

The French Review

From the Editor's Desk: Report for the French Review, 2007–2008

FR statistics for articles submitted 1 June 2007–31 May 2008 (vol. 81)

<u>Category</u>	<u>Submitted</u>	<u>Accepted</u>	<u>Rejected</u>	<u>Under Evaluation</u>	<u>No Decision</u>
Literature	61 (59%)	15 (25%)	28 (42%)	9 (20%)	9 (13%)
Pedagogy Society & Culture	16 (15%)	6 (43%)	7 (50%)	3 (7%)	—
Film	12 (11%)	4 (33%)	6 (50%)	2 (17%)	—
Linguistics	6 (6%)	4 (67%)	—	2 (33%)	—
Totals	9 (9%)	6 (56%)	1 (11%)	2 (33%)	—
Totals	104 (100%)	35 (34%)	42 (40%)	18 (17%)	9 (9%)

I must tell you that Bernard Cerquiglini, author of last year's "Lexique des quatre saisons," was named President of l'Agence universitaire de la francophonie and has had to give up his rubric after one installment. It was too late to find someone new for this year, but I am delighted to announce that James McNab will return with his "Bloc-notes culturel" in 2009. In the meantime, we are very pleased to present Claire Dehon's "Le Roman chez les auteurs francophones d'origine subsaharienne (2001–2006)." In it she takes up the reality of writers who write in French, but live in many different places—not just France or their country of origin. Indeed, a writer from Cameroon may live and write in France, but a different Cameroonian writer may live in the Congo—or the United States for that matter. Either, both, or neither may write about their country of origin, about the country they are living in (or not), or about anything or nothing at all. This has always been true, but our obsession with categories has often obscured the complexities of the question. This truth is only one reason why it is so difficult to talk about or define satisfactorily "francophone" writers—or, for that matter, white or black, or brown or yellow writers born in France or elsewhere who write in French in France or some other French-speaking country, or a place where French is not the native language. So it is very difficult to talk about "francophone literature" at all without oversimplifying, a topic I have discussed before.

In fact, this whole matter is also the subject of William Cloonan's annual column, "Littérature-monde and the Novel in 2007." He first discusses a manifesto entitled "Pour une 'littérature monde' en français" published in *Le Monde* of 16 March 2007. The authors proclaimed in Cloonan's words that "...for too long writers dubbed 'francophone' had been treated by the French literary establishment as second-class citizens" (1). The Manifesto decried the implications of colonialism and racism that they found inherent to the term and called for a "littérature-monde en français." Cloonan goes on to suggest that many of the novels that were published in 2007 in France fit the notion of "littérature-monde."

Our other Année littéraire stalwarts include Edward Baron Turk, who returned to Avignon in 2007. He describes the tradition of renewal which characterized the sixty-first Avignon Festival. Michael Brophy has followed his auspicious 2006 debut with an essay in which he

reviews the essential themes that almost always preoccupy poets: life, love, death, and the ineffable poetic process that accompanies the search for meaning. He once again offers us poems we can try out on ourselves and our students.

It is no surprise that identity looms large in Volume 82. In this issue "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern in Maryse Condé's *Heremakhônnon*" shows how Condé attacks "pc" positions on what constitutes identity through the use of irony and champions multiple identities as a more accurate portrayal of reality. In an interview also in the current issue, Raphaël Confiant argues that literature exists when writers do not feel that they have to write about *their* country of origin and its pertinence, thereby offering an interesting counterpoint to some of the arguments in the essays discussed above. He also says that we have not yet reached this point and presents a brief for the creation of a framework for Antillean literature nineteen years after the manifesto, *Eloge de la Créolité*. The author of another essay, "Boxes and Bridges: Robert Lepage's *Le Confessionnal* and *La Face cachée de la lune*," shows how Lepage criticizes the emotional isolationism that he says has characterized Quebec's institutions and history. Finally, "*L'Interdite* de Malika Modeddem: un Donjuanisme féminine," reveals how Mokeddem's protagonist reflects both Algerian and French identity just like the author herself. Feminine liberation from constraint takes place through the transformation of Molière's *Dom Juan* into a myth of female conquest and autonomy.

In December an essay entitled "Raphaël Confiant's *Le Meurtre du Samedi-Gloria: Crime and Testimony*" explores the cultural and political subtexts of the French-Caribbean detective novel. Confiant suggests that there was obfuscation by the white-French authorities in solving a crime that they have deemed unimportant because it involved poor blacks, thereby reflecting the history of French colonialism. "Mobile Bodies and Kindred Sisters in Djébar's *Ombre Sultane*" examines Djébar's dialogue with the past and her use of the Sheherazade story and its attendant traditional feminine passivity and patriarchal authority to show how this authority is overcome through urban strolling. There is also an interview with Véronique Tadjo, a writer who lives in South Africa, but was born in Paris of an Ivorian father and a French mother and grew up in Côte d'Ivoire. All of this makes for a complex identity!

February brings a piece called "Rachid Boudjedra ou le 'phantasme' de Gibraltar." The author shows how Boudjedra posits Gibraltar as the essential link between Europe and Africa and Boudjedra's relation to the West, translation, and rapprochement through geological continental drift.

March features "Spacial Metaphors and Identity in Pham Van Ky's *Frères de sang*." The author examines the Vietnamese identity crisis created by colonization and exile. Central to the argument is the paradox of the use of the language of the colonizer to describe the sense of being torn between two cultures. "Olfactory Images in Anne Hébert's *Les Fous de Bassan*" demonstrates the centrality of olfactory images in structuring the plot and themes of the novel. In an interview the Haitian author Evelyne Trouillot explores question of slavery under the dictatorship of the Duvaliers. In April the Ivorian playwright, novelist, and essayist Koffi Kwahulé explains convincingly the necessary role of violence in contemporary theater and why the theater should frighten spectators and deal openly with taboos.

French literature from France remains crucial to our readers and scholars in spite of the explosion of studies of literature in French from other parts of the globe. In February the author of "Le Procès Oum-el-Hassen récrit par Colette: une banale histoire de Fès" reminds us that Colette wrote about the downtrodden, abortion, prostitution, and sexual tourism. In 1938 she was sent to Morocco to cover the trial of Aum-el-Hassen, a prostitute (she also served in the French army in 1912 and 1925) who had been accused of sequestration and murder and condemned to forced labor. Colette's report showed how colonialism exploited women. Another article, "Fantasmes et métaphores pathologiques dans *L'Histoire secrète d'Isabelle de Bavière*" outlines how Sade was fixated on negative heroes and pathology in chaotic, irrational, and savage images in a fictional setting. In an interview the French writer Danielle Robert-Guédon, a former nurse, tells us why she focuses her works on the lives of marginal people and hospital life.

The March issue features an essay entitled "La Grande Guerre dans la poésie féminine française." The author shows that the corpus of poetry written by women about World War I is a complex patchwork of reactions ranging from the romantic to the realistic. As expected, the unifying theme is personal and collective grief mixed with mystical and sometimes erotic elements. Racine is timeless, and "Panégyrique, sacré and exemplarité dans *Bérénice* de Racine" confirms that the purpose of the play was to exalt Louis XIV and provide political propaganda for his reign through the character of Titus, the hero of the tragedy.

April brings articles on three other great French writers. The first piece, "Beckett's *En Attendant Godot* and Camus's *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*," shows how Camus's essay influenced Beckett's play and his exploration of the relation between suicide and the absurd in a world devoid of reason. The author also demonstrates how the notion of "le suicide philosophique" developed by Camus is embraced by Beckett's protagonists, who fail to confront their fate honestly. "La Mémoire de l'histoire chez Proust et Benjamin" plumbs the meaning of the intersection of history and memory in both writers and shows how subjective *remémoration* is different from official history. Involuntary memory offers an enrichment of the apprehension of the real, and the re-remembered is presented as a movement of interruption and eruption calling forth forgotten past images.

Film studies continue to grow in importance and this explosion is reflected in the pages of the *French Review* in December. "Senegalese Women, Education, and Polygamy in *Une Si longue lettre* and *Faat Kiné*" describes the status of women now and in the past and suggests that little has changed in Senegal in spite of Ousmane's and Mariama Bâ's sympathy for their plight. There has been only minimal improvement in female literacy, and 40% of women remain in polygamous marriages, a subject much in the news in the United States as I write this editorial (12 May 2008).

In February *Faat Kiné* is featured again in "Répresentation ou travestissement: image de l'Afrique dans *Faat Kiné* de Sembène Ousmane." The author points out that in Ousmane's praiseworthy attempt to undermine negative stereotypes of Africa such as male chauvinism, poverty, violence, famine, and corruption; he goes too far and distorts the sordid reality of the exploitation of children and the very real male chauvinism he criticizes. The author implies that such distortion makes real progress more difficult in Senegal and elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The March issue contains an article, "Vers une banalisation des instances européennes: *L'Auberge espagnole*," which has been very popular in the United States. The author shows the positive influence of the European ERASMUS educational program (begun in 1987) and others which facilitate student exchanges and the possibility for students to change their perspective on life and the people and cultures of other countries for the best.

Our related "Society and Culture" rubric presents a number of fascinating topics this year. One of the most riveting is "Julian Barnes and the *Raft of the Medusa*," a compelling critique of Julian Barnes's decision to omit any discussion of blacks in Géricault's painting from his book, *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*. The author of this pièce de résistance in the December issue provides the documentation necessary to understand the painting (shown by all of us who teach a course on the history of France) and Barnes's shocking omission.

In February "Female Adolescence and *Les Années Folles* in Berthe Bernage's Brigitte Series" shows how the Brigitte series reinforced conservative and traditional women's roles in post-World War I society when French women were beginning to seek greater sexual and professional freedom. Another fine essay, "Between Louverture and Christophe: Aimé Césaire on the Haitian Revolution," appears in April and explains the importance of the Haitian Revolution for Martinique and Césaire (he died in April 2008) in his play, *La Tragédie du roi Christophe* (1963), and "Toussaint Louverture: la révolution française et le problème colonial" (1961). In the latter Césaire explains the figure of Louverture in terms of the "enlightened" universal ideals that shaped the French Revolution. On the one hand Césaire affirms the particularity of the rights of black populations in Haiti and elsewhere (particularism) in terms of universal values, but also points up the drawbacks of particularism

and universalism, a tension he never resolved. A second article appearing in April, "Faites régner la vertu: la morale économique de Jean-Jacques Rousseau," argues that Rousseau was sympathetic to the plight of the rural poor and was supportive of agriculture. In fact, he wrote in defense of a society where there would be no injustice and laws would be applied equally to all. This translates as an economic system where no one would be "too rich" and there would not be too great a gap between rich and poor. This form of egalitarianism in turn led Rousseau to oppose the rural countryside to urban settings, and reveals him to be against technological progress and thus a conservative figure economically; one who prefigured Vichy and Poujadism.

As we lead up to our special issue on pedagogy there are, as always, solid pedagogical pieces to give us new ideas and structure for our teaching. This month "Paperless, Painless: Using MS Word Tools for Feedback in Writing Assignments" is a great "how-to" essay on using technology to aid in corrections. Even I should be able to abandon my old-fashioned ways and red pen (but maybe not) and luddism. "Le Texte autrement: Opening the (Language Classroom) Door to Slam" in the December issue discusses Slam, a protest movement which seeks social reform and the defense of freedom of speech as it democratizes its poetic art forum through social criticism. At the same time Slam also reflects personal experiences and age-old themes like adolescence, love, and loss. Slam provides lyrics that teachers can use today in their classrooms, and the author offers suggestions on how to teach students to write verse. An essay, "Le Verlan, phénomène langagier et social: récapitulatif," also in December, recounts the history and development of *verlan* as well as its important role in contemporary speech, cinema, and song.

In February "Francophonie in the Maghreb: A Study of Language Attitudes among Moroccan Teachers of French" presents the struggle of French to survive in Morocco in the face of *arabisation* since the phasing out of the bilingual system, which was completed by 1990. French is now a foreign language in the public system, and the author claims that *arabisation* has weakened both Arabic and French. March offers a specialized article on conversational Swiss which explains why we should teach expressions like "Mes amis et moi on va aller au magasin ce weekend" and "tu aimes le foot américain toi aussi." In April "Skills and Content: New Designs for the Survey Course" shows us how to integrate discussion of literary, historical, and cultural texts as well as film and written assignments based on OPI guidelines adapted to a survey literature class. Finally, "Films français et remakes américains" analyzes cultural differences between original French films which American film companies "remade" and transformed to reflect American cultural values.

Before closing I want to welcome Edwin Duval to the editorial staff of the *French Review*. He succeeds Jerry Nash, who has retired. Finally, be sure to celebrate national French Week (La Semaine du français) from 5–11 November.

Christopher P. Pinet

Erratum

Thérèse Saint Paul apologizes for an error in her article *Le Carnaval de Binche: signe et symbole d'une culture régionale* published in 81.6. On page 1154, the year in the sentence starting on line 3 should be "douzième siècle" (not "dix-neuvième"). That sentence should read: "Cette fête se déroule chaque année au Mardi Gras, dans une petite ville ordinairement calme, blottie dans ses beaux remparts du douzième siècle" (1154).