

*Routledge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature*

# INVENTING THE POPULAR

PRINTING, POLITICS, AND POETICS

Bettina Lerner



# Inventing the Popular

*Inventing the Popular: Printing, Politics, and Poetics* explores texts written, published, and disseminated in France by a politically and socially active group of working-class writers during the first half of the nineteenth century. Through a network of exchanges featuring newspapers, poems, and prose fiction, these writers embraced a vision of popular culture that represented a clear departure from more traditional oral and printed forms of popular expression; at the same time, their writing strategically resisted nascent forms of mass culture, including the daily press and the serial novel. Coming into writing at a time when Romanticism had expanded beyond the borders of the lyric *je*, these poets explored various dimensions of connectivity and social relation finding interlocutors and supporters in the likes of Pierre-Jean de Béranger, Alphonse de Lamartine, George Sand, and Eugène Sue. The relationships they developed among themselves and the major figures of an increasingly socially oriented Romanticism were rich with emancipatory promise and reactionary temptation. Their writing constitutes an extensive archive of everyday life and utopian anticipation that reframes social Romanticism as a revelatory if problematic model of engaged writing.

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## Printing, Politics, and Poetics

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To Lía Schwartz  
In memory of Isaías Lerner



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# Preface

## Beyond popular culture

J'aime la poésie populaire avec ses rimes en gros sabots et ses sentiments naturels.

—Champfleury, *Le réalisme*

Charles Poncy, a twenty-three-year-old bricklayer and poet from the port city of Toulon, arrived in Paris around two o'clock in the afternoon on November 1, 1845. Just a few years earlier, he had been invited to read one of his own poems at a meeting of his local Academy of Science and Literature and quickly became something of a literary celebrity in his hometown. With help from a few members of this academy, he published his *Marines* (1842) and his fame spread beyond Provence, winning him praise from George Sand and an invitation to visit the nation's capital. On that fall afternoon, Poncy was met at the *barrière de la Gare* by a large delegation of worker-poets, including the ruler-maker, songwriter, and journalist Jules Vinçard and the shoemaker and journalist Savinien Lapointe, who had raised money to bring Poncy to Paris, and who accompanied him to a banquet they had organized in his honor. This literary happening seems to have been a rousing success, but a few days later, a brief and scathing account of the dinner appeared in the pages of the satirical periodical *Le Corsaire-Satan*, mocking the carnivalesque reversal of cultural orders that the term worker-poet implied: "If we're willing to stop at fairground stands to see five-legged goats and two-headed children," the critic ironized, "why not take the trouble to enjoy the curious object [*curiosité*] known as a worker-poet?" Penned by Champfleury, the review derided the workers' literary pretensions, equating the material paucity of the celebratory banquet with the cultural poverty of Poncy's writing. "Take it as an axiom," he quips, "make sure you've had a good dinner before attending a popular banquet." Workers could not properly aspire to be poets, his argument went, and the mere thought of this dual identity produced a phantasmatically queer set of associations that he gleefully enumerated: "worker-poets are amphibious beings, anomalies, hermaphrodites;" they were sideshow freaks and objects of his withering disdain.<sup>1</sup>

The targets of Champfleury's satire wasted no time in striking back, taking to the pages of *L'Union*, a monthly newspaper published by and for workers, to retaliate against the "insolent pasquils from the puppets of the press." Written by watchmaker Charles Gaumont, this carefully worded response decodes Champfleury's rhetoric and turns it back against him, pointing out the awkward turns of phrases and convoluted style that make him an "acrobat-critic" rather than a serious writer, and far more of a circus clown than the worker-poets he had tried to relegate to the county fair. Against Champfleury's bid to exclude workers from the "culture of letters," they reclaim dignity for those who "by dint of their intellectual labor and devotion have conquered the right to represent the nation of workers in its most elevated and poetic personification."<sup>2</sup> This dustup in one of the corners of the *petite presse* highlights some of the debates over popular culture that took place in France in the years leading up to the Revolution of 1848. Tense and highly mediated exchanges like these showcased worker-poets' investment in material and literary questions alike and their strategic mobilization of irony in the struggle to exercise control over consumers and producers of a vaguely defined *culture populaire*. I argue here that worker-poets, their supporters, and their critics waged a veritable culture war to ambivalent ends. Indeed, something of Champfleury's description of worker-poets as monstrous beings still echoes more than a century later in Michel Ragon's assertion that there is something "incongruous" about the kind of proletarian literature whose history he tries to trace and whose value he sets out to defend.<sup>3</sup>

This book explores texts written, published, and disseminated by a politically and socially active group of French working-class writers during the first half of the nineteenth century. Through a network of exchanges featuring newspapers, poems, and prose fiction, these writers embraced a vision of popular culture that represented a clear departure from more traditional oral and printed forms of popular expression; at the same time, their writing strategically resisted nascent forms of mass culture, including the daily press and the serial novel. Coming into writing at a time when Romanticism had expanded beyond the borders of the lyric *je*, these poets explored various forms of connectivity and social relation, finding interlocutors and supporters in the likes of Sand but also Pierre-Jean de Béranger, Victor Hugo, and Alphonse de Lamartine. The relationships they developed among themselves and the major figures of an increasingly socially oriented Romanticism were as rich with emancipatory promise as well as with reactionary temptation. The written traces that remain are not incongruous in the sense that Ragon implies, but rather constitute an extensive archive of everyday life and utopian anticipation that can help us rethink social Romanticism as a revelatory if problematic model of engaged writing.

Pierre Bourdieu may have been largely right to point out that scholarly approaches to popular culture tend to operate between twin "poles

of devaluation and rehabilitation.”<sup>4</sup> The questions I ask in this book, however, try to look beyond this polarization. I am far less invested in restoring prominence or conferring added value to this largely overlooked corpus than I am in exploring the freedoms and constraints that structured experience for those writers and readers who were active on the margins of cultural production in the 1830s and 1840s. In this, my approach resonates with what Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus have described as surface reading, a way of reading that questions the assumption that what is most interesting or relevant about a particular text is necessarily its hidden or latent meaning.<sup>5</sup> The texts I examine do not so much repress their own history as lay bare a set of exchanges that have traditionally been omitted from literary-historical accounts. Rather than read them as somehow representative of the working-class movement or alongside assumptions about what constitutes popular culture, I try here to reassemble the network of multitudinous and contradictory affiliations and repudiations their writers professed. Brought together less by the working-class backgrounds, they had in common than by their shared commitment to transforming literature from the bottom up, their exchanges were boisterous and insistent; they were not shy about engaging with literary celebrities and the mass press, and they often succeeded in getting their attention, thereby impacting the way in which social Romanticism developed as a movement. Yet when reading their public and private correspondence today, it is all too easy to dismiss social romantics like Lamartine, Sand, and Sue as moralizing, paternalistic, and patronizing (which they often were) and, conversely, to read workers’ goals as purely utopian or phantasmatic. Ultimately, however, this kind of reading risks missing the emancipatory drive and intertextual richness that fueled the emergence of what I am calling an alternative public sphere that working-class journalists and poets created in the mid-nineteenth century. The pages that follow amplify the traces that remain of this sphere by exploring its extant texts on their own terms and searching for how they relied on one another to produce new and lasting meaning.

More than anything else, this book is about encounters, some real and some fictionalized, that informed how a group of writers tried to position themselves in a rapidly changing literary field. My own encounter with works by these poets first came (as it has for many) through the work of Jacques Rancière, who brought renewed critical attention to this corpus of texts in the 1980s. Perhaps his most valuable insight was to read this poetry outside of and beyond a Marxist framework of a coming to class consciousness. As he writes, “Workers’ poetry is not a means to revindication; it is an end unto itself, the representation of the self as Other.”<sup>6</sup> Writing as a worker was not easy, and some, such as Hégésippe Moreau and Adolphe Boyer, paid a heavy price for their attempts to defy the constraints imposed on them as manual laborers

and to claim freedom and equality as artists instead. While Rancière has written extensively on the meaning and consequences of these workers' attempts to redraw the boundaries of the sensible, my focus here is on the expressive communities that emerged from their transgression of the boundaries between labor and literature, and the relations they created in and through writing. Their results were not always harmonious, of course. At times, the sphere they created threatened to collapse into the universalizing impulses that reproduced key exclusions and elisions. It nonetheless remains a powerful example of a collective attempt to enact aesthetic and political change.

This book took much longer to write than I could have expected it to, and my having been able to complete it owes much to the patience and generosity of a number of individuals and institutions. I carried out much of the initial research thanks to an ACLS fellowship, and some of the first drafts were written in the Wertheimer Study at the New York Public Library. These drafts were immeasurably improved with helpful guidance from friends and colleagues at CUNY, both in City College's Department of Classical and Modern Languages and Literatures and at the Graduate Center's PhD Programs in Comparative Literature and in French. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Andrea Goulet, Lawrence Kritzman, and Maurie Samuels for supporting this project and providing invaluable feedback on it when it was still very much unformed. I also want to thank David Bell, Nelly Furman, and Catherine Nesci for their support along the way. I was lucky to have regular meetings in New York with Rachel Corkle, Natasha Lee, Rachel Mesch, Raisa Rexer, and Chapman Wing, who pushed me to set deadlines, share drafts, and finalize the manuscript. Patrick Bray and Kathryn Lachman provided keen insights and editorial suggestions; my argument is clearer thanks to them. My deepest gratitude goes to Paul Haacke for sharing in the journey.

## Notes

- 1 Baillet states that the banquet for Poncey was called off by the police, but I found no evidence to support this claim in the worker press. See *De quelques ouvriers-poètes*, 104. Champfleury's article "Les ouvriers poètes," appeared in *Le Corsaire-Satan*, November 11, 1845, 1–2. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.
- 2 *L'Union*, November–December, 1845.
- 3 Ragon, *Histoire de la littérature prolétarienne*, 9.
- 4 Bourdieu, "La sociologie de la culture populaire," 119. Quoted in Rigby, *Popular Culture in Modern France*, 118.
- 5 As Best and Marcus explain in their introduction to a special volume of *Representations*, this way of reading both draws from and also imagines alternatives to the kind of symptomatic reading popularized by Fredric Jameson's seminal work, *The Political Unconscious*; see "Surface Reading: An Introduction," 1–21.
- 6 Rancière, "Ronds de fumée," 36.

# 1 The mysteries of writing

Ôtez les livres médiocres, et l'on ne saura bientôt plus lire ni distinguer les bons.

—Louis-Sébastien Mercier

Part eight of Eugène Sue's best-selling serial novel *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842) takes readers behind the thick walls of a Parisian prison – this time, to solve the “mysteries” of readerly taste and writerly talent among some of nineteenth-century France's most marginalized individuals. In this scene, a group of condemned thieves and murderers have gathered to hear the talented raconteur known as Pique-Vinaigre tell the story of “Gringalet et Coupe-en-Deux.” In tones meant to recall a traditional fireside *veillée*, the storyteller holds his audience captive with the travails of the eponymous young hero who is tortured and nearly killed by his sadistic guardian Coupe-en-Deux before he is ultimately saved in the most improbable and gruesome of ways, when an enraged ape turns on the villain, slashing his throat with a razor. Pique-Vinaigre's story clearly draws on the mixed repertory of early nineteenth-century popular culture<sup>1</sup>: its cast of characters hails from the carnivalesque world of street performers; its violent sensationalism evokes the kinds of crimes recounted in cheaply printed canards; finally, like most melodrama, the story stages an ultimate return to order and rewards Gringalet for his virtue. Moreover, Pique-Vinaigre's tale is not just entertaining; it also successfully thwarts a murder plot. By awakening a latent sense of justice and solidarity in this gang of hardened criminals, the story ultimately dissuades them from killing a fellow inmate. As such, the episode functions as a *mise en abyme* of Sue's own moralizing novelistic project, which he describes as “a bad book, from the artistic point of view,” but “one which, we maintain, is not bad at all from the moral point of view.”<sup>2</sup>

Pique-Vinaigre's success as a storyteller is meant to refract the phenomenon that Sue's novel had become since its first installment appeared in the *Journal des débats* on June 19, 1842; over the course of its triumphant sixteen-month run, it entered collective consciousness in unprecedented ways in part by facilitating “the social identification of

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*couches populaires* with the working classes,” while also “calling attention to their partial cultural enfranchisement as *nouveaux lecteurs*.”<sup>3</sup> That Sue’s novel attracted a considerable number of working-class readers is well known; what is less often stressed is that some of these readers were writers as well, a phenomenon to which the figure of Pique-Vinaigre alludes, albeit in oblique and distorted ways, when he promises to commit his story to paper for his nieces and nephews: “I will write it for your children,” he tells his sister, “*Gringalet et Coupe-en-deux* will entertain them.”<sup>4</sup> Pique-Vinaigre’s promise might just as easily have been read as a threat by critics wary of a seeming explosion of working-class writers who had begun to publish essays, fiction, and poetry, both in newspapers they themselves produced as well as in bound volumes, thanks in part to the support of social Romantics including Sue himself.

In this book, I explore texts produced and disseminated by a politically and socially active group of working-class writers who entered the literary field at the height of social Romanticism, inflecting the movement’s trajectory and broadening its popular reach in the years leading up to and immediately following the Revolution of 1848. Rather than read them as the by-product of social utopias like Saint-Simonism, or as appendices to works by better-known writers like Sue, Victor Hugo, Alphonse de Lamartine, and George Sand, I argue that this sizeable corpus of texts, created over more than a decade of concerted effort and interpersonal exchange, constituted a scene of significant cultural relevance and resistance in its own right. This hybrid mix of newspapers, poems, prose fiction, and essays had little in common with predominantly oral popular traditions of the kind that Sue nostalgically evokes and mourns through the figure of Pique-Vinaigre. Instead, these writers openly sought to position themselves within the rapidly changing literary field by publicly engaging with its principal mediatic forms including the press and the serial novel. For Jacques Rancière, who brought renewed critical attention to this archive in the 1980s, these writers came to occupy precarious positions in their drive to transgress boundaries between aesthetic and politics, and labor and literature.<sup>5</sup> In the process, I argue here, they produced new meanings out of existing discourses and navigated significant practical and theoretical impasses as they tried to construct a community of readers with shared political, social, and cultural goals.

The texts I examine here were thus part of a moment of cultural flux that Sue’s novel carefully tried to contain behind heavy prison walls or push to the margins of its narrative.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, it is precisely at the outer edges of dominant cultural production that interference from these alternative voices and approaches can make themselves heard. One particularly salient example can be found in the actual margins of literary history in the form of a letter that accompanied the very last installment of *Les Mystères de Paris* in the October 15, 1843, issue of *Le Journal des débats*. Sue concludes his novel by writing a letter to

the newspaper's editor, in which he praises a modest publication put together by "a few honest and enlightened artisans," who expressed their views on labor reform in acceptably moderate terms. Created by Saint-Simonian workers in 1839, *La Ruche populaire* had recently come under new leadership and was beginning to move in a new direction that held obvious appeal for the best-selling novelist. The October 1843 issue, from which Sue quotes at length in his letter, includes a quote from the novel's protagonist Rodolphe (reprinted on the masthead in subsequent issues): "Helping those who voice their grievances is a good thing [...] preventing poverty and the temptations that lead to crime is even better." The newspaper, while claiming to represent the interests of the working classes, had positioned itself as a vehicle for Sue's socially-conscious Romanticism and its moralizing philanthropy.

For the editors at the rival working-class paper *L'Atelier*, this *quid pro quo* was as blatant as it was intolerable: *La Ruche populaire* gave Sue further access to working-class readers and lent him an aura of authenticity, while the paper's new editor, the printer François Duquesne, could capitalize on the famous novelist's patronage to sell more copies of his paper. *L'Atelier*, some of whose founding members had briefly worked on *La Ruche populaire* when it was first founded in 1839, was ruthless in calling out a competing publication for what they saw as a shameless and mendacious publicity stunt amounting to a fawning apology for Sue's novel.<sup>7</sup> Even before Marx and Engel's comments on Szeliga's review of *Les Mystères de Paris* appeared in their attack on the group of young Hegelians in *The Holy Family* (1845), the Parisian newspaper *L'Atelier* had already taken Sue's novel to task in markedly similar terms. The November 1843 issue of the artisan-owned and written newspaper denounced the novel for its "philanthropic mystification," warning readers not to buy into the "false pretense of Christian charity permeating this so-called humanitarian novel." In their view, Sue's depiction of the lower classes didn't so much lack veracity as honesty. Sue was less interested in social change than in entertaining his readers. Because of this, the scenes of poverty and misery that he painted fell flat and felt false. However, "If the author had bothered to visit our industrial cities, or even just the outer edges of Paris's faubourgs, he would have seen that reality is at least as bad as the suffering his novel only imagines."<sup>8</sup> *L'Atelier* argued that the time had come to replace the novel's fantastical modes of representation with the kind of in-depth reporting and cultural critique that they themselves had been publishing since 1839.

*L'Atelier* and *La Ruche populaire* thus represent two vocal poles in the working-class reaction to Sue's rise as a best-selling author. Still others, like the shoemaker and poet Savinien Lapointe, took a more nuanced approach. His two-hundred-line ode, "De mon échoppe à M. Eugène Sue" appeared in the inaugural issue of *L'Union*, another working-class newspaper created that same year by former members of *La Ruche populaire*

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who were dissatisfied with the direction it had taken under Duquesne's directorship. On the surface, Lapointe's ode is true to its genre, delivering high praise for the novel and its author. Nonetheless, from its opening stanza, Lapointe's lyric voice calls attention to itself just as much as to the famous author he purports to lionize, using the novel as a pretext for shedding light on his own experiences as a poet who, born into the working classes, feels excluded from the world of literature: "Those yapping basset hounds bit me/Telling me, in bloated haughty terms, /That smocks weren't allowed in the world of art." In spite of his critics, whom he depicts here as guard dogs bent on keeping the worker-poet from entering the literary sphere, he nonetheless perseveres: "Besides, I sing out in the open, /Whoever wants to can hear me on my iron branch."<sup>9</sup> Lapointe is pointedly less invested in the fictionalized portrait Sue paints of the lower classes than he is in the room he hopes the novel has made for writers from these classes like himself to intervene in a newly inclusive literary field. His particular take on the well-worn metaphor of the poet as bird is particularly telling in this regard. His personal resilience and the strength of his words are evoked by the branch of steel on which he sits, but it is the reference to singing "out in the open" [*en plein air*] that stands out as especially significant. Lapointe had indeed claimed a public persona as a poet, since his poems, articles and later on, his stories, circulated in working-class newspapers and in book-length collections like the *Poésies sociales des ouvriers* (1841) and his own *Une Voix d'en bas* (1844). While the panorama of popular culture that *Les Mystères de Paris* exploits through characters like Pique-Vinaigre is consistently situated underground and behind jail walls, a very different kind of popular expression thrived in the 1840s, albeit precariously, as newly resonant voices made themselves heard in the public sphere.

Working-class newspapers (including *L'Atelier*, *La Ruche populaire*, and *L'Union*) and the voices of working-class writers whom they helped to promote (like Lapointe) contributed throughout the second half of the July Monarchy to a popular movement whose cultural forms were entirely distinct from the oral folktales, age-old chapbooks, sensational broadsides, and salacious songs that academics like Charles Nisard would come to both privilege and police in the 1850s and 1860s as the mythological origins of a *culture populaire nationale*.<sup>10</sup> Some of the writers from the lower classes whose works I explore in this book conceptualized their approach to journalism and literature in ways that connected with social Romantics like Hugo, Lamartine, Sand, and Sue himself, with whom some of these self-described worker-poets corresponded and collaborated. Others within this same generation of working-class writers were more skeptical and critical of social Romanticism, seeking to position their works against the kinds of moralizing melodramas and best-selling serial novels that made up a significant part of France's literary production in the first half of the nineteenth century. Read alongside

one another, these texts lay out the aesthetic, social, and political tensions that shaped emerging critical approaches to high and low culture.

My primary aim here is to show how these writers created alternative systems of literary and journalistic discourse and debate that openly contested the structure and limits of the dominant bourgeois public sphere that had emerged in France in the late eighteenth century and continued to grow. I approach these texts in terms of what critical theorists Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge as well as feminist scholars like Nancy Fraser and Lauren Berlant have identified as variants of this dominant bourgeois public sphere. I will return to the theoretical stakes at work in the conceptualization of these alternative spaces as proletarian public spheres, subaltern counterpublics, or intimate publics in more detail below, but I want to note for now that this generation of working-class writers and their readers created a space of popular production that was at its most active during the second half of the July Monarchy and fed into the revolutionary fervor leading to the Revolution of 1848 before ultimately receding during the Second Empire. One of the principal goals of this book, then, is to examine the traces of a sphere whose contours have been blurred but whose discourses reveal much about Romanticism's waning years. In particular, this alternative sphere drew on and reorganized socialist utopian discourses and narrative modes, most notably sentimentality as (oftentimes problematic) frameworks in their attempt to resist and rewrite the relations of production that increasingly defined *juste milieu* society.

These particular discourses were not invented by the authors whose poems, articles, and fiction are the subject of my inquiry. Many of them appropriated and transformed emergent socialist theories and sentimental literary tropes commonly associated with established thinkers and writers of the late Romantic period. To the extent that literary scholars remember and study figures like Charles Poncy, Agricol Perdiguier, and Reine Garde, it is often in the context of their correspondence with now-canonical figures like Sand and Lamartine. The novels I study in later chapters, including Sand's *Le Compagnon du tour de France* (1840) and Lamartine's *Geneviève* (1851), turn out fictionalized portraits of some of the same workers with whom they corresponded and whose writing they supported, but do so in ways that ultimately neutralize their radical positions in order to instead promote images of socially and politically submissive artisans akin to the noble savages of exotic lore. Novels such as these necessarily complicate the relationship between working-class writers and the more established authors whose literary mentorship they sought out. Nonetheless, I argue that these workers' relationships with writers like Lamartine, Sand, and Sue cannot be understood in terms of one-sided literary patronage alone. More precisely, labeling these relationships in terms of paternalism or influence risks obscuring far more complex questions of class, gender, and genre that structured popular

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cultural production at this time. Many working-class writers turned to social Romanticism because it offered a readily accessible vocabulary through which to resist extant social and economic forms. Their appropriation was just as strategic as it was convenient, for it showcased a critique of social Romanticism's philosophical and aesthetic principles from within. While literary historical accounts of social Romanticism routinely highlight its investment in a mythological portrayal of the lower classes, they also tend to gloss over the ways in which these classes read and responded to literature that claimed to represent them and speak in their name.<sup>11</sup> I argue that their complex and creative engagement with the social question was part of a vibrant and politically charged alternative public sphere that underpinned the *populaire* of the time.

### Paris in print: La masse lisante

The popular cultures of reading and writing that I examine in this book were rooted in the everyday lives of artisans, both men and women, most (but far from all) of whom were based in France's capital.<sup>12</sup> Over the course of the half of the nineteenth century, Paris grew to be nearly two times its size in population, bringing a sizeable labor force to a city that numbered more than one million inhabitants by 1848. In the words of typesetter and journalist Anthême Corbon, Paris of the 1830s and 1840s was the nation's "central workshop" drawing workers from all over the country.<sup>13</sup> By mid-century, 15% of all French workers lived in the capital, and nearly one out of every two Parisians identified as *ouvriers*.<sup>14</sup> This heterogeneous labor force, comprised of both skilled and semiskilled labor alike, was excluded from the political process but was nonetheless brought together by a strong tradition of political protest, radicalism, and revolution that went along with relatively high levels of literacy.<sup>15</sup>

For much of the century, Paris was dominated by small-scale industry employing skilled artisans who produced furniture, jewelry, tapestries, and other luxury consumer goods for which the capital became known.<sup>16</sup> Alongside these skilled artisans, the capital also drew semiskilled and menial laborers from rural areas to its workforce. In this diverse setting, the identifier *ouvrier* was employed almost interchangeably alongside its correlates *artisan*, *travailleur*, *producteur*, and *prolétaire*. The differences between these individual terms were often blurred, such that the editors of a working-class newspaper like *La Ruche populaire* could claim to address "the class of plebeians, proletarians, workers, since they make up a class."<sup>17</sup> The perpetual uncertainty of artisans' social and economic status helps explain the concerted effort that the writers I study here made to organize themselves and their readers into a politically effective social body. At the same time, however, the instabilities and ambiguities that characterized their everyday lives made for complex

modes of identification and self-expression. This relatively small and apparently homogeneous group of writers with overlapping goals nevertheless gave rise to a heterogeneous body of writing that cannot be read as the expression of a unified, working-class experience not least because working-class experience was itself so varied and unpredictable.

An artisan – sometimes even a skilled artisan – could not always count on learning and exercising a single trade throughout his entire life, as a number of firsthand accounts of the period clearly show. For instance, employed at a young age by a wool carder who fell on hard times, Norbert Truquin spent his adolescence teetering on the edge of unemployment and destitution only to survive through a series of short-term menial jobs, including errand boy for a pair of aging prostitutes, machine tender in a spinning mill, wandering salesman, metalworker, and canal digger, before becoming a silk weaver and subsequently leaving France altogether for Algeria and then Latin America.<sup>18</sup> A similar fate befell Louis-Marie Ponty, who worked as a blacksmith in Paris before turning to rag-picking and cesspool-cleaning to support his talent for poetry and songwriting.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, as Rancière argues against historians like Sewell, the workplace did not necessarily provide the only, nor indeed the most important, framework in the everyday lives and utopian aspirations of France's nineteenth-century artisans.<sup>20</sup> The shared horizon of experience that shapes texts by Ponty, Truquin, and others I examine here is less rooted in workshop routines than the conflict between the instability of the social identity assigned to them as workers and their individual commitment to reading, writing, and the dissemination of print.

Paris was also the heart of France's print industries. Paul Chauvet calculates that by 1818, over three thousand typesetters, compositors, and press operators were employed in privately owned printshops located on the capital's Rive Gauche or for the monarchy's Imprimerie Nationale.<sup>21</sup> The artisans who ran these printshops were broadly perceived as belonging to the elite rungs of the working class: among the best-paid<sup>22</sup> and most universally literate of the artisanal work force, they laid claim to an ambiguous, even *déclassé*, social status:

He is a worker because he earns a salary and works for a master; he belongs to the people [*peuple*] by birth, by his alliances, his ways of life; however, his education and participation in the work of the mind bring him closer to the upper classes.<sup>23</sup>

From the perspective of the police, printshops were dangerous hotbeds of revolutionary activity. The *Statistique des ouvriers de Paris au 1<sup>er</sup> mars 1807* warned that “No other workers are more insubordinate, disposed to disorder and to coalition,” than printshop workers. It is thus perhaps unsurprising that the first examples of the kind of print culture that I explore here first emerged in the weeks following the July Revolution

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when different groups of printshop workers in Paris (as well as in Lyon) decided to write, edit, and distribute newspapers aimed specifically at a working-class readership.<sup>24</sup>

This first generation of working-class newspapers was born in the crucible of a Revolution famously instigated by the Bourbon monarchy's attempt to muzzle an increasingly rebellious press. When its five repressive ordinances appeared in the July 26 issue of *Le Moniteur* – the first of which suspended the liberty of the press – one group of workers in particular had special cause to feel threatened, not just politically, but economically as well. Fearing for their rights as well as their livelihoods, five thousand printers roamed the streets of the capital on July 27, 1830; eyewitness accounts from the time repeatedly remarked on the role printshop workers and journalists alike played in calling for defiance of Polignac's ministry.<sup>25</sup> A few weeks after their victory on the barricades, several groups of workers in the printing industries in both Paris and Lyon tried to double down on their political triumph to foment a social and cultural revolution. Taking advantage of the new regime's short-lived liberalization of press laws, they created newspapers pitched directly to "workers from all the professions."<sup>26</sup> This first wave of working-class print died out a few months into the Orleanist regime, yet in spite of the passage of the September Laws of 1835 that reimposed draconian restrictions on the press, a second generation of Parisian workers' newspapers including *La Ruche populaire* and *L'Atelier* nonetheless followed after 1839 by avoiding overt political coverage to skirt the steep caution money most dailies had to pay. While the first workers' newspapers were created and run almost entirely by members of the printing industries, this second generation brought collaborators together from a variety of skilled trades, from printers and tailors, to woodworkers and shoemakers, who strove to rally the working classes around a common agenda of political and social emancipation.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, as Jeremy Popkin has argued, workers' newspapers during this period emerged as crucial sites for the construction and dissemination of social identities, in particular where workers were concerned. These papers established a metonymic relationship with the imagined community of workers whose political grievances they publicized, presenting themselves as an extension of the voices they sought to represent.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, they also actively tried to shape this community in ways advertised on their very mastheads: titles like *Le Peuple* and *L'Artisan*, or later, *L'Union* and *L'Atelier*, point to the drive to transcend existing divisions between trades by appealing to a broad coalition of workers as a socially distinct and unified social group. From the outset, the editors recognized that the realization of this ideal depended at least in part on the construction and diffusion of a shared culture among their target readership. Moreover, these newspapers sought to provide readers with the kind of cultural capital that might render their voices intelligible in