

# Literary Journalism Studies

Vol. 8, No. 2, Fall 2016

## Francophone Literary Journalism: A Special Issue

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Information for Contributors  | 4   |
| Note from the Editor  | 5   |
| Francophone Literary Journalism: Exploring Its Vital Edges<br><i>by Isabelle Meuret, Paul Aron, and Marie-Ève Thérienty</i>   | 9   |
| The Appearance of a Court Column: Colette and the Famous Murder Trials<br>of the Early Twentieth Century<br><i>by Amélie Chabrier</i>   | 14  |
| The Mille Collines of Marie Gevers: From Reportage to Literary Text<br><i>by Paul Aron</i>  | 24  |
| Occupation: Flying Parcel. Portrait of Marc Augis, Woman, Journalist, Author<br><i>by Vanessa Gemis</i>   | 38  |
| Toward a History of Reportage in French Canada: From the Beginning<br>of the Twentieth Century to Gabrielle Roy<br><i>by Guillaume Pinson</i>                                 | 52  |
| “An Hour of Our Life in the Mirror of My Mood”: Innovations and Legacies<br>of French Literary Journalism in the Work of Françoise Giroud<br><i>by Marie-Ève Thérienty</i>    | 64  |
| French Reporters, Real and Fictional Transmitters of Colonial Ideology,<br>1890–1900<br><i>by Mélodie Simard-Houde</i>  | 76  |
| Can the Indigenous Speak? Speech of the Colonized in Nineteenth-century<br>Algerian Colonial Press<br><i>by Laure Demougin</i>  | 90  |
| SCHOLAR-PRACTITIONER Q+A<br>Isabelle Meuret and Florence Le Cam Interview Jean Hatzfeld   | 102 |
| Keynote Address, IALJS-11, Porto Alegre, Brazil, May 19, 2016<br>Reading Otherwise: Literary Journalism as an Aesthetic Narrative<br>Cosmopolitanism<br><i>by William Dow</i> | 118 |
| DIGITAL LJ<br>Reading Screens: What Eye Tracking Tells Us about the Writing in Digital<br>Longform Journalism<br><i>by Jacqueline Marino</i>                                  | 138 |
| BOOK REVIEWS  | 151 |
| Mission Statement   | 178 |
| International Association for Literary Journalism Studies   | 179 |

Copyright © 2016  
International Association for Literary Journalism Studies  
All rights reserved

Website: [www.literaryjournalismstudies.org](http://www.literaryjournalismstudies.org)

*Literary Journalism Studies* is the journal of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies and is published twice yearly. For information on subscribing or membership, go to [www.ialjs.org](http://www.ialjs.org).

MEMBER OF THE  
Council of Editors of Learned Journals

Published twice a year, Spring and Fall issues.  
Subscriptions, \$50/year (individuals), \$75/year (libraries).

ISSN 1944-897X (paper)  
ISSN 1944-8988 (online)

# *Literary Journalism Studies*

## *Editor*

Bill Reynolds  
Ryerson University  
Canada

## *Associate Editors*

William Dow  
American University of Paris  
France

Miles Maguire  
University of Wisconsin  
Oshkosh, United States

Roberta S. Maguire  
University of Wisconsin  
Oshkosh, United States

Kate McQueen  
University of Illinois at  
Urbana-Champaign  
United States

## *Book Review Editor*

Nancy L. Roberts  
University at Albany, SUNY  
United States

## *Publisher*

David Abrahamson  
Northwestern University  
United States

## *Advisory Board*

Robert Alexander, John S. Bak,  
R. Thomas Berner, Myriam Boucharenc,  
Robert S. Boynton, Thomas B. Connery,  
Juan Domingues, David Eason,  
Tobias Eberwein, Shelley Fisher Fishkin,  
Leonora Flis, Kathy Roberts Forde,  
Brian Gabriel, Ellen Garvey,  
Susan Greenberg, Vera Hanna,  
Roberto Herrscher, Tim Holmes,  
Beate Josephi, Richard Lance Keeble,  
Willa McDonald, Jenny McKay,  
Isabelle Meuret, John J. Pauly,  
Guillaume Pinson, Josh Roiland,  
Barry Siegel, Norman Sims, Isabel Soares,  
Marie-Ève Thérénty, Alice Donat Trindade,  
Andie Tucher, Doug Underwood,  
Jan Whitt, Christopher P. Wilson,  
Mateusz Zimnoch, Sonja Merljak Zvodc

## *Designer*

Anthony DeRado

## *Web Administrator*

Nicholas Jackson

## *Founding Editor*

John C. Hartsock

## Editorial Offices

### *Literary Journalism Studies*

School of Journalism  
Ryerson University  
350 Victoria Street  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5B 2K3  
Email: [literaryjournalismstudies@gmail.com](mailto:literaryjournalismstudies@gmail.com)



Published at the Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University  
1845 Sheridan Road, Evanston, IL 60208, United States

## SUBMISSION INFORMATION

*LITERARY JOURNALISM STUDIES* invites submissions of original scholarly articles on literary journalism, which is also known as narrative journalism, literary reportage, reportage literature, New Journalism, and the nonfiction novel, as well as literary and narrative nonfiction that emphasizes cultural revelation. The journal has an international focus and seeks submissions on the theory, history, and pedagogy of literary journalism throughout the world. All disciplinary approaches are welcome. Submissions should be informed with an awareness of the existing scholarship and should be between 5,000 and 8,000 words in length, including notes. To encourage international dialogue, the journal is open to publishing on occasion short examples or excerpts of previously published literary journalism accompanied by a scholarly gloss about or an interview with the writer who is not widely known outside his or her country. The example or excerpt must be translated into English. The scholarly gloss or interview should generally be between 1,500 and 2,500 words long and indicate why the example is important in the context of its national culture. Together, both the text and the gloss generally should not exceed 8,000 words in length. The contributor is responsible for obtaining all copyright permissions, including from the publisher, author, and translator as necessary. The journal is also willing to consider publication of exclusive excerpts of narrative literary journalism accepted for publication by major publishers.

Email submission (as a Microsoft Word attachment) is mandatory. A cover page indicating the title of the paper, the author's name, institutional affiliation, and contact information, along with an abstract (250 words), should accompany all submissions. The cover page should be sent as a separate attachment from the abstract and submission to facilitate distribution to readers. No identification should appear linking the author to the submission or abstract. All submissions must be in English Microsoft Word and follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* (Humanities endnote style) <[http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)>. All submissions will be blind reviewed. Send submissions to the editor at <[literaryjournalismstudies@gmail.com](mailto:literaryjournalismstudies@gmail.com)>.

Copyright reverts to the contributor after publication with the provision that if republished reference is made to initial publication in *Literary Journalism Studies*.

**B**OOK REVIEWS are invited. They should be 1,000–2,000 words and focus on the scholarship of literary journalism and recent original works of literary journalism that deserve greater recognition among scholars. Book reviews are not blind reviewed but selected by the book review editor based on merit. Reviewers may suggest book review prospects or write the book review editor for suggestions. Usually reviewers will be responsible for obtaining their respective books. Book reviews and/or related queries should be sent to Nancy L. Roberts at <[nroberts@albany.edu](mailto:nroberts@albany.edu)>

## *Note from the Editor...*



As we occasionally have done in the past, the editors of this journal have allowed the issue's main territory to be occupied by an examination of a particular nation's literary journalistic output. More precisely, for this issue it is not so much a nation's literary journalism we are examining as a culture's. Our guest editor, Isabelle Meuret from Université libre de Bruxelles, has enlisted the services of francophone scholars from France, Belgium, and Canada to provide readers with a portrait of the vitality of literary journalism itself and literary journalism studies in the French language, as well as extended glimpses into the similarities and differences between anglophone and francophone literary journalism.

I want to congratulate Meuret and her colleagues for pursuing this special issue to conclusion. As one might imagine, the journey from the assignment stage onward was long and fraught with difficulties, setbacks, and pitfalls. There were many translation issues to deal with, not to mention the inevitable extra layers of editing involved (not to mention the editor's perhaps perverse insistence on finding wonderful photography and illustration to accompany the various essays). In addition to the seven articles, Meuret and Florence Le Cam interviewed Jean Hatzfeld, the former sports journalist turned political journalist turned literary journalist, on the subject of the Rwandan genocide of the 1990s.

That all of this work was accomplished with professionalism and good humor, on both sides of the Atlantic, is testimony to Meuret's grace.

In reading over and editing these essays, I was struck by certain brute facts that affected literary journalism in France. After the Second World War, for instance, France consciously turned away from any notion of combining literary with journalistic pursuits. Post-Hitler, and post-Holocaust, a wave of determination seemed to wash away previous reporting strategies. Objectivity became the paramount virtue, which meant that news reports needed to be more rigorously fact-based, less imbued with a journalist's (presumably tainted by definition) point of view of witnessed events. As the scholars explain, this era, which held sway for decades, has now receded to reveal francophone literary journalism reclaiming its family resemblance to North American literary journalism.

Other historical facts, including the European lust for African exploration, colonization, and exploitation in the nineteenth century, and the explosion in technology (specifically as tied to air travel and the thirst for resources through colonial extraction), provided a strong impetus for literary journalism, or reportage as it is known in the francophone world, however dubious the justifications

seem now. Journalists in the service of government or airlines—imbeds, we might call them now—nevertheless wrote fascinating accounts of far-off lands and far-above clouds to inform, enrapture, and expand the minds of readers back home.

I'll leave the formal introduction to this special issue to its editor Meuret, along with co-writers Paul Aron, and Marie-Ève Thérénty. Happy reading.

### Digital Literary Journalism

At the previous annual conference of the IALJS, held this past May in Porto Alegre, Brazil, Jacqueline Marino gave a presentation entitled “Read, Watch or Tap? Eye Tracking Longform Journalism on Mobile Devices,” which included some stimulating findings that she and research colleagues Susan Jacobson and Robert Gutsche had discovered. They were able to track how longform reading is actually accomplished on a computer browser—how the eyes move, what they take in, how long they engage on lines of text and images, and so on. Marino has developed her presentation into an essay for our first Digital LJ column, “Reading Screens: What Eye Tracking Tells Us about Writing in Digital Longform Journalism.” Marino and company's research should be of interest to most if not all of us who by default concern ourselves with literary journalism's production future.

My hope is that this new department, Digital LJ, will become a regular part of *LJS*. Literary journalism scholars who focus fully or partially on the digital frontier are invited to send in their ideas for future columns (the length of which should be in the neighborhood of 3,000 words).

### More Thoughts on Schindler's List

In the previous issue of the journal, we reviewed John C. Hartsock's latest book, *Literary Journalism and the Aesthetics of Experience*. Regarding *Schindler's List*, which Hartsock examined as a work of literary journalism, the reviewer, Richard Lance Keeble, countered that it was a work of fiction. Hartsock responds:

The matter of the provenance of *Schindler's List* is an old issue, and perhaps after thirty-five years our memories of its origins are fading. Here is a summary: When published in 1982, the book was marketed in the United States as nonfiction. In the United Kingdom, the British version, *Schindler's Ark*, was initially offered as nonfiction, but after the book won the Booker Award it was marketed as fiction. On hearing it had received the Booker, author Thomas Keneally called it “preposterous” that the book had won a fiction award because it was a factual account. The chair of the Booker Committee, John Carey, did the same when he described the book as “history,” finessing the traditional boundary of fiction (as made up or invented solely from the imagination) by noting that all history is a kind of “fiction.” He was taking the position popular in critical circles at the time that all symbolic discourse is a kind of fiction or mediation. Meanwhile, the American publisher considered the book a “nonfiction novel.”

So, from the beginning it was understood that the work was nonfiction even though it had won the UK's most distinguished award for fiction. Many times Keneally made plain that the book was fact and not fiction. Most notably, in the Author's Note to the book, he said, “To use the texture and devices of a novel to tell a true story is a course that has frequently been followed in modern writing.” He adds, “I have attempted, however, to avoid all fiction, since fiction would debase the record. . . .” Elsewhere he used the phrase “documentary novel” to characterize the book. “I felt that in *Schindler* I had written as a novelist, with a novelist's narrative pace and graphicness, though not in the sense of the fictionalizer.” And, “There is something in it as a novel, but not as a fiction. My publisher, Simon and Schuster, describes it as a nonfiction novel.” Still again, “I deliberately set out to write a book as fact in a literary way.”

Keneally had an array of surviving *Schindler* Jews vet the book for accuracy. He would continue to maintain that the book was nonfiction when the movie of the same name was released in 1993. Keneally acknowledged in 2008 that the decision to sell the book as “fiction” was indeed for marketing purposes. But he has not disavowed his comments that it is a nonfiction account that reads like a novel. That, by definition, is narrative literary journalism. One reason I am surprised by the claim that it is fiction, except in the sense that all discourse is a kind of fiction even when it makes a claim to a direct referentiality, is that it was open knowledge at the time that the book was nonfiction. Of course, that being the case, it casts doubt on whether *Schindler's List/Ark* was deserving of the Booker Award, the UK's most distinguished literary award. That clearly is not a palatable option for a publisher—or an author.

### Death of a Colleague

Many of us were saddened by the loss of our dear IALJS colleague, Jo Bech-Karlsen, who died late last year. Jo (pronounced “You”), who was an associate professor of journalism at the BI Norwegian Business School, Oslo, Norway, had always been an indefatigable supporter of this international literary journalism project we have been nurturing these past ten-plus years. The keynoter of our 2010 conference in London, Jo, who had been a reporter, editor, and coach in a great variety of media since 1970, was instrumental in helping to create a special issue of *LJS* dedicated to Norwegian Literary Reportage (Vol. 5, No. 1, Spring 2013). Fortunately, Jo has left behind a considerable corpus, including twenty books, monographs, and textbooks on literary reportage and narrative journalism. We will treasure our memories of Jo's spirited presentations and learned opinions, both inside the conference hall and at the outdoor restaurant tables, where Jo could be found in his black leather jacket amiably nursing his lunchtime slim, dark cigarillo and coffee (or aperitif). He will be missed.

*Bill Reynolds*

## Francophone Literary Journalism: A Special Issue

Isabelle Meuret, guest editor  
Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium

*Isabelle Meuret is an Associate Professor at the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB), Belgium, where she teaches English in the media, British and American culture, and literary journalism. She was also a Visiting Professor at Universiteit Gent, Belgium, and Fordham University, Bronx, New York. She is currently Chair of the Department of Information and Communication Sciences at ULB. Her research interests are literary journalism, photojournalism, and comparative literature. She was the Research Chair of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies (2012–2014). Meuret is now writing on James Baldwin's literary journalism and comparative literary journalism.*



## Francophone Literary Journalism: Exploring Its Vital Edges

Isabelle Meuret, Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium  
Paul Aron, Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium  
Marie-Ève Thérenty, Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier III, France

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*).<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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).<sup>4</sup> 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.

*This volume was made possible thanks to the generous support of Universiteit Gent (UGent), as well as the Philixte and ReSIC research centers at the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB), Belgium.*

---

#### 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.





Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette (1873–1954)  
by Roger Viollet (Branger/Roger-Viollet/Belga Image)

## The Appearance of a Court Column: Colette and the Famous Murder Trials of the Early Twentieth Century

Amélie Chabrier  
Université de Nîmes, France

**Abstract:** In Colette’s long career as a journalist, “les affaires criminelles sont comme un fil rouge” (“criminal affairs are a common theme”) Frédéric Maget notes, from the Bonnot Gang; to the parricidal Violette Nozière; to Landru, the famous serial killer of women. Because her name drew readers, she was often asked to cover sensational trials for prominent papers such as *L’Intransigeant* or *Le Matin*. Attending hearings, she was not a “judicial columnist” like her specialized fellow reporters. Therefore, the expression, “*chronique d’allure judiciaire*,” borrowed from Josette Rico, would better suit these journalistic texts. Colette tended to favor a literary quality in her “columns” by keeping the event at a distance, or even ignoring the specific “judicial” frame. Indeed, as a literary journalist Colette used three types of discrepancies. First, poetic: Colette knew the codes for such articles, but she deviated from them. Second, ethical: she took stances that went against general opinion and chose to show an unbiased perspective on what was usually accepted. Third, stylistic: in her radical detachment from the rigorous and cold observation usually expected in such context, without breaking away from one of the main objectives of such articles, she let readers (absent from the courts and debates) see those standing in disgrace—and maybe understand them better.

**Keywords:** Colette – court column – murder trials – media dissemination – *L’Intransigeant* – *Le Matin* – Violette Nozière – Landru – Guillotin – French press

In the long journalistic career of the writer Colette, “criminal cases are like a red thread, from the arrest of the Bonnot Gang [in 1912 in *Le Matin*] to the trial of Moulay Hassen [covered in 1938 for *Paris-Soir*] via the trials of Landru [in 1921, *Le Matin*] and of Violette Nozière [in 1933 in *L’Intransigeant*].”<sup>1</sup> But her presence in court does not necessarily make her a “court columnist.” Thus, even if Henri Vonoven, in a talk given in 1924 to young trainee journalists, cites her as an example to be followed for her portrayals of the accused,<sup>2</sup> and even if Germaine Beaumont makes of her a “model of that difficult genre” thanks to her “wonderful ability to grasp, in a human being, what escaped other observers,”<sup>3</sup> the expression “*chronique d’allure judiciaire*”<sup>4</sup> (the appearance of a court column), borrowed from Josette Rico, would seem to better describe these texts. In this expression we can detect Colette’s tendency to favor the writing of a “column” while at the same time keeping the event at a certain distance, or even neglecting the particular legal context. Indeed, although focused on contemporary criminal cases, since these articles fit in the media dissemination synonymous with the coverage of a major trial, the writer-journalist’s treatment of these events is characterized by a distinct approach—poetic, ethical, or stylistic—a deliberate decision to cast a different gaze on what is generally a matter of consensus.

### The “Star” of the Media Dissemination

Since the end of the nineteenth century, writers were “courted for their reputation and the number of readers that their name can draw”<sup>5</sup>: thus on October 10, 1934, the day the trial of Violette Nozière opened, a nineteen-year-old who poisoned her father and nearly murdered her mother, *L’Intransigeant* announced in a box in the center of its front page: “the trial seen . . . on Thursday by Colette.” Calling on a famous author is an important selling point for the newspaper. Likewise, Colette had just joined the newspaper *Paris-Soir* in June 1938 when she was tasked with covering the major trial of Oum el Hassen, the cruel and murderous Madam, scheduled for November in Fez in Morocco. Accordingly, on November 13, an announcement was placed on the front page for the upcoming article, with a photo not of the case, but of the writer assigned to cover it.

Another recurrent way of highlighting these articles written by writer-journalists was to publish them on the front page, while the legal account of the trial was relegated to pages three through seven. These articles preceded the trial dictation taken by the stenographer, complementing and even enriching it. This is how Maurice Goudeké explained the division of labor within the newspaper *Paris-Soir* during the case in Fez. He took charge of the technical part of the account, and left the subjective part to Colette: “Colette

would give her impression of the hearing, while I would give the technical account of the proceedings.”<sup>6</sup> The news item is thus overshadowed by the writer-journalist’s article.

It is more the layout of the newspaper than the contents of the article itself that would make it “the *appearance* of a court column,” with its headline in bold, its quotes extracted and showcased at the start of the article, its photographs captioned, or its drawings of the proceedings included. For the trial in Fez, the publication on page four with the account by Goudeké further heightened the proximity. Indeed, the place, date, and technical means—“Fez, November 15 (by wire)” —as well as the mention “from our special correspondent” that precede the article bring it even closer to traditional court reporting or to reportage. Lastly, Colette’s text is, like that of her companion, divided into small paragraphs by subtitles that were most likely added by the editor, a method often used in accounts of court proceedings to facilitate reading.

Yet Colette sometimes seems more inclined to “mimic” her fellow reporters than adhere to their practices, as in her first case in Tours in 1912, the Guillotin case, about which she describes with a certain distance her entrance in the court in the midst of the legal press: “I was expecting more gravity among those present. These gentlemen from the legal press, fulfilled, overflowing with joviality, take pleasure in making sardonic forecasts. . . . I am won over by the blasé fickleness of my companions.” Just as she adopts the casual attitude of “these gentlemen,” so too does she seem to copy the structure of her article on the usual framework of the column, showing how fully aware she was of the journalistic genre in which she was here proving herself.

On the other hand, from the Guillotin trial onward, a radically different perspective on the case is to be noted. Colette denounces the meanness of some accounts and of the debate revolving around the issue of “whether they were lovers,”<sup>7</sup> a key question that was widely covered in the other accounts. Colette then seems to respond directly to her colleagues: “I am embarrassed, disgusted. These base anecdotes about pierced walls, lifted curtains, lost hairpins, this syndicate of spying, of malicious gossip, perhaps of calumny, end up being revolting.”<sup>8</sup> This decision to take a different approach that reveals itself in the dialogic dimension of the article recurs in all the trials she covered.

### Away from the Media Hype

This distinction is therefore notable with regard to the journalistic genre that is the court column, to the media treatment generally reserved for

famous trials,<sup>9</sup> and lastly to the dominant viewpoint cast on the accused. Concerning the journalistic genre, several codes are not respected: to the usually long articles, which were meant “to be continued,” so as to serialize the information, Colette opposes short, often one-shot columns, and does not introduce cliffhangers when several articles follow one another. For the Landru trial, in 1921, while *Le Matin* serialized the trial, which lasted from November 7 to 30, on its front page, only one report, dated November 8, was signed by Colette.

Likewise, the scoop is of secondary importance. Published on Saturday, October 13, 1933, the day after the verdict, her column on Violette Nozière does not take into account the death sentence although all the rival newspapers describe this fateful moment, a prerequisite of the legal article, with its string of stereotypes. Yet this tension inherent to any legal procedure is lacking from Colette’s account, which has only “the *appearance* of a court column.” While the court column strives to adhere to the time of the proceedings, notably through the use of deictic words or expressions, strangely Colette’s article is almost disconnected, atemporal.

Moreover, contrary to the topical mediatization of the murder trials, Colette refrains from calling excessively on pathos and sensationalism. The case of Violette Nozière is quite illustrative. During the three days of the trial, highlights are systematically pointed out and emphasized in the rival press, such as with the “pathetic confrontation between daughter and mother,”<sup>10</sup> who forgives her on the witness stand, or the rage of the parricide when she received her sentence.

With Colette, by contrast, one notes her perfect indifference to these courtroom incidents and other highlights of the judicial ceremony, which the press are generally all too happy to exploit to attract readers, even when there is almost nothing to relate. Even if it features headlines and sensationalist titles, this column thus remains impermeable to the posturing that runs through other cases. The headlines that dominate her columns were written by editors, not by the author. For instance, “Here comes Landru!” which announces the long-awaited entrance of the serial killer in the courtroom, is a phrase extracted from Colette’s account. Likewise, for the Guillotin and Oum el Hassen cases, the stereotypical dimension of the headlines—“The Epilogue of a Major Tragedy” and “The Ogress of Fez Before the Jury”—seems to indicate them as exogenous to the column. Colette does not retain them when the columns are compiled in *Prisons et paradis* (Prisons and Paradise)<sup>11</sup> (1932), and *Journal à rebours* (Counter-journal).<sup>12</sup>

Lastly, in rewriting the column on Oum el Hassen, Colette seems to combine her disdain for the media hype with the haughty attitude of the ac-

cused, by lending the latter her voice:

As for the aghast chorus of barely pubescent courtesans, it is hardly murmuring, it is groaning so quietly, prostrate. . . . One of them makes the most of her convulsive horror. At the sight of Oum el Hassen, she screams, throws herself into the arms of the Arab interpreter, tries to reach the exit of the courtroom. . . . How disdainful the gaze of Oum el Hassen on the terror-stricken woman! A purely mundane contempt, Muslim haughtiness too. Are prostitutes no longer taught to be quiet in public?<sup>13</sup>

While the scene could be a source of pathos, Colette adopts the merciless point of view of the accused, not that of the victims, to denounce the masquerade.

As can be seen from this example, the gaze cast on the case, and in particular on the accused, is often radically opposed not only to the media *doxa*, but also to the crowd that surrounded the journalist at the proceedings. As though the singularity of the gaze cast on the criminal was the only possible reflection of this being isolated on the bench of infamy, Colette tries to stand out from her fellow journalists or from the public that surrounds her, and more particularly from the female public—from which she dissociates herself by demonstrating incredible misogyny—even at the expense of inciting a scandal. And so while the onlooker does not hide his hostility, his aversion to Mrs. Guillotin, her column is entitled “How Strong Woman Is!” showing admiration for the strength of character of the woman everyone shunned. Although the court column helps to establish certain legends and the myth around criminals,<sup>14</sup> Colette seems to deconstruct the prefabricated media image newspapers impose. Violette Nozière, a surrealist icon,<sup>15</sup> was at the center of a famous affair in the 1930s, in which “parricide and incest are interwoven, that is, the transgression of two fundamental taboos.”<sup>16</sup> Colette, by contrast, finds her “more stubborn than mysterious” in her article in *L’Intransigeant*, which begins with the anaphora “*c’est du petit monde*,” and which shows a colorless and mediocre person, a sordid affair, which has nothing to do with “ancient tragedy”<sup>17</sup> or any other hyperbolic comparison written at the time by fellow reporters.

The way Colette expresses herself in these court columns tends to align them closer to the daily columns she wrote throughout her long journalistic career rather than standard court reporting. Indeed, although these are current events, it seems that the author rejects in part the corresponding writing of current events. Although she does not deny the exceptionality of these criminals, she draws their portraits in a personal manner, not far removed from the “everyday lyricism”<sup>18</sup> or “myopic journalism”<sup>19</sup> evoked by Marie-Ève Thérénty.

### Colette and “Her” Monsters

Colette’s iconoclastic worldview, observed in her war reportage among other places, seems to apply to her court columns. Juxtaposed to and contrasting with the broad “vagueness” that surrounds everything that relates to the facts or to the judicial context (thereby contrasting with the bill of indictment or the stenographic report) is the practice of the “close-up,” a “description from up close”<sup>20</sup> that serves the portrait of the accused. Fixed on the latter, the acuity of Colette’s gaze helps isolate the observer and the observed from the rest of the assembly, as though they alone were left. This concentration enables the journalist, thanks to the precision of the physical details, to draw the personalized physiognomy of the criminals, but also to try to penetrate their thoughts to better understand them.

During the Landru trial, for example, columnists and illustrators tracked the slightest movement, and insisted heavily on the “impassive,” “calm,” “steady” appearance of this “correct *petit bourgeois*”<sup>21</sup> accused of having killed eleven fiancées in cold blood to get his hands on their savings. Yet to account for this impression, Colette pauses and describes in detail a tiny gesture which she renders significant: “*Il se mouche posément, /plie son mouchoir en carré, /rabat le petit volet /de sa poche extérieure. Qu’il est soigneux!*” (He blows his nose calmly, folds his tissue, turns down the flap of his exterior pocket. How tidy he is!).<sup>22</sup> Through the balanced rhythm and the play on sounds, it is Landru’s entire personality, underlined by the exclamation mark, which the reader sees, hears, and feels, thanks to this simple sentence.

However, to achieve this psychological portrait, Colette also draws on the accused’s past, also by means of small touches, “[isolating] details, anecdotes and without any recontextualization,” “turning these things which were seized on the spot into facts to be interpreted in a general context which always remains vague.”<sup>23</sup> While the media machine dehumanized the accused and turned them into monsters, Colette applies herself to re-immersing them in a human, almost banal everydayness, pausing at one or other detail, perhaps in an attempt to grasp what led them to commit an extraordinary act. The column then becomes largely fictionalized in the recreation of this past, which rests only remotely on the case file. For instance, she portrays Violette Nozière as dying of boredom in the “awful, narrow quarter,” “in which, at night, one unfolds, beside a double bed, a small bed, which is folded up in the morning,” surrounded by a father “devoid of genius” and a mother “who sewed and did not read.” Colette elaborates the vision of a miserable life, which could appear as being at the source of the parricide.

In the case of Landru, it is the act itself that Colette imagines, based on her observation in court:

*Did he kill? If he did kill, I would swear that it is with this meticulous, somewhat maniacal, admirably lucid care with which he classifies his notes, drafts his papers. Did he kill? Then it is while whistling a little tune, and wearing an apron for fear of stains. . . . We remain stunned in front of the tranquil and gentle murderer, who keeps a diary of his victims and rested, perhaps, while at work, with his elbow on the window and feeding the birds some bread.*<sup>24</sup>

In this shift from the hearing to Landru’s presumed past, Colette ends up advancing an increasingly clear picture of the crime, bringing together the two antithetical factors that made this case famous: on the one hand, the normality of the accused, and on the other the barbarity and baseness of his crimes. From the meticulousness that he demonstrates during the hearing, she thus passes to everyday gestures that could correspond to his behavior: whistling, wearing an apron so as to avoid stains, feeding the birds some bread. The contrast created is powerful precisely because it is the description of a murder. First using the conditional to make an assumption, “I would swear,” the tone asserts itself after the anaphora “did he kill?” thanks to the introductory “it is” before concluding with the oxymoric vision of “the tranquil and gentle murderer.”

Through her lyricism, Colette ends up transfiguring these media monsters in order to integrate them into her own portrait gallery. Far from being isolated from the rest of her journalistic output, the court columns are republished, alongside others, in various heterogeneous collections, sometimes undergoing changes. Notably it is in the use of metaphor that the writer constructs “her” monsters, as here in the final, revised vision of Oum el Hassen, after the verdict: “Her immaculate veils rise little by little, cover the top of her cheeks, the eyebrows. . . . Through the teguments of the cocoon she is weaving, thus transpired the last movements of the larva, still showing some life before its long hypnosis.”<sup>25</sup>

This extended metaphor is not in the original November 17 article, even though it appears implicitly throughout the three columns: the first, influenced by Orientalist biases, already evokes the veils of women and the harem. On the second day, the first description of Oum el Hassen begins as follows: “If I lean to the right, I almost brush against the light silks, the starched and immaculate muslins that make up the costume of the accused; from head to toe, she is white, freshly ironed.” Already her clothes, by synecdoche, constitute for her a second skin of sorts, a protection that only shows the top of her face. On the day of the verdict, Colette writes: “At midnight we will be in the Courts, around a woman in white who, as the verdict comes nearer, closes all her Muslim veils, raises to her eyes her immaculate muslin, . . . only shows her made-up eyes whose gaze gives into no gaze.”<sup>26</sup>

It is this attitude of withdrawal, which is also present in the account of her companion, that would inspire the final, almost Kafkaesque metaphor to Colette, of the “larva” in its cocoon, present in *Journal à rebours*. “Unlike journalism, [the writer] is not held to the facts. He has his own legitimacy, the certainty that his gaze is enough. While the journalist advances the truth of fact and his objectivity, the writer lays claim to a subjectivity, an unexpected viewpoint.”<sup>27</sup> It is in these terms that Frédéric Maget describes “the writer’s privilege.” Colette, “the writer who sometimes acted as a court columnist,”<sup>28</sup> as her daughter put it, takes part in the media dissemination around the trials by delivering her court impressions. Thanks to the newspaper’s layout, her column does take on the “appearance of a court column.”<sup>29</sup> However, while playing with the codes of the genre and casting a lucid gaze on the mediatization of these famous trials, in no way does she sacrifice her original and independent perspective on the world.

*Amélie Chabrier is an Assistant Professor in French literature. She teaches at the Université de Nîmes, France. Her research interests are the interactions between literature and the press in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She has contributed to research on urban legends (medias19.org) and is currently preparing a publication of her thesis on court genres, court columns, and nineteenth-century literature. She has co-authored, with Marie-Ève Thérénty, a book on the 1930s Détective magazine, Détective, fabrique de crimes? (forthcoming).*



### Notes

1. Colette, *Colette journaliste: chroniques et reportages, 1893–1955*, eds. Gérard Bonal and Frédéric Maget (Paris: Seuil, 2010).
2. Henri Vonoven, *La Belle Affaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1925), 29.
3. Germaine Beaumont, “Colette journaliste,” *Prestige français et Mondanités* 14 (March 1956).
4. Josette Rico, *Colette ou le désir entravé* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2004), 45.
5. Frédéric Maget (coauthor of *Colette journaliste*, *ibid.*), site Présence de la littérature: Dossier Colette, SCÉRÉN-CNDP, 2010, 2. <https://www.reseau-canope.fr/presence-litterature/dossiers-auteurs/colette/colette-un-certain-regard.html>.
6. Maurice Goudek, *Près de Colette* (Paris: Flammarion, 1956).
7. The accused, Paul Houssardet, killed Monsieur Guillotin out of jealousy. Although he was probably Mrs. Guillotin’s lover, he categorically denied their affair

during the case to save his mistress from being accused of complicity.

8. Colette, “Que c’est solide une femme!,” *Le Matin*, June 27, 1912, 1.
9. For the elements concerning the poetics of the court column, see my doctoral thesis, written under the supervision of Marie-Ève Thérénty. Amélie Chabrier, “Les Genres du prétoire, chronique judiciaire et littérature au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle” (PhD diss., Université de Montpellier III, 2013).
10. “Pathétique confrontation dans le prétoire de la mère et de la fille,” *Le Matin*, October 12, 1934, 1, 7.
11. Colette, *Prisons et paradis* (Paris: Ferenczi, 1932).
12. Colette, *Journal à rebours* (Paris: Fayard, 1941).
13. *Ibid.*, 101.
14. Myriam Boucharenc, “Barbe-Bleue aux assises ou la chronique judiciaire en procès,” in *La Chronique des écrivains (1880–2000)*, eds. A. Schaffner and B. Curatolo (Dijon: Éditions universitaires de Dijon, 2010), 36. In this article, Boucharenc shows how the media construct the legendary figure of Landru, evoking the “immediate recycling of the real in the literary category,” giving “an image to the criminal, a fantasmagorical richness to the character.”
15. Anne-Emmanuelle Demartini, “L’Affaire Nozière entre instruction judiciaire et médiatisation,” *Le Temps des médias*, 15 (September 2010): 126–141.
16. Anne-Emmanuelle Demartini, “L’Affaire Nozière. La parole sur l’inceste et sa réception sociale dans la France des années 1930,” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 56:4 (October–December 2009): 190–214.
17. Colette, “Je demande un verdict terrible: la peine capitale’ . . . dit l’avocat général,” *L’Intransigeant*, October 13, 1934, 1. See for example Pierre Lamblin, “Les jurys décident, ce soir, du sort de Violette Nozière,” *L’Intransigeant*, October 13, 1934, 7.
18. Marie-Ève Thérénty, “Le Lyrisme du quotidien,” *Cahiers de L’Herne*, no. 97 (2011), 135.
19. The expression is borrowed from André Billy, *L’Œuvre* (January 27, 1918).
20. Thérénty, “Le Lyrisme du quotidien,” 135.
21. Quotations taken from *Le Matin*, and *Le Petit Parisien* at the moment of the Landru trial, November 1921.
22. Elisabeth Gilet, “Colette chroniqueuse judiciaire,” *Cahiers Colette*, no. 23 (2001), 131–156, 138.
23. Thérénty, “Le Lyrisme du quotidien,” 135.
24. Colette, “Voici Landru!” *Le Matin*, November 8, 1921, 1–2. My emphasis.
25. Colette, *Journal à rebours*, 105.
26. Colette, articles dated November 15, 16, 17, 1938, at the trial of Oum El Hassen, for *Paris-Soir*.
27. Frédéric Maget, *Colette journaliste*, <https://www.reseau-canope.fr/presence-litterature/dossiers-auteurs/colette/colette-un-certain-regard.html>.
28. Colette de Jouvenel, Preface to “Coupables,” *Marie-Claire*, no. 103 (May 1963), 1–16.
29. Rico, *Colette ou le désir entravé*, 45.



Portrait of Marie Gevers by Nicole Hellyn  
© AML (Brussels, Archives et Musée de la Littérature).

## The *Mille Collines* of Marie Gevers: From Reportage to Literary Text

Paul Aron

Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium

F.N.R.S. – Fonds National de la Recherche Scientifique, Belgium

**Abstract:** Little known today beyond the country of her birth, Marie Gevers (1883–1975) is a major Belgian writer. Her interest in the everyday life of farming communities, her attachment to the things and people of her region, and a heightened sense of the rhythms of nature explain the success of her books. As a literary journalist, she also penned articles and reportages for newspapers such as “La Descente du Congo” (1952), *Des mille collines aux neuf volcans. Ruanda* (1953), and *Plaisir des parallèles. Essai sur un voyage* (1957). The relevance of Gevers’s contributions to Belgian colonial literature has received hardly any attention, yet it is essential to analyze these texts in their particular contexts. Years of public banishment because of her minor involvement with the country’s occupying forces during the Second World War prompted Gevers to take some distance and spend time in Rwanda as of 1948. Three years after Liberation, the Cold War was at its height, and majority opinion in Belgium had come down firmly behind the Truman Doctrine. However, United Nations criticism of Belgium’s management of its colonies was not welcome, and the country reaffirmed the role it had to play both in Congo and Rwanda. Therefore, Gevers’s African texts should be read as part of a general and national argument supporting the benefits of colonization. Gevers’s objectives were twofold: first, to provide texts that showed her humanist understanding of a different world; and second, to rehabilitate herself as a major Belgian writer of stylistically impeccable texts.

**Keywords:** Marie Gevers – Rwanda – Belgian colonial literature – Congo – *Des mille collines aux neuf volcans* – German censorship – Second World War – *Le Soir* – “Descente du Congo” – ideology

Little known today beyond the country of her birth, Marie Gevers is a major Belgian writer. Born on December 30, 1883, in Edegem, close to Antwerp, she wrote critically well received poems before turning to the novel. In 1930 she received the Prix du Centenaire and, four years later, the Prix Populiste for *Madame Orpha ou la sérénade de mai* (Mrs Orpha or the Serenade of May).<sup>1</sup> In 1938 she became the first woman to be elected to the Royal Academy of French Language and Literature. Her oeuvre consists of ten or so novels and as many short-story collections, as well as essays dedicated to nature, such as *Plaisir des météores ou le Livre des douze mois* (The Pleasure of Meteors or the Book of Twelve Months).<sup>2</sup> In 1960 Gevers received the Prix Quinquennal de Littérature for her career as a whole. She died on March 9, 1975, in the Missembourg home where she was born.

Gevers wrote in French. She also understood Dutch perfectly, including the patois of her native region. She translated Flemish poets and essayists. Her interest in the everyday life of farming communities, her attachment to the things and people of her region, and a heightened sense of the rhythms of nature explain the success of her books.<sup>3</sup>

Modest, and not given to public statements, Gevers was nevertheless regularly in demand to give an interview, write a column, or release an as yet unpublished story. These journalistic contributions are so numerous that the *Bibliography of Belgian Writers* abandoned the idea of identifying all of them.<sup>4</sup> On several occasions, however, her articles were not simple contributions but rather genuine reportages, ones that make it possible to consider her an author-journalist in the full sense of the term.

Gevers's journalistic contributions thus offer the advantage of revealing a little-known aspect of her career. They are equally important in providing an understanding of the real issues at stake within several of her publications, in particular the subject of *Des mille collines aux neuf volcans. Rwanda* (Rwanda: From a Thousand Hills to Nine Volcanoes).<sup>5</sup>

Between 1950 and 1960, Gevers indeed published three texts that are exceptions to her oeuvre. Before the Rwanda book, on November 8, 1952 she spoke about "La Descente du Congo" ("The Descent of the Congo") at the Royal Academy.<sup>6</sup> And, in 1958, she published *Plaisir des parallèles. Essai sur un voyage [Congo]* (The Pleasure of Parallels: An Essay on a Journey).<sup>7</sup> These writings on Belgian colonies were preceded and nurtured by three voyages she made, in 1948, 1951, and 1955, to the region of Central Africa where her daughter lived.

Gevers's contribution to the corpus of Belgian colonial literature has not often been analyzed. Well received at the time, it still draws approving comments from the *National Biography*, which stresses the author's ability to place

Western standards and values in perspective.<sup>8</sup> More recently, on the occasion of the reissue of *Mille collines*, Valentin-Yves Mudimbe noted: "her testimony is a form of pathos in the sense that it is an expression—and a signification—of being different, and a discovery of the difference around oneself."<sup>9</sup> The website of the Archives et Musée de la Littérature concurred: "the lady from Missembourg' lifts the colonial travel story out of its commonplaces."

Whoever takes the trouble to place Gevers's colonial writings in context will nevertheless note that this evaluation merits some discussion. The category of travel writing, which traditionally designates the literary aspect of journalistic reportage, has little relevance because *Mille collines* is, first and foremost, a freelance article published in the press. As for the author's empathetic viewpoint for African tales and for the actors of the colonial enterprise—the colonized as well as the colonizers—it also demands to be questioned with reference to a particular era and specific stakes.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, these two aspects make sense only in the context of fully understanding Gevers's situation when she took her first voyage to Rwanda. It is with this point we will commence our investigation.

#### The Situation of Marie Gevers in 1945

The war period profoundly marked Belgian literary life. Crucial factors included the closing of borders, which meant that authors found plenty of difficulty in traveling to Paris and publishing there. Authors also encountered a social demand for entertaining texts, as well as German censorship (and, inevitably, self-censorship on the part of writers and publishers). Certain authors "snapped their pen in half" during this period, refusing to publish, while others benefited from new opportunities. In general, for writers as for the rest of the population, the keyword of the period was "accommodation" to new circumstances. Effective collaboration and mounting resistance remained marginal.

In the sector of the press controlled by occupying forces, Gevers's name surfaced frequently. The stories that appeared under her byline were largely in continuity with the subjects she addressed prior to 1940, and the same was true of the eight books she published between 1940 and 1945. The texts were apolitical enough not to alarm the Nazis, although one might compare them with the major themes "in the spirit of the times": the link between the inhabitants and their land, the love of nature, and the fascination with atavisms. Gevers was not the only one writing in this vein, however, and so such an analysis would fall under an *a posteriori* moralism rather than an academic approach. An extensive ideological critique of the texts published throughout the period would run the risk of many anachronisms.<sup>11</sup> One could—and this would be more useful—make a complete inventory of these contributions in

such a way as to compare Gevers's apolitical texts and the clearly more slanted articles that were published in the same newspapers. Putting her complete works under this microscope would doubtless reveal a form of heedlessness, or even intellectual irresponsibility. Nonetheless, at the time of Liberation more specific rebukes were made regarding her.

From its first sessions at the end of 1944, the Royal Academy had to face the question of members who had compromised themselves with the Occupiers. The case of Horace Van Offel, editor-in-chief of the "stolen" newspaper, *Le Soir*, was easy to resolve. He was a notorious collaborator who published Nazi propaganda, and was expelled from the institution on October 21, 1944. Gevers was criticized in less absolute terms. "The Academy considers that Mme Marie Gevers has committed an error in lending herself to the re-publication of certain of her works by a publishing house known for its relations with the enemy. It regrets, on the other hand, that Mme Marie Gevers lacked prudence in her relationships with journalists in the pay of the occupier."<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, because the Academy's statutes made no provision for temporary expulsions, it recommended to Gevers that she not take up her place for some time. Similarly, the Association of Belgian Writers and the PEN Club voted to reprimand both Henri Davignon and Gevers, the former for an article published in *Le nouveau journal* and for his involvement in the francophone cultural council, and the latter for a meeting with journalists from both the "stolen" *Soir* and *Nouveau journal*.

Indeed, Gevers had given an interview to *Le Soir*. Responding to questions from Marcel Dehayé, the following words are attributed to her: "She also thinks that in literature in particular, the time of morbid analyses has passed, as has that of introspections tinged with Freudianism. . . . We must draw closer, the author of *Plaisir des Météores* also tells us, to nature, the land, and draw wisdom from them."<sup>13</sup>

After the war, Gevers was reproached again, this time because of the republication of *Paix sur les champs* (Peace on the Fields)<sup>14</sup> by Éditions de la Toison d'Or in 1943, a publisher funded by the Occupier. The owner of this publishing house was Édouard Didier, who in 1946 was tried in absentia in Brussels and sentenced to death. Raymond De Becker, his main literary advisor, was subjected to the same sentence, commuted in 1947 to life imprisonment.<sup>15</sup>

To defend herself, Gevers explained in a letter to the Academy in October 1944 that Jean Van Loock had introduced her to "two young people," Jean Libert and Jean de la Lune (Marcel Dehayé), whom she did not know were collaborators with *Le Soir*.<sup>16</sup> She also felt that she had nothing to do with the beliefs of its editor.<sup>17</sup> On this point, her defense was convincing: other writers published by the same editor were not troubled (this is the case for Paul

Willems, the son of Gevers), or, if they were, it was for other counts of indictment (such as the stories read on the radio by Michel de Ghelderode). It was, on the other hand, difficult to imagine that she was unaware of the political commitments of her two interviewers, with whom she remained in contact for a while.<sup>18</sup> The case against her nevertheless seemed slight, and it is hard to understand, *a posteriori*, the animosity of Valère-Gille, her principal accuser.

In October 1945, Gustave Vanzype, the permanent secretary, sent her a train ticket so that she could return to the Academy. She refused, as the controversy had yet to be brought to an end. At the same time, she was expelled from the "Soroptimist Club of Antwerp,"<sup>19</sup> of which she had been a member since its founding in September 1945. She received a letter from William Ugeux of the Belgian Civil Mission on February 19, 1945, reminding her that she was banned from publishing for having been involved in publications coming out under enemy control. She would have to request permission to publish again. Finally, after a certain delay, the Société des Gens de Lettres de France pronounced "a very severe reprimand" against her in its session of October 28, 1946. Yet Gevers returned to the Academy for its February 1946 session, "and everything passed off very pleasantly," she told her lawyer.<sup>20</sup> However, almost four years passed before she dared to speak there again. Her first postwar talks were "Memories of Verhaeren" (1949) and "Pilgrimage to Combray-Illier" (1951).<sup>21</sup>

From a psychological perspective, Gevers took the reproaches badly. In her *Journal d'une cave* (Diary of a Cellar), she explained how much hatred she had felt for Germany, following the Great War. This animosity lasted until 1935, at which point it disappeared despite a brief resurgence in May 1940.<sup>22</sup> On January 5, 1945, she noted that she could hate Germany, but above all she loved her country and Flanders, united in a musical "third" or like the components of a stereoscopic photograph.<sup>23</sup> On February 2, 1945, she pitied the Germans taking shelter within their homes, under Allied bombing, as she did the Belgians who had been forced to flee.<sup>24</sup> These ambivalent sentiments placed her in an awkward position with Belgian patriotic opinion. The personal attacks depressed her and for several months she published next to nothing. To gain some distance between herself and a climate she judged poisonous, she eventually escaped the toxicity by joining her daughter in Rwanda in 1948.

### The Author-Journalist of 1948

Again, context is important. Three years after Liberation, the Cold War was at its height, and majority opinion in Belgium had come down firmly behind the Truman Doctrine, as presented by United States President Harry S. Truman on March 12, 1947. The principal enemy henceforth became the



Soviet Union. Anti-communist discourse spread to socialist circles, and the Belgian communist party became isolated. On the day of Truman's speech, communist ministers left the government. A period of social agitation followed, culminating in the murder of elected communist deputy Julien Lahaut on August 18, 1950. The Catholic Party, which had won the June 1949 elections, pushed the socialists out of power for five years.

The dominant political parties thus opted for an unambiguous Atlantist rallying. Nevertheless, as far as the question of the management of the colonial domain was concerned, this choice posed a problem. In 1945, Article 73 of the United Nations Charter recognized the "primacy of the interests of the inhabitants" of the colonies over the interests of the colonizers.<sup>25</sup> As historian Guy Vantemsche has demonstrated, this provision triggered lively reactions in Belgium.<sup>26</sup> Successive Belgian governments considered it necessary to stand up against both US and UN interference in Belgian colonial policy. The Catholic Party in particular was at the forefront of this dispute, issuing a series of propaganda texts that attempted to convince the public that the Belgian government had been doing everything possible, in the Congo and in Rwanda, to develop these countries in the interests of their inhabitants.

Among the newspapers at the forefront of these issues was *Vrai*, managed by three energetic young editors, Jo Gérard, Georges-Henri Dumont, and Georges Sion. This "weekly of national life" published between September 16, 1944 and July 10, 1949, until the Catholic Party victory rendered its role unnecessary. In an editorial entitled, "We Are at War," Dumont wrote, "The hour has come to exterminate communism wherever it has cunningly implanted itself. Let every state threatened from within—and Belgium is one of them—go on the offensive against the agents from abroad, and victory will be ours in 1948."<sup>27</sup> In August 1948, the newspaper led a campaign against the criticisms, which the Belgian administration of Ruanda-Urundi had given rise to, at the United Nations Trusteeship Council (the colonies had been entrusted to it after the First World War, to be managed under the system of mandates).<sup>28</sup> The main Catholic daily, *La Libre Belgique*, took a similar view, explaining that Germany had done nothing for its colonized peoples, and that for Belgium, "The task to be accomplished was and remains enormous: to educate the people, teach them the principles of Christian morality, develop the country economically."<sup>29</sup> While the Trusteeship Council regretted that "no progress has been made in terms of the goal of making the indigenous peoples understand what democracy is and how it is applied,"<sup>30</sup> the *Libre* stressed the countries' economic, medical, and educational development.

On August 15, 1948, *Vrai* began publishing a series of open letters to Sion under the general heading: "Marie Gevers Writes to Us from Ruanda."<sup>31</sup>

For his part, Sion was preparing what was to become his *Voyage aux quatre coins du Congo (1949–1952)* (Voyage to the Four Corners of the Congo),<sup>32</sup> and Dumont would chronicle the history of these years in: *Le Congo du régime colonial à l'indépendance, 1955–1960* (The Congo from the Colonial System to Independence, 1955–1960),<sup>33</sup> and *La table ronde belgo-congolaise (janvier–février 1960)* [The Belgo-Congolese Round Table (January–February, 1960)].<sup>34</sup>

The articles by Gevers, which form the raw material of the text published by Plon in 1952, thus belong to a set of arguments that sought to defend and to illustrate the benefits of Belgian colonization. They were nurtured by articles from *La Libre Belgique* that Émile Gevers-Orban (Marie's brother) regularly sent to his sister, so that she could allude to them "in her reporting."<sup>35</sup>

This became a major turning point in Gevers's oeuvre. Normally an apolitical writer, she found herself enrolled in an ideological cause. In the wake of her *Vrai* articles, in 1950 she offered to the *Patriote illustré* a piece of reportage on "Les sources du Nil" (source of the Nile), based on a story from her son-in-law, Jean Schuermans.<sup>36</sup> In August 1954 she published "Ruanda-Urundi" in *Panorama*. In September 1960 she published "Femmes d'Afrique" ("Women of Africa") in *Nouvelles littéraires*. And in 1961 she published "Les petits vachers" ("The Little Cowherds") in *Bellone*. In strategic terms, the gains were obvious. Excluded on the grounds of collaboration, Gevers returned to the mainstream thanks to the celebration of the Belgian colonial oeuvre. On November 8, 1952, the Academy welcomed her first major personal talk on that theme, "La Descente du Congo," definitively reintegrating her into the literary and national community.

#### Literary Stakes of Rwandan Reportage

We are now able to grasp as fully as possible the literary stakes of Rwandan reportage. For an author censured by the Association of Belgian writers, it was not only a question of producing a text bearing witness to her humanist understanding of a different world, but also of rebranding herself as a writer of the first rank, who had lost nothing of the sensibility that had been recognized in her descriptions of the Flemish region, and who was still capable of producing a stylistically impeccable text.

Of course, nothing is overtly political in Gevers's text. The reportage opens with thoughts on language that aim precisely at escaping colonial stereotypes. It continues with a cosmological description of nature and human beings in line with the categories she has been using in previous works. Nonetheless, in view of the publishing context, three main argumentative axes within *Mille collines* need to be highlighted. It is, first of all, a question

of highlighting the exemplary work of missions, missionaries, Force Publique (Public Force, the Belgian military force), and Belgian administrators.<sup>37</sup> Using classic methods of first-person reportage, a guarantee of authenticity, the female narrator recounts a number of concrete anecdotes that illustrate the good will of the colonists. The devotion of a bush doctor and the skill of an engineer are emphasized. Nonetheless, the author acknowledges some obvious struggles that remain: the difficulties of the terrain, the meeting between races and cultures is problematic, and colonization in general remains difficult. She invokes the brevity of the colonial experience: it is necessary to allow time to do its work and to have confidence in the good will of those on both sides.<sup>38</sup> Beyond these reservations, Gevers concludes that the balance sheet of colonization appears to be positive overall, an observation seemingly based on the fact that it comes from a “normal” writer on a family trip, not from reportage motivated by particular circumstances.

On a conceptual level, the second axis, Gevers in no way distances herself from the dominant mental categories of Belgian colonizers. The notion of “race,” for example, is used in a spontaneous manner. She distinguishes “[t]hree races. It is enough to spend a few days in Ruanda to differentiate them.”<sup>39</sup> The criteria for differentiation are physical. “Aged some forty years, a height of 1.90 m denotes the purity of his race.”<sup>40</sup> And, between these races, the hierarchy is no less evident. According to her, “The Batwa acknowledge the supremacy of the Batutsi. They agree to be employed as court jesters or dancers, they pay their dues to the king, but they don’t work at all. They remain free.”<sup>41</sup> The unconscious superiority of the white race manifests itself even when the narrator believes she is paying a compliment, as when the spotlessly clean residences of the Tutsis “call to mind the work of higher insects.”<sup>42</sup>

The third argumentative axis involves the affirmation of a particular ethos. A French-speaking Flemish writer, known for her sensitivity to nature, Gevers piles on the parallels between native country and visited country. She who knows her trees and her meteorology writes: “The eucalyptus has taken in Ruanda, just as long ago the Canadian poplar took in the Flemish region.”<sup>43</sup> “At home, in Flanders, we know the rain hole.”<sup>44</sup> “It is the northwest. But here? The wind here is as uncertain as a barometer imported from Europe.”<sup>45</sup>

The description of Rwandan weather also serves to strengthen the idea that the separation of the races is a near-ontological fact of nature: “Here the midday sun is eternally at six hours from its rising, and six hours from its setting. Always, always, twenty-four hours divided exactly in two. Desperately, immutably, the azure split into two equal parts for the night and for the day, and the gulf between black and white . . . eternally, eternally. . . .”<sup>46</sup>

Through this type of comparison a positional affirmation is being enun-

ciated. Gevers reaffirms that she has not changed, that she is always faithful to a self-image constructed on perception through the senses and the attention paid to men and women in a strange and foreign world. Nonetheless, this experience of otherness, she insists, remains above all the experience of a writer. From the start of her reportage (in the version published in book form at least), she thus specifies:

I arrived equipped with my verifiable assortment of precise terms, perfect, tried and tested by the centuries. I told myself: *Patience, patience, – Patience in the azure. Each atom of silence. Is the chance of a ripe fruit.*<sup>47</sup> Just as for us, users of the French language, each word is the chance of a well ripened fruit which, detached from us, seizes objects and submits them to us.

These words, so exact in Europe, it was going to be necessary to use them at 2° 33’ of latitude South, at 29° 35’ of longitude East, and at 1650 meters of altitude. . . . I soon realized . . . that it was necessary to make them supple, to train them to serve the new things.<sup>48</sup>

Mediation through writing recalls that “things seen” are also “things read.”<sup>49</sup> Her reportage is a text, and thus shows itself as such through the choice of images, rhythm, and economy of narration. This is why the text of *Mille collines* often differs from the militant reportage published in *Vrai*. Even if Gevers is anxious to respect the spontaneity of her story—the fragmentary and anecdotal character underlining its naturalness—she takes care to revise her work for publication in book form. The illustrations disappear and, with them, a link to immediate reality. The new version is more concise and narrowed, the vocabulary more precise, and the punctuation better adjusted. The shift from one to the other corresponds to the shift from the short-lived to the perennial story.

These strictly literary effects are also present in “La descente du Congo,” the talk delivered at the Academy, a symbol of her reintegration into the Belgian literary community. We will take a few examples from this text, more condensed and fine-tuned for the occasion.

First of all, the authorial position is taken up almost in the exact same way. Gevers declares, “The writer feels proud. Because only she, having words and images at her disposal, could manage to evoke the empire of trees intermingled with the empire of waters.”<sup>50</sup> The reading contract here clearly becomes that of a travel narrative, freed from the constraints of publication in a newspaper. Highly metaphorical images insist on the personification of natural elements. She evokes “the noble and slow dance of the islands,” the river as a kind of big, playful child: “In the steep slopes the waters do not much concern themselves with obstacles. It is a game to shatter them or to wear

away the rocks, to circumvent them by gnawing away at them, or indeed, like at the Falls, to leap over scattered rocks and fall back again howling.”<sup>51</sup>

While the future of the colony remained, in the eyes of the Belgians, as assured as it was radiant, Gevers indulges in the pleasure of words. The repetition of the word “white,” an adjective at first, then a noun, seems to recognize an immutable state of affairs when she writes, “The lower deck of the white boat of the whites is full of black travelers, with their families, their chickens, their bundles, their cooking utensils.”<sup>52</sup> The word is reprised in another image, a few lines further on. There, the technological preeminence of the colonial country is emphasized: “Upon the arrival of the white boat all the canoes steer towards it, like steel needles towards a magnet.”<sup>53</sup>

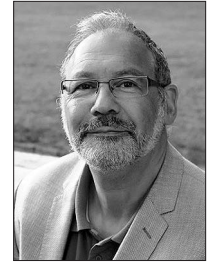
Inevitably, every travel story returns to its starting point, and Gevers’s is no exception. It draws a parallel between Belgium and abroad. Institutions such as religious communities and the Force Publique play an essential role in the two countries, and their functions are highlighted in the colonial story. Another parallel might be more political. We detect that the laudatory portrait of King Mwabi III in *Mille collines* is not without its discrete allusion to the situation of Leopold III, and “La descente du Congo” seems to confirm this. Two years after the 1950 assassination of Lahaut, the communist representative killed for having yelled, “Long live the Republic,” in the Belgian Parliament, Gevers allows herself the pleasure of social irony by evoking the danger of a Congo devoured by “republicans”:

One surmises that the ground of the islands, however hidden it might be under the vegetation, must conceal a wriggling mass of insects and reptiles. . . . The throbbing of the propeller makes every living thing hide. Apart from towards the evening the garlanded flight of the parrots . . . the birds named republicans. They will strip of all its leaves, like locusts, the tree upon which they descend.<sup>54</sup>

Although discreet, the irony is no less manifest. It indicates the extent to which Gevers has re-entered mainstream Belgian public opinion. Seen this way, “La descente du Congo” is a fully appeased text. Gevers, sure of herself and at the summit of her art, ends her African experience, begun under such trying auspices, on a *via sacra*.

Ultimately, Gevers’s trajectory illustrates the power of the press. Reportage had been merely a stage in her life as a writer, yet a decisive one. The author prosecuted for an interview in the “stolen” *Soir* and then banished by the national community finds another news medium, one that allows her to reintegrate herself with literary institutions and the dominant ideological *doxa*. The literary life is one that is written in a media system whose importance is not always acknowledged, but whose effects are incontestable.

*Paul Aron is a Professor of French Literature at the Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium. He is also a Research Chair at the FNRS (Fonds National de la recherche scientifique). His field of expertise is the history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century French literature. He has published a number of articles on literary journalists, and has co-edited Le Littéraire en régime journalistique, a special issue of Contextes 11, 2012. <http://contextes.revues.org/5296>.*



### Notes

1. Marie Gevers, *Madame Orpha ou la sérénade de mai* (Paris-Neuchâtel: V. Attinger 1933).
2. Marie Gevers, *Plaisir des météores ou le Livre des douze mois* (Paris: Stock, 1938).
3. Gevers was a signatory of the Groupe du Lundi manifesto in 1937. This assemblage of Belgian writers rejected regionalism and nationalism, embracing French literature overall. (The question of whether or not Gevers in fact was read as a regional author will not be discussed here.) For Gevers, the meaning of nature attained a general scope. See Cynthia Skenazi, *Marie Gevers et la nature* (Brussels: Palais des Académies, 1983).
4. In periodicals such as *Rex*, *Le Rouge et le Noir*, *Le Soir*, *Comœdia*, *L'Indépendance belge*, *Cassandra*, *La Cuisine*, *Chez soi*, and others.
5. Marie Gevers, *Des mille collines aux neuf volcans. Ruanda* (Paris: Stock, 1953).
6. Marie Gevers, “La descente du Congo,” *Bulletin de l'Académie Royale de Langue et de Littérature française*, 1952, 215–224.
7. Marie Gevers, *Plaisir des parallèles. Essai sur un voyage* (Paris: Stock, 1958).
8. Cynthia Skenazi, “Marie Gevers,” *Nouvelle biographie nationale*, vol. 4 (1997): 172–176.
9. Preface to the reissue of *Mille collines*, Central Africa Series, no. 52 (Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Brussels, 2002).
10. The intertextual dimension has been analyzed by Justin Bisanswa, who compares the statements by Gevers with those of Leiris and Gide. Justin Bisanswa, “Le voyageur et son double: Je te ferai signe,” in *Littératures et Sociétés africaines. Regards comparatistes et perspectives interculturelles. Mélanges offerts à Janos Riesz*, eds. Papa Samba Diop and Hans-Jürgen Lusenbrink (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2001), 243–254.
11. The novel *Château de l'ouest* takes place during the First World War and recounts the story of a pregnancy against a backdrop of espionage (which in fact is

no more than an adultery). See Hubert Colleye, "La vie littéraire," *La Revue générale belge* (April 1948): 949. Colleye makes of it a "novel of war time," thinking, or pretending to think, that it is a book written during the Second World War. In reality the novel had been offered in 1936 to *L'illustration*, which refused it.

12. Académie royale de langue et de littérature françaises de Belgique, *Bulletin ARLLF* (December 1944): 127.

13. Marcel Dehaye, "Un thé aux pommes chez Marie Gevers," *Le Soir*, February 11, 1941, 10.

14. Marie Gevers, *Paix sur les champs* (Paris: Plon, 1941).

15. Both would later live in France. See among others: Olivier Dard, Étienne Deschamps et Geneviève Duchenne, eds., *Raymond De Becker (1912–1969)* (Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2013).

16. Jean Van Loock directed the collection *Les Écrits* during the war.

17. See FS 55/18/6/1-4, Gevers Fund, Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Brussels, as well as the manuscript, "Journal d'une cave," a fragment of a diary in which she returns to these events (FS55/18). Following the controversy, Gevers had written to Alcide, editor of the Antwerp-based *Matin*, to protest against the satirical article he had published on this subject.

18. Marcel Dehaye to Marie Gevers, August 8, 1941 Archives et Musée de la Littérature, FS 55/18/6/4 ter. The letter offers to portray her in the review *Elle et Lui*, to which she agreed. Jean Libert was sentenced to ten years in prison for acts of collaboration; Dehaye, a collaborator with the 'stolen' *Soir*, was stripped of his civil and political rights after Liberation (they would be restored to him in 1949). See Pierre Assouline, *Hergé, Biographie* (Paris: Plon, 1996), 253–254, and Benoit Peeters, *Hergé fils de Tintin* (Paris: Flammarion, 2002), 243.

19. The Soroptimist Club of Antwerp is a branch of Soroptimist International, an organization for professional women launched in 1930, in Belgium, dedicated to advancing human rights and the status of women in society.

20. Marie Gevers to J. Thévenet, her lawyer, February 23, 1946, typewritten copy, (Marie Gevers, *Journal d'une cave*, manuscript, Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Brussels, FS55 00018/0001. AML FS 55 18/6/47).

21. Marie Gevers, *Journal d'une cave*, manuscript, FS 55 00018/0001, Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Brussels.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*

25. Guy Vantemsche, *La Belgique et le Congo. L'impact de la colonie sur la métropole* (Brussels: Le Cri–Histoire, 2010), 183–186.

26. *Ibid.*

27. G.H. Dumont, "Nous sommes en guerre" (We Are at War), *Vrai*, January 11, 1948, 2.

28. "La Belgique ne se laissera pas injurier par l'ONU," *Vrai*, August 8, 1948.

29. "Ruanda-Urundi sous le mandat de la Belgique," *La Libre Belgique*, August 8, 1948, 1.

30. *Ibid.*

31. Marie Gevers, "La source du Nil," *Vrai*, August 15, 22, 29, 1948, September 5, 12, 19, 1948, October 31, 1948; Marie Gevers, "Les belles histoires du Ruanda," *Vrai*, November 7, 1948; Marie Gevers, "Montée vers une chefferie," *Vrai*, November 14, 1948; Marie Gevers, "Huttes de luxe," *Vrai*, November 28, 1948; and Marie Gevers, "En tournée dans les collines," *Vrai*, December 26, 1948.

32. Georges Sion, *Voyage aux quatre coins du Congo (1949–1952)* (Brussels: Goemaere, 1953).

33. Georges-Henri Dumont, *Le Congo du régime colonial à l'indépendance, 1955–1960* (Paris: Éditions universitaires, 1961).

34. Georges-Henri Dumont, *La table ronde belgo-congolaise, janvier–février 1960* (Paris: Éditions universitaires, 1961).

35. Used by Émile Gevers-Orban in a letter to his nephew, Paul Willems, Liège, August 16, 1948 (Archives et Musée de la littérature, Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels, FS557/96/4).

36. Marie Gevers, letter to the editor, *Patriote illustré*, July 1, 1950 (AML, FS 55 7/95 bis).

37. Gevers, *Mille collines*, 95, 107.

38. For example: "It has taken us two thousand years to understand that kindness exists. . . . Oh! We exercise it rarely, but still, everyone knows all the same that it exists. . . . And you want to see the gulf which separates us from the inhabitants of Ruanda bridged in thirty years." *Ibid.*, 90. See also 66, 130.

39. *Ibid.*, 27.

40. *Ibid.*, 101.

41. *Ibid.*, 65.

42. *Ibid.*, 42.

43. *Ibid.*, 18.

44. Editor's note: "hole of rain" is a literal translation of the original French, "trou de pluie," probably crafted after the local Flemish patois.

45. Gevers, *Mille collines*, 56.

46. *Ibid.*, 92.

47. Paul Valéry, "Palme," in *Charmes. Œuvres. Tome I* Édition de Jean Hytier, 1957. Paris: Bibliothèque de la *Pléiade*, n° 127, 155.

48. Gevers, *Mille collines*, 13–14.

49. Myriam Boucharenc, "Choses vues, choses lues: le reportage à l'épreuve de l'intertexte," *Cahiers de Narratologie*, no. 13 (2006), <http://narratologie.revues.org/320>.

50. Gevers, "La descente du Congo," *Bulletin de l'Académie royale de Langue et de Littérature françaises de Belgique*, December 3, 1952, 224.

51. *Ibid.*, 216.

52. *Ibid.*, 218.

53. *Ibid.*, 223.

54. *Ibid.*, 219.



Marc Augis, *Souvenirs d'un colis volant* (Occupation: Flying Parcel).

## Occupation: Flying Parcel. Portrait of Marc Augis, Woman, Journalist, and Writer

Vanessa Gemis

Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium

**Abstract:** Starting from the trajectory of a woman writer-reporter, this article aims to highlight, through the gender prism, the poetics of the nineteenth-century concept of the advertorial as developed in French-speaking Belgium as of the 1920s. Simone Dever (1901–1977), aka Marc Augis, a journalist-cum-writer, belonged to that new generation of female reporters who, thanks to a degree in journalism, won easier access to professional status. The niche she targeted during her career, aviation reportage and literature, led to an observation of gendered hierarchies at work in literary and media fields from different perspectives. Augis confronted this very issue in her 1954 book, *Souvenirs d'un colis volant* (Occupation: Flying Parcel). This collection of texts was both an opportunity for Augis to think about her profession, but also to consider it as a space for building and staging herself, which enabled her to repossess some characteristic aspects of the poetics of reportage and, consequently, to compensate for the failings of advertorial writing in terms of authenticity. Propelled into a mostly male environment, Marc Augis guaranteed the legitimacy of her status by positioning herself explicitly vis-à-vis her gendered identity. Her autobiography enabled her to elude the sexist discourses by means of a counter-discourse that highlighted the added value of a woman's pen. Through her articles, the insistence on her reality as both woman and reporter made it possible for Augis to assert her status as a writer.

**Keywords:** flying parcel – Marc Augis – Simone Dever – aviation reportage – female journalism – sexism – SABENA – advertorial – photography – Belgian aviation

Little known, and concealed under a male pseudonym, Simone Dever deserves a brief biography. She was born in Liège, Belgium, on February 1, 1905. Enrolled in the Institute for Journalists, which had just opened its doors in Brussels, she graduated in 1929 with a degree obtained with distinction. Under the pseudonym of Marc Augis, she then threw herself into a dual career as a journalist and an author. After first working freelance for several newspapers (including *L'Indépendance belge*, *La Nation belge*, and *échantillon*), she joined the liberal newspaper *La Meuse* in 1932<sup>1</sup> while continuing to freelance for several weeklies, including *Elle*, *Nuit et Jour*, *Hebdo*, and *Le Bulletin du Touring-Club de Belgique*.<sup>2</sup> In 1935, Augis published several major reports in *La Meuse*, including “L’Afrique à vol d’oiseau” (Africa as the Crow Flies), published in book form that same year.<sup>3</sup> In 1945, she published “La Meuse en Suède” (“La Meuse” in Sweden), which won the Rotiers Prize two years later.<sup>4</sup> Specializing in aviation reportage, by 1943 she had already launched her own aviation review, *Les Ailes brisées* (Broken Wings), renamed *Icare* (Icarus) five years later. In 1947, she cofounded *Vieilles Branches* (Old Chums), a group of journalists who had followed aviation in Belgium from the beginning. Lastly, she gave many talks on the subject of “the earth seen from above” and published, in a range of genres, works inspired by flying, such as *Les Contes d’Icare* (Tales of Icarus: An Album for Children), *Le Danseur des nuages: Trois histoires d’aviation* (The Cloud Dancer: Three Aviation Tales), *Les Souvenirs d’un colis volant* (Souvenirs of a Flying Parcel: An Autobiography) or *Le Temps de l’aile* (The Time of the Wing: A Collection of Poems).<sup>5</sup> As well as being an aviation reporter, Augis was also a poet, and a collection of her entitled *Les Séductions artificielles* was published in 1930.<sup>6</sup> As in the press, she developed an aviation theme in her literature and in 1951 created the Icarus Prize.

Augis’s prolific career indicates a desire to develop as a reporter while managing the material needs of an independent woman. In 1937, she married Albert Wiccaert, a pilot with the French air force. He died three years later, leaving her alone with their only daughter. Quite symptomatically, Augis’s career at *La Meuse* came to a halt during her married years and only picked up in 1945, after the death of her spouse. However, Augis chose to specialize in a subgenre that placed her against an overwhelmingly masculine milieu and positioned her outside social expectations: aviation. By her own account, she chose to publish under a male pseudonym to escape the sexism of the profession.<sup>7</sup> At the time, few women dared embrace a career in journalism. She was not the only one, however, and in France at that time the journalist Titaïna (pseudonym of Elisabeth Sauvy, 1897–1966) became as famous as the great reporters for articles inspired by her adventures as a pilot.<sup>8</sup> But that, precisely,

is probably what distinguishes Augis from her illustrious colleague: Augis was not a pilot and the experience she shared with her readers is that of the cabin and the baggage hold. Her autobiography, *Les Souvenirs d’un colis volant* (Occupation: Flying Parcel),<sup>9</sup> published in 1954, accentuates this point of view.

### Les Souvenirs d’un colis volant

In *Les Souvenirs*, Augis details the various dimensions of her journalistic practice: her work as a reporter, her specialization in the field of aviation, and her identity as a woman. The book presents itself as both a writer’s work, in which Augis reflects on her professional practice, and as a space in which to construct and present the self, which, although characteristic of this type of historical writing, would also enable her to reinvest certain aspects of the poetics of reportage and thus compensate for the writing effects implied by a subgenre closely linked to her specific practice as an aviation reporter: the advertorial. From its title onwards, *Les Souvenirs* enabled Augis to define her professional practice:

[C]an we not reasonably call parcel the human being whose fate it is to be transported in turn on board all the new types of planes, on all the newly created routes, to all the newly opened destinations? That was my occupation, and that of some of my colleagues. One day when someone wanted to portray me in a review, I looked for the appropriate term and ended up calling myself a “professional passenger.” I at once received requests from young people who wanted to pursue this wonderful profession! As a result, I renounced it and decided to choose the less glorious, but perhaps more accurate term of “flying parcel.” For many years therefore I was a flying, thinking and writing parcel!<sup>10</sup>

What Augis was also trying to define here was a specific writing mode of reportage:

Things have changed now, but there was a time—between 1928 and 1935—when air travel was considered by many as being quite risky. At the time, when an airline invited a newspaper to send a representative for an inaugural flight, the members of the editorial board who were not afraid to take that risk were not that many. . . . There was generally one per newspaper and that one automatically took part in the journey. That is how I began this fascinating career. There were five or six of us in the Brussels newspapers who were of this sort. It was a glorious age, when airline companies were very happy that someone had accepted to take part in their journeys and then to recount them in writing. . . .<sup>11</sup>

The age that saw Augis enter the world of journalism was indeed marked by the growth of commercial aviation. In 1923, Belgium launched Sabena (Belgian Corporation for Air Navigation Services),<sup>12</sup> its national airline

company. The original intention was modest, to connect Belgium to its colony, the Congo, but the company grew quickly, introducing technically advanced planes that combined passenger comfort with technological feats and extending its network by introducing flight routes to Europe but also to India and the United States. Besides its commercial lines, Sabena airlines also handled airmail in Belgium, among other nations, by introducing the helicopter.

Turning its attention to the general public, Sabena then developed marketing policies by means of a press department headed by Victor Boin (1886–1974), a key figure of the sports and journalism world. A former Olympic champion, an aviation fanatic, and a seasoned sportsman in many fields, Boin also founded the Belgian Association of Sports Journalism (1913), and, since 1924, was the vice president of the International Association of Sports Journalism. Moreover, he was editor-in-chief of *La Conquête de l'air* (Conquest of the Sky), the magazine of the Royal Aero-Club of Belgium and the main relay of Sabena's activities. It was through this organization that the link between Sabena and the press was managed in smooth coherence. The company regularly organized and offered free flights to journalists, who were invited in order to ensure that each novelty (new flight routes, new planes, etc.) was dutifully reported by the press.

Augis had already been confronted with this type of reportage at the end of her studies. As early as 1929, while she was finishing her training at the Institute for Journalists, Sabena invited her, along with her fellow students, to fly from Brussels to Antwerp. The trip led to a competition that the future graduate won,<sup>14</sup> thereby inaugurating a long career as an aviation reporter.<sup>15</sup> For more than twenty years, Augis reported on the inauguration of new flight paths. She was present for occasions when Sabena offered to display its technological and commercial advances. The opening of the Brussels–Delhi line in 1947, for instance, enabled her to publish a major report in *La Meuse*.<sup>16</sup> Augis became one of the accredited writers of the Belgian airline company and as such took part in the growth of a commercially oriented media genre: the advertorial.



The header of Marc Augis's writing paper<sup>13</sup>

### The Poetics of the Advertorial

Although it appears as a text commissioned to ensure visibility through the press, the advertorial fits in a tradition at the intersection of media history and literary history. Although in the late twentieth century the advertorial came to mean an article that is written as if based on objective reporting but that can be distinguished as paid advertising, as used here the term refers to an earlier age when, from the nineteenth century onwards, the use of established writers appeared as a necessary strategy for a large number of transport companies. In exchange for services offered, the writer-travelers would not hesitate to praise in their writings both the technical feats and the level of comfort offered by the various means of transport (train, car, boat, plane, etc.). In the late nineteenth century, the Compagnie des Wagons-Lits hired the services of renowned writers. In 1883, writer-journalists Henri Oppen de Blowitz and Edmond About covered the inaugural journey of the Orient Express. The great car rallies also mobilized writers. Among the participants in the Citroën cruises in the 1920s,<sup>17</sup> and their Belgian equivalent in 1928, under the patronage of the F.N.,<sup>18</sup> one finds journalists (Roger Croquet, Maynard Owen Williams). Although male-dominated, by the 1950s female journalists had wedged into this market. In 1954, Gabrielle d'Ieteren and Charlotte Van Marcke de Lummen drove a Volkswagen Beetle in a rally, of which d'Ieteren published an account.<sup>19</sup> As for journeys by sea, in 1935 four writers and journalists (Cendrars, Colette, Wolff, and Schall) boarded the *Normandie* and then delivered personal narratives of their experiences to newspapers such as *Le Figaro*, *La Revue de Paris*, and *Paris-Soir*.<sup>20</sup>

It is clear that, from the travel narrative involving the use of a certain means of transport to the narrative that takes as its main object that means of transport, there is but a small step that many writers who were also engaged in the press were happy to take. The conquest of the skies did not escape this logic, since it was concomitant with the entrance into media culture and thus found in the mass press a special means of dissemination.<sup>21</sup> The texts that emerged in this context were a fertile source of information on the poetics of the advertorial and on its roots in media and in literature. Many renowned writers would not hesitate to put their writing skills at the service of aviation, all the more enthusiastically for those who had passed their pilot's license (Titaÿna and Joseph Kessel in France; Albert Bouckaert in Belgium). For Augis, publishing in this field meant taking part in a tradition that not only valorized the qualities of writing but also, as we shall see, gave the genre a feminine inflection.

Some extracts from the advertorials published by Augis make it possible to identify the main ingredients of the aviation advertorial: a balance between

praise for passenger comfort and the plane's performances (speed, altitude), and the literary descriptions of the earth as seen from the sky:

The sound of the engines is barely perceptible. The conversation is lively. The pod seems suspended, immobile, between two worlds, between two equally anonymous nights, between two dials, without any relation with reality. And yet we are speeding along at 500 kilometers per hour, a formidable bullet propelled by its eight thousand galloping horses.



The Gordon-Bennett Cup, 1937<sup>22</sup>

And then, suddenly, the sun. It is five o'clock in the morning. The sun rises out of the water. It looks like molten metal shaped into a ball. It is impossible to behold its red color for long. The Mediterranean is immense and grey, with this jewel of red gold blazing on the horizon. No landmark interrupts the gaze. Launched like an arrow, the plane seems immobile between two skies that are as anonymous as the night earlier on.

The passengers emerge from their sleep to admire this sun, similar to a stranger that one would have forgotten to present to them.

We have been flying for the past eight hours and suddenly we change sides. Clouds stretch out below us, the clouds which, with each daybreak, are like a cap of freshness for the city of Cairo. The plane rushes towards them. And suddenly the speed has become perceptible. A giddiness propels the plane forward and pushes the clouds behind us.

The plane tilts as it turns. Five hundred kilometers per hour . . . We finally experience the intoxicating speed. The huge wing cuts the clouds like the knife of a giant pastrycook. We descend, we glide, we break through the ceiling of the others who are below, stuck to the ground.

It's finished. Sand, desert, the runway of the airfield, light landing. . . <sup>23</sup>

As we can see, the advertising quality that defines advertorials leaves plenty of room for—and even invites—a literary style comparable to that of major reportages.<sup>24</sup> However, this specific writing context implies two exceptions

with regard to the poetics of the genre. The enunciative “I” is largely erased by a context whose objective is to make air travel accessible to anyone. Thus, Augis often disappears behind a “one” or a “we” which includes her among the passengers.

However, while it erases the traces of authoriality specific to reportage, this characteristic seeks to increase the number of addressees of the investigative report. The narrative adapts itself to the economic role the genre occupies within a mass culture in full development and also within the social discourses that surround the beginnings of mass tourism.<sup>25</sup> Sabena's commercial strategy relied directly on the specific poetics of reportage, mobilizing elements of a participatory reading (hypotyposis, choice of pronouns, and the like) in an advertising perspective:

We settle in. The children are already at the windows, eager not to lose anything of the journey. The engines purr. We drive for ten minutes. The plain of Melsbroek is endless. . . . And suddenly, without any transition, we're off, we break through the ceiling of clouds, we emerge into the sun, above the immense snow-covered plain that represents our grey sky, seen from the other side.

– Meal-box?

The steward places a little box in everyone's lap.

– Ah, ah! Wonderful!

Half the travelers cry out in genuine surprise.

These are the Belgians who, for the first time, are leaving our country.<sup>26</sup>

If it is difficult to perceive Augis in the account of her journeys by plane,<sup>27</sup> it is because the event is most often covered by a horde of journalists invited by the company. The advertorial also appears as a special space of representation of the journalistic milieu. Augis sketches her fellow journalists not without a certain delight, as during a trip to Paris where one ultimately no longer knows who, of the birds or the journalists on board, are the real competition pigeons:

We are a dozen journalists lined up on the longitudinal bench of a Dakota, seated the same way the parachutists sat at the beginning of their war missions.

But there are no parachutes and we are not going to jump.

There are only pigeons in wicker baskets placed one on top of the other and strapped to the carcass of the plane. . . .



The plane flies without straying from its course by a single meter. The pigeons smooth their feathers. The journalists observe the pigeons, without omitting to dig into the amusing meal-boxes that Sabena offers its clients. . . .

The wind in the meantime had completely turned. It blew in the pigeons' noses, and from the start it was certain that they would not reach the anticipated speed. They were expected in Brussels by 12:30. . . .

As for us, the volunteer escorts, insatiably curious, and passionate experimenters, we arrived in Brussels without any problem.<sup>28</sup>

A second consequence of the advertorial is that the reporter must sell not only comfort but also safety, and therefore must exclude from the narrative any presentation of the self that would imply danger and would undermine the reliability of the airline's planes. This is a renunciation of what makes the status of the writer-reporter heroic. Hence it is a sort of renegotiation of the traditional link between reportage and the adventure novel, which proceeds from another form of erasure of the reporter. Yet this is why *Les Souvenirs d'un colis volant* is so interesting. This collection enables Augis to introduce the reader into the corridors of her reportages, describing the adventures that preceded and were left out of the writing. Significantly, two of the recounted episodes even echo aborted articles replaced in the newspaper by a captioned photograph.<sup>29</sup> Augis goes back over her journey to Frankfurt, explaining to the reader how an emergency landing in a field of beetroots did not enable her to arrive at the newspaper on time to submit her article.<sup>30</sup>

This niche of autobiographical writing enables Augis to fully reinvest her authoriality, and specifically her identity as a woman reporter: the reportages where, as the only woman journalist on board, the gendered dimension is fully deployed by the newspaper as an editorial strategy to attract readers.

### Woman on Board

The reportage most emblematic of this strategy is without a doubt "L'Afrique à vol d'oiseau," published in *La Meuse* between April 24 and May 23, 1935, and issued in book form that same year.<sup>31</sup> The Sabena route connecting Brussels to its colony had already been covered, twenty months earlier, in a reportage published in the newspapers *Le Soir* and the *Vingtième Siècle*, written by two leading reporters, Albert Bouckaert and René Weverbergh.<sup>32</sup> The route itself is therefore not novel, except that it is the first time a woman is making the journey. This is precisely what the newspaper wishes to underline:

For several years already, Marc Augis has been fascinated by the problems of aviation. Besides, our readers will have noticed this on several occasions. It

is thus an expert, we could say—at least as regards the details that interest the average reader—that will tell us the story of her journey.

But it will first and foremost be a woman who will tell you her adventures.

It will be a woman who will tell you about her prodigious leaps over the seas, over deserts, over impenetrable forests.

It will be a woman who will tell you about the overnight stages on African soil.

Lastly, it will be a woman who will recall that initiative and courage are also feminine virtues.<sup>33</sup>

Together with this staging of the self there also emerges an adventurous dimension, as can be seen from this reportage from June 1950 entitled, "Marc Augis, the first Belgian woman strapped into a *Météor*, recounts what she felt in a cabin at 925 kilometers per hour":

On the ground, a discussion begins. Someone had told me: "You will be the first woman to fly on a *Météor*. . . ."

Possibly! . . . But still—that's not true, someone shouts, the *Waaf* often fly in England. That seems likely. I don't have time to check. In any case, it is certainly the first time that a *Météor* is removing a female specimen of this ignorant and clumsy merchandise that is a passenger in a pure state. And since the time that I have been traveling about in the sky, I have learned to place a certain pride in my title of "professional passenger" . . . 94,000 kilometers traveled in my capacity as a bundle, that's not too bad! And this time, if the kilometers don't count, I can add the *Météor* to my collection of tested machines: it is exactly the 27th type of flying machine, which I am entrusting my precious self to!

But it is the very first time that I am climbing aboard a military machine; that is the handicap of being a woman . . . without a uniform! Yet, so far in Belgium all *Météor* planes have been military.

Whether or not it's a first, in any case, I have flown on a *Météor*! And, well, it was worth it.<sup>34</sup>



Leaving for Africa (1935)<sup>35</sup>

Another feature of these reportages is the systematic use of photography, which, while doubling the effects of the staging of the self, anchors the gendered dimension (as seen here and on the previous page). Augis also returns to this feminine relation to the field of aviation in her recollections. Recalling the difficulties a woman faces in this environment, she notes that one way to focus her reporting is to emphasize the human rather than the technological elements of flying, thereby revealing once more the identity-related specificity of articles stripped of authorial clues:

People often wondered about two things in relation to me. First, about the fact that a woman chose to specialize in aviation. Secondly, that she had such a slight interest in technology while for many people aviation is synonymous with engines, prototypes and records. These two points explain one another: it would have been strange—although not impossible—if a woman had developed an interest in mechanics to the extent that she would devote a journalistic career to it. (Those that become engineers are another matter.) But it was quite normal that, being a woman, she became passionate about the human element which until then was so important in aviation, and which remains essential despite all possible advances. In fact, what I have always loved in aviation is the human being that gave it its soul.<sup>38</sup>



On board a helicopter (1947)<sup>36</sup>



On board a Météor (1950)<sup>37</sup>

What characterizes Augis's reports is precisely her interest in the players of the aviation sector (pilots, but also politicians), whether by means of interviews or portraits. In fact, in a little book published in 1954, *Des noms et du ciel. Petite contribution à l'histoire de l'aviation en Belgique* (On Names and the Sky: A Small Contribution to the History of Aviation in Belgium),<sup>39</sup> she draws a series of portraits of twenty personalities from the history of Belgian aviation, emphasizing the great pilots of Sabena (Prosper Cocquyt, Jo van Ackere, and Marcel Hanson). Written like a reportage, halfway between recollection and interview, the portraits are built around Augis's encounters with these personalities, and her voice occupies a prominent role in the storytelling.

Augis's career makes it possible to shed light, through the angle of gender, on the poetics of aviation advertorial writing as it developed in French-speaking Belgium from the 1920s. One reads in her articles the reinvestment of writing practices specific to reportage to meet the new economic stakes that accompany a rapidly expanding air travel industry. Propelled into a mostly male environment, Augis would also be able to guarantee the legitimacy of her status by positioning herself explicitly vis-à-vis her gendered identity. Her autobiography enables her to elude the sexist discourses by means of a counter-discourse highlighting the added value of a woman's pen. Through her articles, the insistence on her reality as a woman and a reporter make it possible for Augis to assert her status as a writer.

*Vanessa Gemis has a PhD in French Language and Literature. Her research interests are women in literature, culture, and the media. Her approach combines the sociology of culture and gender. She has published several articles in international journals (Contextes, Recherches Féministes, Sextant, Regard sociologique) and has also coedited a volume on Le Littéraire en régime journalistique (Contextes). She is currently the manager of European and international projects in the Research Department of the Université libre de Bruxelles.*



## Notes

1. Marc Augis worked for *La Meuse* from 1932 to 1937 and from 1945 to 1950.
2. *Le Bulletin du Touring Club de Belgique* in particular is a medium that raises the issue of advertorials (including in the field of aviation) such as elaborated on in this essay. Several reporters of the day worked for the *Bulletin*, including Albert Bouckaert (1891–1951), another important aviation reporter who also acted as the editor-in-chief of the *Bulletin* from 1945 to 1948 (see below).
3. Marc Augis, *L'Afrique à vol d'oiseau: Reportage aérien en Afrique septentrionale et centrale*, with a preface by Maurice Lippens, introduction by M.R. Engels, with drawings by A. Dever and J. Lismonde, sixty photographic plates (Brussels: Éditions PIM Services, 1935).
4. Founded by Frédéric Rogiers, a former president of the General Association of the Belgian Press, the Rotiers Prize was rewarded every three years to a Belgian reporter, among others, to finance a study journey abroad.
5. Marc Augis, *Les Contes d'Icare* (Brussels: Icare, 1951); Marc Augis, *Le Danseur des nuages: Trois histoires d'aviation* (Brussels: Icare, 1953); Marc Augis, *Les Souvenirs d'un colis Volant* (Brussels: Icare, 1958); Marc Augis, *Le Temps de l'aile* (Brussels: Dutilleul, 1955).
6. By 1930 Augis already had published a collection of poems, *Les Séductions artificielles* (Brussels: Confrérie du Canard, Impr. scientifique et littéraire, 1930).
7. Francis Bolen, "Un interview inattendu: Un soir avec Marc Augis, journaliste et globe-trotter," *Hebdo*, no. 112 (January 3, 1948): 12–13. In this interview Augis speaks at length of her condition as a woman in journalism and about the need to earn a living following the death of her husband.
8. Cécile Berthier-McLaughlin, "Devenir Titaïna. Une journaliste à la croisée des chemins," in *L'Année 1925. L'esprit d'une époque*, eds. Myriam Boucharenc and Claude Leroy (Nanterre: Presses universitaires de Paris Ouest, 2012), 293–305; Benoît Heimermann, *Titaïna. L'aventurière des Années folles* (Paris: Arthaud, 2011).
9. Marc Augis, *Les Souvenirs d'un colis Volant* (Brussels: Icare, 1958).
10. *Ibid.*, 9.
11. *Ibid.*
12. On the history of Sabena, see Guy Vanthemsche, *La Sabena: l'aviation commerciale belge, 1923–2001: des origines au crash* (Brussels: De Boeck, 2002).
13. Archives et Musée de la Littérature (Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels, ML 3858/33–44).
14. Marc Augis, "Impressions de vol," in *La Conquête de l'Air*, 1929, 575.
15. Between 1932 and 1950, Augis filed almost a hundred reports and columns to *La Meuse*.
16. The first installment was published in *La Meuse* on September 25, 1947.
17. Ariane Audouin-Dubreuil, Étienne and Marie Christian, *Les Croisières Citroën 1922–1934* (Paris: Glenat, 2009).
18. Roger Crouquet, *La Croisière blanche (de Liège au Cap en automobile à travers l'Afrique; mai–septembre 1928)* (Brussels: Broché, 1928).
19. Gabrielle d'Ieteren, *L'Afrique mouvante: une randonnée automobile sensationnelle en Tunisie, Libye, Égypte, Soudan, Érythrée, Éthiopie, Kenya, Uganda et Congo Belge* (Brussels: Éditions de la Paix, 1954).
20. The four texts were in fact reissued in a single volume: Blaise Cendrars, Colette, Claude Farrère, Pierre Wolff and Roger Schall, *À bord du Normandie: journal transatlantique* (Paris: Éditions Le Passeur, 2003).
21. This question is in fact the main topic of the symposium, "La Presse et la conquête de l'air. Histoire, imaginaires, poétiques (XVIIIe–XXIe siècles)," Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, by the Centre d'histoire du XIXe siècle, January 12, 2017.
22. "La Coupe Gordon-Bennett," photographic box with a medallion photo of Augis and Mrs. Scutenaire, *La Meuse*, June 22, 1937, 10.
23. Marc Augis, "De Bruxelles aux Indes, premier voyage de la Sabena," *La Meuse*, September 25, 1947, 3.
24. On the poetics of the reportage, see Myriam Boucharenc, "Choses vues, choses lues: le reportage à l'épreuve de l'intertexte," *Cahiers de Narratologie*, 13 (2006), <http://narratologie.Revues.org/320>; Boucharenc, *L'Écrivain-reporter au cœur des années trente* (Lille: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2004).
25. The law instituting paid holidays in Belgium was voted on June 27, 1936, inviting the main tourism bodies (travel agencies, airlines companies, etc.) to broaden their target audiences and to review their advertising strategies. The role of the advertorial in this context remains to be studied.
26. Marc Augis, "'La Meuse' en Suède. Par dessus la Hollande inondée Le Danemark brumeux La Scanie voilée," *La Meuse*, September 6, 1945, 1.
27. It should be noted that the reporter resurfaces in her narrative as soon as she leaves the plane.
28. Marc Augis, "Pour la première fois depuis 20 ans, des pigeons de concours ont été transportés par avion de Bruxelles à Paris," *La Meuse*, May 12, 1947, 3.
29. Marc Augis, "La Coupe Gordon-Bennett," *La Meuse*, June 22, 1937, 10; Marc Augis, "Le Rallye Aérien de Francfort," *La Meuse*, July 10, 1937, 1.
30. Marc Augis, *Les Souvenirs d'un colis volant*, 10.
31. Marc Augis, *L'Afrique à vol d'oiseau: Reportage aérien en Afrique septentrionale et centrale* (Brussels: Éditions PIM Services, 1935).
32. The two reportages were also published in book form: Albert Bouckaert, *Belgique-Congo en avion* (Brussels: la Renaissance du Livre, 1935); and René Weverbergh, *18.000 km en avion: la liaison aérienne Belgique-Congo* (Paris; Charleroi: J. Dupuis, 1935).
33. Baud., "Pour la première fois, une journaliste belge survole le continent africain!" *La Meuse* April 6, 1935, 1.
34. *La Meuse* June 22, 1950, 1, 3.
35. *La Meuse* April 6, 7, 1935, 1.
36. *La Meuse* November 10, 1947, 3.
37. *La Meuse* June 22, 1950, 1.
38. *Les Souvenirs*, 33.
39. Marc Augis, *Des noms et du ciel. Petite contribution à l'histoire de l'aviation en Belgique*, with a preface by Victor Boin (Brussels: Icare, 1954).



The literary journalist Gabrielle Roy (1909–1983)  
© collection Roger Viollet, Belga Image.

## Towards a History of Reportage in French Canada: From the Beginning of the Twentieth Century to Gabrielle Roy

Guillaume Pinson  
Université Laval, Canada

**Abstract:** Quebec and French Canada do not have a historiography of reportage, which might appear surprising insofar as this journalistic genre has enjoyed much success in the Western press. But the literary history of Quebec nevertheless remembers the articles published by the major novelist, Gabrielle Roy. For six years, from 1939 to 1945—before her first novel was published in 1945, *Bonheur d'occasion* (The Tin Flute), which brought her immediate fame—Roy wrote reportages and short stories for several Montreal newspapers and periodicals, including *Le Canada*, *Le Jour*, *Le Bulletin des agriculteurs*, the *Revue modern*, and, in particular, the *Revue populaire*. Her reportages dealt with urban and social questions, the farming world, and French Canadian immigration, among other subjects. A quick survey of the francophone press of the first half of the century shows that reportage was well and truly being practiced, and that Roy falls within this tradition of the writing of reality. But we also discover, in this initial general approach to the genre in Quebec (one which remains to be carried out systematically), that subjects such as the life of ethnic communities, or the social conditions of francophone farmers and workers, constituted the subjects of choice for reporters from French Canada from the beginning of the century. Roy thus appropriates one of the inflections of the genre, which for her constituted a great schooling in writing, and which would amply nourish her first novel.

**Keywords:** history of reportage – French Canada – Quebec – Gabrielle Roy – literary history – Germaine Guèvremont – *Revue moderne* – *La Presse* – *Le Matin* – grand reportage

Quebec and French Canada do not have a historiography of reportage. As surprising as it may seem, in a country where literature was forged in the crucible of journalism, where the literary culture is wholly attached to the culture of the periodical, we know nothing, or nearly nothing, of the leading genre of news information in Quebec. If it is accepted that there came into being in a relatively synchronous manner, everywhere in the West, sometime in the heart of the nineteenth century, new methods of practicing journalism, of tackling the real, of making its effects felt and of immersing oneself in it, and that this global movement gave rise to a kind of golden age of written reportage in the first half of the following century, we nevertheless know nothing of the ways in which French Canada contributed to it. No historian or literary critic has ventured to produce a history of francophone reportage, of the writings and imaginaries convoked. If this latter genre remains unconsidered by North American francophone research, it is perhaps because it does not have—at first sight at least—as clear a link with literature as it was able to establish, or even continues to enjoy today, in France and in the United States. Moreover, it seems that in the contemporary world of news information in Quebec, “reportage” is synonymous with something more immediately and factually “realist,” and that the work of writing, a concern for style, or the construction of an original perspective on the world, are not the elements that characterize it. As such, it can still appear incongruous to include reportage in a general study of journalistic poetics.

Yet there remains, miraculously preserved, a small peak of earth emerging from this submerged continent, a corpus, that of the novelist Gabrielle Roy. Such a miracle nonetheless has an explanation: it is obvious that the recognition of the novelistic oeuvre has benefited the journalistic oeuvre, that a little light drawn here has enabled a slight illumination of that which was found there, and that once again it has been necessary to pass through the recognized work to return to the lesser known oeuvre. Roy, who published her first novel, *Bonheur d'occasion*, in 1945 (published as *The Tin Flute* in English), a novel that brought her immediate fame, thus entered into literature via journalism. Born in 1909 in Manitoba, in the center of Canada, the writer published her first series of articles at the end of the 1930s, notably four “Letters from London” in *La Liberté et le Patriote* (Freedom and the Patriot), a Franco-Manitoban newspaper.<sup>1</sup>

But on her return from an eighteen-month sojourn in England and France, in spring 1939, Roy did not go back to Manitoba and instead settled in Montreal. Without an income, she wished to establish herself in journalism, while also getting two articles published in Paris, in *Je suis partout* (I Am Everywhere).<sup>2</sup> She soon embarked on six years of journalism, which

would lead her to the threshold of *Bonheur d'occasion*, a major social novel on working-class Montreal in which her experience with urban reportage would be decisive.

Studying Roy's reportage is an invitation to take an open and decompartmentalized look at her oeuvre, at least at that of her beginnings, because the novelist practiced journalism for only six years, 1939–1945, before abandoning it in favor of the novel. But this gaze toward the future, to see in journalism the impetus behind the novel, can also be reversed. Is not *Gabrielle Roy, journalist*, in fact a kind of terminal point for another history, a history yet to be written, this blank page of the literary history of French Canada, and to which I alluded at the beginning, that of the genre of reportage? How are we to understand this young woman, hesitating between theater, literature, and teaching, at the threshold of the 1940s, finding her path by passing through journalism? And not just any journalism—not the type of journalism that media culture had for a long time generally entrusted to women—but indeed this field of reportage, the journalism of exploration, of travel? And must we thus concur with Roy's biographer, François Ricard, who seems to make of this journalism a unique case in Quebec?

The journalism practiced by Gabrielle Roy stands apart from . . . that practiced by the majority of her male colleagues. Rare are they among them, the genuine reporters who venture out far from their editing desks, who are one step ahead of people and things and give themselves up, as it were, to the disorder and the surprises of the world. Gabrielle Roy, in this respect, represents a unique case, she who works in the “American style,” one might say, a little like an Ernest Hemingway did formerly, or as a Steinbeck or a Dos Passos were doing more or less during the same era as hers.<sup>3</sup>

We are thus once again up against this nonexistence of reportage in Quebec, this blind task that sketches in counter-relief a context in which the practice of Roy is singularly incongruous.

### You Will Be a Journalist

Several clues lead one to believe that this observation only imperfectly traces the contours of the real situation in which Roy found herself. I would first of all like to start by going to look at the fiction—not that of the author of *Bonheur d'occasion*, but in that of one of her predecessors, Germaine Guèvremont—for some clues about a more complex situation, a little more confused and richer than is generally thought. Guèvremont wrote a novel, which is an exact contemporary of Gabrielle Roy's beginnings in reportage, published in the monthly *Paysana* in 1939 and 1940. This novel is called *Tu seras journaliste* (*You Will Be a Journalist*), and introduces a kind of double of

Guèvremont, Caroline, a young woman who is just starting out in journalism as the correspondent of a Montreal newspaper, in a small town which we surmise is Sorel, where the author in fact lived. In the second chapter, published in May 1939, the narrator confides her fascination for the French *grand reportage*, which could serve as a model for a young female writer, as well as its difficulties: “When she read the great reports of the French journalists, she had the certitude that she could reach their level. Grappling with the profession, she was less sure of it. She was moving towards journalism with the ardor of a neophyte, ready to give it her best. She would make of it a calling.”<sup>4</sup>

It seems almost certain that French reportage was read and admired in Quebec, but one would need to retrace with more clarity the circulation, on the other side of the ocean, of the collections of major reportages published in Paris. As for the effective practice of the genre by journalists in Montreal and Quebec, where the principal francophone newspapers were based, the material needs to be sifted through, but a quick survey rapidly reveals that the situation must have been more nuanced than Roy’s biographer first thought.

If reportage is relatively rare in French Canada—and that observation would need to be backed up—it is by no means nonexistent. Little is known about the real practices of these field journalists, and Jean de Bonville’s major survey of the Quebec press, 1884–1914, has no equivalent for the following years.<sup>5</sup> The field is even more sparse when one looks to carry out research into journalistic poetics, beyond book reviewing and column writing, which are better covered by literary history. But a few signposts demonstrate that since the beginning of the century, major reportage was indeed being produced in the daily press as much as in certain periodicals. I have elsewhere shown the importance assumed by a genuine international spectacle, the 1901 race around the world carried out by a dozen or so journalists—a stunt in which they competed to beat the fictional record Jules Verne’s character Phileas Fogg achieves in the 1873 adventure novel, *Around the World in 80 Days*. Two correspondents from *La Presse*, Lorenzo Prince and Auguste Marion, picked up the challenge issued by the Parisian Gaston Stiegler of the newspaper *Le Matin*.<sup>6</sup> Other corpuses must be explored and in certain cases reread with the new analytical methods stemming from the literary history of the press, for example those of Jules Fournier or Jean-Charles Harvey in the 1910s and 1920s, the latter being the single reporter figure fleetingly cited by the collective *La Vie littéraire* in Quebec.<sup>7</sup> Ongoing surveys of the material for the 1870–1939 period will doubtless confirm the French Canadian appropriation of a globalized journalistic genre.<sup>8</sup>

More importantly, in abandoning—at least momentarily—the monographic approach centered on the major literary figures, and in carrying

out more exhaustive surveys of the material, new discoveries will not fail to emerge. In the 1930s, for example, reportage can regularly be found in periodicals such as *Revue moderne* (Roy contributed several stories to this publication between 1939 and 1942; I will return to them later.) The *Revue moderne*, founded in 1919 by Madeleine (Anne-Marie Gleason), published fiction, criticism, international news, and subjects of interest for women—in short, a finely crafted magazine, amply illustrated. There were numerous short, autonomous reportages, sometimes called “Documentaries,” which do not go beyond one installment. The subjects, as the genre demanded, were varied: presentations of low-paid jobs and occasionally of social destitution,<sup>9</sup> explorations of Quebec regions,<sup>10</sup> tourist sites,<sup>11</sup> particular urban areas (for instance, a series was published on “Cosmopolitan Montreal” in 1937, which announced Roy’s debut in reportage, to which I shall also return),<sup>12</sup> following public figures on holiday or abroad,<sup>13</sup> cultural news,<sup>14</sup> and the life of institutions.<sup>15</sup> The expression “grand reportage,” rarer than the term “reportage,” was convoked for a series of three long articles of nineteen pages, entitled “Au cœur de l’Islam” (“At the Heart of Islam”),<sup>16</sup> immersing the reader in the reality of Mecca and its region. Also, in 1936, under the banner “Exclusive report,” was Hollywood reportage.<sup>17</sup>

In such a corpus, certain items belong to the classics of the genre: the articles on Hollywood and Mecca, social and urban investigations, or going down a mine. One of the major topics of reportage, we find a good example of mining coverage in the October 1932 installment entitled, “Au fond de la mine d’Eustis-Capelton. À quinze minutes de Sherbrooke” (At the Bottom of the Eustis-Capelton Mine: Fifteen Minutes Away from Sherbrooke). Signed by an “attorney,” Léonidas Bachand, this article in the *Revue moderne* activates all the poetic aspects of the reportage genre: descending into a mine is one of the major matrixes of reportage, whose imaginary immerses itself in the France of the nineteenth century. Since the 1860s, in fact, journalists often descended down mineshafts, which enabled two major motifs of reportage to be brought together, the exploration of working-class life (a world readers would not often be familiar with), as well as the representation of the body of the reporter, as a form of “sensualist” testimony to the accuracy of the facts reported.<sup>18</sup> Evoking Dante’s descent into Hell, the reporters placed themselves in danger for the benefit of their readers, and would subsequently metaphorically call upon the imaginary of this “descent,” the exploration of the margins of society and its “lowest depths.”<sup>19</sup> In a reportage he produced in Argentina, Albert Londres wrote: “I wanted to descend into the pits where society gets rid of that which threatens it and that which it cannot feed off.”<sup>20</sup> This imagery is thus skillfully made use of in its turn by the amateur reporter

of the *Revue moderne*, convoking the lot: danger, the interminable descent into the pits, the darkness of the mine galleries, the nether regions. He writes, concerning the excavating machines, that they “make a sound from hell—I tell you that we are very close to it, believe me. . . .”<sup>21</sup>

### Bearing Witness to Advances Across the Continent

Other Canadian reportages are translations or adaptations of a globalized genre. Particularly characteristic of the local practice of reportage are concerns about the exploration of distant regions, the north of Quebec and colonization, bearing witness to the advances made by Canadians into the heart of a continent that had not yet been completely cleared, and everything falling within the economic reality of these same populations. I find the origins of these reportages at the beginning of the twentieth century, when French Canadian workers were participating in industrial enterprises in the eastern United States, and the settlers were advancing towards central and western Canada. This constituted a source of curiosity for Quebec newspapers, anxious to follow the evolution of the living conditions and development of Canadian francophone populations. One journalist who followed this reportage practice was Jules Fournier (1884–1918), who worked at *La Presse* in 1903, and then at *Canada* from 1904 to 1908, and on behalf of which he produced a series on the francophone peoples of New England and their living conditions. Entitled “Chez les Franco-américains” (“With the Franco-Americans”), the reportage was published in eighteen articles from October 30, 1905 to January 18, 1906. Another example is the work of Gilbert Larue, a young journalist who joined *La Presse* in 1905, and who from June 1910 was sent to report on the francophone communities of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta. The major reportage that resulted from this voyage, “Nos francophones dans l’Ouest Canadien” (“Our Francophones in Western Canada”), is a model of the genre, which invites us to return now to the corpus of Roy. We will be able to better understand to what extent the major novelist-journalist took her place in a media tradition that largely preceded her.

To begin, let us recall that it was with *Jour* (Day) that she made her debut as a regular contributor, the weekly run by Jean-Charles Harvey, author of *Les demi-civilisés* (The Half-civilized), a 1934 novel about journalism that was important in Quebec. In *Jour* she published articles for the woman’s page, some thirty or so in total, in which she drew on her memories of travel in particular. Still in 1939, she published stories in the *Revue moderne*, where she made the acquaintance of its literary director, Henri Girard, the beginning of a liaison that would last several years.<sup>22</sup> Girard was a well-known figure

in the Montreal literary and media world, and he would guide Roy, open certain doors for her, notably those of the *Bulletin des agriculteurs* (Farmers’ Bulletin), in which Roy would publish the majority of her reportages. The *Bulletin*, launched in 1918, was a monthly that enjoyed enormous success in the 1940s, with a circulation of around 150,000 copies in 1948.<sup>23</sup> Intended for rural Quebec but devised in Montreal, the *Bulletin* offered varied content. Apart from agricultural questions, widely covered, there were columns, short stories, novels published in installments, and the news—Europe at war was obviously the center of attention when Roy was contributing to the *Bulletin*. In the last lines of her autobiography, which deals with her years of training, entitled *La détresse et l’enchantement* (Suffering and Enchantment), the novelist remembers the school of reportage, which would lead to the writing of *Bonheur d’occasion*, and what she would soon owe to the *Bulletin des agriculteurs*, “which would,” she writes, “provide me with the opportunity to handle subjects drawing me closer to facts, to reality, to the close observation of things.”<sup>24</sup> In 1941, Roy’s reportage on Montreal’s Saint-Henri neighborhood working class would constitute the backdrop to her first novel, in which she makes use of the imaginaries of urban reporting. She writes again of this neighborhood in *La détresse et l’enchantement*. After her four reportages were published under the title, “Tout-Montréal”<sup>25</sup> (“All Montreal”), she returned to it “to listen, to observe,” in order to put together the “subject matter of a novel.”<sup>26</sup> In Saint-Henri she discovered, as she writes this time in her reportage, “a nation of termites [that] lives at the heart of the great industrial inferno,” “Its horizon is sullied, restricted on all sides.”<sup>27</sup> Roy observed the existence of “thongs of female workers in overalls” who at day’s end threw themselves into “the rush for amusements,”<sup>28</sup> as would soon Florentine Lacasse, the heroine of *Bonheur d’occasion*. Between the work of journalist and novelist, the border was slender, and the writer-journalist had in a short period of time fully experienced the city, immersed herself in the crowd, and listened to and observed the life of a working-class neighborhood situated in the south of the island of Montreal.

### Addressing Colonial Realities

How are we not to see a kinship in the reportages of the novelist and these investigations, which, since the beginning of the century, have addressed the francophone and colonial realities of the North American continent? For the *Bulletin des agriculteurs*, Roy produced several reportages about the far-off regions of Quebec. For instance, she followed several families who were leaving Îles-de-la-Madeleine, in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, to participate in the clearing of Abitibi for the construction of a paper mill at

Iroquois Falls. Another series of reportages looked at the “Peoples of Canada,” in which Roy explored the living conditions of several immigrant communities in western Canada. She also published reportages on the West, both Canadian and American, for the daily *Le Canada*.<sup>29</sup> The route she followed, which led her from Saint-Boniface, the small Manitoban francophone town of her childhood, as far as the borders of Alaska, echoes Gilbert Larue’s reportage, in particular the interest the journalist takes in the concrete realities of francophone settlers. But Roy is more original than her predecessor, thanks to her immersion in the various ethnic groups that crossed her path. She did not assign any specific mission to francophone settlers, if not that of participating with the other “minorities” (her term<sup>30</sup>) at the heart of Canada in the sublime movement of foundation that so fascinated her.<sup>31</sup>

Through the impressionistic aspect of her reportages, through the sensitivity she deploys, and through her willingness to immerse herself in the real while being concerned with the effects of literature, and despite the relative brevity of her practice, Roy is certain to be aligned closely with the vast movement of “writer-journalists,” well studied by Myriam Boucharenc in the French case.<sup>32</sup> The genre is complex and does not take shape without tensions and hybridizations among factual writing, the desire being to create a body of work within a process of legitimization. It is well known that literary reportage was in vogue far beyond the borders of France, drawing from its origins in the United States and spreading almost everywhere in the West,<sup>33</sup> including Belgium, for example.<sup>34</sup> Quebec was doubtless no exception. In the final analysis, Roy’s reportage was both the resumption by the future novelist of a journalistic genre that had a long tradition in Western newspapers, and a positioning in a typically Canadian filiation, that of an attentiveness to the continent’s francophone communities with a view to accompanying and understanding their dispersion over a vast territory.

*Guillaume Pinson is a Professor at the Université de Laval, Canada. He is the Dean of the Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines, where he teaches French literature, from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, as well as the history of the press in the nineteenth century. His research interests are nineteenth-century media culture, and its impact on literature and social discourse. His research consists in analyzing the first great information narrative that developed between 1830 and the Great War. He is currently studying the making of a francophone media space in the nineteenth century, based on interactions between Europe and America. He is also developing a project on Jules Verne in Canada. He has published several books, including La Culture médiatique francophone, Europe-Amérique du Nord 1760-1930 (2016), and L’Imaginaire médiatique: Histoire et fiction du journal au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle (2013).*




---

### Notes

1. See the complete bibliography in François Ricard, *Gabrielle Roy, une vie*. Collection Compact (Montreal: Boréal, 2000), 596ff.
2. “Les Derniers nomades,” *Je suis partout*, October 21, 1938; and “Noëls canadiens-français,” *Je suis partout*, December 30, 1938. There is a third Roy article, “Comment nous sommes restés français au Manitoba,” *Je suis partout*, August 18, 1939.
3. Ricard, *Gabrielle Roy*, 227.
4. Germaine Guèvremont, *Tu seras journaliste et autres œuvres sur le journalisme*. Collection Les écrits de Germaine Guèvremont (Montreal: Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 2013), 79.
5. Jean de Bonville, *La Presse québécoise de 1884 à 1914. Genèse d’un média de masse* (Quebec: Presses de l’Université Laval, 1988).
6. See the pages which I devote to this event in Guillaume Pinson, *La Culture médiatique francophone en Europe et en Amérique du Nord, de 1760 à la veille de la Seconde Guerre mondiale*. Collection Cultures québécoises (Quebec, Presses de l’Université Laval, 2016), 292–304.
7. Denis Saint-Jacques and Lucie Robert, *La Vie littéraire au Québec*, vol. 6, 1919–1933 (Quebec, Presses de l’Université Laval, 2010), 89.
8. Working under joint supervision, Charlotte Biron (Université Laval and Université de Montpellier) is currently writing a doctoral thesis on literary reportage in Quebec, from Arthur Buies to Gabrielle Roy.
9. Léonidas Bachland, “Au fond de la mine d’Eustis-Capleton,” *Revue mod-*



erne, October 1932, 6, 7, 31; “Une visite au pénitencier de Saint-Vincent-de-Paul,” *Revue moderne*, May 1936, 8, 9, 55; “Guerre à la faim! Ou les cent masques de la misère,” *Revue moderne*, April 1937, 14, 15, 29.

10. Anne de Mishaegen, “Une chasse au caribou,” *Revue moderne*, March 1933, 5; Robert Rumilly, “Au cœur de la Mauricie. Reportage,” *Revue moderne*, September 1936, 9, 10, 53; *Revue moderne*, October 1936, 6, 7; and *Revue moderne*, November 1936, 21, 23, 24, 28; Damase Potvin, “Au pays des montagnes, des lacs et des fjords,” *Revue moderne*, June 1937, 12–13, 18; E. Juchereau-Duchesnay, “L’Île-aux-Grues,” *Revue moderne*, January 1938, 6–7.

11. Auguste Galibois, “Tourisme dans le parc national des Laurentides,” *Revue moderne*, April 1936, 13, 26; Paul Renaud, “Du neuf en pays neuf. Reportage” (About a Hotel in Estérel, to the North of Montreal), *Revue moderne*, December 1937, 9–11, 26, 57.

12. Fernand Lacroix, “Rendez-vous chinois dans Montréal cosmopolite,” *Revue moderne*, March 1937, 5–6, 29; Fernand Lacroix, “Montréal cosmopolitique: le quartier juif,” *Revue moderne*, April 1937, 16–17, 28; see also Paul Renaud, “Souffles de mer” (On the Port of Montreal), *Revue moderne*, July 1937, 10–11, 17, as well as Marcelle Lepage, “Le jardin botanique de Montréal. Reportage,” *Revue moderne*, October 1938, 4–5.

13. Marise Achpise, “Nos souverains à Paris,” *Revue moderne*, September 1938, 6–7.

14. Jean Barois, “Les Immortels. Reportage sur l’Académie française,” *Revue moderne*, September 1938, 4–5, 42.

15. Jean Barois, “Le collège Stanislas. Reportage,” *Revue moderne*, November 1938, 4–5.

16. Jean Barois, “Au cœur de l’Islam. Grand reportage,” *Revue moderne*, September 1937, 4–7, 18–20, 26, 28; *Revue moderne*, October 1937, 6–7, 16, 18, 19, 24; and *Revue moderne*, November 1937, 6, 7, 38, 40.

17. Louise G.-Gilbert, “Le petit monde des artistes à Hollywood,” *Revue moderne*, June 1936, 9; and “Le petit monde des artistes à Hollywood. Reportage exclusif,” *Revue moderne*, July 1936, 7, 31.

18. See Marie-Ève Thérénty, “Dante reporter. La création d’un paradigme journalistique,” *Autour de Vallès*, no. 38 (2008): 57–72.

19. Dominique Kalifa, *Les Bas-fonds. Histoire d’un imaginaire*. Collection L’univers historique (Paris: Seuil, 2013).

20. Quoted by *ibid.*, 67.

21. Albert Londres, *Le Chemin de Buenos Aires (La Traite des blanches)*, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Arléa, 2007), 469, quoted by Thérénty, “Dante reporter,” 67.

22. See Ricard, *Gabrielle Roy*, 207.

23. *Ibid.*, 213.

24. Gabrielle Roy, *La Détresse et l’enchantement* (Montreal: Boréal, 1984), 505.

25. Gabrielle Roy, “Tout-Montréal,” *Bulletin des agriculteurs*, June, July, August, September 1941.

26. Roy, *La Détresse et l’enchantement*, 503.

27. Gabrielle Roy, “Du port au banquet,” *Bulletin* (August 1941), quoted in the series *Heureux les nomades et autres reportages 1940–1945*, eds. Antoine Boisclair and François Ricard, with the collaboration of Jane Everett and Sophie Marcotte, Collection Gabrielle Roy (Montreal: Boréal, 2007), 69.

28. *Ibid.*, 70.

29. On the complete reportages and Roy’s journalistic period, see Ricard, *Gabrielle Roy*, chapter 6, and the exhaustive bibliography at the end of the book.

30. Gabrielle Roy, “Le plus étonnant: les Huttérites,” *Bulletin des agriculteurs*, November 1942, 32, quoted by Ricard, *Gabrielle Roy*, 232; there is “a place for all the minorities,” she writes.

31. See Ricard, *Gabrielle Roy*, 233–234.

32. Myriam Boucharenc, *L’Écrivain-reporter au cœur des années trente* (Lille: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2004).

33. See Isabelle Meuret, “Le Journalisme littéraire à l’aube du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle: regards croisés entre mondes anglophone et francophone,” in “Le littéraire en régime journalistique,” eds. Paul Aron and Vanessa Gemis, special issue, *Contextes*, no. 11 (2012), <https://contextes.revues.org/5376>.

34. See Paul Aron ed., “Les Écrivains-journalistes,” special issue, *Textyles. Revue des lettres belges de langue française*, no. 39 (2010).



Photo by Pierre Vals. Françoise Giroud, 1946 (Opale/Leemage/Belga Image).

## “An Hour of Our Life in the Mirror of My Mood”: Innovations and Legacies of French Literary Journalism in the Work of Françoise Giroud

Marie-Ève Thérénty  
 Université Paul-Valéry – Montpellier III, France

**Abstract:** Françoise Giroud (1916–2003) was the joint founder, with Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, of *L'Express*. She was the managing editor until 1974 and gained political recognition when she became the secretary of state for women's affairs, 1974–1976. This article revisits Giroud's work, at a time when French journalism seemed particularly moribund from a literary point of view. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the purge of the press and the trauma of the Holocaust contributed to new and increasingly widespread protocols of journalistic writing in France, founded on a search for objectivity and neutrality. Giroud clearly stated that journalistic writing differs from literature: “Journalism is a technique; it is not an art, nor a pale copy of literature, as is sometimes believed.” But her attitude is more ambiguous than one might think, as she wrote novels, many biographies, published a whole series of diaries, and several collections of her articles. Yet in the preface to *Portraits sans retouches* (Portraits without Revisions, 2001), she does not shy away from stating, slightly paradoxically, the following: “The articles are written quickly to be read quickly and forgotten quickly.” In fact, Giroud's articles merit a literary evaluation because they should be understood in the context of the long heritage of French literary journalism. I will thus go back to the schools of Giroud, which shaped her practice of literary journalism, before outlining some of its principles. Within the framework of this article, I will focus in particular on one of the techniques of subjectification, which I call journalistic enallage.

**Keywords:** Françoise Giroud – French literary journalism – *L'Express* – *Portraits sans retouches* – Lazareff newspapers – French cinema – French women's journalism – female journalistic tradition – enallage – *Amazones de la République*

Founded in 1953, the weekly *L'Express* played an active role in the campaign against torture in Algeria. By 1964, it also became the first French press media outlet to adopt the news magazine format. For these reasons, *L'Express* has attracted much critical attention, more by historians and political analysts<sup>1</sup> than by literary scholars, who have shown little interest, with the notable exception of François Mauriac's "notepad."<sup>2</sup>

Françoise Giroud (1916–2003) was the joint founder of the paper, along with Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber. She was the managing editor until 1974 and gained political recognition<sup>3</sup> when she became the secretary of state for women's affairs between July 1974 and August 1976.

This article wishes to revisit this wordsmith, who enjoyed her heyday in a period when French journalism seemed particularly moribund from a literary point of view. In fact, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the purge of the press and the trauma of the Holocaust contributed to new and increasingly widespread protocols of journalistic writing in France, founded on a search for objectivity and neutrality. Giroud is among those who clearly stated that journalistic writing differs from literature: "Journalism is a technique; it is not an art, nor a pale copy of literature, as is sometimes believed."<sup>4</sup>

Yet Giroud's attitude is more ambiguous than one might suppose in that she wrote novels, many biographies (of Alma Mahler, Cosima Wagner, Jenny Marx, and others), published a series of diaries, and above all published several collections of her articles.<sup>5</sup> The gesture of collecting in particular is often an attempt to rescue a journalistic oeuvre from oblivion, to have the writer emerge from the carapace of the journalist. Yet in the preface to *Portraits sans retouches* (Portraits without Revisions), she does not shy away from stating, slightly paradoxically, the following: "The articles are written quickly to be read quickly and forgotten quickly."<sup>6</sup> Even more clearly, in the collection of her editorials for *L'Express*, she explains:

Written quickly in order to be read quickly, it may be that these articles suffer much from being reread, that they repeat themselves or contradict themselves or also that, removed from the event, they have withered. I do not know.

I publish them unaltered, without subtracting anything from them out of opportunity or vanity, knowing the risks I am taking with a deferred reading of that which was a reflection of a moment, of a day, of an hour of our life in the mirror of my mood. Because of a person who wants to grab hold of a handful of water, we say that he is mad.<sup>7</sup>

I would here like to be this mad person who tries to grab hold of a handful of water. In fact, it seems to me that Giroud's articles merit a literary evaluation because they should be understood in the context of the long heritage

of French literary journalism.<sup>8</sup> I will thus go back to the schools of Giroud, which shaped her practice of literary journalism, before outlining some principles. Within the framework of this article, I will focus in particular on one of the techniques of subjectification,<sup>9</sup> which I will call journalistic enallage.

### The Literary Schools of Françoise Giroud

Giroud, "thrown into life with no other luggage than heterogeneous reading and a degree attesting to the fact that she could take down, in shorthand, 130 words per minute,"<sup>10</sup> would train in three complementary schools: that of cinema scriptwriting; that of the Lazareff newspapers, which in the post–Second World War period constituted one of the forms of hybridization between the press and literature characteristic of France since the nineteenth century; and lastly, that of the tradition of women's journalism, which, without ever disowning it, she would considerably develop.

In the interwar period, Giroud had been the first script-girl of French cinema. She wrote more than twenty film scripts and contributed to the writing of more than sixty. This activity gave her skills in composing dialogue, manifest in her articles. Some of them are genuine sketches caught in passing. Her repertoire swings between the writing of a complete sketch and that of a simple caustic response. She can stage anonymous characters just as she can have celebrities soliloquize. Above all, scriptwriting taught her that an article is constructed like a story. Her articles are scripted, "taut" until the final full stop. As she recalled:

Writing apart, which can be neither explained nor taught, but comes from a mysterious part of the brain, what I had benefited from was an apprenticeship in scriptwriting at a time when the cinema told stories. Rhythm, no lengthy passages, nor digressions, a taut narration in which everything must drive the action forward, on a conveyor belt: it is that which I had in a way incorporated. When I had understood that, I was able to convey this piece of knowledge, in addition to certain basic principles concerning the news and which everyone knows (which is not to say that they are respected).<sup>11</sup>

Her second schooling was that of the Lazareff newspapers. In the interwar period, *Paris-Soir* was the newspaper which, under the guidance of Jean Prouvost and Pierre Lazareff, had maintained the nineteenth-century tradition of writing by established authors (Jean Cocteau, Joseph Kessel, Saint-Exupéry, Blaise Cendrars, Colette and others submitted articles to this newspaper) and which pushed the school of reportage the furthest. And during the occupation, Giroud contributed to *Paris-Soir*, the daily that had taken refuge in Lyons. When Lazareff exiled himself to the United States, which left Hervé Mille to manage the newspaper, Giroud noted:

I had an excuse to come and see him: two stories written on the off chance. The daily newspapers were publishing stories every day at that time. He glanced over what I had brought him and got me to talk.

When he discovered that I had knowledge of what was called Parisian life, in other words essentially the world of entertainment and its activities, he said to me, “You could maybe write some pieces on the subject. . . . We’ll see. Come back tomorrow. I am keeping this story.”

The next day something incredible happened. He had me sit down opposite him—he worked on a plank perched on some trestles—and said to me: “You will remain there. . . . There is no desk. Look, I need three pages on. . . .” I have forgotten what. I remember only that he snatched each page from me when it was scarcely finished, without letting me reread it.<sup>12</sup>

For several months, seated on a chair opposite one of the greatest professionals of French journalism, Giroud underwent a kind of practical training program. She learnt how to write headlines, to copy edit, and to balance out columns. Following Liberation, Giroud co-managed, with Hélène Lazareff, the wife of Pierre, *Elle*, a woman’s magazine of a new genre. There, Giroud considerably modernized the writing by highlighting concrete questions concerning women: female sexuality and pleasure, contraception, celibacy, and material independence. She herself also regularly published fiction, stories, and serialized novels to supply the magazine. She wrote reportages and launched major inquiries combined with psychological tests. But she was genuinely acknowledged as a major writer when she published, in *France-Dimanche*, another Pierre Lazareff weekly, a series of audacious portraits of the Paris glitterati, a series in which she made full use of her address book—filled thanks to her contacts in the cinema world—to paint a few spirited, indiscreet portraits of the era’s major stars.

Giroud also inherited the rich tradition of French women’s journalism. Female journalists had in fact invented a whole arsenal of attitudes, forms of writing, and practices designed to circumvent the gendered constraints, which, since the nineteenth century in France, had denied them access to certain positions and discourses within newspapers as a whole. In particular, the daily newspaper was a work environment that had integrated the model of gendered public space, one that took shape at the end of the eighteenth century based on treatises written by physiologists and doctors.<sup>13</sup> In effect, during this period a gendered model of society, organized according to two hierarchized and complementary spheres, spread. The “theory of two spheres” pays considerable attention to physiological differences, which are no longer purely envisaged in terms of bodily functions, but in terms of essences,

which, in addition, are said to determine social destinies. Woman was defined through the family and the interior, which were declared to be her specific domains, unlike Man, whose nature destined him to life in the exterior. A new semantics, which also divided the field of journalism, established itself to designate male and female characteristics by pairs of opposites, hierarchized for male advantage: independent/dependent; rational/emotional; fit for public activity/fit for domestic activity.

The gendering of journalistic genres and the ease of access to such, or such a form of writing within the framework of a mixed periodical space, was explained by this theoretical view of the sexes. Political and diplomatic columns were addressed to men, while sections of the newspaper that concerned the house, private life, and society life were intended for women. For a long time, political columns in generalist periodicals were practically inaccessible territory for women, who early on had to invent strategies in order to discuss politics at all. Let us not forget that to their subaltern status within society as defined by the Napoleonic Code, and to their illegitimacy in certain public places such as meetings, is added a discrimination that fundamentally excludes their journalistic activity from being treated in the same way as that of men: up until 1944, women had neither the right to vote, nor the right to be elected to important positions in this public sphere on which newspapers were reporting. On this basis, how can it even be imagined that they could give an account of the real in the same manner as the powerful and the established? True enough, when Giroud embarked on her journalistic career, the right to vote had been granted to women, and she did not suffer from the same flagrant lack of legitimacy as the female journalists who preceded her. However, she would often relate the difficulties she experienced in writing her first political editorial in *L’Express* in 1957, when journalist and government critic Servan-Schreiber was called up to serve in the army in Algeria. Giroud uses a perfectly eloquent comparison to describe the attitudes the majority of women have towards political expertise: “I nevertheless had a flaw concerning politics. With it I cultivated the relation one has with a foreign language when one understands it and when one decides not to speak it.”<sup>14</sup>

Which female journalistic traditions did Giroud inherit? A practice of the spiritual column and the epigram (“While at the age of 25, one ‘wants it,’ at the age of 45 one has it. But one no longer knows what one wants”<sup>15</sup>), which she borrows from a legacy of women columnists which starts with Delphine de Girardin and subsequently nourished by Gyp, Colette, and Odette Pannetier; an overhanging position as a political Cassandra, which Giroud adopted from major writers such as George Sand and Marie d’Agoult, and which she would use, for example, in 1968, when she prophesized a major

catastrophe on several occasions; the practice of immersion journalism, a tradition from which she draws that begins at the Frondeuses, from Séverine to Maryse Choisy. Thus, in 1952, during a reportage in the United States on the occasion of the presidential election, she got herself hired as a saleswoman in a major New York boutique, Lord & Taylor, to better report on American society. Yet all these writing practices, which suppose a strong staging of the self and a little fictionalization, come under literary codes as much as those of journalism. There was, moreover, not a female journalist before 1940 who did not also have a novelistic, theatrical, or poetic body of work to her credit. To be a woman of the press before the war was to be a woman of letters. Can we extend this conclusion to Giroud?

### Journalistic Enallage

Her articles, even the driest and the most technical, effectively borrow from the literary matrix. In an essay published several years ago,<sup>16</sup> I had suggested defining this matrix around four principles, which could be mobilized by the journalist: fictionalization, ironization, conversational writing, and personal writing. Yet Giroud's great strength lies in her ability not only to mobilize these four principles but also to hybridize them. She is reputed for her acidic and corrosive pen, as well as her witty remarks, but she also does not hesitate to invent short stories with characters which are too typical to be true, to mount dramatic sketches<sup>17</sup> to illustrate her subjects, and above all to stage herself in a more or less veiled manner. Several biographies,<sup>18</sup> autobiographical works,<sup>19</sup> and confidences on the part of those close to her<sup>20</sup> have recently lifted the veil on the private life of the public figure that was Giroud. Yet it is disturbing to reread these articles when one has had access to this confidential information because this new reading reveals, even behind technocratic articles, initially unsuspected confessions and disclosures of privacy. The articles can yield various readings, and behind the experienced journalist, behind the writer herself, there also emerges a woman at her most private. And this layering of meaning fully justifies us in talking of the literary journalism of Giroud.

One of the most effective stylistic techniques she uses in this context seems to me to be journalistic enallage, in this case a technique that consists of substituting a personal pronoun for another more expected one. The most frequent enallage consists of substituting "I" for "one":

Every day for the past twenty-five years Madeleine Renaud has proven that she is, quite simply, a great actress. But that the practice of her art, the large fees and the big posters have not succeeded in leaving a mark on her is an inexplicable mystery. She is the opposite of the "screen legend"; she is someone *with whom one would like to exchange the addresses of dressmakers,*

*to talk about the cost of living, and the worries one's children cause; she is, by a miracle, someone who also knows how to listen.*<sup>21</sup>

The enallage, the shift to "one," is more than an economical manner of maintaining a sense of intimate confidence (look, confides the article, how close I, Françoise Giroud, am with Madeleine Renaud), all the while introducing dialogue (not only between the journalist and the female reader, but between the female reader and the star), fiction (the fiction, oh so gratifying for the female reader of *France-Dimanche*, of her closeness to Madeleine Renaud), and irony (for how can one also imagine that this supposition is not to be read with a pinch of salt?). An enallage can go as far as having erotic properties and involving the reader or rather the female reader in the fantasy of a smoldering liaison with Clark Gable: "Having seen him up close, being tempted to see him from even closer still is not ruled out."<sup>22</sup> Or in the idea of flirting with Erich von Stroheim:

He will get to his feet twenty times to light your cigarette, will welcome you with the most exquisite politeness in the splendid property he bought five years ago in the vicinity of Paris, he will not accept you bending down to pick up a glove, and will say to you in his supple and husky English:

I know you . . . Have I tried to sleep with you? I have no memory because I drink like a fish.<sup>23</sup>

Here the enallage is even more erotic because Giroud has purely and simply used a "you" instead of an "I," which enables the lucky female reader to take the place of the female interviewer. She will use the same, almost erotic complicity with certain politicians in her editorials for *L'Express*, giving the reader, thanks to enallage, the feeling of having been taken into the confidence of the Fifth Republic. Moreover, at *L'Express* she trained together with Michèle Cotta and Catherine Nay, women journalists who knew how to use their physique and their allure as a political asset. A recent book has even nicknamed them *Les Amazones de la république* (Amazons of the Republic).<sup>24</sup>

In fact, throughout her life, in her editorials as much as in her portraits, Françoise Giroud made repeated use of this curious personal blurring, which at once authorizes the "one" or the "us," or the "you" instead of the "I," and thus universalizes personal positions or opinions. But also in saying "I" in place of "one" or "us," and thus enlisting, subjectivizing, or personalizing journalistic discourse, she turns herself into the personal witness-ambassador of the nation. Obituaries, as shown by those she wrote for François Mauriac, Coco Chanel, or Marilyn Monroe, are often the opportunity to produce a self-portrait in disguise (here a "he" or "she" is in place of an "I"). It is thus in the portrait of Mauriac that she provided a poetic key that seems to be the

one to her oeuvre: "He had discovered the best way of speaking of others: through oneself, and everything is in the prism."<sup>25</sup>

The practice of blurring also enables her to offer sentences with the value of universal maxims but also doubtless personal confidences: "Once one loses one's parents and the veil which separates us from death tears, one unconsciously takes the place of the deceased and starts to resemble them."<sup>26</sup>

We could enumerate Giroud's other stylistic techniques, but the enallage is sufficient to render still readable and fascinating but often technical editorials that one might have thought outdated. It is indeed a question of showing "an hour of our life in the mirror of my mood," but she could have equally written "an hour of my life in the mirror of our mood," or "an hour of your life in the mirror of my mood." The possibilities are, if not endless, then at least sufficiently diversified to create a completely fascinating system of reflections. Françoise Giroud's *L'Express* is the hall of mirrors of the press article.

The example of enallage also enables us to inscribe Giroud within a genealogy of spiritual and literary journalism such as has been historically practiced by women journalists. I will finish by quoting two exhilarating journalistic phrases, created on the same syntactical template: "When one wants to dry out a marsh, one does not let the frogs vote."<sup>27</sup> And, "When one drives with a wheel loose, one does not know when one will kill oneself."<sup>28</sup> The former was written by a journalist from the nineteenth century, Delphine de Girardin, the inventor of the genre of the Parisian chronicle in 1847, the latter by Giroud. The superimposition of these two quotations manifests a certain similarity of writing, in the causticity and irony whose gendered foundations demonstrate the existence in France of a female literary journalism, doubtless stimulated by the specific constraints to which women journalists were subject.<sup>29</sup>

Marie-Ève Thérenty is a Professor of French literature and the director of the center of research RIRRA 21 at the University Paul Valéry, Montpellier 3, France. Her research interests are the interactions between journalism and literature, in poetry and cultural history. She has written and edited a number of books on literary journalism, including *Mosaïques: être écrivain entre presse et roman* (Champion, 2004), *La Littérature au quotidien: Poétiques journalistiques au XIXe siècle* (Seuil, 2007), *Balzac journaliste* (Garnier-Flammarion, 2014). She has also co-edited *La Civilisation du journal, a cultural and literary history of the French press in the nineteenth century* (2012). With Guillaume Pinson, she is also editing *medias19.org*, a website dedicated to the study of nineteenth century literary journalism. She is currently writing a study of women literary journalists since the nineteenth century.




---

### Notes

1. See Françoise Roth and Serge Siritzky, *Le Roman de L'Express* (Paris: Marcel Jullian, 1979).
2. See Philippe Baudorre, ed., *François Mauriac, un écrivain journaliste* (Paris: Minard, 2003), and Bernard Cocula, *François Mauriac, écrivain et journaliste* (Bordeaux: Sud-Ouest, 2006).
3. Giroud always maintained that she voted left in the two rounds of the presidential election of 1974, but Valéry Giscard d'Estaing had for a long time planned to legislate on the status of women, which he found "scandalously offensive and unjustly inferior on many points." See Laure Adler, *Françoise* (Paris: Grasset, 2011), 363. To lead this project, it seemed natural to him to appoint a major journalist who had cleverly and passionately stood up for the cause of women for some twenty years in the political and social editorials of *L'Express*.
4. Françoise Giroud, *On ne peut pas être heureux tout le temps* (Paris: Fayard, 2001), 110.
5. See, for example, Françoise Giroud, *Françoise Giroud vous présente le tout-Paris* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), or Françoise Giroud, *Portraits sans retouches* (Paris: Folio Gallimard, 2001), or Françoise Giroud, *Une poignée d'eau* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1973).
6. Giroud, *Portraits sans retouches*, 9.
7. Giroud, *Une poignée d'eau*, 8.
8. This research focuses on the collected articles of *France-Dimanche* and *L'Express*, collected in *Une poignée d'eau, Portraits sans retouches*, Jacques Duquesne, *Françoise Giroud: une plume engagée à L'Express* (Paris: L'Express, 2013), and the

editorials of *L'Express*, collected thanks to surveys of the weekly news magazine's archives. We can also refer to the online documentary database of scanned articles of the Giroud endowment fund: <http://www.francoisegiroud.fr/3.aspx>.

9. The process of subjectification, through which a subject expresses themselves in an utterance, makes their voices heard in the text itself and allows the reader to make an enunciatory authority coincide with a signature.

10. Giroud, *On ne peut pas être heureux tout le temps*, 36.

11. *Ibid.*, 110.

12. Françoise Giroud, *Leçons particulières* (Paris: Fayard, 1990), 102.

13. See Pierre Roussel, *Système physique et moral de la femme* (Paris: Vincent, 1775), or Julien-Joseph Virey, *La Femme sous les rapports physiologique, moral et littéraire*, 2nd Edition (Paris: Crochard, 1825).

14. Giroud, *Leçons particulières*, 184.

15. Giroud, "À l'échelle du temps," in *Une poignée d'eau*, 10. Originally published in *L'Express*, October 3–9, 1966, 103.

16. Marie-Ève Thérénty, *La Littérature au quotidien. Poétiques journalistiques du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2007).

17. See for example Giroud, "Dîner en ville," in *Une poignée d'eau*, 246. Originally published in *L'Express*, January 23–29, 1967, 61.

18. Christine Ockrent, *Françoise Giroud, une ambition française* (Paris: Fayard, 2003), and Laure Adler, *Françoise* (Paris: Grasset, 2011).

19. Françoise Giroud, *Histoire d'une femme libre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2013); Giroud, *On ne peut pas être heureux tout le temps*.

20. Alix de Saint-André, *Garde tes larmes pour plus tard* (Paris: Gallimard, 2013).

21. Giroud, *Portraits sans retouches*, 42 (my emphasis).

22. Giroud, *Portraits sans retouches*, 335.

23. *Ibid.*, 293.

24. Renaud Revel, *Les Amazones de la république* (Paris: Éditions First, 2013).

25. Françoise Giroud, "François Mauriac," *Une poignée d'eau*, 468. Originally published in *L'Express*, September 7–13, 1970, 36.

26. Françoise Giroud, *Une poignée d'eau*, 10. Originally published in *L'Express*, October 3–9, 1966, 103.

27. Vicomte de Launay, "La Croix de Berny," *La Presse*, July 11, 1847, 2.

28. Françoise Giroud, "1001 numéros de *l'Express*," *L'Express*, September 14–20, 1970, 59.

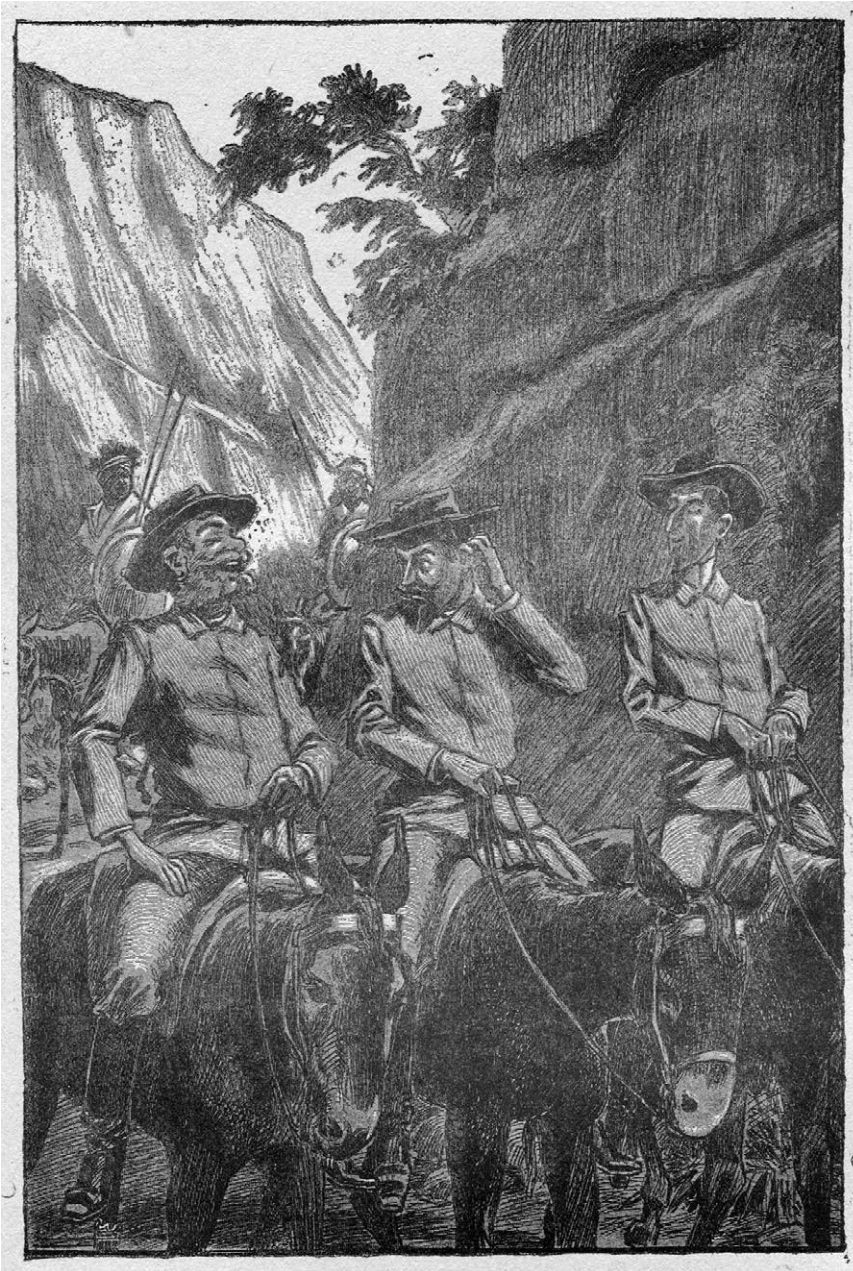
29. For more on this, see my forthcoming work, *Femmes de presse, femmes de lettres (1836–1944)*.

## French Reporters, Real and Fictional Transmitters of the Colonial Ideology (1890–1900)

Mélodie Simard-Houde  
Université Laval, Canada; Université Paul-Valéry—  
Montpellier III, France

**Abstract:** Colonial reportage crucially raises the issue of the reporter's political engagement. An envoy of his homeland, the reporter must inform his readership about the state of the colonies, but often does so by putting forward information that is not neutral, structured according to a commonly admitted axiology liable to federate a gathering and to participate in the construction of the national identity. This article interrogates the way in which the figure of the reporter takes charge of the dissemination of the colonial ideology in the 1890s and 1900s, a period still marked by the conquests in Africa and the need to establish and stabilize the French colonial empire in the 1890s. I focus on two major reporters, Pierre Mille (1864–1941) and Félix Dubois (1862–1945), and examine their reports on the African colonies serialized in the general press. These examples will be compared to that of their fictional equivalent, the reporter of the geographical novel, as found at the same time in the novels of Jules Verne, Paul d'Ivoi, and Léo Dex. Comparing reportages and novels makes it possible to highlight views and representations that are common to both genres. In so doing, it will be possible to show that reportages and novels featured witnesses committed to the colonial project while colonial culture was still in the making. These two types of stories share an educational perspective and contribute to building narrative axes that participate in the dissemination of a republican colonial ideology, of which the reporter, real or fictional, stands as a prime ambassador.

**Keywords:** French reporters – colonial ideology – political engagement – Pierre Mille – Félix Dubois – African colonies – Paul d'Ivoi – Léo Dex – colonial reportage – nineteenth century



Léo Dex (pseudonym of Édouard Deburax), three reporters in Fachoda, Paris, Ancienne librairie Furne, s.d., 212.



Like war correspondence, colonial reportage crucially raises the issue of the reporter's political engagement. An envoy of his homeland, the reporter must inform his readership about the state of the colonies, but often does so by putting forward information that is not neutral, structured according to a commonly admitted axiology that is liable to federate a participation in the construction of the national identity.<sup>1</sup> As such I will explore the way in which the figure of the reporter takes charge of the dissemination of colonial ideology in the 1890s and 1900s, a period still marked by conquests in Africa and the need to establish and stabilize the French colonial empire. This expansionist phase corresponds with a period of impregnation<sup>2</sup> with the colonial culture in France, in which several mass cultural artifacts participate.

Both a press transmitter and a fictional character, the reporter will here be analyzed through the prism of two narrative genres, reportage and the geographical novel, both of which engage in a similar narration of the colonial ideology. Viewed in parallel, they make it possible to bring out certain convergences of representations in the social imagination. I will focus on two major reporters, Pierre Mille (1864–1941) and Félix Dubois (1862–1945), and examine their reports on the African colonies serialized in the general press. These examples of engagement will be compared to their fictional equivalent, the reporter of the geographical novel as found in the novels of Jules Verne, Paul d'Ivoi, and Léo Dex.<sup>3</sup> This article falls within the scope of recent work on French reporting during the colonial situation, which has thus far received inadequate critical attention.<sup>4</sup>

### A Figure Invested with Official Missions and Functions

The novelty of the colonial territories conquered at the end of the nineteenth century encouraged the undertaking of journeys that combined an informative purpose and an exploratory mission. In the 1890s, territories in Africa either were still unstable or only recently had been pacified. As a result, it frequently happened that reporters joined official missions, financed by government funds and in which soldiers and political figures took part. This was the case of Dubois and Mille, who both present an ambivalent professional status.

Dubois came into contact with the colonies via journalism. Having written on colonial issues from a distance for *Le Figaro* since the late 1880s, he made his first journey to Africa for *L'Illustration* in 1891, a journey that would give birth to *La Vie au continent noir* (Life on the Dark Continent).<sup>5</sup> Dubois accompanied an official mission led by Captain Brosselard-Faidherbe. Its aim was to “ensure effective occupation, and to take possession by means of treaties, of the territories coveted”<sup>6</sup> by France in West Africa, in the wake

of the Berlin Conference (1885), which had formalized European colonization of Africa. The mission's leaders, joined by Dubois and Adrien Marie, an illustrator for *L'Illustration*, as well as a civilian explorer, Georges Warenhorst, were accompanied by a small escort of fifteen infantrymen, a sergeant, and servants.<sup>7</sup> Dubois, apparently eager to conserve an ethos<sup>8</sup> of intellectual independence, is evasive about the actual circumstances of the journey in his reportage, contenting himself with a few allusions to the “chief” of the mission. It is only in the postscript that he mentions him, while making sure to distance himself from the official objectives:

Organized by the undersecretary for the colonies, this mission became the basis for ours. While Captain Brosselard-Faidherbe, with a lieutenant, and Mr. George Warenhorst, whom he had taken on, were drawing topographical maps and making scientific observations, we were looking around us at the vibrant life, in its familiar detail, we were jotting down what was being said and, what was no less eloquent, the silences.<sup>9</sup>

In the following report, on Tombouctou, Dubois's attitude becomes more complex as the reporter finds himself even more closely involved in the official milieu. It is for *Le Figaro* that he made the report in 1894, with the agreement of the newspaper's director, Antonin Périvier. The latter requested an authorization for Dubois from the undersecretary for the colonies, Maurice Lebon, who granted a substantial allowance worth 12,000 francs<sup>10</sup> to the reporter for a study mission of “the regions that recently came under French influence thanks to the occupation of Tombouctou.”<sup>11</sup> As various letters cited by his biographer show, Dubois received “official instructions”<sup>12</sup> from the new minister for the colonies, Théophile Delcassé. The reporter sought to camouflage the partiality of his role less than in 1891; he presented himself as a lover and promoter of French Sudan, of which he made himself not only the observer, but also the historian and archaeologist, collecting rare documents and making archaeological visits. It should be noted that his adherence to the colonial project was in large part the product of scientific curiosity rather than of expansionist ambitions.

Mille also presented a pronounced link with official milieu, although of another nature. His voyage to the Belgian Congo took place in the company of a delegation of sixty guests on the occasion of the inauguration of the Congolese railway. Moreover, Mille, like Paul Bourde (1858–1914), who signed the preface to his reportage when it was published in book form, combined journalistic and administrative functions. Indeed, some ten years older than Dubois and Mille, Bourde presented himself as a titular figure through his dual career as a reporter and as an important administrator for the early imperialism of the Third Republic. He debuted in colonial reportage by accompa-

nying a parliamentary mission to Algeria (1879) for *Le Temps*, then undertaking journeys to Tunisia (1880, 1889) and to Tonkin (1885) before occupying high-ranking posts in the colonies. Likewise, Mille became the “principal private secretary to the general secretariat of Madagascar” from 1895 to 1896 and, during the 1900 World’s Fair in Paris, was named “commissioner of the section of Côte d’Ivoire,”<sup>13</sup> in addition to his journalistic occupations.

Dubois and Mille’s situation of active political engagement seems to be the case for several late-nineteenth-century reporters with an interest in the colonial question. The reporter presents himself as a witness “enlisted among those who are working on the elaboration of new theories that are necessary to give our country a clear conscience of its new [colonial] destinies,”<sup>14</sup> or else as an “embedded” witness, to use the term that Marie-Ève Thérénty borrows from American journalistic practices in Iraq.<sup>15</sup>

During these same years, fiction took note of this engagement and developed plots in which the reporter took part in a mission, whether official or secret, on which rested the fate of the colonies. In Verne’s *L’Étonnante aventure de la mission Barsac* (The Surprising Adventure of the Barsac Mission), the reporter Amédée Florence accompanies, like Dubois, an official mission to French Guinea, whose members form “the high staff of the extra-parliamentary committee tasked by the central administration with making a study journey.”<sup>16</sup> What’s more, Florence is a reporter for a leading daily called—the title is rather eloquent—*L’Expansion française* (French Expansion). Likewise, in Dex’s *Du Tchad au Dahomey en ballon* (From Chad to Dahomey by Hot Air Balloon), a reporter character, Phocle, accompanies a military mission, the Goermain column, to Sudan, to the town of Kouka, an ally of France, which must fight against the rebel troops of a local chief. Two years before, in *Trois reporters à Fachoda* (Three Reporters in Fashoda), Dex had related the adventures of the French reporter Victor Olovant, entrusted by the Negus of Ethiopia with a secret document, which he had to carry to Fashoda, where none other than Captain Marchand, a striking colonial figure, was waiting for him; his political mission—which, however, he would fail to fulfill—was to prevent the annexation of Fashoda by the British. These novelistic fictions highlight the role of the press and of its actors in the colonial project. They convey a representation that is coherent with the official functions of the figures evoked above: in this time of expansion and impregnation with colonial culture, the reporter is not an infantryman, but he imposes himself on the general public and on the social imagination as an active member of the colonial project and a defender of French interests, placed at the heart of political intrigues, moving to the front line of colonization alongside the military and the explorers.

### An Educational Objective

Furthermore, the observations made by Mille and Dubois in their respective reports are similar: there is much to be done to promote and highlight the French colonies in Africa—whether the French Congo or the Niger valley—and an audience which the reporters, like their editorial teams and publishers, believe it is necessary to enlighten on colonial issues. The reporter is thus invested with the roles of making the subject accessible to readers and of educating them. The announcement of Félix Dubois’s departure for Tombouctou by *Le Figaro*’s editorial board provides an exemplary illustration:

At this time when colonial questions have developed so considerably, such a journey undertaken by a competent and experienced journalist could not but draw the attention of the general public, all the more so since the most elementary practical data about our colonies are lacking, since most of the country barely knows them by name, and since they ignore their resources, their aspect, their climate and their hopes for the future. . . . Mr. Félix Dubois hopes to fill this lack through an in-depth study.<sup>17</sup>

The reporter aims to combat the misapprehensions circulating in France<sup>18</sup> on the climate, resources, and customs, and on the efforts made and those remaining to be made.

This educational objective is underlined by the publication in book form of the journalistic tales of Mille and of Dubois, publishing events that were far from being applied systematically to *grand reportage*. It shows that colonial reportage is considered of public interest, sufficiently documented to have an impact on the public, and captivating enough to draw the attention of readers. Paul Bourde, in his preface to Pierre Mille’s reportage in the Belgian Congo, evokes the political role assigned to the reporter, witness, and guide of public opinion: “What a fortunate idea you had to pick up again the correspondences you had addressed to the *Temps*, to complete them and turn them into a book. They had proven to be a great success in the newspaper and they had the most useful influence on the still hesitant public about the value of our possessions in Equatorial Africa.”<sup>19</sup>

As early as 1879, Bourde had insisted on the role of transmitting colonial reportage in the public sphere and in political discussions.<sup>20</sup> Through both their conception of their role of transmission and the hybridity of their careers, Mille and Dubois appear as his heirs.

Moreover, it should be noted that Dubois’s *La Vie au continent noir* was published by Hetzel in the Bibliothèque d’éducation et de récréation (Educational and Recreational Library), alongside Verne’s *Voyages extraordinaires*. Likewise, Dex’s novels found a home in Furne’s series *Aventures scientifiques* (Scientific Adventures) or in Hachette’s *Bibliothèque des écoles et des familles*

(Library of Schools and Families). This fact shows that colonial reportage and the geographical novel were intended for an overlapping audience, just as they shared an educational objective that relies on entertainment and the narration of an adventure. Like reportage, the geographical novel seeks to convey information about the colonial territories: it is dotted with remarks on the country's fauna and flora, geography, and local customs. To illustrate this, we can compare the following two passages that both describe butter made from the shea, a tree from Western Africa. The first comes from Verne's novel *L'Étonnante aventure de la mission Barsac*, while the second comes from Dubois's reportage, *Tombouctou la mystérieuse* (Mysterious Tombouctou):

Millet . . . is a cereal similar to wheat. Mixed with the butter of the shea or *cé*, because the tree from which it is made bears these two names, it constitutes a quite passable sauce, on condition that the butter is nice. This butter is extracted from the fruit of the tree, a sort of nut or chestnut. It is obtained by a series of grindings and fusions, and lastly one purifies it by melting it one last time and, while it is boiling, adding a few drops of cold water. It then becomes very pleasant.<sup>21</sup>

Guided by our sense of smell, we soon found ourselves in front of a hut and in front of a large earthen pot in which a brownish mass was simmering. That is where the well-known aroma came from, and these were shea nuts that were being boiled to extract their vegetal butter. The fruits of the shea look like nuts, wrapped on the outside in a flesh that, to the taste, recalls the taste of the peach, and from which the locals prepare a dish.<sup>22</sup>

In each case, the author describes the extraction of the shea butter and its dietary use in a brief didactic sequence that momentarily interrupts the narrative thread. Although generally speaking reportage emphasizes the educational and informative objective while the novel grants the plot a prominent position, both share, in the late nineteenth century, the same desire to transmit to the readership exclusive knowledge on the new colonies, which must be accessible and integrated in a story. It is a question of stimulating the audience's curiosity and, beyond that, in an even more significant and propagandist manner, of nourishing a feeling of belonging with regard to the overseas territories through the prism of a colonial culture. For in spite of the political consensus that it generated at the end of the century, we must not lose sight of the fact that the colonial project was still mainly supported by specific political groups (the transverse "colonial party") and remained for the vast majority of French citizens "a distant, if not little-known fact"<sup>23</sup>—on this point, reporters, publishers, and press managers were right in their belief that there existed in the public a curiosity to be awoken and a lack of information to be filled. However, the active role they gave themselves also bears witness

to the fact that the colonial culture of which they wanted to be the producers reflects less the conceptions already shared by the metropolitan population than the republican ideals to be promoted.

### The "We" and the Others: A Shared Axiology

As supports for the dissemination of colonial culture, reportage and the geographical novel shared similar narrative mechanisms regarding republican colonial ideology. These enabled them to implicitly support "the values of colonization in their very structure,"<sup>24</sup> like the narratives of the weekly *Journal des voyages* (Travel Journal) studied by Matthieu Letourneux.

As a witness-ambassador, in the words of Géraldine Muhlmann, the reporter makes much use of the collective "we" and the possessive "our," through which there emerges a feeling of belonging and representativeness: Mille speaks on behalf of his nation of "our colony in the French Congo,"<sup>25</sup> of his "homeland,"<sup>26</sup> which he likes to recognize in the colonial territory, and lauds the "patriotism"<sup>27</sup> of the personnel in Brazzaville. Likewise, Dubois evokes "our moral and civilizing influence . . . , our political action"<sup>28</sup> in West Africa. Didn't the mission he joined seek to have the indigenous people sign the protectorate treaties and, at the same time, to distribute "red, white and blue flags"?<sup>29</sup>

To this French, white, adult, civilized, and civilizing "we" represented by the reporter, both Dubois and Mille oppose the indigenous, the barbarian, the savage, the child, the colonized. No allegory better embodies colonial ideology than the following statue described by Mille, located in the public garden of Léopoldville, "Civilization extending its hand to a beautiful savage," a "work cast in plaster for our arrival."<sup>30</sup> On several occasions, Mille evokes the struggles of the colonizers against the "countless barbarians," unfortunate pioneers who met a "terrible end in the cooking pots of cannibals."<sup>31</sup> Likewise seeking to highlight the merits of civilization, Dubois draws an extended metaphor that compares indigenous customs and life in the Middle Ages, the latter being understood "only in the way in which it is crude, brutal and rudimentary."<sup>32</sup>

Just as we can talk of a "witness-ambassador" in reportage, it seems appropriate to describe as a "hero-ambassador" the fictional reporter who likewise embodies a French agent of dissemination of the light of colonization. The fictional character intensifies and fixes in a single type the national and political dimension that characterizes the attitude of his real counterpart, in plots that are structured along the same axiology. Unlike the distinction between the national "we" and the colonized Other, the novel emphasizes the competitive relationship between the colonizing European nations, including France

and England, exacerbated at the end of the 1890s by the Fashoda Incident. In *Trois reporters à Fachoda* (Three Reporters in Fashoda), besides the Frenchman Victor Olovant, we find two other reporters, a Russian, Ivan Oursoff, and an American, Mr. Hinley. Each is defined by national stereotypes, according to the Gallo-centrism and imagology that dominate the representations of foreign peoples at the time.<sup>33</sup> Olovant, the Frenchman, is by temperament lively,<sup>34</sup> frank,<sup>35</sup> talkative, and pleasant.<sup>36</sup> Oursoff, for his part, is “patient and supple like all Slavs,”<sup>37</sup> superstitious and fatalistic,<sup>38</sup> while Hinley possesses “a typically Anglo-Saxon pride,”<sup>39</sup> a taciturn and phlegmatic character,<sup>40</sup> who likes order and correction.<sup>41</sup> Not only do the three reporters represent the features that are stereotypical of their compatriots, but on a broader scale they embody the relations between the respective nations: the spontaneous sympathy that unites Olovant and Oursoff<sup>42</sup> evokes the Franco-Russian Alliance, and Olovant’s distrust of Hinley<sup>43</sup> that of France towards a possible alliance between Anglo-Saxon countries, which would limit its colonial interests. Like d’Ivoi’s *La capitaine Nilia* (Captain Nilia), Dex’s novel is an exemplary case where the reporter character becomes the messenger of the French colonial project, through a novelistic project that bears a clear axiology: opposite the sirdar and the English stands the trio of reporters, representatives of the allied Western forces—Russia and America, led by France.

Whether a hero-ambassador or witness-ambassador, the reporter appears as a key figure of the dissemination of colonial culture. His political engagement is in part implicit and sometimes hidden, but nevertheless manifest when we go beyond the claims of objectivity, which the reporter otherwise expresses. If his fictional role can resemble in this respect that of other characters of the geographic novel, such as the engineer, the explorer, or the hunter,<sup>44</sup> his journalistic function gives him a greater influence and helps to inscribe him on a long-term basis in the social imagination as a transmitting figure of republican values. The reporter thus distinguishes himself with regard to other heroes of the colonial conquest, by his double role as actor and transmitter (taking part himself in the construction of his media image and discourse).<sup>45</sup>

The particularity of colonial reportage of the late nineteenth century is to bear witness to an almost unshakable adherence to imperialism, which enables Dubois to conclude *La Vie au continent noir* with these words: “The early enthusiasm for these mysterious lands, wonderfully lovely and rich, has not decreased. My faith in their destiny has remained intact.”<sup>46</sup> This univocal observation is linked to the engagements of reporters as well as the particularity of the fin-de-siècle moment, characterized by “the construction of a colonial consensus that contrasts, in the 1890s, with debates initiated ten years

earlier,”<sup>47</sup> for instance Pierre Loti’s sharp critique of the French army’s actions during the 1883 Tonkin Expedition. But it is also the case that French colonialism is still, in part, a project; the time had not yet come for the inter-war insurrections that would herald the wave of independences and would force reporters, even those most favorable to imperialism, to cast a critical gaze on the conditions in which it was implemented.<sup>48</sup> At the same time there would emerge a more engaged and dissident form of colonial reportage, written by intellectuals and women reporters, that would rattle the certitudes of the gaze cast on the Other.<sup>49</sup>

---

*Mérodie Simard-Houde is a postdoctoral candidate (CRSH) and teaches at the Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne (Centre d'histoire du XIXe siècle ; Center for the study of nineteenth-century history). Her doctoral dissertation was devoted to the study of imaginary representations and the poetics of French reportage under the Third Republic. Her research interests are the representations of the conquest of the air in media culture (press, popular literature, cinema) at the beginning of the twentieth century. Her research combines literary research and cultural history methodologies. She also contributes to the research group working on events in the francophone press (France, Canada, Belgium), directed by Marie-Ève Thériault, Micheline Cambon, and Paul Aron. Her recent contributions to reportage can be found in *Romantisme* (no. 171, 2016), *Études françaises* (2016/2), and *Mémoires du livre* (2015/2).*



## Notes

1. In this sense, the reporter presents himself as the “witness-ambassador” of his readership, as Géraldine Muhlmann has shown. Géraldine Muhlmann, *Une histoire politique du journalisme. XIXe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2004), 28–68.
2. Pascal Blanchard and Sandrine Lemaire, “Avant-propos. La constitution d’une culture coloniale en France,” in *Culture coloniale, 1871–1931. La France conquise par son Empire*, eds. Pascal Blanchard and Sandrine Lemaire (Paris: Éditions Autrement, 2003), 7.
3. Pseudonym of Édouard Deburax.
4. Among others, “Le reportage de presse en situation coloniale,” the symposium co-organized by RIRRA 21 and SIELEC (Université Paul-Valéry, Montpellier, June 4–6, 2014).
5. Félix Dubois, *La vie au continent noir* (Paris: J. Hetzel, 1893).
6. Yves-Jean Saint-Martin, *Félix Dubois, 1862–1945: Grand reporter et explorateur, de Panama à Tamanrasset* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1999), 32.
7. Saint-Martin, *Félix Dubois*, 32.
8. The concept is understood in the sense of discourse analysis, which defines ethos, at the intersection of rhetoric and sociology, as the discursive construction of a self-image. The latter enables the utterer to trigger the adhesion of his reader but also, more broadly, to self-represent in the context of a “scenography” or of an utterance scene. A meaningful modality of reportage, self-representation is often the locus of a political or ideological investment; it can also be implicit and, as is the case here, involve the eclipsing of some information. On ethos and scenography, see Ruth Amossy, *La Présentation de soi: Ethos et identité verbale* (Paris: PUF, 2010) and Dominique Maingueneau, *Le discours littéraire. Paratopie et scène d’énonciation* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004).
9. Félix Dubois, *La vie au continent noir* (Paris: Hetzel, 1893), 298.
10. The sum was considerable. It represented a year’s salary for Dubois, knowing that the most famous reporters in 1905 earned (following the economic boom of 1896) between 1,500 and 2,000 francs per month and that journalists had a very variable pay scale that ranged from 150 to 3,000 francs per month for the highest rated columnists. Gilles Feyel, *La Presse en France des origines à 1944: Histoire politique et matérielle*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Ellipses, 2007), 129–130.
11. Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer, FR ANOM 50COL20.
12. Saint-Martin, *Félix Dubois*, 51–56.
13. C.-E. Curinier, ed., *Dictionnaire national des contemporains*, vol. 6 (Paris: Office général d’édition de librairie et d’imprimerie, 1899–1919), 257.
14. Paul Bourde, introduction to Pierre Mille, *Au Congo belge, avec des notes et des documents récents relatifs au Congo français* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1899), xv (my emphasis).
15. Marie-Ève Thérénty, “Le grand reportage embrigadé: entre aventure et polémique coloniales (1881–1885),” paper presented at the symposium *L’Aventure coloniale* (Université Montpellier III / SIELEC, 15–16 May 2008).

16. Jules Verne, *L’Étonnante aventure de la mission Barsac*. Collection À tous les vents, vol. 772 (Bibliothèque électronique du Québec), 49, <https://beq.ebooksgratuits.com/vents/Verne-Barsac.pdf>. Verne began writing this novel in 1904. It was originally serialized in *Le Matin*, 1914, and published in book form by Hachette in 1919.
17. *Le Figaro*, August 22, 1894.
18. The formula paraphrases Félix Dubois: “. . . since my return, it has seemed to me that people had grave misapprehensions about these countries between the Niger and the west coast of Africa.” Dubois, *Continent noir*, 84.
19. Bourde, introduction to Mille, *Au Congo belge*, v.
20. Paul Bourde, *À travers l’Algérie: souvenirs de l’excursion parlementaire (septembre–octobre 1879)* (Paris: Charpentier, 1880).
21. Verne, *Barsac*, 135–136.
22. Félix Dubois, *Tombouctou la mystérieuse* (Paris: Flammarion, 1897), 73.
23. Arnaud-Dominique Houte, *Le Triomphe de la République. 1871–1914* (Paris: Seuil, 2014), 156.
24. Matthieu Letourneux, “La colonisation comme un roman. Récits de fiction, récits documentaires et idéologie dans le *Journal des voyages*,” *Belphégor* 9, no. 1 (2010), <http://dalspace.library.dal.ca/handle/10222/47782>.
25. Mille, *Au Congo belge*, 8.
26. *Ibid.*, 61.
27. *Ibid.*, 65.
28. Dubois, *Continent noir*, 35.
29. *Ibid.*, 42.
30. Mille, *Au Congo Belge*, 116.
31. *Ibid.*, 116.
32. Dubois, *Continent noir*, 273.
33. Marc Angenot, “Gallicentrisme et imagologie des peuples étrangers,” in *1889. Un état du discours social* (Longueuil: Le préambule, 1989), 270–271.
34. Léo Dex, *Trois reporters à Fachoda*, drawings by E. Vavasseur (Paris: Ancienne librairie Furne, n.d.; 1st ed. Paris, Combet, 1901), 22.
35. Dex, *Trois reporters*, 60.
36. *Ibid.*, 62.
37. *Ibid.*, 11.
38. *Ibid.*, 204.
39. *Ibid.*, 7.
40. *Ibid.*, 15.
41. *Ibid.*, 11.
42. “[H]e was quite indifferent to the American Hinley, on the other hand he [Olovant] felt transported by a genuine wave of affection for his Russian companion.” Dex, *Trois reporters*, 22.
43. On several occasions, Olovant suspects Hinley of wanting to impede his maneuvers and of having concluded an agreement with the English forces in order to keep a watch on him. Dex, *Trois reporters*, 47, 105, 151.

44. On these three types of characters, see Matthieu Letourneux, *Le Roman d'aventures 1870–1930* (Limoges: Presses universitaires de Limoges, 2010), 97–107.

45. Unlike most of the figures studied by Edward Berenson (with the exception of Stanley, also a reporter), in *Les Héros de l'Empire. Brazza, Marchand, Lyautey, Gordon et Stanley à la conquête de l'Afrique* (Paris: Perrin, 2012).

46. Dubois, *Continent noir*, 300.

47. Houte, *Le triomphe de la République*, 137–138.

48. See my article “Des reporters français en Syrie (1925–1927), médiateurs des ‘confusions de l’Orient’,” in *Les Médiateurs de la Méditerranée*, eds. Christine Reynier and Marie-Ève Thérénty (Paris: MSH et Geuthner, 2013), 145–160.

49. Marie-Ève Thérénty, “L’autre de l’autre. Femmes reporters en contexte colonial dans l’entre-deux-guerres,” in *Le Reportage de presse en situation coloniale*, eds. Guillaume Bridet and Jean-François Durand (Paris: Keilash, 2016).

## Can the Indigenous Speak? The Speech of the Colonized in the Colonial Press in Algeria in the Nineteenth Century

Laure Demougin  
 Université Paul-Valéry—Montpellier III, France  
 Université Laval, Canada



Illustration by Gambinus, *Le Siroco*, May 7, 1870. Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer, BIB AOM 30745.

**Abstract:** Looking into the expression of an indigenous speech in the colonial press published in Algeria in the nineteenth century is not without its difficulties. One might think that *a priori* these newspapers would not permit the native populations to speak, for practical reasons as much as political and social ones. This article rests on a few cases taken from colonial newspapers and aims at examining the words that the colonizers stole to those who had become “indigenous” in the colonial lexicon: for which texts were they credited? How did they emerge and what literary ethos was being built? In these texts targeted at colonizers, the fact that indigenous people were expressing themselves was being questioned as it revealed the ideological foundations of colonization through that particular type of literature. Arabian poetry was one axis to apprehend native discourse, that is, an idealized speech that was still connected to orientalism and the thirst for “local color.” Historical texts also provided a second access to this discourse, this time from a scholarly perspective, which turned colonial words into dominant discourse even when it came to historical truth. Finally, on a different level, caricatures highlighted the representation of the spoken word by the indigenous. These three types of texts, considered as a whole and illustrated here by precise examples, share a common presentation of a colonial voice that relays the voice of the colonized. What remains is to observe the rare cases of texts claiming a native signature, which deserve our attention given their unusual character.

**Keywords:** Indigenous speech – colonial press – Algeria – nineteenth century – subaltern – Oriental poetry – *Moniteur algérien* – caricature – irony – Arabic language

Looking into the expression of indigenous speech in the colonial press published in Algeria in the nineteenth century is not without its difficulties. One might think *a priori* that these newspapers would not permit the native populations to speak, for practical reasons as much as political and social ones—these newspapers are in French, and it would be necessary to wait for French to become widespread, or Arabic to be recognized, for real indigenous speech to emerge in the press.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the press was part of the colonial structure, and it thus appears unlikely that the point of view of the indigenous person could be expressed or taken into account within it, since the latter was not considered a citizen or a fully-fledged subject. It is in this sense that we have borrowed our title from the wording Gayatri C. Spivak chose for her study of “subalterns” and their problematic speech.<sup>2</sup> For more terminological precision, in our study we are replacing “subaltern” with “indigenous”: Indigenous peoples in colonized countries are de facto placed in a subaltern position, symbolically. But indigenous is the term employed legally<sup>3</sup> in the colonial context and indicates more specifically the reality within it. Nevertheless, the question remains fundamentally the same: the possibility given to a minority to express itself and the escorting discourses that accompany this potential speech. The possibility of reformulating indigenous with “colonized” implies the same semantic work: through colonized we are implicitly evoking the Other, that is, the colonizer. It is in fact the mix of these two speeches that we are aiming at and the interactions between two social groups.

Even in 1974, after the decolonization processes had been completed, Louis-Jean Calvet evoked the definition that the French standard *Robert* dictionary gives of colonization and from it draws the conclusion, “this article presents a remarkable absence: that of the colonized. The colonies are thus empty countries,”<sup>4</sup> and this image would be necessary to justify colonization. But it is in starting out from this supposed absence that one can initiate a genuine reflection on the meaning of indigenous speech in the non-metropolitan French press, even if it is rare. This essay focuses on the official press—*Le Moniteur algérien* (The Algerian Monitor)—as much as private periodicals. These publications are all written, published, and read on Algerian territory. I will examine indigenous expression on the basis of specific examples and according to different columns, not for the purpose of being exhaustive, but rather to offer an account of what was available in such publications: poetry, history, caricature, and the possibilities of an assumed expression without an escorting discourse.

### Indigenous Speech Authorized: Poetry

The connection between the indigenous populations and poetry appears to be predominant in the media imagination of the Algerian colony. The first

manifestations of indigenous speech in the press occur through the medium of poetry, in a perspective marked by Orientalism and its representation of a fantasized Orient.

Thus, in 1840 already, we discover in *Le Moniteur algérien* “a free translation of some Oriental poetry”<sup>5</sup> on the third page, where several short extracts of translated Arab poems follow one after another without comment. But gradually, as colonization intensified, the translations, which are offered at regular intervals in the newspapers, are more often than not accompanied by explanatory notes that frame source texts and explain them. Thus, in 1864, Augustin Marquand writes a *Variétés* (Varieties) column entitled “Les Poètes du Sa’hara” (The Poets of the Sahara), featuring “Pindares du douar ou de la tente”<sup>6</sup> (Pindars of the *Douar* or of the Tent), which he acknowledges as the source of inspiration for the French Orientalist poets. He then mixes up quotations and commentaries, as in this extract, in which two lines of poetry are accompanied by a contextualizing sentence and a concurrent paragraph brimming over with images:

Another nomad appeals for a kiss from the living houri of his dreams:

To Djemila

Djemila! My glances are sown with roses on your cheeks.

The law of the Prophet permits he who sows to harvest.

Usually, these poems are sung in the bluish vales where the wadis illuminate with reflections of silver the fragile branches of the Mauritanian jujube tree, where the euphorbia of Sudan blossom at the foot of heaped dunes, and where the gazelles lose their way in the distance in an Asiatic *salem*.<sup>7</sup>

The indigenous viewpoint, even in a poetic and amorous domain, thus only seems roughly outlined. The voice of the commentator, of the translator, of the colonizer, emerges and demonstrates his ability not only to comment upon but also to appropriate what is seen as the essence of the Arab style, visible here in the ternary rhythm, the choice of alien linguistic terms that had become commonplace (wadi, *salem*), and the scope of the sentence. By framing these translated Arabic lines of poetry, the colonizer, as it were, steals the voice of the colonized. This rather habitual mimetism, which we find in particular among the authors of the Enlightenment, develops an image of the Arabic language.

Let us add that while Arab poetry is published and commented on in the newspapers, it is clear that it is because the colonial journalist can highlight its primitive and naive beauty. It was unthinkable that Romantic poetry



and its codes could serve to express an indigenous point of view. Thus, in 1846, the *Moniteur algérien* published a Romantic-seeming poem, supposedly written by a native, but which the journalist—whose speech frames the text—analyses as a fake poem precisely because of its similarity to a French aesthetic norm.<sup>8</sup>

### Indigenous Speech Questioned: History and Sources

The history common to the colonized and the colonizers is also favorable to the expression of an indigenous point of view. But the translation of the indigenous perspective is once again carried out with a framing colonial discourse, without anyone being surprised about it. In the 1850s particularly, translations of historical texts by scholars such as Auguste Cherbonneau,<sup>9</sup> a university professor of Arabic, and Adrien Berbrugger, an archaeologist and custodian of the Algiers library-museum and editor-in-chief of the *Moniteur algérien*,<sup>10</sup> flourished in newspapers. In the April 20, 1849 edition of the *Moniteur algérien*, we can find, for example, an article published on the second page titled, “Dernière expédition et mort de Saint-Louis. Chapitre inédit de l’histoire des dynasties musulmanes et des tribus arabes et berbères de l’Afrique septentrionale, d’Ibn-Khaldoun”<sup>11</sup> (“The Last Expedition and Death of Saint Louis. An Unpublished Chapter of the History of the Muslim Dynasties and of the Arab and Berber Tribes of North Africa, by Ibn Khaldun”). This article is drawn from the work of a scholar, the Baron of Slane, which guides the text with no less than twenty-six correcting footnotes. The critical apparatus is habitual for a scholarly text, but its publication in the press could have allowed for a few adjustments, because the layout itself becomes a hybrid form that complicates the reading. The reasons for doing this must be questioned.

The notes here play the role of an overarching discourse. In this relatively short extract, the translator picks up on four errors, presented with the following turns of phrase: “our author is mistaken” (concerning the dates given); “the author’s grandfather is mistaken” (concerning the presence of the queen of France); “this is an error” (concerning the sons of Saint Louis), and, further on, “another error: we have already said that the queen had remained in France,” a phrasing which allowed for a kind of dialogue between author and translator, if not a history lesson given by a fastidious professor. If one can here talk of ethos<sup>12</sup> to describe the personality of the author, which the text constructs, it indeed seems that this ethos is in effect that of a scholar using notes to correct the words of a not very rigorous author.

It should also be noted that the image of the French is tarnished by means of one of the major figures in the country’s history. Saint Louis is described as

a perfidious sovereign, motivated exclusively by money. The author recounts how the sultan of Tunis tried to dissuade Saint Louis, and the scene described here is remarkable for several reasons:

To support their negotiations, these emissaries, it is said, brought with them a sum of eighty thousand pieces of gold. The king accepted the money and then announced to them that the expedition would be led against their country. When they demanded the return of their money, the king replied that he had not received it. While they were with him, there arrived an ambassador sent by the sovereign of Egypt. He was presented to the king of France, who invited him to be seated. The ambassador refused, and, stood as he was, he recited the following lines of verse, by Ibn Matroub, the poet of the sultan of Egypt:

“Go and tell the French the words of a sincere monitor:

May God remunerate you for having killed so many Christians, worshippers of the Messiah!”<sup>13</sup>

Here we find poetry as the defining speech of the Other, and as proof of a historic grandeur. We also see how positive values are on the side of the Other. In a press read by the colonizers this change of perspective is fundamental. It varies the perception in order to offer an image of an impartial colonization at the same time as making clear the shrewd ambition of this colonization. But the interest of this passage also lies in the footnote added by the translator. In it he writes that “Ibn Khaldun reports this anecdote as hearsay, proof, on his part, that he found it hard to believe.”<sup>14</sup> The French commentator thus disapproves of the oral speech, and notes the honesty of the written speech. Thus, he positions himself as an arbiter and an attentive reader of the Arab text, in an attitude common to scholars who contribute to Algerian periodicals and offer the readers an insight into history as seen by the indigenous peoples.<sup>15</sup>

### Indigenous Speech in Situation: Caricature and Devaluation

When it comes to broaching the political question and the daily voice of the indigenous—what emerges not from texts but from the street—it is noticeable that poetry and history have become out of place. Above all it is the caricature, published in satirical newspapers emerging in the 1870s, that enables us to see how the indigenous point of view can be expressed and discredited at one and the same time. For caricatures developed after the 1870s, we might take the example of *Sirocco*,<sup>16</sup> an “Arab scene” in which can be found an incompetent translator, an indigenous person who can in fact express himself in poor French, and an administrator ruled by prejudices. Here, political claims are replaced by the image of the cunning and thieving Arab (“he

admits to cheating a Frenchman at cards”). This caricature reveals a political situation in which the indigenous figure, mocked for his command of French, is not even listened to. Misinterpreted by the translator, viewed according to a negative stereotype, his speech is of secondary importance because of his language. The equivalent of this expression can be found in written form, without an illustration this time, but with the same satirical impact, in the transcription of accents. In 1881, for example, the *Courrier d’Oran*<sup>17</sup> published a letter to its director, signed “Z., *fiis di* Dennoun,”<sup>18</sup> which plays the same belittling role by presenting a form of French discredited by the accent (“*di*” should be pronounced “*dé*”). These texts are not often found during the first years of Algerian media output, for reasons that are as much down to the real use of French by the indigenous peoples as to a general colonial attitude, which seems to have evolved. This comical and racist remit, which an already well-established colonization asserts in the 1870s, is reinforced in the following decade, and moves onto another level: it no longer represents but shows an illusion of reality.

### Indigenous Free Speech: Two Isolated Examples

If the majority of discourses are framed and commented on no matter the newspaper or its political hue over the course of time, we nevertheless find traces of indigenous speech that is not commented on immediately. In August 1851, three “indigenous columns” appeared in the *Akhbar*,<sup>19</sup> supplemented by two regular articles and signed by Ismael ben Mohammed Khodja, who within them questions the functioning of the French colony while affirming his indigenous identity. We find this passage at the beginning of the column:

Around three years ago, there was written all over Algiers, above the doors of the houses of the *beylik*, a short inscription, always the same one. I asked a Frenchman to explain it to me; and I believe I more or less understood it, apart from the second word, about which I believe I was mistaken. Because, in the end, these inscriptions, on which can be read *Equality*, between Liberty and Fraternity, are some painted in black tempera and others engraved in golden letters on marble slabs. . . .

But let us move on from the sign to the thing signified; you forbid us to bury our dead in the Sidi Abd-er-Rahman-el-Tsaalebi cemetery because, according to your laws, burials must not take place within the city walls. And yet you permit to be placed there a member of the family of pasha Moustafa, a relative of Ben-Mrabet and very recently Bey Ahmed; only the poor are strictly excluded. . . . Have your transcendent notions, extending across all the sciences, led you to recognize that the emanations of the body of a pauper are more dangerous for public health than the others?<sup>20</sup>

An ironically ignorant posture is here used to show the errors of colonization and the betrayal of the republican maxim. This fusing of discourse with assertive rhetoric is strengthened by its structured argument. On this occasion, unlike with the poetry examples, the French “discursive mold” is recognized for an indigenous speaker. This use of an accusatory rhetorical attitude is explained by the policy of the *Akhbar*, at that time a rival newspaper to the official *Moniteur algérien*, and which could allow itself acts of audacity the government would not dare to perform, precisely in order to comment on official positions. Alas, after three columns, two regular articles are necessary to develop certain themes that should have been addressed in the column. This disruption enables Chandellier, the newspaper’s editor, to take the floor once again with the heading, “A Shoulder Barge,” to point out that the “author of the *indigenous column* of this newspaper is ignorant of or scorns our literary customs: he is not in the slightest concerned about maintaining appropriate proportions between a parenthetical narration and the main subject.”<sup>21</sup> In the end, the indigenous point of view is commented upon for its form, not its content. It is treated as resistant to the literary order, to organization, and thus to the colonial order. By using the banner “Shoulder Barge” Chandellier seems to show that the paradigm of violence makes it possible to reprimand the indigenous rebelling against the media order. The ability to speak out is thus but a fleeting one, before an escorting discourse is again at the forefront. The *Akhbar* did not keep its promise, then, to be more liberal than the official press.

Another expression of indigenous speech is found in the December 4, 1868, issue of the *Est algérien* (East Algerian),<sup>22</sup> in which the eye is drawn to, on the first page, an unusual title. Indeed, one notices a “Monologue du dernier des Arabes” (Monologue of the Last of the Arabs) on one column, a text in which the immediate structure appears broken up and marked by numerous new paragraphs. Nevertheless, one can discover in the title a reference to Chateaubriand’s *Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage* (published in English as *The Adventures of the Last Abencerrajes*) and James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*.<sup>23</sup> A Romantic attitude is adopted here, which builds on the individual to bring out a whole people. The article, which is unsigned (except by an enigmatic dash), allows a litany, remarkable in its power, to develop. Here are the opening lines: “Here are the scattered remains of the last Muslims! “There is no God but God, and Mohammed is his prophet.” And not to be able to die like them. . . . Death is the good fortune of the vanquished.”<sup>24</sup>

In an aesthetic of interrupted speech, recalling the speech of a dying person (but one could also talk of the aesthetic of scraps), the text develops a

reminder of the arrival of the French: it is indeed the voice of an indigenous person that is supposed to emanate from this text, a voice that draws attention to itself in the following lines by an “us,” by elaborate apostrophes (“Oh vanished race, extinct tribe, brave sons of Islam whom destitution has scythed down”<sup>25</sup>), by a downgrading of the expressions used to refer to oneself. The “troop of cavalymen” thus becomes the “frightened tribes” and the “famished gangs.” The Ouled-Sliman, a name mentioned at the beginning of the text, are represented as being on the decline.

The text also expresses the confrontation between a positive image of the colonized people and a negative image of the colonizers. “Christians” are referred to for the “cunning and depravity of their race,”<sup>26</sup> and colonization is then described in a few words: the sketch of the lawyers is reinforced by a ternary rhythm showing that they know neither “values, nor religion, nor language,” and also evokes “prisons without sunlight”<sup>27</sup> into which the colonized people are thrown. The reversed axiology found here, in relation to the expected discourse, is supported by a strong rhetoric that legitimizes the denunciation and gives it credibility for the reader, as in the indigenous column I quoted earlier. Thus, there remains the question of the intention hidden behind this text. Why publish it on the first page? Concerning this point we remain at the stage of hypotheses: a critique of colonization, a battle to have Arab culture taken into account, a provocation? It seems unlikely that this text was actually written by an indigenous person, for symbolic reasons as much as practical ones. The text would thus have been signed, and doubtless the style would not have been so Romantic. It is probably a literary exercise in liberal perspective written by one of the newspaper’s contributors. And since this article was published among the first issues of the newspaper, one might wager that it is an attempt to make a striking statement, to leave a mark on a readership that already had periodicals at its disposal, and to clearly position the editorial policy of this newcomer in the world of the “battles of the major Algerian press”<sup>28</sup> from which it did not wish to be excluded. The voice of the indigenous thus also represents a strong political issue that, above all, concerns the editorial policy of a newspaper and the image of its position in colonial life it wishes to project.

### Conclusion

Out of the vast corpus that the colonial press in Algeria represents at the beginning of the conquest in the 1880s, texts either written by indigenous people, or supposedly written to make their voices heard, are rare. That was to be expected. The examples I have chosen give an account of the trends that shape this corpus. The speech of the colonized in the colonial press is, in

effect, hardly audible. When this speech does find space for expression, it is almost systematically taken over and framed, or even distorted by the colonizing speech. The few texts that set themselves apart are remarkable because they crystallize certain issues inherent to this act of speaking out. It is also to be noted that these texts, with a carefully polished rhetoric, boast a style that borrows from the French literary canons of their epoch, proof that the colonizer can only listen to the colonized when he takes on his discursive mold.

Within this particular corpus, which does not renounce knowing the colonized but constructs that knowledge, indigenous speech cannot emerge without the overarching speech of the colonizer—who is thus the man of letters, the journalist. This is not surprising, and it is what Edward Said broached in his seminal work.<sup>29</sup> But the press has its own imperatives—rhythm of publication, layout, and the personality of contributors—that give rise to variations in the assumption of speech, and thus an image of the speech of the indigenous as an issue of a colonial situation that reveals itself to better define itself. Between the expectations of the colonial situation and the surprises of scattered texts, the nonmetropolitan colonial press thus makes it possible to show a literary space that is freer than the works found in the bookshops, and in which the ties between colonizer and colonized can be read as variable knots.

---

*Laure Demougin teaches at the Université de La Rochelle, France. She has an MA degree in literature and has a certified teaching degree (aggregation) from the École Nationale Supérieure (ENS, Ulm). She is writing her PhD dissertation, “Identities and Exoticism: Representations of Self and Others in Nineteenth-Century French Colonial Press,” at the Université Montpellier 3, France, and at Université Laval, Canada. She has contributed to the media19.org platform.*

---



## Notes

1. See Zahir Ihaddaden's thesis, *Histoire de la presse indigène en Algérie des origines jusqu'à 1930* (Paris: Ihaddaden, 2003), in particular page 8: "The period from 1852 to 1881, which is rather important because it contains decisive events, will never deliver the hidden face of these events because the 'indigenous' peoples of this period have left no written testimony."
2. Gayatri C. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988).
3. See the works of Laure Blévis for precise details concerning this legal status, for example, "La citoyenneté française au miroir de la colonisation: étude de des demandes de naturalisation des 'sujets français' en Algérie coloniale," *Genèses* 53 (2003/4), 25–47, <http://www.cairn.info/revue-geneses-2003-4-page-25.htm>.
4. Louis-Jean Calvet, *Linguistique et colonialisme* (Paris: Payot, 1974), 12.
5. These translations can be found in *Annales maritimes et coloniales*, vol. 1 (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1840).
6. Augustin Marquand, "Les Poètes du Sa'hara," *Moniteur algérien*, November 13, 1864.
7. Ibid.
8. "On nous communique les vers suivants. . .," *Moniteur algérien*, March 18, 1846.
9. One could for example cite Auguste Cherbonneau, "Voyage du Cheikh Ibn-Batoutah, à travers l'Afrique septentrionale, au commencement du XVIe siècle, traduit d'un manuscrit arabe de Si-Hamoudaëben-Lefgoun," *Le Moniteur algérien*, April 20, 1856.
10. Alphonse Rousseau trans., "Chroniques du Beylik d'Oran, par un secrétaire du bey Hassan," introduction by A. Berbrugger, *Moniteur algérien*, March 30, 1855 to April 15, 1855.
11. Baron de Slane, "Dernière expédition et mort de Saint-Louis. Chapitre inédit de l'histoire des dynasties musulmanes et des tribus arabes et berbères de l'Afrique septentrionale, d'Ibn-Khaldoun," *Moniteur algérien*, April 20, 1849.
12. We are borrowing the idea of ethos here from Dominique Maingueneau, who picks up and adapts this old rhetorical notion to a modern literary framework.
13. Augustin Marquand, "Poètes du Sa'hara."
14. Ibid.
15. This mediating position would be particularly highlighted by Albert Devoulx, a custodian of Arab archives and a contributor to the *Moniteur algérien* in the 1860s. His texts problematize the question of indigenous sources in their introductions.
16. The *Siroco*, a journal of trivia founded in 1866, was produced at the printing plant of the *Courrier de l'Algérie*, and was run by J. Asnard.
17. The *Courrier d'Oran*, a journal founded in 1861 by a certain Gauché, takes over a title already used in the Algerian press.

18. Z., son of Dennoun, "A M'Siou li directeur di courrier di Oran," *Courrier d'Oran*, April 8, 1881.
19. *Akhbar*, a journal founded in 1839 by Auguste Bourget, is one of the colony's oldest private publications.
20. Ismael ben Mohammed Khodja, "Chronique indigène," *Akhbar*, September 16, 1851.
21. Chandellier, "Un coup d'épaule!," *Akhbar*, October 5, 1851.
22. The *Est algérien*, an Annaba journal founded by Carle in 1868, is one of the private publications, which flourished after the bill of May 11, 1868; it makes clear its liberal intentions in its first issues. Its editor was also the publisher of the periodical *La Seybouse*.
23. *Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage* was published in 1826, just like *The Last of the Mohicans*, by Fenimore Cooper, which is read and commented on by George Sand in the *Journal pour tous* in 1856. Sand also published a story, "Le Dernier sauvage" (The Last Savage) in the *Artiste* periodical, which enacts, on the island of Mauritius, the end of a precolonial civilization through the character of an old warrior.
24. "Monologue du dernier des arabes," *Est algérien*, December 4, 1868.
25. Ibid.
26. "Monologue du dernier des arabes."
27. Ibid.
28. Carle, "Aux lecteurs," *L'Est algérien*, November 13, 1868.
29. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

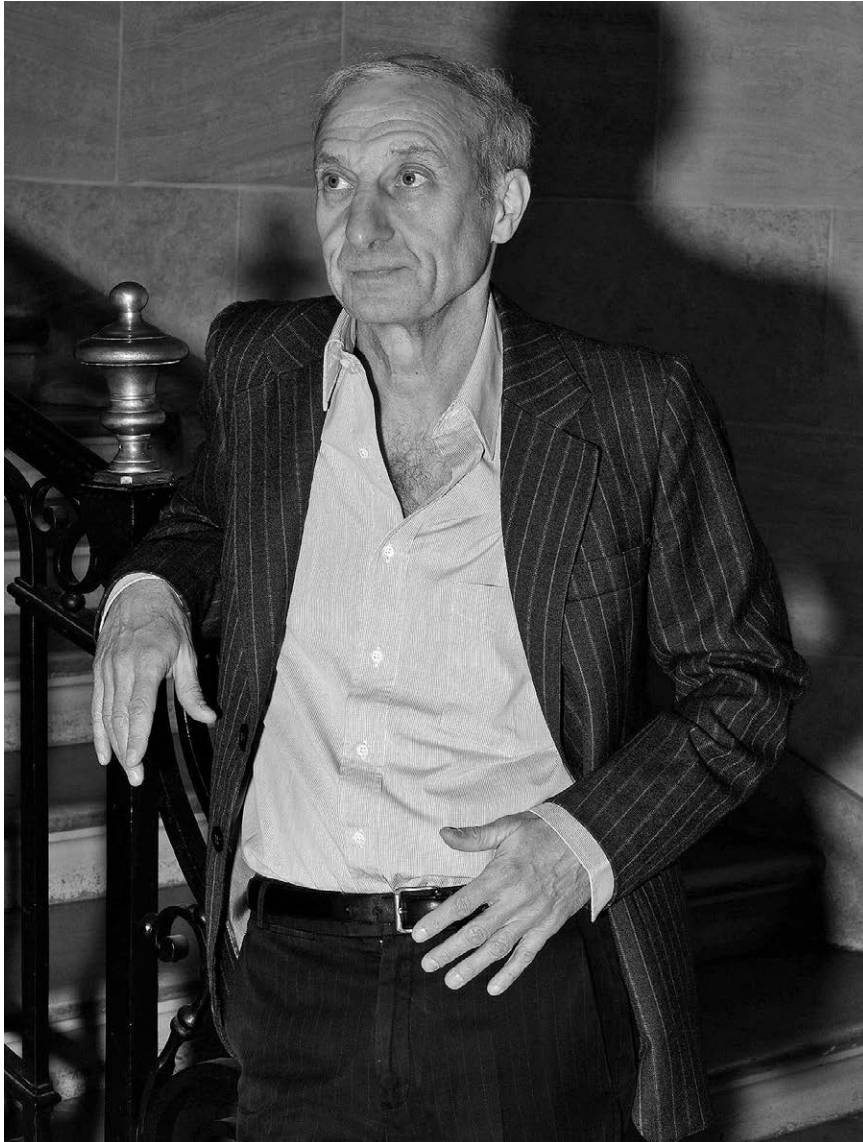


Photo of Jean Hatzfeld by Catherine Hélie (éditions Gallimard).

## *Scholar-Practitioner Q + A . . .*

### An Interview with Jean Hatzfeld

Isabelle Meuret  
 Florence Le Cam  
 Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium

While preparing this volume devoted to literary journalism in French, Jean Hatzfeld appeared as an obvious choice to help us navigate the porous border between journalism and literature. Hatzfeld is a French journalist and author, born in Madagascar in 1947. He started his career as a sports journalist and then worked as a reporter for the French paper *Libération*. Later on he became a war correspondent and covered conflicts in Lebanon and ex-Yugoslavia, where he was severely wounded by a sniper. Parallel to his career in journalism, he has also written an essay and four novels. But his major breakthrough came following his experience in Rwanda, a watershed moment in his career, which led to the publication of five books in which he experiments with new narrative forms.

On April 6, 1994, the plane transporting then-president of Rwanda, Juvénal Habyarimana, exploded above Kigali. The Hutus had been calling for the killing of Tutsis for quite a while, but the president's assassination triggered the genocide, whose magnitude and speed had never been seen before. Eight hundred thousand Tutsis were slaughtered in three months. In the region of Bugesera, near Nyamata, where Hatzfeld initiated his literary project, in daily massacres from April 11 until May 14, 50,000 out of 59,000 Tutsis were murdered. The *Interahamwe*, a paramilitary organization, chased down the Tutsis hiding in marshes, desperately trying to avoid Hutu machetes.

Hatzfeld decided to write about the Rwandan genocide because he came to perceive a journalistic failure. In all the reportages of the time there appeared to be one glaring omission: as sources, the survivors were nowhere to be found. This was the author's cue to go and look for their stories. His determination to spend time with survivors, but also with killers, and later

with their children, resulted in a number of stories: in 2000, *Dans le nu de la vie* (Life Laid Bare: The Survivors in Rwanda Speak)<sup>1</sup>; in 2003, *Une saison de machettes* (Machete Season: The Survivors in Rwanda Speak)<sup>2</sup>; and in 2007, *La Stratégie des antilopes* (The Antelope's Strategy: Living in Rwanda after the Genocide).<sup>3</sup> The next two volumes, *Englebert des collines* (2014) and *Un papa de sang* (2015), will be available in English soon.

Stunned by the poetry of the survivors' language, Hatzfeld does not tire of exploring its sense of possibilities. Walking a tightrope between real facts and creative writing, the author has opened new avenues of expression to tell stories of survival. He kindly accepted our invitation to discuss the specificities of English and French reportage, the challenges of literary journalism, and the promises of good journalistic literature. More particularly, he revisited his epiphanic transition from journalism to literature in the context of Rwanda, and shared with us his pleasure of the text.

We met Jean Hatzfeld at Éditions Gallimard, in Paris, on July 8, 2016. Some additional notes were added via email. Isabelle Meuret translated the conversation.

**Isabelle Meuret:** In our email exchanges you wrote that literary journalism has a long history, but that anglophones are much more comfortable with it than francophones.

**Jean Hatzfeld:** I am not learned enough to answer this question, but my impression is that almost all great American authors did or are doing journalism.

**Meuret:** Hemingway. . . .

**Hatzfeld:** Steinbeck, Jack London, Mark Twain. They were often trained in journalism and they were proud of it. What distinguished them from the French is that they did a lot of reportages. Granted, Camus or Sartre also did journalism, but usually as editorialists. They were thinkers writing in newspapers rather than storytellers. The Americans are much better storytellers. They love telling stories, and can wear different hats (author or journalist). It seems, though, that there was a great, albeit little known, tradition of literary journalism in France in the nineteenth century. Émile Zola, Colette, Alexandre Dumas, Victor Hugo—in *Les Misérables*, some digressions are pure reportage. For a long time there existed a love-hate relationship between authors and journalists. Mutual incomprehension. It is changing today, with authors such as Emmanuel Carrère.<sup>4</sup> Everybody draws from reality, but some lean on the real more than others.

**Florence Le Cam:** In your practice, were you aware from the beginning that you were building a bridge between journalism and literature?

**Hatzfeld:** It all depends on what you call literature. If it means telling stories, then certainly I did. I have always loved telling stories, and I have always tried to do it well. Now a genuine journalistic literature also exists. There are two very different attitudes—the author's, and the journalist's—which you cannot tell apart by the quality of the writing, although they can be distinguished by a different grammar, vocabulary, or syntax. A journalist is a go-between, a mediator between the readers and the event. So he must ask himself the questions that the readers ask when faced with that event. An author answers his own questions. An author only thinks of his book. He does not think of his readers. So they have different attitudes. During the first twenty-five years of my career, I did not want to address my own questions. I was happy to be a journalist. It is an extraordinary job. There is a true ethic in journalism. There are rules that authors do not need to comply with. It is a different attitude. Storytelling comes more naturally to the Americans: the story is always the driving force. If you follow Hillary Clinton's presidential election campaign, stories come up every day. Politics is made of stories. For us, it is not so natural. The French press has always been defined as ideological, political; points of view should not be radicalized, but still, there is some truism in this.

**Meuret:** There is renewed interest for storytelling and narrative journalism in France, though, with the emergence and proliferation of journals like *XXI*.<sup>5</sup>

**Hatzfeld:** I wouldn't say so. I think *XXI* emerged because narratives had disappeared from our daily papers. It is the principle of communicating vessels: newspapers such as *Libération* or *Le Monde* used to have many more storytellers in the 1970s–1980s than today. But stories were written to illustrate, like photos. Narratives are central in magazines such as *XXI*. They compensate for the shortage of stories in newspapers.

**Le Cam:** You said earlier that there exists a genuine journalistic literature.

**Hatzfeld:** I want to go against the idea that there is a first and a second division. I think authors and journalists do not write in the same way. Modiano<sup>6</sup> does not write like a journalist. Journalists do not write like Modiano. We tend to think—it was not the case in the nineteenth, but it was certainly the case in the twentieth century—that those who can write are novelists. That is not true. I believe that quite a few novelists cannot write, whereas there exist excellent pieces of journalism. We tend to elevate the novelist, while the journalist is seen as a schemer, a trickster. That's not fair. For instance, in sport, we used to have great storytellers at *L'Équipe*, *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, in the 1970s and '80s. Novelists and journalists do not write in the same way, but their difference is not qualitative. When your job is to answer

other people's questions, you do not write in the same manner. Journalists create a distinctive world. Of poor or high quality, but they also create a world in which enters the reader.

**Meuret:** Did you move from journalism to literature because you were disappointed with readers? In another interview you said, "Readers don't do their jobs."<sup>7</sup> They no longer ask questions.

**Hatzfeld:** There is an exchange between the journalist and the reader; there is a transmitter, and there is a receiver. The transmitter is always criticized—often rightly so—but no one ever questions the receiver. Sometimes, with particular events, the receiver is not working, and it is difficult to know why. When I covered the war in Bosnia, I started writing on the seventh or eighth of April 1992, and continued until the end of June, without there being any interest from readers. Then the Americans began to show interest. It is difficult to know why things suddenly change. I did write about ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. You can find it in the records at *Libération*. I wrote about it in April, May, but nobody cared. Then, all of a sudden, there was some uproar and everyone wanted to hear that story. It is difficult to say why the receiver did not accept the message in the first place, and then did, almost overnight. What I mean is that transmitter and receiver are interconnected; they cannot work independently. That relationship between journalist and reader is very different from the relationship between author and reader. An author may be disappointed if he is not read, but that won't have an impact on his writing. Conversely, if the connection does not work between journalist and reader, there is a disjunction. Journalists can also be a bit cynical—a French malady—and stop believing in their interlocutors. This condition is also what protects them, gives them staying power. Journalists can either lose heart or be passionate about a story. When you spend three months in Ceausescu's Romania, you don't give a damn whether the reader cares or not. You just try to find some space to tell your story.

**Meuret:** At the time of the war in ex-Yugoslavia, Martin Bell, a former BBC journalist, coined the term "journalism of attachment" to describe a situation in which the reporter had a moral obligation to "record the human and emotional costs of war,"<sup>8</sup> demand intervention, and not simply transfer information. Were you aware of this change in reporting, which foregrounds emotions?

**Hatzfeld:** This situation affected the Anglo-Saxons more than it affected us. We had another term, "militant journalism." We have often been activists. Both journalists and authors have championed causes. That is a very French tradition, from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Now on the Anglo-Saxon side, George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* is a case in point.

Attachment is not new. But the Americans have always felt more embarrassed by this. British journalist John Burns, who spent forty years reporting for the *New York Times*, defended that idea—slightly iconoclastic in the US—that he was on the side of the victims. Some French were siding with the Algerians. The Americans used to avoid taking sides. They did all the Vietnam War behind the US army but were very critical, even violent. In Bosnia, the BBC also played a role of paramount importance. It put a lot of effort in covering the conflict with radio, television. They developed a variety of narrative forms: daily news, magazine journalism, fiction. The BBC produced *Warriors*,<sup>9</sup> and also this remarkable documentary series in six episodes, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, on the breakup of the country. Their narrative commitment was extraordinary. Some journalists, like Allan Little and John Burns, were put in the hot seat because they stood by the victims. Geography was part of the explanation. The war in Bosnia had two main characteristics. First: freedom of movement, at your own risk. That's why it killed so many journalists. Thirty-seven died, others were wounded. You could cross the frontlines very easily. It was dangerous, but not forbidden. Second: the siege. You were either in it, or out of it. Some decided to stay in. John Burns did.

**Le Cam:** The journalist's commitment is somehow similar to the author's engagement, for instance in the case of Rwanda. How do you, as a journalist and/or author, develop or apprehend reality?

**Hatzfeld:** We all lean on reality, the real. Then there are rules. The main difference between an author and a journalist is the so-called *mise-en-scène*: how you present the facts. Authors can present a reality in a way that is not possible for journalists. In my own situation, there may have been a kind of complementarity. Some stories are terribly difficult to tell because time flies. Let me give you an example. At war, we get bored. The most important moment of the war is boredom, waiting. And that is impossible to tell in a newspaper, so we don't talk about it. The readers want to know about actions—decisive moments, massacres—and therefore the journalist instinctively takes an interest in highly tense moments to the detriment of slower, less relevant moments, which are nevertheless constitutive of the event. The author—and that's what I tried to do—will use the notes that are left aside. We meet a lot of people that never or hardly appear in our reportages. We listen a lot but use little material because we must work fast. As journalists, we leave lots of people by the wayside. But as authors we can come back and spend time with them, not just out of duty, but because they are truly important in the war. Their role was underestimated and they never had due recognition. And yet they are interesting characters. As an author, you can come back to these moments of silence, boredom, and cheerfulness. It is difficult, in a war, to tell stories

of intense love, which explain the nostalgia, because people and relations are different. Everything is upside down, and this disruption is a difficult story to tell. So you may be tempted to get back to this and to recreate characters that you actually met. So you recreate a reality. That's where the difference lies. If you read Faulkner, you are in the South of the United States; if you read Victor Hugo (*Les Misérables*), you are in nineteenth-century France. Cosette and Jean Valjean do not exist, but in fact they do. Madame Bovary existed in all the small French towns at that time. So there are different situations and temperaments for authors and journalists, but the difference is actually minimal.

**Le Cam:** Fiction makes it possible to tell something that actually happened, but also to introduce elements that would transform that reality?

**Hatzfeld:** Authors have the liberty to do so, but it is forbidden to journalists. In the case of fiction, reality may be distorted. The official boundary is the way in which you represent reality. It also depends on your point of view (racist, sexist, etc.). The First World War is the most blatant case where novelists—namely the French, Henri Barbusse (*Under Fire*), or later, Céline (*Journey to the End of the Night*); the Canadian, Timothy Findley (*The Wars*); the German, Erich Remarque—all wrote about the reality of the trenches with more truth and understanding than the journalists and historians at the time, who were handicapped by the urgency, the technical issues, and above all the censorship and patriotism. There is also Vassili Grossman, who was an immense war correspondent for *Krasnaya Zvezda*. He was on the frontline for four years and covered the battles of Kursk and Dniepr, and the siege of Stalingrad. He was one of the first journalists to arrive in Treblinka, and then Berlin. Twenty years later, starting from unused notes, gripping memories, abandoned characters, forgotten moments, unexpressed impressions, he created a story and presented that reality using his imagination, to write his masterpiece, *Life and Fate*.

**Meuret:** Nonfiction, however, brings us closer to a vibrant truth. With the voices of witnesses, nonfiction transcends reality. You compare, with a great deal of caution, the Rwandan genocide to the Shoah, because no one was there to collect what the survivors had to say about their traumatic experience. Telling true stories, rather than using your imagination, brings an extra touch of soul or sensitivity, a humane awareness, to the texts. Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man*, Elie Wiesel's *Night*, or Robert Antelme's *L'Espèce humaine*,<sup>10</sup> shake you to your foundations. These authors attest that the extermination project was a failure, as the Nazis did not succeed in ousting the Jews from the human species. These stories are not imagined—they are written with a pen dipped in harrowing experiences.

**Hatzfeld:** With genocide there is no room for fiction, contrary to what

Lanzmann says.<sup>11</sup> I have been looking for stories that would lead to a novel, but I haven't found any. War is a river that overflows. Genocide is a river drying up. In genocide there are no humane relationships as in wars, where there is love, friendship, solidarity. It's all gone. That's when I stopped journalism. It fell short. When the Rwandan genocide started in 1994, I was in Sarajevo. I didn't even notice. There was no Internet, hardly any phone. I heard about the genocide during the World Cup in the United States. My editorial staff had taken me out of Sarajevo, where I had been staying for too long.

When I arrive in Rwanda, I describe what I see—distraught, starving people fleeing to Congo; the Rwandan Patriotic Front's progress; the blue helmets; corpses; fallow lands; Kouchner<sup>12</sup>; journalists—and I think I'm doing a good job. In September I come back, and I am in shock.

We, the journalists, had written about all the characters in the genocide except the survivors. We had forgotten the survivors. I had copiously read the American and the French press between 1944 and 1946 to see how the end of the war had been narrated. Those who had survived Treblinka or Auschwitz were conspicuously absent from the papers. That was my cue. I had read Primo Levi and Charlotte Delbo.<sup>13</sup> We always say that history never repeats itself, but it does repeat itself. Henceforth my project was to focus on that silence. The survivors were not excluded from the story because they were disliked, but simply because no one had seen or heard them. I went on working in Sarajevo and in Iraq, but by 1997–'98 I felt I had to change attitudes. There was no need to ask *Libération* to send me to Rwanda. I went back on unpaid leave to spend time on the survivors' silence. I felt it was the subject of a book. I crossed the country before finding a place, thanks to a woman.

Here my project becomes literary: I start with this paradox of beauty and horror. I start in Nyamata, a village with 50,000 corpses in the marshes, ghosts, survivors, and killers. I don't need to go through files and records. I am no longer a journalist. I work with the fourteen people who show up first, who agree to work with me thanks to a woman who understands my project. I am not asking the questions a journalist would normally ask. I work with a lot of women, because women are less suspicious. I make several trips to Nyamata, and then back to Paris. I do not investigate; I hardly read anything on Rwanda. I essentially work with Shoah texts, mostly from Primo Levi's last book,<sup>14</sup> forty years after *This Is a Man*. So I fly to and from Nyamata for two years. I travel with notebooks.

With these people conversation is impossible, so I use topics. And I work with Francine, Berthe, Jean-Baptiste on these various themes and I discover a lot of things. For instance, something shocked and embarrassed me right away: lies matter more than truth. In these stories, the most important mate-



rial will be lies and silence. The first time I meet sixteen-year-old Jeannette, she tells me she has been hiding in the marshes for six months. It is impossible, I tell her. Then she says, “Six hours.” I understand that it does not matter at all. She has confused memories. She can remember only some things distinctly.

Angélique said, “Some memories are polished like glass; others are thrown down the hole of oblivion.” This was spot on. The survivors were together and were always telling the same story. I came and asked questions. I prevented their conversations from going nowhere. I understood that I was going to work with that memory, the lies (sometimes deliberate: if you abandoned your child while running to save your life, you lie; also, several women survived because they were raped). My project was a different way of working that was not fiction and not journalism either. It was something else.

**Meuret:** The subtitle to the collection of your first three books is “Récits des marais rwandais” (Stories from the Marshes in Rwanda). “Stories,” not “testimonies.”

**Hatzfeld:** There are two reasons for this. First, these people don’t want to testify anymore. Out of respect for them I opted for “stories.” The survivors were speaking, but reluctantly. They feared they would not be believed, or were ashamed of what they had to say. This shameful feeling may be linked to a maternal or fraternal gesture they failed to make, or to the fact that some had lost faith in God. Talking about God was very complicated. Or maybe it was too late. A testimony is often useful to put an end to a situation; but here, why would they testify? The survivors did not want to make that effort. A testimony is on a voluntary basis, and they did not want to talk.

**Le Cam:** They do not want to testify. Yet they talk to you. How does that communication happen?

**Hatzfeld:** Sometimes, it was extremely long. We became more familiar as time went by. For the first book, a lot of people refused to talk. Being French, it was rather delicate. I was in rural country, and a lot of people from Nyamata don’t want to talk. Women saved me. They protected me. Others accepted out of politeness. I was very kind to them, never brutalized them. I asked them questions they did not dare to ask themselves. Several years after the genocide, they were all wittering on about the same old things. I helped them to reconstruct their days and thoughts. I intrigued them. It then became possible to understand the silence. It really helped them to talk about their becoming animals. I did not show sympathy. I took all of this naturally, including the stories they dared not tell each other. In *The Antelope’s Strategy*, I explained how a population of 5,000 was decimated at Nyamata, and only twenty survived. They don’t see each other. When they do see each other, they

dare not talk. When people survive a war and go through that kind of experience, they stick together, celebrate. Here they avoid each other because they are incapable of telling that story together.

So I came along and invited them to tell their stories. “How was life then?” “How was it in the mornings?” Innocent explained that he imagined he was a monkey, living in trees, licking leaves to quench his thirst; he was ashamed. Marie-Louise told her story in one day; for Francine, on the other hand, it was a very long process. She wanted to say something but did not dare to say it. You could guess she had been raped. She had been engaged to Théophile, but while they were hiding in the marshes they found they had no feelings for each other anymore. She was ashamed of the fact that she had stopped loving her fiancé. I had been very patient. The process took two years. For the first book I had enough material to write thirty books. They talked because they had nothing to lose.

**Meuret:** The survivors’ poetic language is steeped in Kinyarwanda, leavened with their pain and suffering.<sup>15</sup> The project is also therapeutic, a talking cure?

**Hatzfeld:** It’s not exactly therapy but it helped them. It’s not therapeutic because there is no healing. Talking can alleviate the pain. They realized they had gone through the same experience. I had no duty of remembrance or attachment. First was the beauty of the language—I would never have worked for seventeen years on this project were it not for the beauty of their language. In that story, there is a literary beauty. Pleasure is in the beauty of the landscapes—a paradoxical beauty, as it is tainted with the horror of fifty thousand dying in the marshes—and the searing intensity of the language, the superb metaphors. When Francine says, “When the soul of a person leaves them for a little while, it will then be delicate for them to regain their existence.” When you hear this, you just need to put pen to paper.

**Le Cam:** You have notebooks, pencils, and highlighters. You work and edit. How do you write?

**Hatzfeld:** I flew to and from Nyamata several times. In Rwanda I never left Nyamata, a village with hills and marshes. I understood early on that this would be the place. The characters were the first fourteen people I came across. I had questions, so I talked to people and had long conversations with them. Back in Paris I transcribed every single word, punctuation, hesitations. New questions emerged. So I asked these new questions when I went back, questions about God for instance. The story took shape little by little. For the first book, the choice of monologues was quite natural. Some texts also provided context. I started with Cassius; then Francine, the schoolteacher; then Angélique; then Innocent; then Berthe, her friend; etc. The book was always

the priority. I was looking for rhythm, a narrative thread that would help me write a book where the characters would respond to one another. The rapes were narrated by different voices. Life in the marshes was also told by several characters. Everything in the book was said, but not as written—I did major editing and pruning. First, I connected elements that were said at different times. Then I deleted a lot to avoid boredom, repetition, weariness, triteness. A literary tension must be maintained throughout. With the killers, I did not respect the monologues but worked with themes. I hacked their monologues into pieces, interspersed them with texts that provide context and explained how I got access to them. It was a lot of editing work.

**Le Cam:** You are very modest when you say it's just editing: there is so much rewriting. In *Un papa de sang*,<sup>16</sup> we hear the youth's voices, the transformation of language.

**Hatzfeld:** You are right, that's a lot of work. But it's also a question of intuition. Questions have been finely honed. The writing is more intuitive. I have the attitude of a novelist. I recreate a world.

**Meuret:** Your books also question what it means to be human. The killers say, for instance, "We did not see human beings when we found the Tutsis in the backwaters. I mean, people like us. . . ." The killers do sometimes think about what they have done, although they do not feel guilty and talk about the massacres as if they were a regular job. The split inside the killers is apparent. Pio says, "This wickedness was like someone else's, someone with a heavy heart. The worst changes in me were in my invisible parts, i.e. in my soul and feelings. Which is why I do not recognize myself in that person." Despite the horror, we touch upon something human here.

**Hatzfeld:** Yes, indeed.

**Meuret:** The survivors' stories usually fascinate the readers, but the second book, with the killers, fascinates even more. Cruelty fascinates.

**Hatzfeld:** The fascinating thing in that book is that I succeeded, unwittingly, and without any merit, in doing something no one had been able to do before. I say it quite frankly because I deserve no credit and benefited from exceptional circumstances. On the question of killers, Lanzmann failed; even Rithy Panh,<sup>17</sup> to whom I talked a lot. My characters have a particular story: they are prisoners, locked up in jail, and they believe they'll stay in there forever. Yet they will be released. But when I interview them, they don't know this. They think they will die in jail. They have been tried, so they do not think that what they are telling me can either be useful or harmful to them.

Exceptional is the fact that they killed until May 14, and overnight they were on the run to escape the Rwandan Patriotic Front. So they took refuge in camps in Congo, where they spent two years before being herded back

to prison, where they lived between themselves. Eight thousand killers were jailed. They never faced scrutinizing looks. So it created an altogether different attitude. In the beginning, they lied. It was pointless.

Then they get on with it because the stakes are nil and they can learn a little bit about themselves. So I ask them, "Pio, you are a Christian, and you, Fulgence, you are a vicar, so how do you do with God?" And he tells me that he did not believe for one second that God was on his side when he killed with his machete. So he asked God to give him a break. He asked God to forget him for a little while, and that he would be even more devout later. I helped them say such things. Alphonse said at some point this incredible sentence: "We were less embarrassed to use our machetes than to face the scoffing and scolding of our comrades." He said something extremely important about social conformity. They killed just to be with their folks. They did not see it would end in disaster. I allow them to say those terrible sentences. At some point they tell me that if they did not kill, they would be punished. I was reading Christopher Browning at the time,<sup>18</sup> who explains that Nazi officers always had the choice to kill or not to kill. Nobody obliged them to kill. But if they did not, they were punished. Latrine duties, potato peeling, washing, etc. No big deal. Nobody was sentenced to imprisonment in Germany for refusing to kill a Jew. When I asked one of the killers in Rwanda to tell me what the punishment was, he replied, "A crate of beer." He himself realized, at the moment of speaking, that this was pathetic. So my characters are incapable of facing the killers they were, but they can try talking about it. After they were released, they agreed to meet me again.

**Le Cam:** This is a long-term project—seventeen years on the Rwandan genocide. Do you keep writing because the first interactions were so promising?

**Hatzfeld:** The first idea was the book on the survivors: silence and absence. Sylvie, one of the survivors, had this superbly clever sentence that should be repeated in all schools of journalism: "the international reporters walked past our doors and did not bother to stop because they had no time to lose with people who were at a loss for words." That is the starting point of my book. The story of the killers are different. I was moved by the story of the first book and could not get away from it. I had this urge to go back to the village. The second book was born from the idea that I could talk to the killers. And the third followed because someone told me, "You know, the killers will be set free." They were released and sent back home. Telling the story of men leaving jail and walking twenty-five kilometers back to their plots of land and neighbors was almost a journalist's idea. Ten years had gone by, so it was interesting to ask the same questions again. The killers had changed

since they were set free. More than the loss of confidence, the fact that they had become animals was the hardest part for the survivors. That's the topic of the third book.

The fourth book is about Englebert, a man who had always refused to participate in my other projects. He started talking about his childhood, how he lived with his grandmother, bred cows, went to school, and then his adolescence, the constant threat—that was the story. The last book was premeditated: conversations with the children of the survivors and of the killers. The kids have always seen me talk to their parents. For years I was the only white person in the region. I saw them grow up. Inevitably I wanted to ask them questions too, and I was very pleasantly surprised. I had not imagined what they would tell me.

**Le Cam:** Getting back to this connection between journalist and author, as for instance in your semi-autobiographical novel, *La Ligne de flottaison* (The Waterline),<sup>19</sup> how do you define your approach?

**Hatzfeld:** Whatever the situation, you always have your imagination. The journalist's imaginative world is based on his reportages. Duras's imaginative universe is her childhood in Vietnam. For Modiano, it is his adolescence during the war. For Faulkner, his village in the South. My own imagination is fueled by situations I experienced when I was a journalist. I was first a sports journalist, then a war correspondent, and then I came back to the subject of war for the pleasure of the text. *La Ligne de flottaison* is about the addiction to war journalism. It is possible, for intellectual, sensual, psychological reasons, to be addicted to war. As a journalist, you become addicted because there are so many—love, war—stories to tell. If fear is no obstacle, then it is pure exhilaration. So here we have a piece of journalistic literature, created from reality, without fictive characters, but it can be novelistic in style. Telling the story of the siege in Sarajevo or Beirut is addictive. Very addictive. In *L'Air de la guerre*<sup>20</sup> I wanted to tell the story of characters that had gone by so quickly in my reportages, but also to tell the story of the journalist's position: where is he when he tells his story; what does he see when he moves about with his interpreters; how does he feel the fear, or the absence thereof; what does it mean to be on the frontline? I have written novels because some events struck me when I was a journalist, but I did not have the opportunity to tell them. I also write novels because I have lost patience to fight with newspapers. I used to be more pugnacious.

**Le Cam:** All the narratives you write result from a wish to tell stories inspired by real events, but which require different forms.

**Hatzfeld:** I'm interested in various narrative forms. As a journalist I feel frustrated. I spent three years in Bosnia. At some point dissatisfaction is so

unbearable that it becomes productive: why not come back on that story, with memories and notebooks? With a little imagination I can recreate characters, and in my imagination these characters are real. I devise characters that exist in my imagination. I do not invent them. And then there is the pleasure of writing, a different type of grammar. With reportage, there is not much surprise. I enjoyed the demands of journalism. To live by twenty degrees, without water, with shells and bombs falling over my head. Fine with me, provided you get something in return.

**Meuret:** Literature gives you more latitude?

**Hatzfeld:** Not everyone is as gifted as John Burns. There is a true pleasure in telling real stories differently. All forms of narratives are equally valuable. It is a question of quality, not status. I'm lucky enough to practice different forms of writing. In the stories of Rwanda, the survivors' words are so aesthetically pleasing that I didn't need to ask myself ethical questions. The long-term relation also explains the confidence, and the fact that you can only write true stories. I enjoy striving for truth. It is a question of pleasure: I enjoyed meeting the people in the village, the energy I spent trying to be smart and resourceful. When you have become impervious to cynicism, then it is a pleasure. These stories did not look like anything I had experienced before. War reporters failed in Rwanda. I was blessed to go back to Rwanda and to discover a language.

---

*Florence Le Cam is an Assistant Professor at the Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium. Before becoming the Journalism Chair and Program Leader of the Master's in Journalism in the Department of Information and Communication Studies, she worked in France and Canada. Her research interests are the socialization of web journalists, professional identities of journalists, and the history of newsrooms. She coauthored two books, Du pigeon voyageur à Twitter: Histoire matérielles du journalisme (2013) and Changements et permanences du journalisme (2014). She is currently completing another book on war journalists, anchormen, and emotions, with Denis Ruellan (forthcoming).*



## Notes

1. Jean Hatzfeld, *Dans le nu de la vie* (Paris: Seuil, 2000, trans. Linda Coverdale, *Life Laid Bare: The Survivors in Rwanda Speak* (New York: Other Press, 2006).
2. Jean Hatzfeld, *Une saison de machettes* (Paris: Seuil, 2003, trans. Linda Coverdale, *Machete Season: The Survivors in Rwanda Speak* (New York: Picador, 2006).
3. Jean Hatzfeld, *La Stratégie des antilopes* (Paris: Seuil, 2007), trans. Linda Coverdale, *The Antelope's Strategy: Living in Rwanda after the Genocide* (New York: Picador, 2010).
4. Emmanuel Carrère (b. 1959) is a contemporary French novelist and scriptwriter, best known for his nonfiction, translated in English as *The Adversary* by Linda Coverdale (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), based on a true crime, and *Limonov*, trans. John Lambert (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2014). He is among this generation of French authors that find inspiration in *fait divers* and real events, together with Régis Jauffret and Jean Rolin.
5. *XXI* is a French journal created by Patrick de Saint-Exupéry and Laurent Beccaria, specializing in longform journalism. It contains pieces of narrative journalism, but also photo and graphic reportages. Some of its contributors are Emmanuel Carrère, Denis Robert, Jean Rolin, and Joe Sacco. In French we call it a mook, a portmanteau (magazine + book), as it contains no advertisements and sells in bookshops, not at newsstands. *XXI* created a sensation when it emerged in 2008, and has proved an immense success since then, with an average of 50,000 readers for each issue. A plethora of other magazines are trying to emulate it.
6. Patrick Modiano (b. 1945) is a famous French author who was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 2014, “for the art of memory with which he has evoked the most ungraspable human destinies and uncovered the life-world of the Occupation.” He is best known for his *Occupation Trilogy: La Place de l'Étoile, The Night Watch, Ring Roads* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).
7. Laure Adler interviewed Jean Hatzfeld for *Hors-Champs*, France-Culture, October 24, 2013.
8. Martin Bell, “The Journalism of Attachment,” in *Media Ethics*, ed. Matthew Kieran (London: Routledge, 1998), 15–22.
9. *Warriors* is a 1999 BBC TV series on the war in Bosnia, written by Leigh Jackson and directed by Peter Kosminsky.
10. Robert Antelme, like Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel, was a Holocaust survivor. His *L'Espèce humaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000) (literally, “the human species”) is a major work on concentration camps, trans. Jeffrey Haight and Annie Mahler, *The Human Race* (Marlboro, VT: Marlboro Press, 1992). Before deportation, Antelme was married to Marguerite Duras, whose *War: A Memoir*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), is a journal of her husband's absence.
11. Claude Lanzmann (b. 1925) is a Jewish journalist and filmmaker. He was in the French Resistance during the Occupation of France. He is best known for his 1985 documentary, *Shoah*.
12. Bernard Kouchner is a French physician (cofounder of Doctors without

Borders) and politician, who was minister in several governments. At the time of the genocide in Rwanda, he took initiatives to evacuate Tutsi kids from the country.

13. Charlotte Delbo (1913–1985) is a Holocaust survivor. She is best known for her trilogy, *Auschwitz and After*, trans. Rosette C. Lamont (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).

14. Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Summit Books, 1988).

15. The texts, originally in French, alternate French from France (contexts provided by Hatzfeld) and Rwandan French, influenced by Kinyarwanda, the official language of Rwanda (the survivors' accounts). This reinforces, Spiessens argues, the authenticity of the witnesses' testimonies. See Anneleen Spiessens, “La Mise en scène du bourreau: Jean Hatzfeld et Gilbert Gatore: Fictions sur le genocide rwandais,” in *Témoigner: Entre histoire et mémoire/Getuigen: Tussen Geschiedenis en Gedachtnis* 102 (2009): 29–40.

16. Jean Hatzfeld, *Un papa de sang* (Paris: Gallimard, 2015).

17. Rithy Panh (b. 1964) is a documentary filmmaker born in Cambodia and who took refuge in France to escape the Khmer Rouge tyranny. His oeuvre, which includes *The Missing Picture* (2013) and *Exile* (2016), is entirely a tribute to the victims of the genocidal regime of the Khmer Rouge.

18. Christopher Browning (b. 1944) is a US Holocaust historian, best known for *Ordinary Men* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), a book about the German officers who deported and killed Jews. Browning posits that the officers committed atrocities partly due to pressure and influence.

19. Jean Hatzfeld, *La Ligne de flottaison* (Paris: Seuil, 2005).

20. Jean Hatzfeld, *L'Air de la guerre: sur les route de Croatie et de Bosnie-Herzégovine* (Paris: Éditions de L'Olivier, 1994).

## Reading Otherwise: Literary Journalism as an Aesthetic Narrative Cosmopolitanism

William Dow  
American University of Paris, France

*Keynote Address, The Eleventh International Conference for Literary Journalism Studies, Pontificia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil, May 19, 2016.*

“All progress is experimental.”<sup>1</sup>

“The first person is the most terrifying view of all.”<sup>2</sup>

We need to pay much closer attention to the “experimental progress” that combinatory and hybridic narrative forms have made and what writers are doing with such forms. We also need to see how these forms interact with “raw material,” the actual workings and driving forces of culture and society. One of the most critically neglected narrative genres, resulting in a not particularly satisfactory term, is “literary journalism” (I’ll spare you my neologisms for variants of this term). Instead of obsessing with genre issues or scrambling for more taxonomic features, it can be more helpful to see how the modes of literature and journalism fuse and function in individual works produced from specific historical moments and contexts. In broad terms, literary journalism is foremost a pairing of literature and journalism—a combination perhaps more intimately related than any other two narrative genres because it is a way of posing problems and pursuing solutions in ways that no other paired or interfused genres can.

I’d like to expand on this point for a moment by inverting and modifying David Shields’s recent argument in his book, *Reality Hunger*: the work of a literary journalist is vital precisely because it permits and encourages readerly knowledge in a way that is less indirect than fiction and less contrived and more open than conventional journalism.<sup>3</sup>

In my talk today, I want to focus on *reading* literary journalism—an under-treated and under-explored element in literary journalism studies—and



James Baldwin by Samuel Price  
(reproduced by kind permission of the artist).

specifically on reading first-person literary-journalistic texts. But I want to do so with the understanding that, like literature, literary journalism is not immutable, self-defining, and non-transgressive. Related to this, the formalistic and ontological natures of literature and journalism, when brought together, do things that we're just beginning to understand. For example, the "literary" in literary journalism is unlike the literary in literature because it is essentially transformed by the journalistic and essayistic discourse; so, too, is the "journalism" by the literary. I would suggest that interpreting a metaphor in a literary journalistic text is not necessarily the same as doing so in a piece of conventional journalism or fiction, and that such literary tools and descriptors as symbol, metonymy, image, and tone can take on quite different qualities and meanings in a literary journalistic work, and particularly, as I'm going to suggest, if the work is in the first person. This of course affects the reading of literary journalism in that one reads (or should read) this genre differently than one reads literature or straightforward journalistic pieces.

But regarding the reading of nonfiction/hybridic/experimental/literary-journalistic prose, this is far from the view espoused by the majority of specialists who have devoted their lives to studying narrative. For example, Dorrit Cohn's *The Distinction of Fiction* argues for "a definition of fiction that applies solely to nonreferential narrative"<sup>4</sup> (e.g., "novels, short stories, ballads, and epics"<sup>5</sup>), while referential narratives (e.g., "historical works, journalistic reports, biographies, autobiographies"<sup>6</sup>) refer to a world outside of the text, and, unlike nonreferential narratives, "are subject to judgements of truth and falsity."<sup>7</sup> Significantly, falling under neither category, a part of her nonfictional argument centers on describing the New Journalists of the 1970s as a "postmodern reincarnation of the New Biographical trend."<sup>8</sup> She asserts:

Some have actually made claim to the creation of a new literary form that wipes out for good . . . all the antiquated distinction between factual and fictional writing. But a look at the oxymoronic subtitles featured on the title pages of these newer crossbreeds—True Life Novel, Novel Biography, Nonfiction Novel—makes it clear that they were largely written and read for their transgressive shock value. . . . [T]heir fictionalizing devices boil down principally to the consistent application of focalizing technique—sometimes in stream of consciousness form—to real life sports heroes, rock stars, and convicted murderers. In this perspective, biographies that act like novels, far from erasing the borderline between the two genres, actually bring the line that separates them more clearly into view.<sup>9</sup>

Cohn, "the doyenne of American narratology,"<sup>10</sup> is both suspicious and dismissive of new journalistic texts and, as she shows later in her book, of combinatory and hybridic texts in general.<sup>11</sup> Quite simply, she doesn't know

what to do with them. Not only does she suggest that the discourses of fiction and history are qualitatively different from each other—"[history] ties to the level of reference and [fiction's] detachment from this level determines distinct discursive parameters"<sup>12</sup>—but she implies that the genres of fiction and nonfiction are un-porous, immutable, and should be seen as mutually distinct; she also suggests (e.g., in her criticism of Tom Wolfe) that these two forms would do best to stay away from each other.

I would agree with her claim that narratologists "have, to a quite astonishing degree, ignored the question of demarcation between fiction and nonfiction"<sup>13</sup> by limiting their analyses to fictional narratives.<sup>14</sup> But I'm going to mistrust any kind of overarching narrative poetics that tends to believe that the entire panoply of literary analyses and tools apply equally well to both fiction and nonfiction, especially when the textual exemplifications for defending this position are drawn exclusively, as they are in Cohn's study, from novels and other fictional genres.<sup>15</sup> According to Cohn, the kinds of discursive and (by implication) reading modes that she argues for in her book "apply equally within and without fiction,"<sup>16</sup> a point she constantly returns to.

Two persistent problems can be seen in Cohn's argument: in the scholarship on narration and narrative theory—and that of literary criticism in general—literary-journalistic texts do not seem to deserve the same degree of scrutiny as fictional texts. But this is essentially a non-issue for Cohn, as it is for Genette, Barthes, Ricoeur, and the standard parade of French theorists from whom she profusely quotes. Thorough formalistic and narrative analyses of the literary-journalistic work of such canonized writers as James Baldwin, Barbara Ehrenreich, Charles Bowden, Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, Joan Didion, and David Foster Wallace is noticeably lacking in the criticism. This lack becomes even more striking when compared to the amount of criticism on their novelist and poet counterparts or, equally problematic, to that of their own fictional output.

For example, there's a profusion of commentary on Wallace's novel, *Infinite Jest* (1996), and the critical industry has now clicked in for his unfinished novel, *The Pale King* (2011), but there's very little formal analysis on his best literary-journalistic pieces, among them "Shipping Out," "Ticket to the Fair," and his collection of essays, *Consider the Lobster* (2005), which deserves its own book-length critical study. As borne out by the MLA international bibliography and other scholarly databases, a similar scenario can be seen in Ehrenreich studies. What one generally finds in the criticism are generic biographical sketches and trudging summaries of her major works, usually accompanied by an exclusion or dismissiveness of her narrative importance. Predictably, a notable exception can be found in Steven J. Kellman's critical

review of Ehrenreich's only published novel, *Kipper's Game*.<sup>17</sup> Not accidentally, this kind of critical attention and close reading is not found in the studies of her literary-journalistic work—for example, *Nickel and Dimed* (2001), her hallmark achievement.

Cohn is not alone. For narratologists and narrative theorists such as Monica Fludernik, Brian Richardson, James Phelan, and Jonathan Culler, literary-journalistic texts seem to deserve no attention at all. I've always found it remarkable that many critics trained to recognize the finest grains of formal and generic structures in poetry and the novel, and to interpret their influence with theoretical sophistication, still treat journalistic and literary-journalistic texts as if they expect the texts, based on such forms, to provide transparent access to the thoughts of the writer. The second problem might be best suggested through two questions. One, can we show that the narratives of literary-journalistic texts are unique in their potential for crafting a self-enclosed universe ruled by formal patterns that are ruled out in all other orders of discourse? And two, can we make an argument for a specific reading of such texts dependent on the fact that, in John Hartsock's words, "narrative literary journalism's referentiality to phenomena [is] different from that of other related genres, particularly conventional fiction on the one hand and dominant journalism practices on the other"?<sup>18</sup> As a response to both questions, we can—and must—if we're going to defend the reading of literary journalism as a particular ontological and practical activity, and literary journalism itself as a historical form to be reckoned with by linguists, narratologists, and narrative theorists of every stripe.<sup>19</sup> We also need the mutual recognition of other disciplines—e.g., sociology, anthropology, African American Studies, gender studies, visual studies, media studies, and literary criticism—if literary journalism studies is to reach its full potential.

One last point before I get to my discussion of reading first-person literary journalistic pieces. And this argument concerns issues surrounding histories of American literature, American journalism, and American literary journalism. Please excuse my Anglo-American centrism here, but what I have to say will be largely applicable to international forms of literary journalism and national literary and journalism histories.

In relation to histories devoted to American literature and American journalism, I'll start off with a question: What does literary journalism know? Literary journalism's relation to knowledge of course is complex and open. But what is clear is that this genre's merits as a guide to self-interpretation, self-understanding, and its ability to expand, enlarge, or reorder our sense of the world, is unquestionable. My point is that knowledge and genre are inescapably intertwined because all forms of knowing—whether poetic or

political, journalistic or scientific—rely on an assortment of formal resources, stylistic conventions, and conceptual schemata. The literary-journalistic genre and the knowledge it procures is an essential part both of an American literary history and a journalism history, and therefore its general exclusion from both these histories is more than troubling.

Take the case of some of the representative American literary histories as exclusionary examples: *The Columbia History of the American Novel* (1991); *The Oxford History of the Novel in English: The American Novel: 1870–1940* (2014); *A Companion to the Modern American Novel, 1900–1950* (2009); *A Companion to American Fiction, 1865–1914* (2009); *The Cambridge Companion to American Novelists* (2013); and *A New Literary History of America* (2009). Although many of us consider literary journalism as a historical *literary genre*, much like modernism or realism, none of these histories have any chapters on literary journalism, in whole or in part, and its relation to US literature. None list the term "literary journalism" or such related incarnations as "creative nonfiction," "reportage," and "investigative fiction" in their indexes or tables of contents. Nor do any of these histories, with the exception of one chapter in *The Cambridge History of the American Novel* (2011), David Schmid's "The Nonfiction Novel," and a subject-related chapter, Betsy Klimasmith's "Journalism and the Urban Novel" (from *The Oxford History of the Novel in English*), contain any discussions about American literary journalism, as if both its knowledge and form were immaterial and its historical formations nonexistent.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, histories of American journalism also tend to efface the term *literary journalism*, and exclude the genre as essential to journalism history.<sup>21</sup> In a random sampling of book-length studies on the subject, my results were mostly negative. Predating the New Journalism of the 1960s, an older work such as Frank Luther Mott's *American Journalism: 1690–1960*<sup>22</sup> perhaps understandably does not contain substantive content on literary journalism nor is this term listed as part of any chapter title or in its index. But neither do more recent studies, including *The Press in America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media*<sup>23</sup>; Hilary H. Ward's *Mainstreams of American Media History*<sup>24</sup>; and Ken Auletta's *Inside the Business of News*.<sup>25</sup> Even more specialized studies often concerning alternative narrative forms, such as Jean Marie Lutes's *Front Page Girls: Women Journalists in American Culture and Fiction, 1880–1930*<sup>26</sup>; Everette E. Dennis and William L. Rivers's *Other Voices: The New Journalism in America*<sup>27</sup>; Lauren Kessler's *The Dissident Press: Alternative Journalism in American History*<sup>28</sup>; Bob Ostertag's *People's Movements, People's Press: The Journalism of Social Justice Movements*<sup>29</sup>; and Todd Vogel's *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays*<sup>30</sup> eschew the term literary journalism and its old

and new avatars.

This is not to deny that there have been excellent, groundbreaking studies done on American literary journalism history. We are all immensely indebted to Norman Sims, John Hartsock, Thomas B. Connery, Shelly Fisher Fishkin, Phyllis Frus, Jan Whitt, Karen Roggenkamp, Doug Underwood, Ben Yagoda, John J. Pauly, Mark Kramer, and others. And there have been useful social histories on American newspapers that include, for example, discussion of literary realism and new journalism, such as Michael Schudson's *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers*<sup>31</sup> or Cecelia Tichi's cultural history on muckraking in America, *Exposés and Excess*,<sup>32</sup> or Jeff Allred's study of 1930s documentary forms, *American Modernism and Depression Documentary*.<sup>33</sup> But it is to say that we have work ahead in reciprocally engaging with other disciplines—and in considering in our work not only literary criticism and journalism studies but also American studies, African-American studies, gender studies, and so on—to create an interdisciplinary, cross-cultural and international study of literary journalism that would include its various national, area-based, and local histories. A principal challenge for American literary journalism studies—a challenge which can be applied transnationally—is that a case must be made for literary journalism as a *necessary* category for literary and journalistic historiography.<sup>34</sup>

Now, what does all of this have to do with first-person forms of literary journalism? Not surprisingly, I'm going to say, "everything." As a backdrop for the rest of my talk, the act of reading first-person forms can best be contextualized, not through an atomized approach (i.e., inexplicably separate and largely mutually exclusive histories for American literature, American journalism, and American literary journalism), as is the case today, but rather through a certain kind of historical, interdisciplinary, international way to both present narrative history and to interpret narrative.<sup>35</sup>

This is also a way of suggesting a specific phenomenology of reading that contains both an inside (experience in and of itself) and outside view (historically and culturally determined experience).<sup>36</sup> Put another way, the historical claims that literary journalism history makes need to be embedded in the reading process.

But why the primary focus on first-person narratives? To my mind, the first person is best positioned to provide a window into and a history of subjectivity—or in Svetlana Alexievich's words, "a history of feelings,"<sup>37</sup> arguably the heart-blood of literary journalism, which third-person and other narrative points of view do much less effectively. Secondly, the increasing presence of first-person narrative is the current ballast of our Internet age—and is therefore imperative to study. Thirdly, and most importantly, the first-person liter-

ary journalistic point of view can serve as an important inroad to developing a discipline of literary journalism studies that not only informs a theory of the field but creates a platform in which the genre can be examined on its own terms, and not necessarily on those of mass communications, journalism, and literary studies.

### Baldwin in the First Person

James Baldwin's first-person narratives will serve as a kind of template for what I'm suggesting in this talk. But I'm going to try to do this without assuming that you know about or have necessarily read James Baldwin. My argument begins with an exploratory poetics of Baldwin's first-person literary forms and ends with a discussion of what I'm calling a "literary-journalistic reading pact," largely transferable to first-person forms in general.

"First person is where you can be more interesting," Shields writes in *Reality Hunger*. "The wisdom there is more precious than the sage overview."<sup>38</sup> He associates such wisdom as conducing to "the real world, with all its hard edges, but the real world fully imagined and fully written, not merely reported."<sup>39</sup> On the other end of the first-person debate and the use of the "personal" in narrative journalism, the journalist, Eve Fairbanks, criticizes the personal essay and "confessional articles" as harming serious journalistic endeavors. In a recent article for the *Washington Post*, she laments what she calls "the personal essay boom," which draws the reporter away from the wider domain of human experience and—in a position diametrically opposed to Shields's—creates "a disconnect between how we imagine ourselves and who we really are."<sup>40</sup> Fairbanks argues for an in-depth and "outside" view but concedes: "perhaps in our new age of instant news deadlines and dried-up travel budgets, plumbing the depths of [one's] own life seem[s] to be the only way to spend time on a topic, to take the breath and say something slower and more considered, to draw 'reporting' from a wider time frame than this morning's press conference."<sup>41</sup>

In the context of this debate, the writings of Baldwin can be seen as offering an intriguing affirmation of *both* positions. That is, the merit of his work exists precisely in that its overt personal meditations intend to result broadly in some kind of social or racial understanding—and the work does not want to be confessional or idiosyncratically individualized. As forms of resistance to mainstream representations, his literary journalism demonstrates that the domains of aesthetics and philosophical reflection are coextensive and that it can be impossible to disengage individual political claims from artistic practice. At its best, driven by a stylistic forcefulness, his first-person narratives fuse a "sage overview" with a penetrating "personal account."



Baldwin's "I" prompts us to understand his function as a writer bringing together, or pairing, literature and journalism—in ways and under a certain African American literary journalistic tradition that have gone largely unrecognized by Baldwin critics. In fact, extant Baldwin scholarship is still largely bifurcated between Baldwin's essays and his fiction, his political advocacy and his literary art.<sup>42</sup> This scholarship pays scant attention to his hybridic experimental progress and literary use of raw material, particularly if it concerns forays into his visions of journalism.

Nevertheless, most of Baldwin's first-person literary journalistic pieces seem to have as much "fiction" in them as his fiction does, but at the same time their aims are different: the mediation between the reader and writer is sharper and closer in his first-person literary journalism. This is the case even when the issues and events described are chronologically distant and overtly topical. Clearly, it is Baldwin's "I" that conflates the subjectivity of the personal essay and the objectivity of the public essay, the intelligence of the personal witness with the atemporal political prognostics that make his first-person accounts so powerful and compelling.

### Baldwin's Autobiographical Selves

I'm now going to sketch out a poetics appropriate to reading Baldwin's first-person narratives. First, though, as conventional narrative categories go, the most substantial difference between a first-person nonfictional narrator and that of its counterpart in fiction is that the writer is not the same person as the narrator. In works of nonfiction, the writer and the narrator are almost always the same.<sup>43</sup> To a certain extent, Baldwin's work can be productively conceptualized through such a division.<sup>44</sup> His first-person accounts generally give special attention to the relations among the narrator, and the audience and the something that has happened or perhaps might or will happen. Although for him the first person might be "the most terrifying point of view," it is arguably his preferred point of view.<sup>45</sup>

Here are the major elements of the poetics:

First, Baldwin will clearly identify his autobiographical self as the author of the text. For instance, the "Jimmy Baldwin" in the profile "Sidney Poitier" is the actual James Baldwin described in the text,<sup>46</sup> as is the friend "Jimmy" to Lorraine Hansberry in the portrait, "Sweet Lorraine."<sup>47</sup> So, too, the obvious but unnamed young James Baldwin is the real-life protégé of Beauford Delaney, the African American visual artist, in "The Price of the Ticket." To put this differently, Baldwin's narrative reflections in his essays commonly begin with an identification and an inquiry into the specific nature of the autobiographical self—and then work outwards towards social and racial realities as

they affect this self.

In congruence, Baldwin's first-person literary journalism makes us think about what it means to read ourselves into history. Tracking the conditions of his first-person journeys constitutes a certain historical enterprise, one that does not mitigate historical fact but persuades us of its inextricability from aesthetic articulateness. *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961), *The Fire Next Time* (1963), *No Name in the Street* (1972), and *The Devil Finds Work* (1976) all insist on the importance of their first-person historicity. At the same time, the internal perspectives of these literary-journalistic texts, achieved through first-person narrations, best promote narrator identification and reader empathy.

Second, Baldwin's literary-journalistic intensity is inseparable from his first-person self-exposure. In this self-exposure, Baldwin interweaves instruction and provocation, vulnerability and authority, self-condemnation and prideful racial and sexual beliefs, to carve out his own spaces between the interstices of "fiction" and "nonfiction."

As a result, unlike other writers traditionally considered nonfiction or essay writers, he does not insist on the unassailable verisimilitude of his writing. Instead, he follows his emotions and intellectual logic while fusing his truth claims with the creation of himself as a symbolic cultural and racial figure who, with his journey of the "I" at the center (and not infrequently eliding into his various incarnations of "we"), freely imagines experiences and makes readers virtually feel his beliefs. In this way, for example, the dramatized "I" in such essays as "The Harlem Ghetto," "Equal in Paris," and "Stranger in the Village" becomes the persona of an alienated outsider who at the same time wishes to upset the comforting shibboleths of Western institutions.

Third, Baldwin's first-person narratives (e.g., *Notes of a Native Son* and *Nobody Knows My Name*) maintain the literary as a structure of knowledge.<sup>48</sup> While his fiction contains elements such as figurative language, imagery, conflict, voice, and characterization, his first-person literary journalistic pieces transform into an arguably closer polemical-emotional bond with the reader than his fiction allows. In this sense, it is symptomatic that Baldwin, like Didion, tends to work in a smaller, more intimate range, creating sketches rather than large, synthetic narratives.

For example, in *No Name in the Street* (1972), when Baldwin is about to give the suit he wore at Martin Luther King's funeral to a former childhood friend, he muses about his present existence: "I had no conceivable relationship to them anymore—that shy, pop-eyed thirteen year old my friend's mother had scolded was no more. I was not the same, but *they* were, as though they had been trapped, preserved, in that moment of time."<sup>49</sup>

In *No Name in the Street*, a fragmented, literary-impressionistic, and non-linear recounting of the black freedom struggles and the civil rights movement, Baldwin intimately associates his own existential alienation with the racial and social power struggles then taking place in the US. His intense polemical-emotional bond focuses on sensory intimacy and personal feeling that converge with his interrogation of black historical memory and experience.

Fourth, Baldwin's autobiographical selves, specifically his intention to let the reader know that the biographical Baldwin is both the narrator and author of his texts, readily conduce to pronouncing his views on racial or ethnic communities *and* on his own writerly state. "What the writer is always trying to do," Baldwin asserts in "As Much Truth as One Can Bear," "is [to] utilize the particular in order to reveal something much larger and heavier than any particular can be."<sup>50</sup>

This is why Baldwin, in such rarely examined profiles as "The Fight: Patterson vs. Liston" (1963), wished to provide the reader with a sensation of referential directness and clarity, while at the same time being about Baldwin's "self-story" rather than a conventional autobiographical "life story,"<sup>51</sup> and producing his conception of an essayistic literary style.<sup>52</sup> In "The Fight," first published in the *Nugget* in 1963, Baldwin identifies himself as a "journalist,"<sup>53</sup> though a rather hapless one, suffering the press conferences, and freely admitting that he's not "an aficionado of the ring."<sup>54</sup>

As Baldwin stated in a 1959 questionnaire, "the private life, his own and that of others, is the writer's subject,"<sup>55</sup> a maxim teased out in "The Fight." That is, at crucial times in the profile, Baldwin focuses, both referentially and subjectively, on his real-life subjects' privacy (e.g., Patterson's "will to privacy") and on the narrator's own ("I had had a pretty definitive fight with someone with whom I had hoped to be friends").<sup>56</sup>

Fifth, in such first-person pieces as "The Fight," Baldwin, the biographical author, turns himself into a narrator who reports directly to us on persons and events: either on his own experience, when the highly personal, autobiographical dimension prevails, or on others' when a more impersonal journalistic "story" is involved. Baldwin's first-person literary journalistic pieces may be narrative, dramatic, or poetic—depending on which configuration dominates—or they may be all three. His literary journalism can be stretched in any direction, which can well explain the neglect of the genre in literary studies.

Sixth, Baldwin's literary-journalistic pieces are "lyrical" or "poetic" to the extent that he appears to be talking to himself rather than to others. This is the case with "Stranger in the Village," in which the first-person narrator-protagonist recurrently tries to explain to himself why he feels like a "stranger"

in a small Swiss village, "despite everything [he] may do to feel differently."<sup>57</sup> Thus some of his "I"-accounts will characteristically take the form of a "mediation" overheard by the reader.

On the other hand, the content of some of these pieces, the fact that they are concerned with ideas ultimately addressed directly by an author to a reader, assigns the genre primarily to a category of didactic, expository, or critical writing. Insofar as the literary-journalistic account's essential quality is persuasion, in so far as in its purest form it is argument, for example *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* (1985), the aesthetic organization of the material remains subordinated to the treatment of an event or situation that exists in time and space, of an idea or text which the writer is ultimately committed to telling the "truth" about, a truth for which he is answerable.

Seventh, in an ancillary way, we might ask if Baldwin's first-person literary journalism, besides being a narrative mode, might be conceived more productively as an analytical mode that—in evoking a certain authority to the referential—distinguishes it from fiction and conventional journalistic texts, and that we must adjust our reading (and teaching) practices accordingly.

Eighth, reading Baldwin's literary journalism, I am continually adjusting myself to the emerging aspects of his fictional and journalistic selves. What this necessary adjustment perhaps also underlines is that the prevailing sense of his first-person literary pieces tend to be diachronic rather than synchronic: his first-person literary journalistic accounts are and are not literature; are and are not journalism; or rather not yet literature or not yet journalism but could evolve or dissolve into either narrative form. This speaks to Baldwin's inclination, in his first-person narratives, towards a "free improvisation," which, as Carter Mathes argues, "begins to capture part of the critical and formal interplay between vernacular tradition and formal innovation that Baldwin executes in his texts."<sup>58</sup>

Ninth, Baldwin's first-person literary journalism is exemplary not so much for the wealth of his knowledge as for his "vision"—a vision that contributes to bringing the writer's racial-historical conceptions as a whole before us. Baldwin's first-person visionary potential is representatively evinced in "Down at the Cross":

Everything now, we must assume, is in our hands; we have no right to assume otherwise. If we—and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others—do not falter in their duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world.<sup>59</sup>

The dramatic "I" in "Down at the Cross" adopts a *persona* as an outside

prophetic viewer of Western culture and history. “[Baldwin’s] conception . . . of a prophetic dimension,” as Hortense Spillers has argued, “would be borne out in the democratic process as the route to the achievement of ‘our country’: one that is no longer based on skin color, but rather on consciousness. . . .”<sup>60</sup> Baldwin’s private, intimate “I,” however, is most meaningful in a public, trans-racial, transnational sense.

### Literary-Journalistic Reading Pact

As part of his first-person strategies, Baldwin (ideally) creates, heightened by his profusion of personal data and references, what I call a literary-journalistic pact or tacit narrative understanding with the reader. For the pact to be effective, not only must “the author, the narrator, and the protagonist . . . be identical,”<sup>61</sup> but the author must be convincing both on a referential level and on a story or discourse level. Implicit in this pact is the reader’s attention to the world created by the referential world outside the text *and* by the text itself. For Baldwin, this world would include the immeasurable problems of race, racial exclusion, and poverty, as well as the possibilities of a modern racial ideal, and, as suggested in *Nobody Knows My Name*, a de-racialization of the self as a precondition for being in society.<sup>62</sup>

Thus the literary journalistic pact cannot be concluded, or conclusively analyzed, by taking text alone into consideration. Nor can it be concluded by neglecting the author’s purposes of enlivening, reiterating, or bringing attention to the referential level. This pact forms the basic relationship through which literary journalists bind themselves to their readers, that is, by warranting true statements that can be factually verified; by insisting on a verifiable autobiographical self; and by simultaneously employing a literary expressiveness as effective as the discourse of a literary text. In contrast, in a fictional text, the author is not necessarily identical to the narrator, and the protagonist and the contents of the text need not be verifiable.<sup>63</sup> This pact therefore suggests that the literary journalistic text is as much a mode of reading as it is a genre of writing—which, in my view, most differentiates literary journalism from either literature or journalism.<sup>64</sup> For the pact to work, however, “the lure and the blur of the real” must effectively combine with an “overly literal tone, as if a reporter were viewing a strange culture.”<sup>65</sup> And, I should add, as if this strange culture were being explained for the first time.

The reading of Baldwin’s first-person narratives should not only be an attempt to look at literary-journalistic writing as a cultural or historical document, but also to attend to what these narratives do as distinct from other language acts.<sup>66</sup> More precisely, congruent to the pact, this position entails a phenomenology of reading in which experience is always related to narrative

and new experiences will constantly affect our narrative interpretations. As Hanna Meretoja has argued in her discussion on the ontological significance of narratives: “narrative interpretations have a very real effect on our being in the world: they take part in the making of the intersubjective world . . . and affect the ways in which we act in the world with others.”<sup>67</sup> Reading Baldwin’s use of the first-person singular—and of such forms in general—demands new formalistic tools based on such a pact, the value of which is inescapably linked to the experience of the reader and to the reader’s willingness to be changed by his or her reading experience.<sup>68</sup>

---

### Notes

1. John Jay Chapman, *Practical Agitation* (New York: Scribner, 1900), 17.
2. James Baldwin, *The Art of Fiction*, no. 78, Interview by Jordan Elgrably, *Paris Review*, Spring 1984, <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2994/the-art-of-fiction-no-78-james-baldwin>.
3. David Shields, *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* (New York: Vintage, 2011), 202–03.
4. Doritt Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 9.
5. *Ibid.*, 15.
6. *Ibid.*, 15.
7. *Ibid.*, 15.
8. *Ibid.*, 28.
9. *Ibid.*, 29.
10. Craig Cravens, “Review: *The Distinction of Fiction*” by Dorrit Cohn, *Comparative Literature Studies* 37, no. 1 (2000), 78.
11. I’m defining narratology as the study of the ways a text functions. As the narratologist Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan argues, narratology operates with a “double orientation”: it “present[s] description of the system governing all fictional narratives,” while at the same time “indicat[ing] a way in which individual narratives can be studied as a unique realization of the general system” (*Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 4).
12. Cohn, *Distinction*, 117.
13. *Ibid.*, 109.
14. Exceptions include Gerald Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative* (Amsterdam: Walter de Gruyter, 1982), and Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985). For a more recent study that qualifies as an exception, see Marie-Laure Ryan and

Jan-Noel Thon, eds., *Storyworlds across Media: Toward a Media Conscious Narratology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014). See also Cecilia Aare, “A Narratological Approach to Literary Journalism: How an Interplay between Voice and Point of View May Create Empathy with the Reader,” *Literary Journalism Studies* 8, no.1 (Spring 2016): 106–29.

15. On this matter, see for example Mark Z. Muggli’s “The Poetics of Joan Didion’s Journalism,” in *American Literature* 59, no.1 (October 1987): 402–421. Although I agree with Muggli’s point that “close analysis of individual journalistic texts has been rare” (402), I don’t think it necessarily follows that “Didion’s rhetoric of fact is best approached through the close analysis practiced by critics interpreting individual literary texts” (403). The works Muggli focuses on in his article—Didion’s *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1968) and *The White Album* (1979)—are not exclusively fictional or journalistic accounts but rather literary-journalistic in nature and intention.

16. Cohn, *Distinction*, 109.

17. Steven J. Kellman, “Ehrenreich’s Game,” *Michigan Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 375–84.

18. John C. Hartsock, *Literary Journalism and the Aesthetics of Experience* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 2.

19. Unfortunately, most critics of American literature are paying little attention to contemporary nonfiction writers or to a group that Robert S. Boynton refers to in his study, *The New New Journalism* (New York: Vintage, 2005), as “the New New Journalists” (Jane Kramer, Jon Krakauer, Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, et al.). The claim that Boynton makes in the book’s introduction—“the New New Journalism has assumed a premier place in American Literature” (xxx)—would be astounding news to these critics, as well as to most cultural historians and American Studies scholars. This does not detract from the point that scholars of American literature should be reading and writing about this extraordinary group of nonfiction writers and literary journalists.

20. Elisa Tamarkin, “Literature in the News,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, ed., Russ Castronovo, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), is one of the rare studies on American literature by a literary historian that demonstrates a firm grasp of journalism scholarship.

21. For the “built-in identity crisis” in journalism history, see John Nerone’s “Does Journalism History Matter,” *American Journalism* 28, no. 4 (Fall 2011): 7–27.

22. Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: 1690–1960* (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

23. Michael Emery, Edzin Emery, Nancy L. Roberts, eds. *The Press in America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media*, 9th ed. (Needham Heights, MA: Pearson, 2000).

24. Hilary H. Ward, *Mainstreams of American Media History* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997).

25. Ken Auletta, *Inside the Business of News* (New York: Penguin, 2003).

26. Jean Marie Lutes, *Front Page Girls: Women Journalists in American Culture*

*and Fiction, 1880–1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

27. Everette E. Dennis and William L. Rivers, *Other Voices: The New Journalism in America* (London: Transaction Publishers, 2011). Originally published 1974.

28. Lauren Kessler, *The Dissident Press: Alternative Journalism in American History* (London: Sage, 1984).

29. Bob Ostertag, *People’s Movements, People’s Press: The Journalism of Social Justice Movements* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).

30. Todd Vogel, ed., *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

31. Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978).

32. Cecelia Tichi, *Exposés and Excess* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

33. Jeff Allred, *American Modernism and Depression Documentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

34. What I’m ultimately considering here is the possibility of a certain history of narrative, in an expansive and inclusive sense, as opposed to a literary history or a journalism history or a literary-journalism history. This could be something in the spirit of the *Oxford History of the Novel in English* (2014), as expressed in the Oxford website’s blurb for the volume: “The *Oxford History of the Novel in English* is a comprehensive, worldwide history of English-language prose fiction in all its varieties. The series spans more than six centuries and draws on the knowledge of a large international team of scholars. It offers a new understanding of the novel’s distinctiveness, its continuity, and its global significance in the modern world” (<https://global.oup.com/academic/content/series/o/oxford-history-of-the-novel-in-english-ohne/?cc=fr&lang=en&>). Literary-journalistic texts, of course, in and as part of a general history of narrative, would find their own distinctive home.

35. Literary journalism studies should probably be more often associated with the discipline of world literature. Both have strong transnational aspirations, studying narrative forms outside of and beyond a single national tradition; both have a tendency to favor encounter and relation—to other texts, cultures, and disciplines; and both have a commitment to a more global scholarship and pedagogy.

Like the case of world literature, we are still struggling to find the concepts and tools that permit us truly to study literary journalism at the global level. These concepts and tools will gradually materialize.

36. See Jens Brockmeier, *Beyond the Archive: Memory, Narrative, and the Autobiographical Process* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

37. Svetlana Alexievich, “Boys in Zinc,” trans. Arch Tait, *Granta* (Autumn 1990), 537.

38. *Reality Hunger*, 182.

39. *Ibid.*, 69.

40. Eve Fairbanks, “How personal essays conquered journalism—and how they can’t cut it,” *Washington Post*, October 10, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/postevery-thing/wp/2014/10/10/how-personal-essays-conquered-journalism-and->

why-they-cant-cut-it/.

41. Ibid.

42. This critical neglect overlooks the essential functions of Baldwin's "I" narratives in relation to his racial politics, cultural commitments, and essayistic eloquence. Essentially ignoring Baldwin's fusions of narrative mediums, the artificial bifurcation has also resulted in a critical neglect of Baldwin's aesthetics—and specifically how his activism and writing have mutually influenced each other. For exceptions to this neglect, see Marianne Dekoven, *Feminist Locations: Global and Local, Theory and Practice*, ed. Marianne Dekoven (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2001); Wolfgang Karrer, "Discursive Strategies in James Baldwin's Essays," in *James Baldwin: His Place in American Literary History and His Reception in Europe*, ed. Jakob Köllhofer (Frankfurt: Main & Bern, 1987), 113–28; and James Cunningham, "Public and Private Rhetorical Modes in the Essays of James Baldwin," in *Essays on the Essay: Redefining the Genre*, ed. Alexander Butrym (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989). For a formal analysis of Baldwin's poetry, see Meta Deuwa Jones, "Baldwin's Poetics," in *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin*, ed. Michel Elam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 41–55.

43. See Ruediger Heinze, "Violations of Mimetic Epistemology in First-Person Narrative Fiction," *Narrative* 16, no. 3 (October 2006): 279–97.

44. But narrative theorists have complicated this conventional equation by questioning first-person narrative taxonomies. John Paul Eakin, for example, argues that all first-person narratives can be defined as "autobiographical narratives," since such narratives depend as much on a process of self-invention and imagination as on historical fact. See John Paul Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 330. In a different vein, J. David Vellman, objecting to equating "selves" to "actual persons," emphasizes the relationship of reflexivity to self-knowledge: "The self does not denote any one entity but rather expresses a reflexive guise under which parts or aspects of a person are presented in his own mind." See J. David Vellman, *Self to Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Narrative creation may be a significant feature of the self, but does not necessarily compose a whole life narrative. The generic ambiguity of first-person narrations and taxonomies of the self aside, however, Baldwin imparts to his texts a fictional status while at the same time distilling within his texts autobiographical facts that can be authenticated as biographical data.

45. For example, in *Notes of Native Son* (1955), eight of the eleven pieces in this collection are cast in the first person; in *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961), only one out of the fourteen essays is not in the first person. In the majority of Baldwin's nonfiction, the first person dominates.

46. James Baldwin, "Sidney Poitier," in *James Baldwin, The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, ed. Randall Kenan (New York: Vintage, 2011), 223.

47. James Baldwin, "Sweet Lorraine," in *Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998), 757, 761.

48. The essay is by no means a self-evident narrative category. Baldwin's essays

take the form far beyond a prose composition that has a focused subject of discussion or is merely a long, systematic discourse. While serving polemical ends, his essays are a "style de pensée" (a style of thinking), a literature in its own right. For the origins of the essay as a French literary genre and tradition, see Marielle Macé, *Le temps de l'essai* (Paris: Belin, 2006), 5–8; 247–62. For the essay as a form of "paraliterature," see Claire de Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit: Literature, Modern Criticism, and the Essay* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). For an incisive study on the protest essay as a distinct literary genre, see Brian Norman, *The American Protest Essay and National Belonging* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007); and for the personal essay form in African American writing and inquiries into multiplex identifications, see respectively Gerald Early, *Speech and Power: The African American Essay from Polemics to Pulpit* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), Robert Reid-Pharr, *Black Gay Man: Essays* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), and Phillip Brian Harper, *Private Affairs: Critical Ventures in the Culture of Social Relations* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

49. *Baldwin: Collected Essays*, 361.

50. *Cross of Redemption*, 41.

51. Arnaud Schmitt, "Making the Case for Self-Narration Against Autofiction," *Auto/Biography Studies* 25, no. 1 (Summer 2010): 130.

52. For this distinction, see Schmitt, 130–33.

53. As with Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen, Richard Wright, and Langston Hughes studies, this is a self-identification largely unexamined in Baldwin scholarship.

54. *Cross of Redemption*, 210.

55. Colm Toibin, "Baldwin and 'the American Confusion,'" in *James Baldwin: America and Beyond*, ed. Cora Kaplan and Bill Schwartz (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 62.

56. Baldwin is referring to Norman Mailer here. See David Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1994), 183–84.

57. *Baldwin: Collected Essays*, 121.

58. Carton Mathes, "'The Mind Is a Strange and Terrible Vehicle': Fractured Time and Multidimensional Sound in *No Name in the Street*," *African American Review* 46, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 591.

59. *Baldwin: Collected Essays*, 346–47.

60. Hortense Spiller, Afterword, in *James Baldwin: America and Beyond*, 244–245.

61. Phillipe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*. Trans. K. Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1989), 5.

62. As more explicitly expressed in Baldwin's later writings and interviews, this ideal would also include a "sexual maturity" dependent on a "racial maturity." As Baldwin stated in the 1984 interview with Richard Goldstein, "the sexual question and the racial question have always been entwined. . . . If Americans can mature on the level of racism, then they have to mature on the level of sexuality." "Go the Way Your Blood Beats': An Interview with James Baldwin," in *James Baldwin: The*

*Legacy*, ed. Quincy Troupe (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 178.

63. My argument here is indebted to Philippe Lejeune's *On Autobiography* and Philippe Carrard, "Biography and the Representation of Consciousness," *Narrative* 5, no. 3 (October 1997): 287–305.

64. How might the distinctiveness of reading literary-journalistic texts result in certain epistemological forms of interpretation? In a matter of degree vis-à-vis literary and "mainstream" journalistic works, does narrative journalism, in its reading demands, encourage more a co-creating or forging of links between things that were previously unconnected? Might the emphasis on reading such texts be on acts of making rather than unmaking, composition rather than critique, substantiating rather than subverting?

65. *Reality Hunger*, 5.

66. Baldwin's first-person literary journalistic forms establish an affective model of aesthetic response that stresses the reader's activity. Although the act of reading is not an act of understanding something necessarily contained and given in advance by the text; it is, however, never separate from historical process and referent. With its interest in describing individual consciousness or experience, the first person lays its emphasis on the singularity of each reading encounter.

67. Hanna Merejota, "Narrative and Human Existence: Ontology, Epistemology, and Ethics," *New Literary History* 45, no.1 (Winter 2014): 101.

68. I would like to thank Roberta S. Maguire for her comments on an earlier version of this essay and Christopher Wilson for our ongoing conversation about reading reportage and literary journalism, and on teaching the reading of these forms.



Photo by Nico Ciani. The author wears the eye-tracking device she used to discover how fifteen millennials interacted with longform journalism on iPads.

## *Digital LJ . . .*

### Reading Screens: What Eye Tracking Tells Us about the Writing in Digital Longform Journalism

By Jacqueline Marino  
Kent State University, USA

**Abstract:** Little is known about how audiences read, watch, or otherwise consume the content in digital longform journalistic works such as the *New York Times's* “Snow Fall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek.” These projects often contain thousands of words, as well as photographs, videos, information graphics, and even news applications. There are so many places for the users’ eyes to travel on the digital page that critics have called these longform, multimedia works distracting, showy, and ineffective. To examine how readers feel about such work—and to determine how both the type and arrangement of elements affect readers’ experience of these projects—my research partners and I conducted an eye-tracking study of fifteen millennial readers of digital longform journalism in Ohio during the fall of 2015. Although researchers have been tracking people’s eye movements to discover how they read since the late 1800s, eye tracking has evolved from studying how people read printed words to examining how they interact with words, images, video, and other multimedia elements on websites and mobile devices. In this essay I describe the evolution of eye tracking, as well as the equipment and process used to record the eye movements of the Ohio study’s participants, all of whom interacted with longform digital journalism on iPads. I focus on what we learned about what kind of writing millennials read when they look at digital longform journalism, as well as how they regarded the writing in the projects chosen for the study.

**Keywords:** eye tracking, digital longform, mobile journalism, audiences

I think I know how I read. Line by line usually, sometimes pausing to picture a description, consider a metaphor, or question a fact. When I'm interested, the reading goes more quickly. I catch myself skimming and force myself to slow down and take . . . in . . . every . . . word. But how I think I read is not how I really read. To learn how I really read, researchers have to watch me do it. They have to measure my eye movements and account for things like interest level, word difficulty, and familiarity with the material.

Even though people have been reading for the past 5,000 years, scientists have only been studying readers' eye movements since the late 1800s. Edmund Burke Huey, in his classic work, *The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading*, credited the French ophthalmologist Louis Emile Javal with first noting, in 1879, that readers do not read from left to right in uninterrupted sweeps.<sup>1</sup> By observing readers, he noticed that the eye makes short, quick movements and pauses as it traverses a line of text. The quick movements are called saccades. Later research not only upheld their existence but argued that cognition is not occurring to any significant extent during them. The pauses, called fixations, were also confirmed. When the eye pauses long enough, thinking can happen. The importance of these and other reading events have been studied and debated over the past 140 years. Learning how people read, Huey argued, is crucial to the future of reading itself. "The slightest improvement either in the page or in the method of reading means the rendering of a great service to the human race."<sup>2</sup>

Huey wrote this in 1908, almost a century before everyone started reading most everything on the Internet. While he worried about reading the printed page, his successors are examining the future of reading on mobile screens that fit into pockets and purses, as well as wearable ones that can render unnecessary not just paper but watches.

Despite the greater challenges, readers of today aren't much more helpful when it comes to describing how they read than the readers of Huey's time were. Even though I have been a reader longer than I've been a writer, I can tell you much more about my writing process than my reading one. I can tell you I like a quiet space with natural light. I try to avoid distractions by turning off email and keeping my phone out of sight. When I'm writing journalistic or academic works, I know I need to compile my facts first. Then I begin by writing the main points I want to make in one column and list the details, examples, and descriptions in another. I always start writing what I want to write first, usually the lead or introduction, sometimes a scene or a description. I indulge myself in the beginning because I know I will suffer later.

I can't tell you what I need to begin to read. Reading is automatic, like the way my car starts when I turn the key in the ignition. I can't tell you what

words will catch my eye before they do, how fast I'll breeze over a paragraph or what will cause my reading eye to stop and prompt those mental pictures, ponderings, or questions. When it comes to process, the writer can be trusted more than the reader.

So because readers don't really know how they read, scientists had to develop methods and later machines to accurately observe, record, and measure eye movements. The early methods were awkward, invasive, and often unsuccessful: readers' eyes were watched through a telescope, beams of light were reflected from their eyes at different angles and photographed, sounds of eyelid movements were heard through a microphone and counted. Huey even messed with people's eyes. He molded a plaster of Paris cup to fit their corneas, making them "insensitive by the use of a little holocain, or sometimes cocaine."<sup>3</sup> A light celloidin and glass lever connected the cup to an aluminum pointer and created a record of each eye movement on a smoked-paper surface. Huey acknowledged his limitations, and those of other scientists studying eye movements during that time. He said it was impossible for any of them "to get a trustworthy account, by direct observation, of the speed, nature and even number of the eye's movements in reading, of the length and variation of the reading pauses, etc."<sup>4</sup>

While readers still can't tell you how they read, these days technology can get us much further. There are many different eye trackers on the market, most of them nonintrusive and used by academia and industry alike. In 2015, my research partners, Florida International University professors Susan Jacobson, Robert E. Gutsche, Jr., and I developed a protocol to use Tobii Glasses 2, then a new-to-market, lightweight mobile eye tracker worn like glasses, to track eye movements of millennial readers of digital longform journalism on tablet computers. We recruited fifteen participants in Northeast Ohio between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four, eight men and seven women. Ten



Photo by Nico Ciani. Researchers followed the path eye-tracking participants' eyes traveled across the screen. Software captured how long and how often they looked at text, photographs and other elements.



were undergraduate or graduate students from a range of disciplines. Twelve identified themselves as white, two as Asian and one as African-American. All were regular users of tablet computers.

Longform journalism has only recently found a suitable home in the digital world. In the early 2000s, writers for work destined for the web were advised—to quote Steve Krug’s famous web-usability text of the time—“Don’t Make Me Think.”<sup>5</sup> The web’s natural state is hypertext not narrative, and the best web writing was thought to be short and direct. This writing contrasted the sort of writing one typically finds in magazines and nonfiction books, lengthy works whose authors use characterization, dialogue, and other literary techniques of the fiction writer and the poet. These works plod along masterfully, pulling in the reader with captivating characters, plot twists and riveting action, often using dramatic pacing and building to an arc. Many of these stories found their way to the web, of course, but they didn’t fit well there. Not until the *New York Times* published “Snow Fall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek”<sup>6</sup> in 2012, that is. “Snow Fall,” which won the Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing, used the journalist’s multimedia tools, as well as the writer’s literary ones. Video, time-lapse maps, animations, and words were fused into a single story that kept readers engaged for an average of twelve minutes,<sup>7</sup> entralling them with sights, sounds, and narrative.

Jacobson, Gutsche, and I studied fifty works of digital journalism that attempted similar feats of fusion, old-fashioned narrative storytelling seamlessly integrated with pictures, graphics, and videos. We ultimately concluded that literary journalism had entered a new era, one where journalists are experimenting with digital tools to fulfill literary goals.<sup>8</sup>

While researching our article, however, we read the work of some who did not like “Snow Fall” and saw its use of multimedia as excessive.<sup>9</sup> We wanted to learn how audiences felt about digital longform journalism. With the support of the University of Missouri’s Reynolds Journalism Institute, we launched four studies in 2015 to investigate audience reception to digital longform journalism, including one on eye tracking, which I spearheaded.<sup>10</sup> We consulted other works by researchers who have conducted eye-tracking research on journalism audiences, including those by the Poynter Institute, which began using eye-tracking technology to study online audiences in 1999. Its EyeTrack07 project, Poynter’s expansive study of online news audiences, was of particular interest to us.<sup>11</sup>

For our study, we looked at digital “longform journalism,” the more generic term for writing of at least 2,000 words infused with multimedia elements, such as photography, video, and infographics. We investigated the number and scope of literary techniques that appeared in both the text and



Screenshot from “Rebuilding Haiti,” published on Rue89. Participants spent a great deal of time on the text in this work funded by the European Journalism Centre.

the multimedia elements of these works. Longform could be literary journalism. It could also be explanatory, investigative, or provide a public service.<sup>12</sup>

For our participants, we chose millennials, news consumers whose ages range from age eighteen to thirty-four, because they access news differently than previous generations, and news producers are eager to appeal to them.<sup>13</sup> Social media is more likely to be that generation’s main source of news,<sup>14</sup> where they “bump into” news but also where they engage with it.<sup>15</sup> The majority of millennial respondents in a 2015 survey conducted by the American Press Institute and the Associated Press NORC Institute for Public Affairs Research said keeping up with the news is at least “somewhat” important to them and reported accessing news daily.<sup>16</sup> In addition to being in the news audience and the digital audience, we suspected millennials would also be in the audience for longform journalism. After all, studies have shown that younger readers are more likely to have read a book in the past twelve months than those older than thirty.<sup>17</sup> Some have also argued they prefer in-depth journalism to shorter forms.<sup>18</sup>

Since growing numbers of consumers are now accessing news on multiple devices, especially mobile devices,<sup>19</sup> we chose to test on one, the iPad. We were interested in learning which elements of digital longform journalism capture and keep the audience’s attention. We picked four projects of varying subject matters and presentation styles:

- “Firestorm,” *Guardian* (UK, 2013)
- “Planet Money Makes a T-shirt,” National Public Radio (USA, 2013)
- “Your Meat Addiction Is Destroying the Planet,” *Verge* (USA, 2013)
- “Rebuilding Haiti,” produced by a team of French journalists funded by the European Journalism Centre and published on Rue89 (France, 2014)

Each piece consisted of at least 2,000 words and several multimedia elements, such as infographics, photographs, and videos. The eye-tracker head unit’s four cameras (two on each eye), recording device, accelerometer, and gyroscope provided precise information on where the participant looked on



Photo by Nico Ciani. While participants interacted with longform journalism on iPads, researchers watched where the participants focused their attention, indicated by a red ring on the researchers' screen.

the screen and for how long, accounting for movement of both the head and the device.

The participants each chose two projects to view. While the participants perused a story on an iPad, user experience designer Christopher Halahan and I watched their real-time gaze patterns on a desktop computer. We watched where they were looking, which was indicated by a red ring moving across our screen (but not theirs). This video was recorded then exported into Tobii Glasses Analysis Software, which tallied all the fixations of at least 300 milliseconds (ms) and classified them into video, text, infographic, or other categories we determined in our content-analysis codebook.

Again, fixations are places where the eye paused. Most scientists agree that visual or cognitive processing occurs during fixations, but they do not agree on how long a fixation must be.<sup>20</sup> We followed Poynter's lead in capturing fixations of at least 300 ms because other research has shown that eye movements must fixate on something for at least this length of time in order for cognition to take place.<sup>21</sup>

We only looked at two eye-movement measurements: the number of fixations (fixation count) and the duration of fixations (fixation duration). One thing eye-tracking technology still cannot do is tell why a participant fixated on something. It can only answer the questions of if, when, and how. More fixations on an area of interest could mean that area was more noticeable, or it could mean the participant thought it was more important. Longer fixation duration could indicate a greater level of difficulty for the participant, or it could suggest a greater level of engagement.<sup>22</sup> In post-eye-tracking interviews, we asked what the participants liked and didn't like about the story, how they felt about specific elements and whether they planned to return to the story or share it with others and why.

As a writer and a scholar of literary journalism, I was particularly interested

in the role of the text stories in these presentations. All four of them contained many words—the range was from 2,147 to 5,591—and I wanted to know if those words attracted or repelled our young participants. What made them want to read or stop reading? How did the infused multimedia elements distract or enthrall them?

The most important finding to me: Participants did read the text. I suspected this as we watched the red ring travel across lines of text in the real-time video, but I didn't know for sure until we interviewed the participants. In fact, in five of the thirty eye-tracking session interviews, participants said they liked text better than all other elements. "I usually like to read an article and then maybe watch the video afterwards," said a participant who read "Meat Addiction." "Sometimes I find the videos just repeat what the article was already saying."

The data, once analyzed, show the participants as a whole spent a great deal of time fixating on the words in these multimedia projects. In all but one story ("T-Shirt"), the greatest number fixations were on story text (the text in the main story or sidebar story). In "T-Shirt," fixations on video were slightly greater than on text.

The longest fixations were also on story text in two of the projects. However, in "T-Shirt," subjects spent more time watching video (thirty-seven percent of fixation duration time) than reading text (twenty-five percent of fixation duration time). In "Meat Addiction," subjects also spent slightly more time fixating on video (forty-eight percent) than on story text (forty-four percent). In "Firestorm," participants fixated on story text for a longer period (fifty-two percent) than they watched videos (thirty-three percent). In the one project without video, "Rebuilding Haiti," text was the element fixated on the longest (thirty-eight percent), followed by the game (thirty-four percent), which was also text but coded separately as "game."

What those numbers didn't tell us, however, is whether they liked the text they read.



In the *Guardian's* "Firestorm," whole-screen photographs often provide context or an emotional dimension to the words.

From the interviews, we learned some did and some didn't. For the majority of our thirty sessions—all but five projects—some other element was more appealing to the participant than text. The participants told us they read to learn about the topic and appreciated writing that was clearly written, informative, and well integrated with other elements, such as photographs and infographics.

About "Firestorm," one participant said, "It's very text heavy, but it's not very text-overwhelming. Because I think the way it's structured where you just kind of read a bit and then you have to do something like scroll up to get to the next bit. It keeps you awake. It's not just a giant page of text."

"Firestorm" is the story of how one family survived a bushfire in the Tasmanian city of Dunalley. Readers liked how the text appears on the left side screen on top of a photograph or infographic that fills the entire screen. The images provide context or an emotional dimension to the text on the screen it shared. For example, early in the story, the author explains how the weather on the day of the bushfire (hot, dry, and windy) and other conditions (a lot of brush and foliage) set the stage for the fire. The photograph underneath the words shows the brush-filled landscape. When one scrolls down, a map of Tasmania appears (with cities indicated), along with text about fire starts



Photo by Nico Ciani. On heat maps like this one, researchers saw what elements on the iPad screen attracted the most attention from participants.

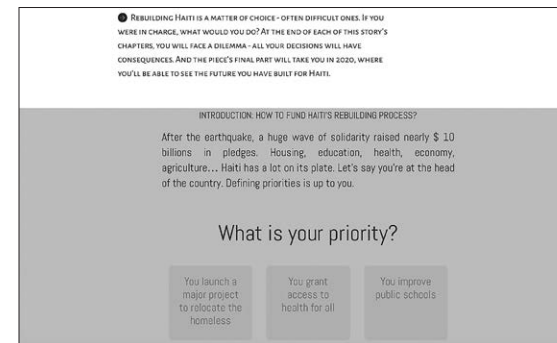
around the state. After the next scroll, the map becomes an infographic showing fire-danger ratings of various cities, including Dunalley, which is also mentioned in the text on that page.

Later in the piece, the photographs provide a more emotional dimension. For instance, the author explains how terrifying it was for Bonnie, the Holmes' daughter who wasn't there, to not to know if her parents and children survived the fire. Then the reader sees the photographs Tim Holmes shot, those of the children clinging to the jetty, and sent to Bonnie to tell her

they were alive. "The fact that they're [photos] in the background, along with the text, almost paints a picture in your brain," a participant said. "It gives you context with what you're reading. It's not just words on a screen."

Giant blocks of text evoked dread when they appeared mid-scroll. It was the opposite with photographs. This was especially true in "Rebuilding Haiti." That story relays the difficulties associated with rebuilding the nation after a 7.0 magnitude earthquake hit in 2010 through text, photographs, and an interactive game that gives the decision-making power to the audience.

"It took me longest to read the sections of text, but the parts I was most interested in were the photos and captions with the photos," one participant



Screenshot from "Rebuilding Haiti," published on Rue89. Participants said they liked being asked to make decisions in this game. One said, "It wasn't just a game for game's sake. There was information I was getting by playing the game."

said. "So every time a photo was coming up, I was interested to see what was going on in the photo. The [story] text helped me put context to the photo but I liked reading the [text on the] photos more."

While the pairing of text and photographs is not new, the way audiences interact with these elements on the mobile screen is more complex than how a reader peruses both elements on a printed page. Participants in our eye-tracking study spoke most highly of stories where the elements were placed on the page in ways that enlightened and delighted them. The way we classified each element—photograph, video, story text, etc.—was necessary for our purpose of quantifying, but we have learned that users do not look at longform digital journalism as a sum of identifiable parts. They look at them all when they look at, read, watch, scroll, and share that story.

In the last chapter of "The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading," Huey relays "the wildest of speculations," a time when reading is displaced by other means of communicating. Some argue "writing and reading may be short-circuited, and an author may talk his thought directly into some sort of graphophone-film book which will render it again to listeners, at will; re-

producing all the essential characteristics of the author's speech, which, as we have seen, are not recorded by written language and which the reader must construct for himself at a considerable expense of energy."<sup>23</sup>

The technology to do all of this now fits into our pocket, but words have not disappeared. They still fulfill a purpose, one that images and sound cannot supplant. Not yet. Those words still make us think, and many of us welcome that particular expense of energy.

---

*Jacqueline Marino is an Associate Professor at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Kent State University. She studies the digital evolution of storytelling and teaches courses in feature writing and the business of journalism. She wrote the book, White Coats: Three Journeys through an American Medical School (Kent State University Press, 2012).*



*Many thanks to the Donald W. Reynolds Institute at the University of Missouri for funding this research, to my research partners Susan Jacobson and Robert E. Gutsche, and to my graduate assistant Lauren Dargay. I am grateful also to Christopher Hallahan, who ran the eye-tracking equipment, and Chris Selvey, both from Kent State University's student-powered design firm, IdeaBase. Thanks also to Chance York, David Stanton and Sara Quinn for consulting with me.*

---

### Notes

1. Edmund Burke Huey, *The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading* (Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2009; originally published 1908), 11.
2. *Ibid.*, 277.
3. *Ibid.*, 17.
4. *Ibid.*, 16.
5. Steve Krug, *Don't Make Me Think! A Common Sense Guide to Web Usability* (Berkeley: New Riders, 2005).
6. John Branch, "Snow Fall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek," *New York Times*, December 20, 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/projects/2012/snow-](http://www.nytimes.com/projects/2012/snow-fall/#/?part=tunnel-creek)

[fall/#/?part=tunnel-creek](http://www.nytimes.com/projects/2012/snow-fall/#/?part=tunnel-creek).

7. Jim Romenesko, "More Than 3.5 Million Page Views for *New York Times*' 'Snow Fall' Feature," *JimRomenesko.com*, December 27, 2012, <http://jimromenesko.com/2012/12/27/more-than-3-5-million-page-views-for-nyts-snow-fall/>.
8. Susan Jacobson, Jacqueline Marino, and Robert E. Gutsche, Jr., "The Digital Animation of Literary Journalism," *Journalism* 17, no. 4 (2016): 527–46.
9. Farhad Manjoo, "A Whole Lot of Bells, Way Too Many Whistles," *Slate*, August 15, 2013, [http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2013/08/snow\\_fall\\_the\\_jockey\\_the\\_scourge\\_of\\_the\\_new\\_york\\_times\\_bell\\_and\\_whistle.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2013/08/snow_fall_the_jockey_the_scourge_of_the_new_york_times_bell_and_whistle.html).
10. Robert E. Gutsche, Jr., Susan Jacobson, and Jacqueline Marino, "Can Longform Journalism Thrive in the Age of the Mobile Device?" *RjiOnline.org*, October 28, 2015, <http://www.rjionline.org/blog/can-long-form-journalism-thrive-age-mobile-device>.
11. Pegie Stark Adam, Sara Quinn, and Rick Edmonds, *EyeTracking the News: A Study of Print and Online Reading* (St. Petersburg: Poynter Institute, 2007).
12. Jacobson, Marino and Gutsche, 531–32.
13. The Media Insight Project, *How Millennials Get News: Inside the Habits of America's Digital Generation* (Chicago: American Press Institute and AP NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, 2015), 1. <http://www.mediainsight.org/PDFs/Millennials/Millennials%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>.
14. Amy Mitchell and Jesse Holcomb, *State of the News Media 2016* (Washington: Pew Research Center, 2016), <http://www.journalism.org/2016/06/15/state-of-the-news-media-2016/>.
15. Media Insight Project, 26.
16. *Ibid.*, 1.
17. Lee Rainie and Andrew Perrin, "Slightly Fewer Americans Are Reading Print Books, New Survey Finds," October 19, 2015, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/10/19/slightly-fewer-americans-are-reading-print-books-new-survey-finds/>.
18. Chris Giliberti, "Three Reasons Why Millennials Want Long Form Storytelling over 'Snackable' Content," March 8, 2016, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/under30network/2016/03/>.
19. Nic Newman, "Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2015" (Oxford: University of Oxford Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2016), <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2015/executive-summary-and-key-findings-2015/>.
20. Dario D. Salvucci and Joseph H. Goldberg, "Identifying Fixations and Saccades in Eye-Tracking Protocols," in *Proceedings of the Eye Tracking Research and Applications Symposium* (New York: ACM Press, 2000), 71–72.
21. David Stanton, *Discriminating News-reading Behavior and Cognition Using Eye-tracking Methodologies* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Florida, 2013), 25, [http://ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu/UF/E0/04/63/23/00001/STANTON\\_D.pdf](http://ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu/UF/E0/04/63/23/00001/STANTON_D.pdf)
22. Claude Ghaoui, ed., *Encyclopedia of Human Computer Interaction* (Hershey, PA: Idea Group Reference, 2006), 213.
23. Huey, 282.



# Book reviews . . .

Nancy L. Roberts, Book Review Editor

---

- Orwell in the New Century  
*George Orwell Now!*  
 edited by Richard Lance Keeble  
*Reviewed by Kevin Kerrane* 152
- An Oddball Ride on the Gonzo Train  
*I Am Sorry to Think I Have Raised a Timid Son*  
 by Kent Russell  
*Reviewed by Brian Gabriel* 157
- A Graphic Memoir from Kashmir  
*Munna: A Boy from Kashmir*  
 by Malik Sajad  
*Reviewed by Punnya Rajendran* 159
- A New Englander Comes Home to the South  
*Deep South: Four Seasons on Back Roads*  
 by Paul Theroux  
*Reviewed by Doug Cumming* 162
- Punjabi History, or Fiction, or Both?  
*The Fall of the Kingdom of the Punjab*  
 by Kushwant Singh  
*Reviewed by Sudha Shastri* 165
- Author Struggles to Solve Linguistic Triangle  
*In Other Words*  
 by Jhumpa Lahiri  
*Reviewed by Giovanna Dell'Orto* 168
- Writing the Iraq Invasion:  
*Author and Authority in Five War Memoirs*  
*Essay by John M. Coward* 170



Richard Lance Keeble, Orwell scholar.

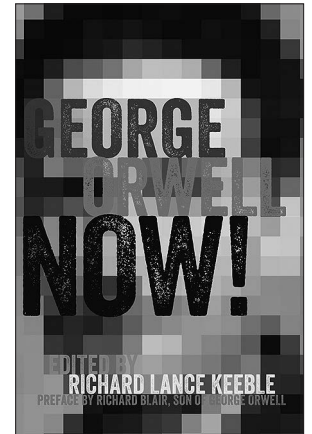
## Orwell in the New Century

*George Orwell Now!*

edited by Richard Lance Keeble. New York: Peter Lang, 2015. Paperback, 236 pp., \$40.95

Reviewed by Kevin Kerrane, University of Delaware, United States

This intriguing anthology almost lives up to the exclamation point in its title. At first glance, it looks like a sequel to *Orwell Today*, a 2012 collection with the same editor, Richard Lance Keeble, and several of the same respected contributors (Philip Bounds, Tim Crook, Adam Stock, and Keeble himself). The new volume also has the same central theme: George Orwell's continuing pertinence to contemporary discussions of politics and journalism. What distinguishes this anthology is its sharper focus on the surveillance of private citizens, on the international implications of Orwell's writing, and on the range of his work as a documentary reporter, a war correspondent, and a writer and editor for the BBC.



Keeble has been a mainstay of the Orwell Society since its founding in 2011, and he recently posted this tribute on the society's website: "Orwell the journalist has always been an inspiration to me—a model of a committed, radical, intelligent, witty, wonderfully imaginative writer who deployed the tools of journalism for their best purpose: as a crucial, morally urgent intervention in politics." In the anthology this journalistic emphasis is evident in Keeble's essay on Orwell's war reporting, which contrasts *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) with fourteen newspaper dispatches from France near the end of World War II. Whereas *Homage* is "a wonderfully confident piece of eye-witness reportage that embraces a wide range of literary techniques," Orwell's 1945 dispatches show his unease with an "objective" style. Philip Knightley, author of *The First Casualty*, a classic study of war correspondence, confirms this reading of the dispatches. In an email to Keeble, Knightley comments: "Orwell was feeling his way. He was troubled, diffident and insecure in his reporting. Should he allow his emotions full rein? Could he insert his political views? Could he refute the propaganda some of the others had been writing? He never found the answers."

In another discussion of journalistic personae, Luke Seaber focuses on the second half of *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) to show how Orwell, during his wanderings in England, was living among tramps "in order to have the experiences of doing so, not through need." And yet, by means of subtle rhetorical techniques, Orwell "was able to suggest to his readers that what they were reading was reasonably pure non-fiction." In a related essay, "George Orwell and the Radio Imagi-

nation,” Tim Crook begins by observing that Orwell’s literary and professional life spanned the radio age of the twentieth century (his death in 1950 coincided with the dawn of the television age), and that the “sonic realism” of Orwell’s early fiction and documentary journalism evoked the aural perspectives of radio broadcasts. Although Orwell described his later tenure at the BBC, 1941–43, as “two wasted years,” Crook argues that the germinal essay “Politics and the English Language” represents “the exposition of a radio journalism communicator.” Crook also suggests that Orwell’s engagement at the BBC with a wide range of story ideas and approaches may have sharpened his narrative methods in *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Two other essays examine those narrative methods from fresh perspectives. Adam Stock charts Orwell’s complex use of time in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and discusses the novel’s influence on such texts as Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*, Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time*, David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas*, and the movie *V for Vendetta*. Orwell’s successors, Stock says, “have engaged with the novel not only as a presentation of ideas or a means of invoking an atmosphere of fear and tyranny, but as a work concerned with the alienating experience of modernity.” Henk Vynkier, in a particularly well-written analysis, surveys Orwell’s fascination, in his personal life as well as his writing, with collectible objects. This “jackdaw” tendency led to incisive essays on such topics as boys’ weeklies, comic postcards, and crime fiction—and ultimately to the use of a junk shop in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as an apparently safe haven. The novel’s protagonist, Winston Smith, “has the collector’s keen awareness of the destructiveness of time and endeavors to salvage whatever remnants of the old civilization are still available to him.” In the bleak world of this novel, of course, Smith’s effort is futile (the shop’s proprietor is an agent of The Party), and Vynkier notes wryly that in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* “it is the collectivist, not the collector, who triumphs.”

The anthology includes several discussions of politics alone, in efforts either to calibrate Orwell’s exact niche on a left-right axis or to use his political views as guides to the contemporary landscape. From 1943 to 1947 Orwell wrote regularly for *Tribune*, a London fortnightly paper that supported the Labour government while providing a voice for “democratic socialism.” Paul Anderson, a former editor of the paper (1991–93), follows the lead of Bernard Crick, author of perhaps the best Orwell biography (there have been seven so far), in concluding that Orwell was “a pretty typical *Tribune* socialist.” By contrast, John Newsinger foregrounds Orwell’s articles in *Partisan Review* to argue that “he maintained his engagement with the far left and his belief that hope for the future lay with the working class.” In yet another political essay, Philip Bounds reframes a question that Orwell posed in *The Road to Wigan Pier*: Why is the British left so rhetorically ineffective, especially when addressing those who would seem to be natural allies? Bounds focuses on three sources of alienation diagnosed by Orwell—the left’s officiousness, its ambivalent commitment to achieving real change, and its uncritical embrace of modernity—and offers several revisions in the light of contemporary politics.

Exasperation with the “officiousness” of leftists seems justified by Florian Zollman’s polemical essay “*Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 2014.” Zollman asserts that the dys-

topian societies envisioned in Orwell’s novel “appear to have come into being” in supposedly democratic Western nations. Using lines of argument developed more cogently by Noam Chomsky, Zollman says that the so-called democracies govern at the behest of a business elite—which he equates with “The Party.” Even when advancing his strongest points, such as the existence of a permanent war economy in the United States, Zollman undercuts them with sweeping (and clumsily written) generalizations unworthy of an Orwell scholar: “Similarly, the threat of Islamist-related terrorism has been manufactured, its root cause—Western foreign occupation of Muslim lands—is largely denied.” After Zollman summarizes Edward Snowden’s revelations and the attempts to prosecute Julian Assange, it’s no surprise when he asks: “Does not all this suggest that the Big Brother, surveillance-dominated society described in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is with us today?”

A more reasoned analysis appears in the anthology’s opening essay, in which Peter Marks surveys the development of surveillance studies as an academic field, noting that some scholars regard *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as irrelevant or distracting because our consumer society is based on Big Data rather than Big Brother. In an amusing aside, Marks suggests that Orwell’s nightmare vision of constantly being watched has a depressing alternative in the modern “need to be seen,” as described by the cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek: “today anxiety seems to arise from the prospect of NOT being exposed to the Other’s gaze all the time, so that the subject needs the camera’s gaze as a kind of ontological guarantee of his/her being.” Ironically, this phenomenon is epitomized in an international TV franchise entitled *Big Brother*.

To Keeble’s credit, the anthology includes a section on “International Perspectives,” reflecting the global interest in Orwell’s work. Shu-chu Wei demonstrates striking similarities between *Animal Farm* and a collection of short stories, *The Execution of Major Yin* (1976) by Chen Jo-hsi. The author, a Taiwanese who lived in mainland China during the Cultural Revolution, became fixated—as Orwell was—on the gap between socialist ideals and brutal political realities. Cross-cultural insights also inform an essay by Sreya Mallika Datta and Utsa Mukherjee, both students at Presidency University in Kolkata, India. Datta and Mukherjee explore interactions between the colonizer and the colonized in the novel *Burmese Days*, and in the essays “Shooting an Elephant” and “A Hanging,” emphasizing “ambiguity” in Orwell’s portrayals.

A companion piece, Marina Remy’s study of *Burmese Days* and *A Clergyman’s Daughter*, takes ambiguity to the level of obfuscation. Remy cites a half dozen fashionable theorists (Homi K. Bhabha, Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, Terry Eagleton, Johannes Fabian, Emmanuel Levinas) without bringing clarity to either one of the novels. And some passages in this essay resemble the kind of academic prose that Orwell skewered. For example, according to Remy, the plurality of voices in Orwell’s writing “can point to another form of dialogism in the interstices of certain pre-emptory and authoritative statements, thus furthering the novels’ reflection on coercive, oppressive and authoritarian systems which blur the face of the other while attempting to supply some of the otherness and the communication which these systems constantly seek to deny.”



*Orwell Now!* opens and closes with brief but enthusiastic commentaries by Richard Blair, Orwell's adoptive son, and Peter Stansky, emeritus professor of history at Stanford—both attesting to the continuing relevance of this complex and versatile man of letters. In the 1970s, when Stansky and William Abrahams published two biographical studies—*The Unknown Orwell* and *Orwell: The Transformation*—the author's widow, Sonia, denied access to some documents and withheld permission to quote from others. As Blair notes, Sonia's death in 1980 led to much greater freedom for biographers, publishers, and filmmakers. And as this anthology shows, the field of Orwell studies remains vital—in more ways than one.

---

## An Oddball Ride on the Gonzo Train

*I Am Sorry to Think I Have Raised a Timid Son*

by Kent Russell, New York: Knopf, 2015. Hardcover, 284 pp., \$24.95

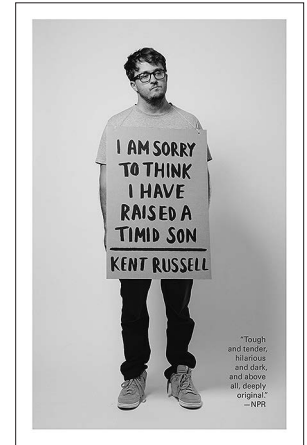
Reviewed by Brian Gabriel, Concordia University, Canada

Gonzo lite seems the best way to describe Kent Russell's collection of nonfiction adventures and reflections. Unlike Hunter S. Thompson's full-bore, self-focused, sometimes suffocating gonzo style, Russell picks and chooses an effective mix of self-assertion, intrusion, and observation that makes *I Am Sorry to Think I Have Raised a Timid Son* a book worth reading.

The words in the book's title are credited to frontier legend Daniel Boone, who is said to have used them to admonish his soldier son for not being brave during a Revolutionary War battle. The son would die under his father's command. The Boone story comes early in the book and, while not quite foreshadowing, it encapsulates what the reader will discover in the relationship between Russell and his father, a former Navy lieutenant. Indeed, this book is a father-son tale loosely connected by pieces of Russell's oeuvre that have appeared in *Harper's*, the *New Republic*, the *Believer*, and elsewhere. Thematically, they are linked because the stories, as well as the author's life, involve alienation, scarred masculinity, or a combination of both. (So, what is it about the wounded male psyche? How it distorts and contorts a man's reality.) Just as Russell tries to reconnect with his father, his stories have him trying to connect with his subjects. This creates tension, and it is this tension that brings focus to the stories.

Each of those pieces has merit and can take a place at the literary journalism table. "Ryan Went to Afghanistan," the first chapter, introduces the book's main characters and establishes that this book is about men and their relationships. (Women do not figure prominently in the book except as nonessential ornamentation.) It's a book about male intimacy, not physical but emotional. When Russell writes to his childhood friend Ryan, who is fighting in Afghanistan, that he loves him, the author finds himself with a familiar internal struggle that many straight, white men have when they express affection to men with whom they are closest. "[W]e'd never been sentimental about anything," Russell writes, feeling compelled to take the next step: "I closed by telling him that I loved him, because I did, and I'd never said it before. I didn't want to miss what could be the last chance to say it." Thus, the book's premise is established.

Still, the book isn't all brooding; it's mostly a lot of fun. Among the stories, "American Juggalo" details Russell's failed attempt at going gonzo while taking the reader on an incursion into the profane world of a rock music festival gone mad.



Started by the founders of Psychopathic Records (that should be a clue), the four-day festival promised, “You’ll meet people, make future best friends; you’ll probably get laid.” The author was lucky to escape after only three days with his life and dignity intact: “On my way out of the grounds, four hitchhikers ran into the path of my rental car. I did not slow down . . .” “Artisanal Ball” is a sweeter, kinder story where Russell showcases the world of young Amish men who like to play baseball and illuminates their otherness with a sensitive understanding of their closed community. He also profiles Dave, a man who owns his own island and believes (Western) culture has turned everyone into “marshmallows.” When Dave gets visitors, he never shuts the hell up. Finally, “Mithradates of Fond du Lac,” recalls the eccentric characters in John McPhee’s “Travels in Georgia.” Here, Russell gets drunk with Tim, a man whose vocation seems to be to absorb and survive the bites of the world’s most deadly snakes. The title refers to King Mithridates, the poison king, who fought the Roman Empire and took poisons to acquire immunity against any assassination attempts by poison. Of course, Tim is not a king, but he’s what Russell calls a “self-immunizer,” someone who is part of a group described as a “far-flung community of white, western men.” This exploration of Tim’s world is also a deeply researched piece of science journalism.

These stories are about outsiders, and Russell feels like one too, especially when it comes to his father. He hopes to reconcile this during a two-week visit to his parents. The Talmud teaches, “When you teach your son, you teach your son’s son.” Russell’s grandfather was one tough guy and so is his father. Russell is not (particularly), and this complicates things. When Russell arrives at the airport and jumps into his father’s still rolling car, his father gives him a beer and complains about picking him up, “This is a pain in the ass for *some* people, you know.” The father can only communicate through exasperation and frustration, but his son doesn’t hold it against him. As a character, the senior Russell is a loving but isolated man who might just love his children too much. In these connecting vignettes, all dated like diary entries, he challenges his father, trying to get the old Navy man to see things his way. Not going to happen. And that’s OK. As the *New York Times* book reviewer Ben Greenman put it, “What’s really saluted here, what’s really bright and stripped bare, is the son—and his father—both trying to see, both newly unafraid to be seen.”

So, if a denouement exists it comes when Russell remembers how, as a child, he would climb into bed with his sleeping father to be close to him. “I have spent a lot of my life trying to regain this power [to be intimate with his father],” he writes. A few words later, just as Boone admonished his son with “I am sorry to think that I have raised a timid son,” Russell’s father exclaims after learning his son is going to be a full-time writer: “I was thinking, You have chosen, by my estimation, a pretty shitty life for yourself.” Unlike Boone who left his son to die on the battlefield, Russell’s father thanks his son for saving him by making him a responsible man. “You are, if nothing else, my son.”

One critic complained that *I Am Sorry to Think I Have Raised a Timid Son* was a book with many parts that never quite added up to a whole. Maybe so, but if readers can just relax and enjoy the oddball ride that Russell takes them on, the whole becomes quite clear.

## A Graphic Memoir from Kashmir

*Munnu: A Boy From Kashmir*

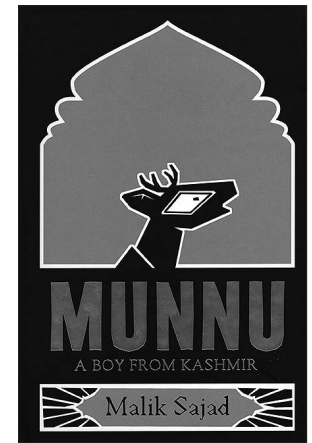
by Malik Sajad. London: HarperCollins, 2015. Hardcover, 352 pp., \$26.99

Reviewed by Punnya Rajendran, Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, India.

Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* initiated the tryst between comics nonfiction and testimonies of human rights violations. The thirty-six-year-old graphic novel looms over Kashmiri cartoonist Malik Sajad’s graphic memoir, *Munnu: A Boy From Kashmir*, as a formidable stylistic predecessor. In *Munnu*, Kashmiris are depicted as anthropomorphized hanguls (an indigenous species of deer on the brink of extinction due to habitat destruction by army settlements). This silent massive borrowing of strategy, not dismissible as merely artistic homage, is a weak point of entry into the text. Readers are left wondering about the rationale behind establishing such strong generic ties and the subsequent risk of being mistaken as a pale imitation. However, *Munnu*’s visual grammar, in its many presumptions and political vantage points, weaves in and out of the *Maus* universe in remarkably subtle fashion.

Hanguls and mice offer a contrasting interrogation of humanity. While the hanguls are picturesque creatures of beauty, mice scuttle down sewage lines. A rhetoric of conservation and exclusionism, as opposed to extermination and abjectness, dominates the figure of the hangul. While mice represent Jewishness as a racial constant, the rest of Spiegelman’s “natural” food chain (dogs, pigs, and rabbits) are tied to nationalities. By contrast, the Kashmiri hangul is a supranational category pitted against a world of human beings, conflating Hindus, Muslims, and indeed anyone whose state of domicile is the valley of Kashmir regardless of religion, race, or ethnicity. This taxonomy dismisses the Hindu-Muslim dynamics of the conflict as well as a Kashmir-versus-India framework. The crude angular figure of the hangul, frozen in non-emotive and unindividualized woodcut style, confronts its human Other in *Munnu*—it is Kashmir versus the rest of the world. The narrative is both a retreat from as well as a beckoning to this Other world, a world that may otherwise mediate with Kashmir exclusively in the format of “breaking news” or not at all.

In fact, much of Sajad’s memoir is a narrative quarrel with certain dominant journalistic habits that for decades now have been relegating the humanitarian crisis in Kashmir to India’s “internal affairs.” Consider its concluding episode. Armed with a solar-powered torch received as a gift from the ambassadors of the European Union, political cartoonist Sajad (aka *Munnu*) plunges from a meeting inside the brilliant



interiors of a luxury hotel into the darkness of the Kashmir Valley. He walks into the rape by two men of a mentally disabled vagrant woman inside an auto-rickshaw and, thoroughly helpless, leaves the spot in silence. This moment of sexual violence caps Sajad's highly personalized map of Kashmir's political machine, yet it is one in which there are no overt political agents at play: no separatists, no army, no militants. The entire episode, rendered in hauntingly black panels, violently cleaves Kashmir along gendered lines. To this point gender has been accorded merely passing reference, making the closing scene all the more surprising. This is the nucleus of Sajad's approach to Kashmir as a narrative task, an issue of "news" versus the "normalcy" of everyday life in the valley. The rape recorded here will never grab the headlines in India, or even in Kashmir. It is swallowed, just as *Munnu's* final pages are, in the chaotic darkness of civil strife, a nonissue amidst greater political battles. At the center of this depiction, therefore, is a question of journalistic imperative: What constitutes "news" in a conflict zone, and what is the praxis of its communicability?

Apart from this, the cornucopia of political opinions that have spilled out around the Kashmir "problem," the body of academic scholarship and literary works about it, and the rise of an "expert" culture regarding Kashmir, are all strongly rejected by *Munnu*. The text is marked by a survivor's awareness of the different ontology of a conflict zone (as opposed to an official war bookended in time), and the reconstitution of personal narratives and micro-histories required in order to exhume it. Therefore, on several occasions, the narrator places side by side the frequent funerals of friends and neighbors he has attended, and his recurrent nightmares as a child about funerals. The images of both events, one taking place in reality and the other unfolding in Munnu's subconsciousness, are sutured into a continuum of experientiality. "They say Mustafa had been killed again," says Munnu in his dream, an empirically null statement underlining the moribund repetitiveness that has sunk into the Kashmiri sense of being.

The most remarkable feature of *Munnu* is that it does not mince words regarding the political integrity of Kashmir. The text finds its voice among a slew of violent incidents that characterize Munnu's coming-of-age. The militants, the Indian Army, as well as the Hurriyat, are equally implicated in the text. The narrator relates with a straight face the crossing of disillusioned youngsters across the Line of Control to receive arms training in Pakistan. As an incident in the text reflects, this equivalence does not sit well with Kashmir's separatist leaders, who take Sajad to task for his perceived unfaithfulness to the cause. Sajad's narration sympathizes not with one political cause as opposed to another, but with the singular spectrum of violence experienced by civilians in the valley. This is graphically marked by three iconic events: identification parades, crackdowns, and curfews. While Kashmir crops up in Indian media mostly in relation to terrorist attacks and the seditious tendency towards separatism, the book revives the subtext of humiliation and human-rights violations that make up everyday life.

*Munnu* is narrated in the third person, a curious choice of perspective for a graphic memoir. Unlike the narrator of Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2007), one of the doyens of the genre, who says, "This is me," at her cartoon self in the opening panel,

*Munnu's* narrator is a distanced presence that says, "That is Sajad," to Munnu's cartoon self in the first panel. Jared Gardner, in "Autography's Biography, 1972–2007" (2008), his formal analysis of autography as a genre, identifies this distantiation as an important locus of meaning making. The narrative voice straddles a timescape across which subjectivity is distributed. By means of this distantiation, in Gardner's words, the comics form "explicitly surrenders the juridical advantages of . . . testimony . . . refuses any claims to the 'having-been-there' truth, even (or especially) on the part of those who really were. The split between autographer and subject is etched on every page." Gardner argues that this split is at the crux of comics nonfiction as a narrative strategy.

In *Munnu*, the existing narratorial split is duplicated by the almost unnecessary third-person narrator, its notable effect being the transformation of a memoir into "objective" reportage. This device intensifies the spectatorial links between the text and its reader, and the identification of the author on the book cover with the cartoon subject is rendered schizophrenic. *Munnu* is watched rather than being the narrator of the story. An agentive role is consciously traded for that of a passive object. Some of the narrator's concluding lines strike light here: "If it still stings, don't seek forgiveness from God. Draw, confess your guilt, write a story." Narration is penance for the guilt-ridden survivor, located in the interstices of a layered subjectivity. It is also through these interstices that journalistic "facts" are dropped in favor of an ostensibly innocent experientiality.

## A New Englander Comes Home to the South

*Deep South: Four Seasons on Back Roads*

by Paul Theroux. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015. Hardcover, 441 pp., \$29.95

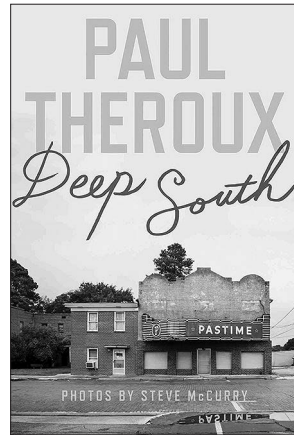
Reviewed by Doug Cumming, Washington and Lee University, United States

When the greatest living travel writer in America, now in his seventies, finally leaves off exotic lands to spend a couple of years traveling in the United States, you get to re-experience the lifelessly familiar as fresh and vibrant and true. For example, airport security. You are “an alien at home, and not just a stranger but someone perhaps to be feared, a possible danger, a troublemaker if not a terrorist—the hoo-ha, shoes off, belt off, no jacket, denuded and simplified and subjected to screening while tapping your feet, eager to get away; all this while still in a mode of predeparture, scrutinized, needing to pass inspection before you can even think of the trip ahead.”

But Paul Theroux’s four coilings through the Deep South’s backcountry avoided airports. Each trip begins with driving from his Cape Cod home into the Carolinas and beyond. In one of these preliminaries, he again rescues something from the oblivion of your repeated experience, Interstate 95, and irradiates it with his magic. The route becomes one long tunnel. “The potholed chute of I-95 is hectic, unpredictable, dangerous and bleak, cavern-like and confining, at times like shuttling through a sooty culvert . . . a journey like a trip through a mine shaft where the air is so thickened by the murk of pollution that even the open road is like a tunnel.”

Exploring the American South, Theroux knows the tracks left by artists and writers before him. With courtly respect he cites several, including: James Agee, whose *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* begins with the black and white photography of Walker Evans, while *Deep South* ends with the color photographs of Steve McCurry; Erskine Caldwell, whose wife Margaret Bourke-White’s photograph of a Georgia chain gang is evoked as Theroux talks to the black female guard of unchained prison workers; painter Thomas Hart Benton, whose *America Today* mural includes a panel also called “Deep South”; and Theroux’s mentor Sir V.S. Naipaul, who executed a thinner version of this same literary project twenty-five years earlier, *A Turn in the South*.

There is risk in this pilgrimage. A world-besotted traveler and famous author (who almost no one had heard of wherever he went in Dixie) has no business bringing old New England righteousness to judge the folkways of a defeated, tacky region. He knows that. Theroux adopts a cheerful, innocent role with the sometimes hilari-



ous drollness that reminded me of filmmaker Ross McElwee’s 1986 Southern romp *Sherman’s March*. Theroux enjoys the freedom of the back roads, is astonished at the beauty of the land and the seasons, and admires the courage of community-agency do-gooders he seeks out. He attends every gun show he finds, and small Sunday morning church services, putting aside intellectual snobbery. But neither can this brooding loner censor his conclusions as he thinks and asks again and again about race, poverty, the myths of Southern literature, and why these forlorn American places seem more despairing and backsliding than any impoverishment he saw in Asia and Africa. The depths of the Deep South are Third World, with “something weirdly colonial” about the shabby motels where he stayed, thick with the fragrance of Gujarati cooking from owners predictably named Patel.

Theroux is a “literary” writer in that he ranges through an alien world immersed in literature and writing. After thirty works of fiction and sixteen of nonfiction, *Deep South* is a meditation on writing as well as a homecoming and road trip. It is buttressed with three critical “Interludes,” one that proposes that William Faulkner’s originality is partly his passive-aggressive revenge on too many years as an uncomplaining Hollywood scriptwriter. Another bridge essay is a good detoxing of Southern fiction. But the book is more reporting than meditating—about seventy percent material to thirty percent “writer’s genius,” to use a Tom Wolfe ratio.

How does Theroux capture such fine dialog between himself and folks he meets? “I’m passing through. I’m from Massachusetts.” “What church are you affiliated with?” How accurate are the full paragraphs inside quote marks? A few years ago, he described his method to an interviewer in London: “I have a small notebook and I make notes all day. I don’t have a tape recorder. I take notes. Then at night, I write up my notes, write up the day.” He has a good ear—with renderings like, “Ah mo put my trust in Jesus” and “Nemmine”—but doesn’t overdo dialect. The scenes are novelistic; the characters reappear in another of the four seasons. This is an experiment in cyclical travel writing, returning to people and places he met before, perfect for a culture that asks, “When are you coming back?” and means it.

You wish there were a hundred more reporters like this abroad in the land taking notes, writing them up. Most places he visits turn out to be scenes of news long since abandoned by the reporters and now followed up by this patient observer. In Money, Mississippi, where young Emmett Till broke the racial code he didn’t know, the store of that violation is swallowed in vines. In Brinkley, Arkansas, where an alleged sighting of the mythic ivory-billed woodpecker made national news in 1983, Theroux spends time with an African-American doctor who is trying to reverse land loss among black farmers. In Dover, Arkansas, where there was a mass murder in 1987, Theroux spends the day with a cranky old part-Cherokee woman who outshoots him hitting beer cans with rifle shot.

There is a much bigger story he is following up. Back in the late 1980s, singer-songwriters were noting a profound loss of hope in small towns across America. While Bruce Springsteen was singing the poignant “My Hometown” (“They’re closing down the textile mill across the railroad tracks/ Foreman says these jobs are going boys and they ain’t coming back”), songwriter Greg Brown lamented:

*I don't have to read the news, or hear it on the radio  
I see it in the faces of everyone I know  
The boards go up, the signs come down  
What's going to happen to our little town?*

It got worse, after NAFTA and the presidency of a former Arkansas governor whom Theroux wants to blame—up to a point. *Deep South* comes around to moral judgments that are not so much New England's as they are the earned judgments of a dedicated writer who has given himself here to long visits in a generously mellow mood.

When the South was more visibly poor and hurting, between the World Wars, a Sears and Roebuck executive named Julius Rosenwald donated his fortune for schools and scholarships to help. Theroux finds a decaying Rosenwald school in Alabama that a transplanted California woman is trying to restore, without much support from locals or big foundations. Today, philanthropists who are “benevolently concerned with poverty and deficiencies elsewhere” (as Theroux chides repeatedly) could use this book as a guide to a host of small-scale worthy causes all over the rural South. There is another South, of course, a region of reviving cities and political power that the writer avoids. This brings him to a conclusion that is so wrong it's laughable: the South, he writes in the end, “has been held back from prosperity and has little power to exert influence on the country at large, so it remains immured in its region.” But there is a real South he has discovered, a region not found in all the books he cites, a South in fact without books or readers to speak of. It is a South just waiting for other writers and other generous spirits to find, following Theroux's example of listening, observing, and bringing it into shimmering existence on the page.

## Punjabi Fiction, or History, or Both?

*The Fall of the Kingdom of the Punjab*

by Khushwant Singh. Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1962; Hyderabad: Penguin/Viking, 2014. Hardcover, 200 pp., \$22.99

Reviewed by Sudha Shastri, Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, India

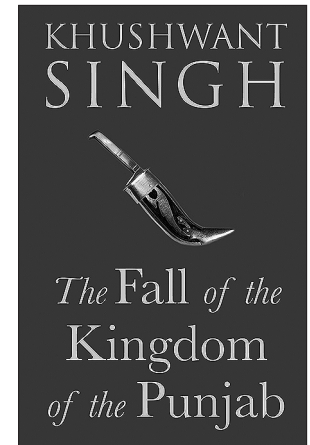
In the “Author's Note” to *The Fall of the Kingdom of the Punjab*, Khushwant Singh acknowledges the institutions and people who helped him along his journey in writing this book. He also includes a brief summary of its contents: the book “tells the story” of the ten years after the death of the legendary hero of Punjab, Maharajah Ranjit Singh in Lahore—then a part of undivided India and now of Pakistan—in 1839. What seems a routine prefatory message merits attention because it problematizes the issue of what genre to place this book in. Is it fiction or history? Or is it both without being a historical novel?

For one, the author's claim that “every character and incident mentioned in this narrative is based on contemporary historical records” notwithstanding, the objectivity that is an integral part of a journalistic report can be influenced by the author's personal choice between several accounts of a given historical incident.

Thus, within the severely colonial/nationalistic dialectic of British versus Indian, Khushwant Singh's occasional inability to interrogate his own choices—at least explicitly, on the pages of this book—tends to tilt the balance towards “literary” and away from journalism. In the tenth chapter, for example, the confrontation between the Punjabi Sikhs and the British is described, twice, within nationalistic discourse: first in the sentence, “the nation began to rise in arms”; and later, “thus did a local rebellion become a national war of independence.”

The pertinence of “nation” to describe the battles is questionable, since until 1857 no national identity was observable amongst the various kingdoms that ruled different parts of India. They may have united in attacking a perceived common enemy, the British, but this was hardly sufficient to make them part of the same nation.

The specific instance cited has other problems. Less than a page later, Khushwant Singh reports that Lord Dalhousie, while declaring war against the Punjab, was indulging in equivocation, since Maharajah Dalip Singh and the majority of the regency council, who were also a part of the Punjab, had not revolted against the British. In making this observation he fails to see the inappropriateness of his own choice of the word “national.” How can an uprising be “national” if the Maharaj and his council were themselves not a part of it?



Periodically, Khushwant Singh alerts us to the awareness that history is not authoritative. We may be tempted to speculate that it is perhaps not so different from fiction. While describing the first war against the British by Punjab, he notes that it is “still uncertain as to when exactly the Durbar army crossed the Sutlej.” Following this statement come sentences with phrases such as “according to some Indian historians,” and “according to British records.” The recognition that accounts of the past are determined by who recites them is thus a tacit presence here.

Another example of this lack of authority is the recording of Nao Nihal Singh’s death. The author foregrounds different historical accounts of this incident before deciding in favor of the British version—as documented by Alexander Gardner, not the official British report. This move not only indicates differences among the British, but also displays the author’s objectivity in choosing a British writer to denounce a British action. In choosing Gardner’s version he cements this move, as it “is accepted by many serious historians, both English and Punjabi.” Agency—the recognition that the author’s role might explain a prevalent passive voice throughout—can never be discounted.

Discussing Maharajah Ranjit Singh’s army, for example, Khushwant Singh comments favorably on its modernization and discipline. Later in the same paragraph, he says that despite the shortage of money “the iron discipline imposed by the Maharajah” prevented the troops from mutiny. The very next sentence, “[T]he seeds of indiscipline had however been sown and Ranjit’s successors had to reap the bitter harvest,” does not clarify who was responsible for the collapse of discipline, or how it happened. It is possible to infer from such instances that the author was aware of the limits of historical knowledge and the tentativeness required while attributing causes to historical events.

Similarly, while describing the adventures of Rani (Queen) Jindan, Khushwant Singh states, “[A] certain Prema was charged with the design to assassinate the British Resident [a diplomatic officer] . . . and it was suggested that the Maharani was an accessory to the plot.” While he recounts future outcomes by claiming that Lord Hardinge advised the resident to ignore this “plot,” even while Lord Hardinge was keen to get rid of Jindan, he does not clarify who set whom up in the first place.

*The Fall of the Kingdom of the Punjab* is well attempted, but it suffers from a lack of distance and perspective with respect to the larger significance of events. On the flipside, it records minute details with a lot of attention, and also traces the lives of the principal characters till the end. But the positioning of this historical trajectory—in hindsight—makes it a potential site for trying to understand a colossal event that came to pass less than a decade later: what the British called the Sepoy Mutiny, which broke out in 1857 and was of sufficient gravity to call for the transfer of power over India from the East India Company to Queen Victoria. This understanding is absent in the book.

That the Indians played as much a role in the conquests made by the British in India is acknowledged with self-criticism by Khushwant Singh in his repeated use of words like “traitor” to describe betrayals from within. At the same time, a certain eagerness to stress the bravery of the Sikhs is evident in his recall of Shah Mohammad

and Lord Gough poems in praise of Sikh warriors. It may be possible to attribute this eagerness to his reluctance to be as judgmental about the several traitors within the Punjab who were responsible for its downfall as about the British. Take, for instance, a sentence like, “[T]he prospect of loot induced many of the tribesmen to come in on the side of the British,” and compare it with, “[T]he British attitude towards an ally who had not only helped them to win the war in Afghanistan but was allowing his territory to be used by alien armies as if it were a common highway, is an example of ingratitude the like of which would be hard to find in the pages of history books.” Together they represent a clear bias along with no redeeming irony.

In the final analysis, *The Fall of the Kingdom of the Punjab* leans on the side of fiction and authorial imagination in its anecdotes and dialogues, even as it rests firmly on history while excerpting from texts and local newspapers such as the *Punjab Akhbar*. It tells a story of intrigue, conspiracy, and murder in a power play, but in its crowding the canvas with characters, and insufficiently distinguishing their individuality, it suffers from being a generic portrayal of any brave kingdom’s fall rather than a specific place, at a specific time, in history.

## Author Struggles to Solve Linguistic Triangle

*In Other Words*

by Jhumpa Lahiri. New York: Knopf, 2016. Hardcover, 256 pp., \$26.95

Reviewed by Giovanna Dell'Orto, University of Minnesota, United States

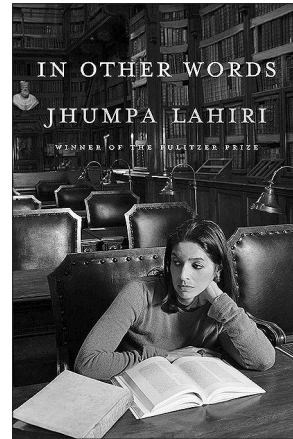
The premise of Jhumpa Lahiri's autobiographical book is both enticing and wildly ambitious. The acclaimed anglophone author writes of her passion for, and struggle to learn, Italian in that language itself, leaving the page-by-page English translation to a professional. The result, however, ends up reading like her Italian: contrived, stilted, and ultimately utterly uninteresting as a piece of writing and as a story—"parole, parole, parole," nothing but words, to quote a catchy 1970s Italian song.

Full disclosure, bilingual in English and Italian, I grew up with the latter but the entirety of my professional literary output, both as a scholar and as a journalist, is in English. I am fluent in two other languages, and have studied five more, so I am biased by both profound love and humble respect for the power of languages.

*In Other Words* traces Lahiri's fraught relationship with three languages: Bengali, her immigrant parents' native tongue; English, "the language of my previous books," as she revealingly writes, in English, in the author's note; and Italian, which she came to love during a first visit to Florence in 1994. More trips and multiple teachers later, Lahiri moved from the United States to Rome, and there she started writing in Italian only, calling it "a risk that I feel inspired to take."

The "triangolo/triangle" chapter, worth reading as a stand-alone essay, explores Lahiri's wrestling with all three tongues—not only in fluency and literary expression but in the emotional reverberations. The tension is palpable as Lahiri describes what amounts to her sense of exile from all realities she experienced. Bengali, which she needed to excel in to please her parents, she felt, "died" after she started reading. English, which she had to master "per sopravvivere all'America" (which literally means "to survive America," but is more suavely if incorrectly translated as "to survive in America"), was a traumatizing "stepmother." And Italian? Italian was "a flight from the long clash" between the other two, a way of carving a new path.

Strikingly, the languages themselves are barely portrayed in the book. The reader is told nothing that makes them come alive, nothing of their different rhythms on the page or in the ear, and nothing of their inextricable link to intersecting and varied ways of thinking, reading, and engaging the world. Arguably, what is most captivating about learning another language is to open a window into a foreign life, to get a



more intimate glimpse of its mysteries and realities through an idiom's idiosyncratic flow. Yet Italy and Italians are conspicuously absent from *In Other Words*, aside from perfunctory descriptions of foggy bridges in Venice, jogging in a Roman park, and strangers and acquaintances passing judgment on the author's fluency.

In fact, it is hard to imagine a book that reveals less about its author's encounter with the world, even the group one would guess she must have some intimate rapport with—her family. Of her children, the reader learns that two exist because they become a metaphor for her attitude toward English and Italian. There is slightly more on her husband: his proficiency in Romance languages and his name make him a natural in Italian speakers' eyes and ears. He is also, source of further alienation for the author, who feels only "walls" all around her linguistic attempts.

Language, of course, is also at the core a means of communication. Whether for imparting information, as in journalism in all its branches, or for self-expression, as in autobiography, it allows an author to share her experiences of an outer or inner world. As readers, we keep turning the page, or tapping the screen, because we are engrossed in seeing something, feeling something, living something—if only the passing beauty of the prose itself—through another's eyes.

A linguist who is fluent in Italian and English might keep turning Lahiri's pages, or rather comparing them, for the fascinating interplay between the two texts. Her Italian, with its constant lexical, grammatical, and syntactical errors, reveals it was conceived by a foreign mind, and, judging from most sentence constructions, by one thinking in English. But the excellent translator, Ann Goldstein, seeking to reproduce the original, bypasses the colloquial formulations, so that the English version, too, feels just a bit off.

But back to the linguistic triangle of Bengali, English, and Italian, Lahiri calls it "a kind of frame" that defines her self-portrait. Looking into it as if in a mirror, she fears that it "reflects only a void, that it reflects nothing."

Exactly like this book?

## Writing the Iraq Invasion: Author and Authority in Five War Memoirs

John M. Coward  
University of Tulsa, USA

### Works Discussed

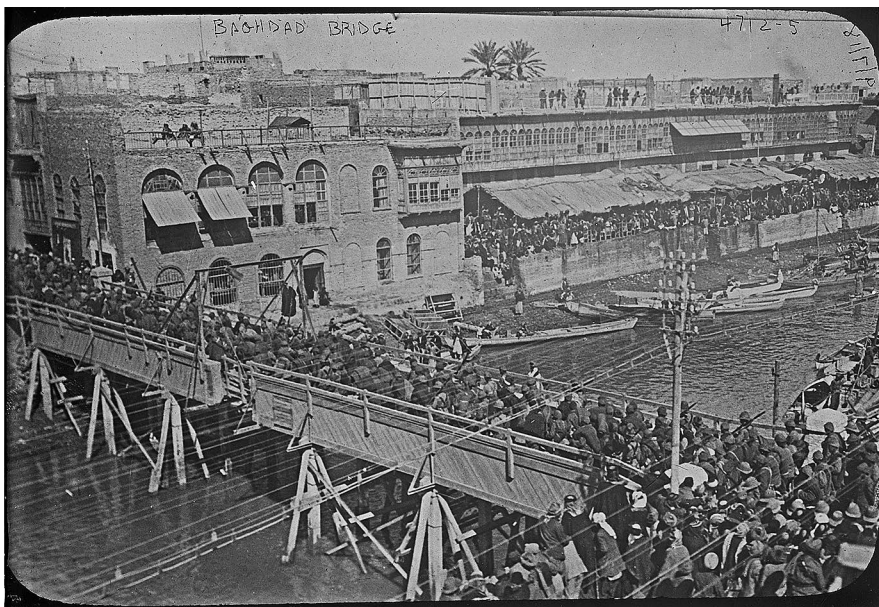
Anderson, Jon Lee, *The Fall of Baghdad*. New York: Penguin, 2005. Paperback, 400 pp., \$16.

Ayers, Chris, *War Reporting for Cowards*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006. Paperback, 308 pp., \$13

Engel, Richard, *A Fist in the Hornet's Nest*. New York: Hyperion, 2005. Paperback, 272 pp., \$13.95

Garrels, Anne, *Naked in Baghdad*. New York: Picador, 2004. 264 pp., \$19

Wright, Evan, *Generation Kill*. New York: Berkley Caliber, 2005. Paperback, 368 pp., \$17



Some things never change: *Baghdad Bridge*, c. 1915, George Grantham Bain Collection (Library of Congress).

“It’s another Iraqi town, nameless to the Marines racing down the main drag in Humvees, blowing it to pieces.” This is the dramatic opening line of Evan Wright’s *Generation Kill*, his 2004 book about the invasion of Iraq.<sup>1</sup> Jon Lee Anderson opens *The Fall of Baghdad*, his account of the Iraq war, in a different way, visiting the elegant home of an exiled Iraqi living in Jordan. Anderson’s source, Nasser al-Sadoun, is no ordinary Iraqi. “Nasser, a handsome, silver-haired man in his late sixties, is a descendent of a legendary Sunni Muslim clan that once possessed its own kingdom, called Muntafiq, which had once ruled over most of southern Iraq for four centuries,” Anderson writes. Not only that, Nasser is also “a direct descendent—thirty-sixth in a direct line—of the Prophet Muhammad.”<sup>2</sup>

The contrasting openings of these two war memoirs illustrate different journalistic approaches to twenty-first century war reporting. Wright is a frontline journalist, riding in a Marine Humvee fighting its way toward Baghdad. He provides gritty descriptions of young Americans facing the violence and chaos of combat. Anderson takes a more considered approach. In the run-up to the invasion, he travels from Jordan to Iran to Baghdad in pursuit of people who can explain the complicated politics of the region. Anderson’s Middle Eastern sources add cultural nuance and historical depth to his narrative way of explaining the war and its effects to a more sophisticated reading audience.

This essay looks back at five books about the beginning of the Iraq war of 2003, a conflict well documented by combat veterans<sup>3</sup> as well as reporters, so much so that its timeframe has been described as “the Decade of the Embedded Journalist.”<sup>4</sup> I examine these books—two by magazine writers, two by broadcast journalists, and one by a daily newspaper reporter—in order to better understand the nature of war reporting in the twenty-first century, especially the ways that journalists turn their wartime experiences into book-length, autobiographical narratives. My starting assumption is that these correspondents want to establish themselves as credible witnesses with the experience, knowledge, and skills to understand and explain what they hear and see. For readers, a reliable and authoritative narrator offers the promise of a greater version of the truth: that is, deeper insights and thoughtful evaluations not available in daily print and broadcast journalism. But how do these five journalists—Wright reporting for *Rolling Stone*, Anderson for the *New Yorker*, Chris Ayers for the (*London*) *Times*, Richard Engel for ABC and Anne Garrels for NPR—construct and maintain their positions as authoritative narrators of a chaotic military action? What themes, or “narrative codes,”<sup>5</sup> do they employ to establish their credibility? Finally, how do these books fit under the umbrella of nonfiction writing known as literary journalism?

My essay builds on a recent article by James Aucoin in which he describes the methods Sebastian Junger uses to establish his credibility as a war correspondent in his 2011 book, *War*.<sup>6</sup> These methods—some drawn from literary journalism, include the use of secondary sources, immersion reporting, direct observation, extensive interviewing, the use of informants, videotaping, and expert testimony—are used to one degree or another in the war memoirs under review here.

As noted, Anderson has produced an erudite narrative in *The Fall of Baghdad*. A *New Yorker* staff writer since 1998, he has wide-ranging international experience



including assignments in Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Afghanistan, Angola, Somalia, Sudan, Mali, and Liberia.<sup>7</sup> He has also reported extensively from Latin America and the Caribbean, and is the author of *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (1997). In *The Fall of Baghdad*, however, Anderson does not highlight his familiarity with warzones. Instead, he focuses on two aspects of the Iraq story—its recent political history under Saddam Hussein, and the US invasion. As might be expected, Anderson's political reporting is thorough and multi-toned, building on a series of extended interviews with knowledgeable Iraqis. One of his sources is Ala Bashir, a London-trained physician and artist whom Anderson meets before the invasion.<sup>8</sup> Bashir, being one of Saddam's personal doctors, puts him in a precarious position in Baghdad, but makes him a valuable guide to the mysteries and dangers of Iraqi politics under Saddam. Notably, Anderson does not emphasize his proficiency with war reporting in his narrative, but the scope, depth and explanatory nature of his writing make clear that he is a careful observer, well versed in international conflict and war. One reviewer hailed Anderson's thoughtful reporting of the US invasion and its chaotic aftermath—as opposed to the day-by-day reports of combat filed by embedded reporters—as “the best book on the Iraq war.”<sup>9</sup>

Like Anderson, Wright is already a veteran reporter before he leaves for Iraq. Unlike Anderson, though, he has little international experience, having worked for several US magazines such as *Time* and *Vanity Fair*. At *Hustler*, he has covered the porn industry and reported on white supremacists, in the process developing a knack for getting “outsiders” to talk. For *Rolling Stone*, Wright embeds in Iraq with a Marine reconnaissance unit, a “tip of the spear” force that is guaranteed to face hostile fire as it blasts out of Kuwait on its way to Baghdad. Wright's first-person account—or “eyewitnessing”<sup>10</sup>—of the US invasion is immersive journalism in its rawest, most profane form. As the title suggests—and as *Rolling Stone* readers might expect—*Generation Kill* emphasizes the macho, pop culture-obsessed soldiers who make up the Marine fighting force where he is assigned. “They are kids raised on hip-hop, Marilyn Manson and Jerry Springer,” Wright says. “There are tough guys who pray to Buddha and quote Eastern philosophy and New Age precepts gleaned from watching Oprah and old kung fu movies.”<sup>11</sup> Wright concentrates his reporting on the lives and actions of these men, both in combat and in the daily, dirty grind of warfare.

The authority of Wright's approach comes from his ground-level view of modern warfare, warts and all. In contrast to Anderson, who seeks to explain the intricacies of Iraqi life and politics in a time of crisis, Wright offers a testosterone-fueled ride in the back seat of a Marine Humvee, dodging enemy bullets and rocket-propelled grenades. Given the life-and-death situation, it is no surprise that Wright bonds with the men in his unit. This fact reinforces his credibility not only with his unit but also with readers, who can see, hear, and feel the chaos of battle in Wright's reporting. In the Afterword to the paperback edition, Wright defends the Marines and criticizes American citizens who have lost interest in the war. “The young troops I profiled in *Generation Kill* . . . are among the finest people of their generation,” Wright writes. “We misuse them at our own peril.”<sup>12</sup> This declaration, along with his extensive experience under fire, helps make *Generation Kill* a powerful—and authoritative—war

story. Having put himself in harm's way repeatedly, Wright is allowed to claim authority as a real combat veteran as well as a journalistic witness for the courage of the Marines he chronicles.

Broadcast journalist Engel, author of *A Fist in the Hornet's Nest*, goes to Iraq as a freelancer for ABC television. Early in his book, he explains that his path to foreign correspondent begins in Egypt. In 1996, as a recent international relations graduate of Stanford, Engel moves to Cairo to learn Arabic and begins his apprenticeship as a reporter. His language breakthrough comes when he moves into a run-down apartment in a poor neighborhood where no one speaks English. Nonetheless, he quickly becomes a popular figure. The locals, he explains, want to “check out the new young American who'd landed in their neighborhood like a Martian.”<sup>13</sup> In time, Engel's Arabic improves and he begins to develop contacts in Egypt, working as a freelance journalist for various newspapers and magazines. In 2003, Engel makes his way to Baghdad, entering the country from Jordan as a pretend “peace activist.” In contrast to Wright, who focuses on the lives of soldiers (with little attention to his own safety), Engel emphasizes the physical, mental, and emotional hurdles he has to jump in order to report and file stories from Baghdad. (The theme of Baghdad bureaucracy is also prevalent in Anderson's and Garrels's books.) Unlike Anderson, though, Engel provides little of the historical background or political context. His focus has a certain narrative appeal—revealing the dangers and drama of war reporting—but at a cost of context (Anderson's strength) and a focus on US troops (Wright's forte). As an identifiable broadcast personality, though, Engel's emphasis on his safety and other reporting challenges makes his story more accessible and compelling for American readers.

As the senior foreign correspondent for National Public Radio, Garrels, author of *Naked in Baghdad*, refers to a number of her previous assignments to establish her credentials as a war reporter. “In many ways covering Iraq is like covering the former Soviet Union, where I began my career in the late 1970s,” Garrels notes early in her book.<sup>14</sup> These references are consistent with the personal tone of her memoir, a narrative that includes her husband Vint Lawrence's email reports to friends about Garrels's time in Baghdad.

Like Engel, Garrels emphasizes the many personal and logistical challenges of radio reporting in a highly unstable situation. As one of the few women reporting from Baghdad, she sometimes feels vulnerable in a male-oriented Iraqi society where women are sequestered. On balance, she notes, being a female reporter in such countries “has been a distinct advantage.” She continues, “Men generally deal with me as a sexless professional, while women open up in ways that they would not with a man.”<sup>15</sup> Garrels also reports in detail about the living conditions for journalists covering the invasion. As the bombing of Baghdad intensifies, in late March 2003, she writes that the phone service begins to fail and the hotel where she and other foreign journalists are living is now filthy. “Trash mounts in the hallway,” she writes. “I have to keep the balcony door open so the blasts don't shatter the glass. The room is consequently covered with a layer of oily dust.”<sup>16</sup> Feeding the NPR beast, she admits, is a challenge in Baghdad. “First there's *Morning Edition*, then *Talk of the Nation* in the afternoon, and then *All Things Considered*, not to mention the hourly newscasts,”

she writes. “Given the nine-hour time difference from Washington, this means working a double-shift.”<sup>17</sup> Like Engel, Garrels emphasizes the challenges of dealing with Iraqi officials and her minders, as well as the technical obstacles of filing stories. This central “how-I-got-the-story” theme fits her more intimate and personal narrative.

The outlier among these memoir writers is Ayers, who reports for the *(London) Times* and later expands his thoughts into the book, *War Reporting for Cowards*. As the title makes clear, Ayers takes a different approach to war reporting, one that reveals the significance of author and authority in the other books. While the others present themselves as trustworthy, veteran journalists, assuring readers of their competence and bravery, he emphasizes his incompetence and cowardice, which he explains, or exploits rather, for comic effect. For instance, Ayers says he did not have international reporting experience beyond the US, and none at all as a war correspondent. As a journalism graduate student in London, he says he was “easily the least cool student” in his program.<sup>18</sup> He also says he has no interest in foreign reporting, and that it is a job he is ill equipped to tackle. “I couldn’t speak a foreign language and I hated any kind of physical discomfort,” he writes. “I had flown only once before. . . , and I wasn’t keen to repeat the experience.” He continues, “The idea of covering a famine in the Sudan or a civil war in a failed Balkan state was enough to bring me into a hot, prickly state.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Ayers begins his journalism career as a business reporter, a self-described “financial geek.” Nevertheless, by accident of fate, he happens to be working in New York on September 11, 2001, which thrusts him into the nascent US war on terror. After a two-day public relations junket on the *Constellation*, a US aircraft carrier, off the coast of California, Ayers finds himself covering the Iraq war for the *Times*, embedded with the US Marines. Not surprisingly, he underscores the many discomforts of combat, which include heat and sandstorms as well as bad military food (Meals Ready to Eat, or MREs) and the resulting constipation. He is also obsessed with the many ways to be injured or die in a desert war, from chemical weapons to land mines, from scorpions to tarantulas, to ordinary enemy fire. His fears overwhelm his ability to report, or so he claims. Early in the invasion, he contacts his editor by sat phone. His editor asks,

“Are you in a position to file us something. Just give me something off the top of your head?”

For the first time in my career I blanked out. I couldn’t think of anything. I was the world’s worst war correspondent.

“Come on, Chris,” said [editor] Barrow. “You’ve dictated stories a million times before. Just concentrate. You’re going to be fine.”

But I wasn’t fine. I was very much not fine.

And I had nothing to say.<sup>20</sup>

Despite such mistakes, Ayers manages to survive the early days of the invasion to file some vivid, frontline stories, one of which covers the entire front page of the

*Times*. He describes his reaction to this news in terms many readers can understand: “For a brief, exhilarating moment, I realized why people become war reporters. The thrill of writing an I-nearly-died-a-gruesome-death story is unbeatable. It feels like giving a middle finger to anyone who’s ever doubted you, including yourself.” He adds, “War makes you feel *special*.”<sup>21</sup>

But Ayers does not stick with the story. He is offered a chance to pull out, and rides out of Iraq in a Marine Humvee after nine days of fighting. He feels guilty about leaving—like Wright, he has bonded with some of the Marines—yet elated to get back to London. “Freedom is a novelty,” he writes, “the thrill of spending money; of eating your own choice of food, of not doing what the captain says.”<sup>22</sup> Serious for once, he admits war reporting has changed him, writing at the end, “Battlefield fear has put all other fear into perspective.”

By admitting his cowardice and lack of experience, Ayers deliberately subverts the standard way Iraq war reporters present themselves and claim the authority to report from the war zone. The contrast is stark: Anderson and Garrels are well-traveled and knowledgeable foreign correspondents; Ayers is not. Wright, like Ayers, is embedded with the Marines as they invade Iraq, but Wright goes all the way to Baghdad, taking fire and chronicling day-to-day fighting for months, not days. Nevertheless, Ayers’s approach works as humor because of these differences. That is, readers expect war correspondents to be brave, tough, and competent—all qualities Ayers gleefully repudiates. They also expect war reporters to be knowledgeable about war or international diplomacy, topics Ayers admits he knows nothing of. As a chronicler of war, Ayers is effective as a kind of anti-correspondent, appealing to readers because he admits he does not know what he is doing—and because he is funny.

### Conclusions

The analysis shows that these writers use various combinations of the methods identified in Aucoin’s research. All of them, for example, are immersed in the war and all are direct observers, witnessing what they can of the invasion given the limitations of their location. Wright is the most traditional combat reporter, living (and suffering) with the troops for many weeks. Wright’s Marines are his informants, and he renders their lives in vivid, sometimes gruesome detail. In contrast, Anderson is the most reliant on secondary sources and extensive interviewing. On assignment for the *New Yorker*, which to some degree still luxuriates in the time-consuming, explanatory approach of magazine journalism’s more prosperous days, tells the story of the war from a broader perspective.

The analysis also reveals additional narrative themes these writers use to explain their role and bolster their authority. Three of the five—Anderson, Garrels, and Engel—have international reporting experience. Although Anderson makes little mention of his background, Garrels and Engel make notable references to their foreign experiences, thereby claiming authority in international reporting. Wright lacks international reporting, but brings significant US experience as a magazine reporter covering outsiders and misfits—a fact that helps him bond with his Marine unit and tell their stories from their point of view. Ayers’s complete lack of war-reporting expe-

rience explains his brief, funny, and somewhat warped approach to the war.

These memoirs emphasize other themes, including the logistics of war reporting, especially involving the gear each journalist uses to stay alive and keep reporting. All write about the threat of chemical war and discuss their preparations for such an attack. The broadcast reporters, Engel and Garrels, underline the challenges of filing stories from Baghdad, offering readers behind-the-scenes stories about the difficulties of reporting from a warzone.

Ayers excepted, combat competence is also a major theme. Wright is the most conventional war reporter, spending weeks on the front lines with the Marines and, from all accounts, holding up well under the stress of combat. Anderson, Engel, and Garrels are un-embedded reporters in Baghdad, subject to the power and unpredictability of the Iraqi regime (while it lasts), and to the hardships and miseries of a city under attack. In their own stories at least, all of them are courageous in the face of uncertainty and danger.

With the exception of Ayers's humorous approach, all of the themes here represent ways for these writers to establish their authority as war correspondents. That is, they need to make the case for their presence in the warzone, to offer evidence of their qualifications and thus their abilities and trustworthiness. These narrative themes justify their war reporting and mark their authority. Highlighting experience, preparations, equipment, suffering, and perseverance, these Iraq War journalists present themselves as credible and worthy observers who have accumulated significant, detailed, first-hand knowledge of the war to elucidate its meanings and consequences.

In terms of literary journalism, Anderson's *The Fall of Baghdad* is the most ambitious book. A deeply observed narrative distinguished by his range of knowledge, it is a carefully rendered examination of the people and politics of Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Wright's experience of the war is intense and action-oriented, yet his story is also rich with details of fighting men and their terrifying, sometimes thrilling, drive to Baghdad. The books by the two broadcasters, Garrels and Engel, are exercises in immersive journalism, to be sure. Yet their books are more narrowly conceived, focusing largely on their experiences as un-embedded reporters in Baghdad. Garrels organizes her book as a diary, a technique that allows her to tell a vivid, personal story, though she offers few of the wide-ranging observations and detailed character studies that mark the work of Anderson and Wright. Engel's account is similar to Garrels's—a personal narrative of the invasion limited in depth and scope. In short, Garrels and Engel produced compelling, firsthand reports of the invasion, but neither succeed as fully developed examples of literary journalism. The final book reviewed here, Ayers's comic account of the war, remains detached from the other accounts. While self-deprecating and funny, he makes little effort to go beyond the limits of this comic approach in search of a larger, more meaningful narrative.

Whatever their merits as literary journalism, all of these books describe the day-to-day psychological and physical challenges of war. Embedded with the Marines or un-embedded in Baghdad, these reporters suffer physically and psychologically, as do the troops and Iraqi civilians. In one powerful but terrible example, Anderson reports on the victims of a rocket attack he finds in a Baghdad hospital, including a

twelve-year-old boy named Ali. His body has been hideously blackened, Anderson reports, "and both of his arms had been burned off."<sup>23</sup> Anderson's source, an Iraqi surgeon, tells him Ali has three weeks to live. This incident—usually not the focus of the evening news—is one way Anderson can explain the myriad complexities of the Iraqi invasion in memorable and human terms.

---

### Notes

1. Evan Wright, *Generation Kill* (New York: Berkley Caliber, 2004), 1.
2. Jon Lee Anderson, *The Fall of Baghdad* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 1–2.
3. War memoirs by veterans include, for example, John Crawford, *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005); Paul Rieckhoff, *Chasing Ghosts* (New York: New American Library, 2006); and Kayla Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005).
4. Tom Bissell, "American Soldiers," a review of *War* by Sebastian Junger, *Columbia Journalism Review*, July/August 2010, 58.
5. This useful term is borrowed from James Wood, "Red Planet: The Sanguinary Sublime of Cormac McCarthy," *New Yorker*, July 25, 2005, 90.
6. James Aucoin, "Sebastian Junger's *War*, 'Expert Testimony,' and Understanding the Story," *Journalism Studies* 17:2, 2016, 231–246.
7. <http://www.newyorker.com/contributors/jon-lee-anderson>. Retrieved May 13, 2016.
8. Anderson, 63–71.
9. Matthew Harwood, "Ground Up," *Washington Monthly*, December 2004, 51–53.
10. The meaning and use of the term "eyewitnessing" is discussed in Barbie Zelizer, "On 'Having Been There': 'Eyewitnessing' as a Journalistic Key Word," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 24:5 (December 2007), 408–428.
11. Wright, 5.
12. Wright, 370.
13. Richard Engel, *A Fist in the Horner's Nest* (New York: Hyperion, 2004), 16.
14. Anne Garrels, *Naked in Baghdad* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 49.
15. Garrels, 31.
16. Garrels, 141.
17. Garrels, 104.
18. Chris Ayers, *War Reporting for Cowards* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2005), 24.
19. Ayers, 24.
20. Ayers, 209.
21. Ayers, 252–3.
22. Ayers, 274.
23. Anderson, 209.

MISSION STATEMENT  
*Literary Journalism Studies*

*Literary Journalism Studies* is an international, interdisciplinary blind-reviewed journal that invites scholarly examinations of literary journalism—a genre also known by different names around the world, such as literary reportage, narrative journalism, the New Journalism, *nuevo periodismo*, reportage literature, literary nonfiction, narrative nonfiction, and creative nonfiction—focusing on cultural revelation. Published in English but directed at an international audience, the journal welcomes contributions from different cultural, disciplinary, and critical perspectives. To help establish comparative studies of the genre, the journal is especially interested in examinations of the works of authors and traditions from different national literatures not generally known outside their countries.

There is no single definition of the genre, but the following descriptions help to establish a meeting ground for its critical study:

- “The art and craft of reportage—journalism marked by vivid description, a novelist’s eye to form, and eyewitness reporting that reveals hidden truths about people and events that have shaped the world we know.” —*Granta*
- “Reportage Literature is an engagement with reality with a novelist’s eye but with a journalist’s discipline.” —Pedro Rosa Mendes, Portugal
- “I think one of the first things for literary reportage should be to go into the field and to try to get the other side of the story.” —Anne Nivat, France
- “A good reportage must not necessarily be linked with topical or political events which are taking place around us. I think the miracle of things lies not in showing the extraordinary but in showing ordinary things in which the extraordinary is hidden.” —Nirmal Verma, India
- Literary journalism is a “journalism that would read like a novel . . . or short story.” —Tom Wolfe, United States

Such definitions are not comprehensive and may at times conflict, but they should help to establish an understanding of this fundamentally narrative genre, which is located at the intersection of literature and journalism.

At the critical center of the genre lies cultural revelation in narrative form. Implicit to the enterprise are two precepts: (a) that there is an external reality apart from human consciousness, whatever the inherent problems of language and ideology that may exist in comprehending that reality; and (b) that there are consequences in the phenomenal world, whether triggered by human or natural agency, that result in the need to tell journalistically-based narratives empowered by literary technique and aesthetic sensibility. Ultimately, the emphasis is on the aesthetics of experience.

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
FOR LITERARY JOURNALISM STUDIES

The International Association for Literary Journalism Studies is a multidisciplinary learned society whose essential purpose is the encouragement and improvement of scholarly research and education in literary journalism (or literary reportage). For the purposes of scholarly delineation, our definition of literary journalism is “journalism as literature” rather than “journalism about literature.” Moreover, the association is explicitly inclusive and warmly supportive of a wide variety of approaches to the study and teaching of literary journalism throughout the world. The association’s web address is <http://www.ialjs.org>.

IALJS OFFICERS

Isabel Soares, President  
Universidade Técnica de Lisboa  
Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais  
e Políticas Pólo Universitário  
do Alto da Ajuda  
Rua Almerindo Lessa 1300-663  
Lisboa, Portugal  
+351-213-619-430  
[isoares@iscsp.utl.pt](mailto:isoares@iscsp.utl.pt)

Thomas B. Connery  
First Vice President  
University of St. Thomas  
Department of Communication  
and Journalism  
2115 Summit Avenue  
St. Paul, MN 55105, United States  
+01-651-962-5265  
fax +01-651-962-6360  
[tconnery@stthomas.edu](mailto:tconnery@stthomas.edu)

Rob Alexander  
Second Vice President  
Brock University  
Department of English Languages  
and Literature  
St. Catharines, Ontario L2S 3A1  
CANADA  
w/+905-688-5550 x3886  
[ralexander@brocku.ca](mailto:ralexander@brocku.ca)

David Abrahamson, Secretary  
Northwestern University  
Medill School of Journalism  
Evanston, IL 60201, United States  
+01-847-332-2223  
fax +01-847-332-1088  
[d-abrahamson@northwestern.edu](mailto:d-abrahamson@northwestern.edu)

John S. Bak, founding president, 2006–2008

