

Francophone Literary Journalism: A Special Issue

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Francophone Literary Journalism: Exploring Its Vital Edges

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This issue of *Literary Journalism Studies* draws attention to the francophone traditions of literary journalism analysis. For some twenty years now, academic research has taken a close interest in this phenomenon, and it has done so for several reasons. The first owes to the evolution of writers' practices. After a long period marked by the predominance of formalist approaches, French-language literature is experiencing a "return to reality," as it were, looking for original narrative forms to describe reality without falling back into the literary codes of realism or the "thesis novel." Journalistic reportage in this respect provides a useful model, since it involves a singular outlook, an original and distinctive take on events. A number of contemporary French writers, including the most significant, manifestly draw inspiration from it (here we are thinking of Annie Ernaux, François Bon, or Emmanuel Carrère). For their part, professional journalists also have been adopting the codes of a writing that distances itself from an event and that takes the time to contemplate and consider literary construction (such as Florence Aubenas, or the texts published in the journal *XXI*).¹ On the side of web journalism and blogs (Pierre Assouline, Claro, Eric Chevillard, etc.), writers are revisiting and reinvesting in practices, poetics, and positions that hybridize journalism and literature.

A second reason can be traced to the observation made by French nineteenth-century writers that it is necessary to observe jointly the worlds of the press and of literature if we wish to grasp all the aspects of literary life.² In his novel *Illusions perdues*, published as *Lost Illusions* in English, Balzac describes two antinomic universes. His protagonist, Lucien, has to choose between a slow career fraught with the pitfalls of the literary coterie of Daniel d'Arthez, and a more comfortable profession that offers immediate benefits, represented by the journalist Étienne Lousteau. For a long time this choice appeared to be the result of an essential separation between contradictory practices. The writers have ratified it, despite (or because of) their contributions to the press, as if journalistic publication were incompatible with "real" literature.

The distinction between the academic disciplines (journalism on the one hand, literature on the other) has to a great extent confirmed this division. Yet

the press is not simply a way station for literary activity or the site of professional investment for a number of writers, but a universe of words and genres, which poetic and narrative analyses can describe in a relevant manner. The staging of news, columns, reportage, and even the interview here appear like genres whose poetics establish themselves simultaneously in literature and in the newspaper. And, conversely, the necessities of grasping the real, of reciting the event or the human document, which are the *raisons d'être* of journalistic writing, return in literary works that reflect or ignore them in meaningful ways. The outcome of this research has been a genuine archaeology of French literary journalism, which has enabled the recovery of many forgotten texts not only in the press of the nineteenth but also of the twentieth century.

Arguably, it is this time lag between the national histories and chronologies that explains the relative unfamiliarity abroad of the literary practice of francophone journalism. In the aftermath of the Second World War, even though the New Journalism and its theorization (very close to what French writer-journalists had suggested and practiced) were developing in the United States, the French press underwent a radical purge. Post-war journalism, of which Hubert Beuve-Méry's *Le Monde* constitutes the best example, applied itself to rebuilding journalism on the principles that spurned not only professional corruption but also the subjectification and fictionalization of French journalism on the whole. The French press for a time claimed to have broken with its tradition of hybridizing the press and literature, and in so doing distanced itself from the practices of the literary journalism that was developing elsewhere, notably in the Anglo-Saxon world. However, pockets of literary journalism persisted in dailies such as *France-Soir* or, later, *Libération* and *L'Autre journal* (The Other Newspaper), and the French tradition of the writer-journalist did not disappear, as is shown by the examples of Albert Camus, François Mauriac, Boris Vian, Marguerite Duras, and others.

It thus appears that literary journalism is neither a recent invention, nor an Anglo-Saxon specificity. But research (and practice) in the English language helped francophone journalism and literature to revise their own histories and recover this nascent literary journalistic tradition. We did not wish here to rehash the known and the already accessible.³ The following pages are therefore devoted not to the major wave of French literary journalism, but to the issues that have remained on the margins of research, even though they are vital to an understanding of francophone literary journalism. The first five articles address women who have practiced literary journalism, and the last two the discourse of the press within a colonialist context. The common denominator here is paying attention to the discursive strategies shaped by either the context or the social status of the enunciators, that is, differentiat-

ing in the narrative who is doing the speaking and who is doing the acting. In the case of the women journalists, this constraint was inspiring. In effect, they invented ways of saying and of presenting themselves that enabled them to circumvent societal limitations placed on their gender, which for them ruled out certain positions and discourses within the newspapers for which they worked and wrote.

We will look first into the journalistic interventions of Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette and Marie Gevers, two women known more as contemporary novelists than as journalists. But the reasons underlying, and the dates of, their interventions differ. Colette partially relied on journalism for her financial independence. She wrote columns from 1910 onwards, and even became the literary director of the major daily newspaper of the time, *Le Matin*, and, as Amélie Chabrier discusses, continued her journalistic work in parallel with her literary output. Gevers, by contrast, was first of all known for her novels. Her journalistic columns were more traditional and could be seen as “by-products” of her literary production. Nevertheless, Paul Aron shows that her reportages published in *Vrai* (True) after the Second World War have quite another status: they enabled her to enter Belgian colonial discourse by managing to have her reputation (in part usurped) of having been favorable to the New Order be overlooked.

Simone Dever used the male pseudonym Marc Augis to make a name for herself in journalism. Augis occupied a particular position, and Vanessa Gemis subjects her journalistic works to critical study here for the first time. As her reportages were partly advertorials, Augis was not in a position to claim the heroic status usually attached to special correspondents. Consequently, she used her female status paradoxically, writing ironically or even self-mockingly to compensate for her predictable commendation of the comfort and safety of the aircraft company that funded her trips.

Canadian fiction is one of the rare sources that can confirm the existence of a significant amount of reportage in Quebec at the beginning of the twentieth century, in particular women's reportage, whose history has yet to be written. It is a history, however, that deserves to be recovered, not only for the content of numerous and varied texts but also for the interplay of their literary and journalistic practices. Here, Guillaume Pinson compares a work of fiction, Germaine Guèvremont's novel *Tu seras journaliste* (You Will Be a Journalist), with the work of the famous French Canadian novelist Gabrielle Roy, whose novel *Bonheur d'occasion* (The Tin Flute) owes much to her investigative fieldwork published in the press, similar to Émile Zola's having visited the mines of northern France in writing his novel *Germinal*.

Marie-Ève Thérénty's essay focuses on the major journalist Françoise Gir-

oud, who was also a well-known woman of letters and scriptwriter. Thérenty's perspective is nonetheless neither biographical nor institutional. She attempts to grasp what a modern feminist woman owes to the heritage of a female literary journalism produced under constraints. A precise analysis of the enunciation shows that Giroud's use of the first person is particularly inventive.

These female authors were journalists as much as writers, which is significant insofar as they were not on equal terms with their male counterparts in the attitude toward the "pure journalist." They learned instead to explore a greater diversity of enunciative perspectives, and to integrate several media formats simultaneously. The contemporary reader will observe not only their mastery of column writing and reportage, but also their ability to go beyond or to reorient the codes inscribed within these two distinct but overlapping genres.

The final two articles highlight the fact that journalistic practices cannot be separated from their contexts, especially if those contexts are colonialist in nature. First, Mélodie Simard-Houde explores how recent controversies on the subject of "embedded" journalists (reporting on the second Iraq War, for example), were already a factor in the colonial context. Going back more than a century, the journalist served as a mouthpiece for state propaganda when it was not that of a particular administrator (we have seen that this was already the case of Marie Gevers). Simard-Houde demonstrates that Félix Dubois and Pierre Mille, famous journalists in their day (the latter in particular), excelled in their roles as ambassador-witnesses. In a number of novels, the ambiguity of this situation has already been dealt with, notably in their contemporary Jules Verne's posthumous novel *L'Étonnante aventure de la mission Barsac* (The Surprising Adventure of the Barsac Mission).⁴ Between the real newspaper and the fictional adventure, a kind of to-and-fro asserted the colonial consensus of the 1890s. However, because the press was naturally a less systematic format, paths for a native people's discourse could emerge, evidenced in the poetry or songs curious journalists or folklorists included in their stories, or in a few columns whose dissonant voice relativized the pervading colonial ideology that framed it.

The historiography of francophone literary journalism is in its infancy. What seems vital to its growth is its need to be inscribed within the long history of practice, in which codes and narrative methods are developed and gradually transformed according to their own logic. Also necessary is the linking of that tradition to a history of gendered genres and interests that do not conform to dominant ideas. Only through a comparatist perspective will this history and its subsequent historiography thrive, since in a world the press has strongly helped globalize, national traditions have transformed one another through assimilation or differentiation.

Our concluding words will be to express our gratitude to editor Bill Reynolds and the *LJS* team, who from the start showed great interest in a special volume devoted to francophone literary journalism. In particular, we wish to thank John Bak and William Dow for their unflinching support and insightful comments. Our gratitude also goes to the translators, Patrick Lennon and Eriks Uskalis, for agreeing to be our voices in English. We are also grateful to Florence Le Cam, with whom it was stimulating to conduct our interview with author Jean Hatzfeld. It was a privilege to share a moment of grace with this inspirational writer-journalist, whose work on the Rwandan genocide is commendable and enlightening. Hatzfeld's thought-provoking reflections on journalism and literature can be found in the Scholar-Practitioner Q+A that concludes our series of articles.

Last but not least, our heartfelt thanks go to all the contributors to this special issue, for their unabated enthusiasm, scholarship, and discipline.

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Notes

1. On this point, see Marie-Ève Thérenty, "Le 'new journalism' à la française," in *Littérature et actualité*, ed. Simon Bréan, Catherine Douzou, and Alexandre Gefen, special issue, *ELFe* 20–21, no. 3 (2013).

2. See the overview of this research in Dominique Kalifa, Philippe Régner, Marie-Ève Thérenty, and Alain Vaillant, eds. *La Civilisation du journal. Histoire culturelle et littéraire de la presse* (Paris: Nouveau Monde Éditions, 2011).

3. See, for example, "Le littéraire en régime journalistique," ed. Paul Aron and Vanessa Gemis, special issue, *Contextes* 11 (2012), <https://contextes.revues.org/5296>; or Myriam Boucharenc, *L'Écrivain-reporter au cœur des années trente* (Lille: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2004).

4. *L'Étonnante aventure de la mission Barsac*, based on two Jules Verne manuscripts and written by Verne's son Michel, was published as a serial in 1914 and then as a book by Hachette in 1919.