale* would long remain the symbol of the vitality of French jurists up to the twentieth century. Then the *Juris-Classeur* and the *Librairie Générale de Droit et de

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for the conservation diploma, ENSSIB (École nationale supérieure des sciences de l’information et des bibliothèques), 1999.
Jurisprudence, which in 1836 had brought together the publishers Durand-Auzias and Pichon, began to challenge Dalloz’s share of this highly profitable market.³⁸

Born at the same time, the medical publications of Jean-Baptiste Baillière and Victor Masson represented, in their turn, the arrival of the French in a broad movement of scientific curiosity, which favored scholarly books and, to an even greater extent, works of popular science.³⁹ Medicine triumphed with the publication in 1865, by Baillière himself, of Claude Bernard’s Introduction à la médecine expérimentale, and the scientist now began to claim a share of the writer’s symbolic capital, in a contest, as it were, between Pasteur and Hugo. At the same time, several publishing houses offered practical manuals which, on one hand took over the role of the old almanacs, and on the other reflected contemporary scientific thinking. The Roret manuals are the best known of these but a large number of publishers were looking for sales in this domain. Meanwhile specialist booksellers like Dunod, Vuibert, Gauthier-Villars, and later Eyrolles offered their expertise, from the angle of the engineer, the graduate of the École Polytechnique or the expert in public works, covering every branch of technology.

Much could be said about publishers of dictionaries and encyclopedias, from Pierre Larousse to Aristide Quillet, not forgetting Louis Hachette, but these houses remained quite close to the model of educational and scholarly publishing, even though, as they developed, they increasingly relied on sophisticated sales methods. Sale on credit “for the purchase of music and books,” according to Abel Pilon’s advertising,⁴⁰ henceforth occupied a place of

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³⁸ Today the sector is dominated by the Lefebvre-Sarrut group, which bought Dalloz from Hachette Livre in 2006. Lamy, a subsidiary of Wolters Kluwer, is also very present in this market. See Jean-Yves Mollier, “Éditer le droit après la Révolution française,” Histoire et civilisation du livre, revue internationale 1 (2005), 137–47.


prime importance. In similar fashion, the publishing of travel guides and foreign language teaching manuals also made a contribution.

Industrial literature, however, had become so important in intellectual debate from 1839 onward that we have to make a selection from its most distinguished representatives, not so much from among the authors as among the publishers without whom their fiction would have encountered even more difficulty in reaching a wide audience. The pioneers and founders in 1848 of what have been called “fourpenny novels” (*romans à quatre sous*), Gustave Barba, Joseph Bry, Gustave Havard, and Hippolyte Boisgard, wanted their less well-off readers to be able to afford a small library consisting of 16-page installments sold at 20 *centimes* each.\(^{41}\) After the decline of these works which so alarmed the authorities, the vogue for newspaper-novels which began in 1855 guaranteed these producers a supplementary income. At the beginning of the Third Republic, their successors Degorce-Cadot, Fayard, Rouff, Ferenczi, and Tallandier produced their own equally cheap series. When, in 1904–05, Arthème Fayard launched his “Modern Bibliothèque” at 95 *centimes* per volume and his “Livre populaire” for 65 *centimes* (or 13 *sous*), he took publishing into the “age of the hundred thousand,” that symbol of commercial modernity of which Bernard Grasset claimed long and loud after 1918 that he was the father.\(^{42}\)

If we add drama publishing, whose leading lights were Christophe Tresse with his “Bibliothèque dramatique,” Bezou and Delloye with “La France dramatique au XIXe siècle” (French theatre in the nineteenth century), Marchant with his “Magasin théâtral” (Theatrical magazine), Michel Lévy, and one or two others like Tresse’s widow and her nephew Pierre-

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\(^{42}\) His biographers, including the most talented of them, Gabriel Boillat, allowed themselves to be taken in by his assertions, but simply repeating an error does not turn it into truth. Sophie Grandjean-Hoog’s thesis, “L’évolution de la librairie Arthème Fayard, 1857-1936” (Université de Versailles-Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, 1996) clearly showed that Fayard’s “Livre populaire” series was produced with print-runs of at least 50,000 copies, as were those of his competitors, which is comparable to the first print-runs of the “Livre de poche” in 1953.
Victor Stock who succeeded her; and if we further add music publishing so beloved of Maurice Schlesinger, publisher of the *Revue et gazette musicale*, Jacques Léopold Heugel and his *Ménestrel* (Minstrel), Gemmy Brandus, and Simon Dufour, we will have a fairly good idea of the diversity of nineteenth-century publishing. This takes nothing away from the wealth of its more literary sector, but this is extremely well-known and we can summarize it as a portrait gallery, or let us say a Panthéon-Nadar. In the first row we have François Ladvocat immortalized by Balzac, Gervais Charpentier likewise and also by Gautier, Michel Lévy made famous by Baudelaire, Nerval and Ernest Renan who were his friends and acquaintances, Flaubert and the Goncourt brothers who were his most vehement opponents and poisonous in their anti-Semitism; then Pierre-Jules Hetzel made famous by Jules Verne, Georges Charpentier by Émile Zola, Ernest Flammarion by Alphonse Daudet, Calmann Lévy by Pierre Loti and Anatole France, Alphone Lemerre by the Parnassian poets, and Léon Vanier by Verlaine. This list is inevitably unfair because it only names the publishers who were successful and omits those whose businesses failed, like Auguste Poulet-Malassis, Baudelaire’s loyal companion, Louis Mame who published the early Balzac, Léon Curmer, symbol and standard-bearer of the Romantics with his magnificent “cathedral editions,” and Albert Lacroix who published *Les Misérables* in 1862 and Lautréamont in 1870. All the above and many others tried in their way to take advantage of the new climate in France, a society thirsty for printed material, newspapers, magazines, journals, brochures, or books, and they crystallized the image of the publisher as a talent-spotter. Renan paid him

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44 Translator’s note: Nadar’s Panthéon consisted of photographic portraits on which he based his caricatures of eminent Parisians.
45 Mollier, *Michel et Calmann-Lévy*. Flaubert’s correspondence with George Sand about his split from Michel Lévy could not be clearer on this point, and the same goes for the Goncourts’ *Journal*.
extraordinary homage in his *Souvenirs d’enfance et de jeunesse* (Memoirs of childhood and youth), although we should not lose sight of the element of myth embedded in any legend.

The nineteenth-century publisher, the “great baron of industrial feudalism” and key factor in the construction of vast media empires

Until now, our discussion has not distinguished between the publisher working alone or assisted by a clerk, and the businessman at the head of an enormous printing concern such as the Hachette bookshop on the Boulevard Saint-Germain where, as a young man, Émile Zola was in charge of publicity – an experience which partly inspired him to write *The Ladies’ Delight* (*Au Bonheur des Dames*). It would be deceptive, however, to lump together both beginners in the profession, often a former shop-clerk but not necessarily from a bookshop, and heirs or shareholders of limited companies interested in producing books. From this perspective, it is essential to distinguish in any period publishers who are trying to make a name in the profession from those who have risen to the top of the hierarchy, most notably to the presidency of the Cercle de la Librairie (Booksellers’ Circle). A good example is Hachette bookselling, founded by a twenty-six-year-old graduate of the École Normale in 1826, which by his death in 1864 had become the largest publishing house in the world. This publishing house – a warm phrase, which conjures up the proprietor offering his authors a personal welcome, and often an invitation to dinner or to his country house – spent its first twenty-five years solely in the field of educational and scholarly books. Then, in 1852, it turned a corner, illustrating the changes which the profession was undergoing in mid-century. By deciding to imitate William Henry Smith, who had been the first to open railway

bookstalls in London stations, Louis Hachette added the dissemination and distribution of books to publishing proper. This led him to become a publisher of general literature and to conceive of his “Bibliothèque des chemins de fer” (Railway series), divided into seven sub-series, each with its own identity and color-coded covers. From here on, amateurism and risk-taking would no longer be tolerated in the direction and management of the firm.

For some time Hachette had been unable to follow every aspect of the business himself, including the search for new authors and the nurturing of a friendly and personal rapport with them. So he had brought first his two sons-in-law and then his two sons into the business, and he had recruited his series directors, or “editors” in the English sense of the term, to help him organize this important task. After 1848, Victor Duruy received the official title of literary director and other equally strong personalities, Paul Lorain and Adolphe Régnier, followed at the beginning of the Second Empire. They brought their expertise to the series of foreign literature and translations, which were indispensable if Hachette was going to be serious about challenging his British competitors, especially Routledge, Macmillan, Longman, and Smith.49 London publishers enjoyed a head start, as well as profiting from the existence of a vast empire, which absorbed a share of production and helped them to maintain their lead. From the early 1850s, Macmillan employed professional readers to prepare reports on manuscripts submitted, prefiguring the comité de lecture (reading committee), which came into being in France in the 1880s.50 Hachette & Co. based its strategy on that of these great forerunners, and henceforth situated itself as an international player. This strengthened its decision to open branches in London and Leipzig at the end of the 1850s, and when Louis Hachette died it was contemplating expanding into the United States. Elias Regnault, writing in 1840, could not foresee the development of such a company, comparable in terms of

profits and turnover to the Schneider factories at Le Creusot or the Bon Marché department store in Paris. If he had been able to do so, he might not have been satisfied with describing it as a “great baron of industrial feudalism.”

When we examine the post-mortem inventories of great captains of industry and commerce like the Garnier brothers, the Lévy brothers, and the co-directors of Hachette, we realize that these men did indeed accumulate wealth on the scale of Eugène Schneider and Aristide Boucicault. Hachette and Co., the richest of all, had amassed a fortune of nearly 25 million gold francs before 1914, roughly 80 million euros in today’s currency. The Lévys possessed 17 million, a figure equal to the estates bequeathed by Hachette and his associates Breton and Templier. They were Schumpeterian entrepreneurs, as I have argued, always on the attack but never satisfied with their results, shrewd investors in land, bricks, and mortar of course, but also and increasingly in stocks and shares, whether French or foreign. They ran their businesses in the most rational way possible. The publishing firm was divided and compartmentalized into distinct functions, directed by energetic leaders. In this sense, it did not differ very much from any other business engaged in manufacturing and distributing products, which had no connection with creative imagination or scientific knowledge. This evolution was as noticeable in France as it was in Germany, where in 1911 the Reclam company became the first to install automatic distributors of 20-Pfennig books in stations and other public places.

This development goes a long way toward explaining the visceral rejection of commercial publishing expressed by the avant-gardes at the end of the century. Whether we consider the Natanson brothers at the Revue blanche, Alfred Vallette and his friends at the Mercure de France, or André Gide and his circle at the Nouvelle revue française, we find intellectuals who would not rest until they had set up small publishing ventures in order to

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51 Mollier, Louis Hachette, 445–46; Mollier, L'Argent et les Lettres, 485.
52 Barbier, L'Empire du livre, showed that Reclam sold a million books from automatic machines in 1913.
by-pass the established companies. The publications of the *Revue blanche* only had an ephemeral existence, and they disappeared after Fasquelle bought them up in 1902, but the editions of the *Mercure de France*, which appeared shortly after the journal was launched in 1890, still exist in the shape of the Comptoir d’éditions of the *Nouvelle revue française*, founded in 1911 and transformed into Gallimard bookselling in 1919. Even the name of the Comptoir d’éditions (the publishing counter) speaks volumes about its modest ambitions at the outset, and Gide had done no more than imitate Edmond Bailly, founder of the independent Librairie de l’Art (Art bookshop) and of the Comptoir d’éditions attached to his shop.\(^5^4\)

Vallette had absolutely no wish to promote any rapid commercial expansion. He refused to print large numbers of copies of the works he published, and the award of the Goncourt Prize to Pergaud for his collection *De Goupil à Margot*, which was given a print-run of 1,100 in 1910, almost prevented the prizewinner from extracting any benefit from his success.\(^5^5\) The procession of defecting authors, like Pierre Louÿs and Francis Jammes, suggests that writers were in grave danger of finding themselves in a cul-de-sac. This probably explains why Gide and his friends at the *Nouvelle revue française* accepted Gaston Gallimard’s proposition in 1919, but it also confirms the heterogeneity of the publishing world at the dawn both of the nineteenth and of the twentieth centuries. So the same sector simultaneously embraced both novice small-scale publishers who were content to issue a small number of publications per year, and limited companies which permanently fed the channels of diffusion and distribution which they had themselves created to reinforce their position. This was the case for Hachette & Co., which took over the large Parisian delivery


\(^{55}\) Lesage, “Des avant-garde en travail.”
and distribution companies in 1897–1900. When the First World War was over, it accepted offers from the Banque de Paris et des Pays-Bas, constituted itself as a limited company in 1919, allowed the bank to share its capital and sit on its board of directors in 1920, and saw its shares quoted on the stock exchange in 1922. This change had several consequences and, in 1930–31, Hachette & Co. became a distributor for most of its publishing colleagues, including Gallimard, Fayard, and Tallandier. After the Liberation in 1944, it simply swallowed up Grasset, Fasquelle, Fayard, Stock, Chêne, and a few other houses weakened by the long war. In taking this trajectory, it moved further away from its origins, increased its sub-departments and activities and reinforced its power over a sector which was to experience further transformations after 1980.

Publishing expanded rapidly after 1870, which saw the end of the licensing regime which had governed the book trade since 1810, and which limited its growth in order to facilitate police supervision exercised by the French State. Its progress, however, was assisted above all by the advent in France of a mass literary culture resting on powerful cultural industries. Publishing houses, like the press corporations with which they are often confused, profited from this favorable situation and the Ferry reforms to promote the sale of tens of millions of school books which would now complete the achievement of universal primary education. Charles Delagrave, Armand Colin, Fernand Nathan, Alexandre Hatier, and Henry Vuibert now began to challenge the market share of Hachette & Co., the Larousse and Boyer company and the Belin family (the oldest of them all, established in 1777) in this substantial sector. But just at this moment, other players in the profession entered the commercial arena, equally intent on success and on leaving their mark on the period. With Arthème

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Fayard, who took over the direction of the family company on the death of his father in 1895, and Ernest Flammarion who made his début twenty years earlier, we enter fully into the age of mass circulation. This engendered a phenomenon unknown before 1900: the printing of 50,000 or 100,000 copies of book series, designed from the outset to be sold cheaply and to be displayed wherever a popular clientele congregated, in department stores which were selling books from 1880 onward, station kiosks which did so from 1853, dime and hardware stores where publishers henceforth sold lots of tens of thousands of books purchased wholesale, from their catalogue, in the most popular series.

The launch in 1904 and 1905 of Fayard’s “Modern Bibliothèque” at 95 centimes per volume, and above all of his “Livre Populaire” at 65 centimes, marked a break or a threshold in the history of publishing and of commercialization because, from this date on, Joseph Ferenczi, Jules Rouff, Jules Tallandier, and their numerous imitators envisaged their series of romances, detective or adventure fiction solely in terms of the market’s capacity to absorb their productions. The standardization previously noted with the advent of the roman-feuilleton (serialized fiction) and the fourpenny novel went one step further, and the authors enlisted to satisfy the new readers’ thirst for entertainment and escape bore only a slight resemblance to the generation of Balzac, Dumas, Sue, Féval, and Soulié. A few made a name for themselves, like Souvestre and Allain, the creators of Fantômas, or Simenon with Maigret who made his début in Fayard’s “Livre Populaire” series, or even the creators of Rouletabille and Chéri-Bibi, but most of their colleagues in the Société des Gens de Lettres have disappeared into oblivion. Perhaps literary history has been right to forget them and separate the grain from the chaff; but Pierre Loti was condemned to literary purgatory for having sold 500,000 copies of Pêcheur d’Islande (Iceland Fisherman) and 300,000 of the Mariage de Loti (Loti’s Wedding) between 1906 and 1919 in Calmann-Lévy’s “Nouvelle collection illustrée.”

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59 Grandjean-Hoog, “L’évolution de la librairie Fayard.”
60 Mollier, Michel et Calmann Lévy, 440-42, on this neglected aspect of book sales outside traditional channels.
priced at 95 centimes. This is a good example of the loss of legitimacy or of symbolic capital, which can befall any author who becomes the victim of conspicuous success.\textsuperscript{61} This was a sort of revenge against the spirit of the market, demonized by the young Pierre Louys and his friends and anathematized by Catholic polemicist Léon Bloy.\textsuperscript{62} Their absolute repudiation of the market showed the force of the confrontation between two different aesthetic, and perhaps ethical, sensibilities, but in its own way it also expressed the disgust and disdain inspired by mass culture in full expansion. They did not go so far as the Germans to contrast \textit{Literatur} with \textit{Schundliteratur}, or “High Culture” with “Mass Culture,” but French writers and a section of the elites rejected some of the more obvious manifestations of France’s entry into the regime of the culture of the greatest number.\textsuperscript{63}

Clearly an abyss had opened up between on one side, the corporate boss who, after 1960, called on his managers to make every series turn a profit, and if possible, every title within a homogeneous series too, just as he also called on technicians specializing in large-scale circulation to disseminate products designed to occupy prime display space in hypermarkets,\textsuperscript{64} and on the other side, the literary enthusiast who spent all his time publishing authors in whom he passionately believed. Nothing, it seemed, could bridge this gap. Certainly, the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2000 to Gao Xingjian was a reward for the determination of Jean Viard and the Éditions de l’Aube to follow aesthetic criteria rather than the law of the market, but one should be under no illusions about this kind of success. It happens rarely, and world publishing has a strong tendency to substitute financial imperatives for the industrial imperatives that have previously prevailed in large

\textsuperscript{62} Mollier, \textit{L’Argent et les Lettres}, part 3, for multiple examples of the virulent condemnation of this much-abused era.
\textsuperscript{63} Mollier, Sirinelli, and Vallotton, \textit{Culture médiatique et culture de masse}.
\textsuperscript{64} The career of Daniel Maillotte is a typical example of the transformation of contemporary publishing. A graduate of the École Polytechnique, he worked for Elf-Aquitaine (petrol) and then the Auchan supermarket chain in the first and longest part of his career, before directing in turn the delivery and distribution services of the Groupe de la Cité (now Editis), then of Hachette Livre and, finally, of La Martinière-Le Seuil between 1991 and 2006.
corporations, which probably means that the worst is yet to come.\textsuperscript{65} From this point of view, the take-over by Wendel Investments of the remains of Vivendi Universal Publishing, the former Groupe de la Cité and the Nathan-Larousse complex of companies can be seen as a turning point.\textsuperscript{66} Wendel intended to make its acquisition profitable as soon as possible; it drew on bank loans to make the purchase, taking advantage of a tax concession, which calculated its taxable profits only after the interest on the loan had been repaid.\textsuperscript{67} In the face of such events, we may well come to mourn the time when industrial giants invested in publishing intending to stay, and to use their arrival in the sector to showcase their corporation.\textsuperscript{68}

Only the future will tell us what will become of the publisher and his dual role as businessman and intellectual, capable of debating with authors on equal terms. If, however, he has to hand over all functions to a financier who doubles as a shrewd manager, his end is probably nigh, and a new chapter in the history of the book will soon have to be written. If this is also accompanied by the gradual disappearance of reading on paper and the rise of reading on a flat screen, we will witness a genuine revolution. But, as usual in the history of technology, nothing is certain as long as one option has not yet overwhelmed the other. Let us rather just retain the conviction that, in the nineteenth century, publishing went through some profound transformations which nothing has yet managed to completely obliterate.

Translated by Martyn Lyons

\textsuperscript{65} See André Schiffrin, \textit{L'édition sans éditeurs} (Paris: La Fabrique, 1999), \textit{The Business of Books: How the International Conglomerates Took Over Publishing and Changed the Way We Read} (London and New York: Verso, 2000), and \textit{Le contrôle de la parole} (Paris: La Fabrique, 2005), which complements his pessimistic analysis of the evolution of large media conglomerates.

\textsuperscript{66} Mollier, \textit{Où va le livre?}, Introduction.

\textsuperscript{67} This is the famous “leveraged buyout,” so deplored today, which allows investment funds to take advantage of tax breaks. See Mollier, “Les stratégies des groupes de communication.”

\textsuperscript{68} This is how the late Jean-Luc Lagardère presented it, always insisting on the primacy of the “industrial” over the “financial” in the management of Hachette Livre. See Mollier, \textit{Où va le livre?}, Introduction. In Italy, the Rizzoli-Corriere della Sera group, which took over Flammarion in 1998, adopted the same strategy in order to reassure the Presses universitaires de France, Actes Sud, and all the publishers in whose capital Flammarion had invested.