

The French Review

From the Editor's Desk: Report for the French Review, 2008–2009

FR statistics for articles submitted 1 June 2008—31 May 2009 (vol. 82)

<u>Category</u>	<u>Submitted</u>	<u>Accepted</u>	<u>Rejected</u>	<u>Under Evaluation</u>	<u>No Decision</u>
Literature	51 (48%)	13 (26%)	20 (39%)	14 (27%)	4 (8%)
Pedagogy Society & Culture	37 (34%)	14 (38%)	12 (32%)	10 (27%)	1 (3%)
Film	11 (10%)	6 (55%)	3 (27%)	2 (18%)	—
Linguistics	7 (6%)	4 (57%)	2 (29%)	1 (14%)	—
	3 (2%)	1 (33%)	2 (67%)	—	—
Totals	109 (100%)	38 (35%)	39 (36%)	27 (25%)	5 (4%)

This year (2009–2010) we welcome back James McNab and his always thought provoking column “Bloc-notes culturel.” We also thank Philippa Wehle for standing in for Edward Baron Turk by furnishing us with her review of the Avignon Festival Theater Festival entitled “The Sixty-Second Avignon Festival, July 4–26, 2008: From Hell to Paradise and Beyond.” William Cloonan’s “Celebrations: The Novel in 2008” highlights the seventieth birthday of the publishing house, José Corti and the thirtieth anniversary of the foundation of *Actes Sud*. Both of these publishers have flourished, in part because they have not been afraid to feature new authors. Michael Brophy once again reviews the year’s work in poetry and furnishes complete poems for us to read and teach.

Whereas last year we had a preponderance of articles and interviews dealing with French literature written outside of France, this year the pendulum has swung back to writers who live in France, some of whom; like Nathalie Sarraute, Marguerite Duras, Michel Butor, George Sand, and Robert Desnos, are well known to all. Others, including Nancy Huston, a Canadian who has lived in France, have been hugely successful in recent years. Still others are less known. One author, Catherine Millet, has become notorious since the publication of her autobiographical and scandalous novel, *La Vie sexuelle de Catherine M.* (2002).

Our current issue features a striking essay entitled “Witnessing Creation in Nancy Huston’s *Une Adoration*.” By concentrating on the figure of the actor in the novel the author posits an implicit exchange between author, character, and context and shows how our own interactions with literally everything surrounding us play a crucial role in the definition of our existence. This very Sartrean approach emphasizes artistic inspiration and the enhanced role of the reader, who is pushed to reflect on and recreate his or her own life. A second article, “Nathalie Sarraute: genèse d’une écriture,” returns to the origins of Sarraute’s world of “*tropismes*” or “*sous-conversations*”; and solitude in Sarraute’s autobiographical *Enfance*. The author shows how Sarraute felt a need to connect with others, but reveals the despair she felt in her relations with her own mother. This led her to write of the importance of words as carriers of truth, but also the bearers of hurtful lies. This issue also offers an interview with Marie-Odile Beauvais, an author who only began writing and publishing at the age of 42.

The interviewer shows the decisive influence of Proust on Beauvais's writing and the cruel yet delicate quality of her prose.

In December we feature "Unconditional Love as Lifestyle: *La Vie sexuelle de Catherine M.* by Catherine Millet." The authors explore the implications of unconditional consent and freedom from all conventions in Millet's book, as well as libertarian models of female sexuality. They find it striking that Millet does not blame men for implicitly setting the rules for female consent since, for them, the novel seems simply to represent another form of subjugation to male norms. Another article, "La Poésie précaire de Georges Perros," analyzes the eroticization of the "quotidien" in Perros's *Vie ordinaire*. The author argues that it is the lyrical elements in his poetry that reveal the unique character of "le moi" and that Perros provides us with a window onto how to express the ineffable. "Sur les vers de George Sand ou le FLIRT poétique d'Aurore" outlines Sand's attitudes toward poetry and how they led her to a personal and lyrical approach to writing.

February brings an essay entitled "*L'Amour courtois* de Gaston Paris: une lecture décadente du *Chevalier de la Charette*." The author reexamines the history of the term "amour courtois" and shows how its invention by Gaston Paris reflected his personal views on love rather than the description of a phenomenon that ever actually existed during the Middle Ages. This thesis should reopen debate on the whole notion of "amour courtois." Another article, "Emmanuel Carrère: l'étranger en soi," considers conscience and reflection as a topos in Carrère's fiction and the existential anguish it engenders by plunging readers into extreme worlds of violence and violent crimes. The world closes in on both characters and readers in the destabilizing and chaotic universe of Carrère. There is also an interview in February with the québécoise writer Monique Proulx. She discusses the meaning of "Amérique" as an "espace" for Nord-américains francophones and the fear of the Montréalais of losing their identity and disappearing.

In March we have a terrific piece entitled "Marguerite Duras's Murderers." The author examines murderers in Duras's journals and novels, including some based on real people. Duras forces us to reflect on how we measure up to them (!), how they can exist, why they exist, and why we are or are not like them. Not only does she express her ambivalence about murder (she witnessed it often during her time in the Resistance and the post-war period known as "l'Épuration," she also represents male (normal) characters who set out to understand female characters (murderers) in order to create order out of chaos. Ultimately they fail to do so. For Duras murder is ultimately inexplicable. There is also an essay, "The Roman d'aventures as a Subgenre in *Maria Chapdelaine*." The author demonstrates how the adventure side of the novel has been neglected in the face of its categorization as a regional novel where Quebec is presented as a backward society of peasants.

Finally, in April, there is a moving and sensitive article "Rose Selavy's Ghosts: Life, Death, and Desnos." Desnos uses images of the commonplace and advertising in his early one-line poems to display the very logic the Surrealists were trying out to undermine conventional notions of reality. Thus, each of the two parts of the one-line poems undermined the other. At the same time the author shows how, long before Desnos's death in a German camp in May 1945 (Desnos was Jewish), the earlier double meanings and messages of his poems seemed to foreshadow his own death. Teachers of poetry should use Desnos's poetry and this extraordinary article in their classes to help students understand their own humanity as well as the courage and character of Desnos. Another article, "Temporalité en milieu urbain dans 'Comme de rien n'était' de Lise Bissonnette" presents Bissonnette's (she is best known as the former editor of *Le Devoir* during the struggle for the independence of Quebec and the first referendum) considerations on "destiny." In her short story she considers the destabilization of one of the characters through the revelation of rape and incest by a woman she meets. Also in April "Eroticism and the 'Espace Hyperéel' of History in Yambo Ouologueme's *Le Devoir de violence*" shows how the Malian writer recreates history by using sex, violence, and the colonial as metaphors where history can never be completely eradicated; but historical space can be renegotiated, reframed, and redefined.

Over the past twelve years film has come to play an increasingly important role in the offerings of the *French Review*. This year is no exception. In December we have an article, "Contemporary French Cinema and Lucile Hadzihalilovic's *Immocence*," in which the author traces the resurgence of French cinema and examines the current role of women directors as well as Hadzihalilovic's treatment of young women in a girls' boarding school. There is also an interview with Osvalde Lewat-Hallade, a young Camerounian director, who is known especially for her documentaries. The first of these was about Amerindians and their plight as a minority in Canada. The second documented the endless trials and tribulations of a man who was unjustly imprisoned for 31 years in Cameroun. Lewat-Hallade describes the difficulties women have in becoming directors in Sub-Saharan Africa for both financial and political reasons. She herself has had trouble with the Camerounian government because of her criticism of some of its decisions concerning human rights.

The February issue presents a piece entitled "Foreigners in the Margins: English Subtitles in *Inch'Allah dimanche*." The author discusses the cultural implications of code-switching and the difficulties inherent in understanding scenes in a language where there are either no subtitles or which some of the target-language viewers or even native speakers can not understand. What emerges through the analysis of this important movie by Yamina Benguigui is that subtitles may have serious limitations and even obscure meaning, especially when there are minority cultures in a film who speak a different language such as Arabic and where this language, whether it is represented in song or other ways, is not made available through the subtitles. Beyond this, French viewers would likely not understand the Arabic in the movie if it were not in the subtitles alongside the English!

March offers "Itinerant Men, Evanescent Women: Ismael Ferroukhi's *Le Grand Voyage*," a "road movie" as "knowledge" made by a linguistically estranged Muslim father (born in Morocco) and his agnostic, French-born son. What takes place is a renegotiation of Western preconceived notions about the Muslim world. Nonetheless, traditional gender politics seem to prevail with the exception of a conciliatory ending. This reminds me in many ways of the British masterpiece, *My Son the Fanatic*.

In April we bring you an article, "Levinas and 'Medieval' Film: Memory and Time in Marcel Carné's *Les Visiteurs du soir*." The theme of the film is responsibility for "the other" and the past framed in a medieval setting. A sense of loss permeates the film, often interpreted as a critique of the French during the Occupation. The author argues that time as "other" holds ethical meaning and that the film represents the ethics of mournful history and an uncertain future while exploring loss and responsibility during this dark period of French history. There is also an interview with Marina de Van, a provocative female film maker and actress who has been linked with the *cinéma du corps* "that foregrounds sensorial encounters with the body."

In the wake of our May 2009 issue devoted to pedagogy, Volume 83 offers still more ideas for teaching. This issue presents "Language Camps as an Extracurricular Tool to Expose Young Learners to French." The author suggests that language camps offer more flexible learning opportunities than the traditional classroom.

December introduces "A Multiple Literacies Approach to the Advanced French Writing Course" The author describes how she uses Delerm's *La Première Gorgée de bière et autres plaisirs minuscules*, *Exercices de style*, and two short stories by Anna Gavalda to promote writing in general and generate the students' own stories. I concur heartily with using the first two works and agree that Gavalda's short stories would work well in the classroom. In the same issue there is a fascinating and timely article, "Prononcer mâle ou prononcer mal: Linguistic Markers of Effeminacy in Early Modern French." The authors uncover prejudice and possibly homophobia in writers who discussed language and pronunciation in the sixteenth century. They also show that the judgments about how words should be pronounced sometimes led to the charge of effeminacy. These judgments were often arbitrary and contradictory since pronunciation in one region was often in direct contradiction to that in another.

In our February issue there is an interview with Michel Butor. It is a tour de force by the great novelist, who speaks eloquently about the importance of improvisation in teaching and how ludic elements are essential to success in the classroom. The interview is a must read and will inspire all of us to become better writers and teachers. In it Butor also offers a substantive critique of the French educational system. There is also a piece, "Le Français parlé à Jay-Livermore Falls (Maine)," which shows how the French spoken there today is both a prolongation of that spoken by the original Québécois settlers and a product of borrowings from English.

"Enseigner la variation lexicale en classe FLE" in March promotes the use of popular French and *verlan* in the classroom in order to prepare students for what they will hear when they go to France. As one who has students use *verlan* and non-verbal components such as emblematic gestures and proxemics in skits at the intermediate level, I can attest to the need for and success of such an approach. Also in March, an article, "Orthographic Variation in Electronic French: The Case of *l'accent aigue*," presents interesting remarks on how the computer has changed written French in on-line chat and discussion environments.

Appearing in April we have "*Mots passants: A Computer Program for Textual Analysis*," an extremely useful article for those who want to conduct word counts in support of stylistic analysis through a new computer program generated by the author.

Our articles in the "Society and Culture" rubric are very strong this year. In October there is an important essay, "Liberty versus Equality: the Marquis de La Fayette and France," which provides an analysis of La Fayette's thoughts on the United States and its role in the French Revolution on through to the Revolution of 1830. La Fayette's own politics were very complex and sometimes appeared to be contradictory; this article helps us to understand the full range of his thought and action.

December brings "Of Discourse and the *Beur* in France and American Universities." The author offers a history of the term "*Beur*" and discusses the controversy and ambiguities surrounding it as well as how to teach about the Maghrebi minorities in France.

A question that has always intrigued me as a late medieval and Renaissance scholar is answered in February in an article entitled "Iconography and Iconoclasm: The Female Breast in Renaissance Culture." The authors demonstrate that we must "read" the breast with the political, social, literary, and religious contexts of the sixteenth century; not just as a sign of female beauty, sexuality, or "desired return to innocence."

"Le Leadership en France: distance de pouvoir et valorisation humaine," which appears in March, follows in the footsteps of Michel Crozier's *Le Phénomène bureaucratique* and *La Société bloquée*. The author analyses power relationships between upper and middle management in French society in order to explain French attitudes toward authority.

Finally, in April, we present "La Campagne de Ségolène Royal: bilan et perspectives," a lucid and insightful article on why Ségolène Royal, who seemed poised to become the first woman president of France, failed to do so.

This smorgasbord of food for thought and action should keep you replete, reflective, and smiling for much of the year. Do not forget that we are devoting the May 2010 issue to the complex relationship between Algeria and France, two countries that are inextricably bound together. This issue promises to be a *pièce de résistance*. Finally, do be sure to celebrate National French week during the first week of November.

Christopher P. Pinet