Critical Review of Contemporary French Fissxion

Editorial Statement

Literary cosmopolitanism
Twenty-first century readers no longer limit themselves to a single, national literary canon; they are as likely to read a novel by Roth, as by Echenoz, Coetzee, Atwood, Fuentes, Rushdie or Confiants. Globalization is also a literary phenomenon, and literary cosmopolitanism is the hallmark of readers interested in contemporary writing practices. Today's literature is global, and our tendency to read works in translation largely stems from our own limited linguistic capacities in other languages. Writers, who are above all readers, can attest to the fact that traditional literary frontiers are now obsolete. Now more than ever, they allude to texts stemming from a variety of sources, as evidenced, for example, by the importance accorded by Francophone writers to authors as diverse as Faulkner, Conrad, Borges, Morrison, Chandler or Hammett.

Teaching and Research
If writers and readers have emancipated themselves from the confines of nations, the same cannot be said of institutions, particularly universities. In terms of teaching as well as of research, national traditions still maintain their stranglehold. France long held the belief that French literature stopped at its borders. Furthermore, the teaching of French literature was conceived —quite rightly given its success— as a pillar of the Republic and an essential vehicle for the new humanism engendered by the Declaration of the Rights of Man.

The study of literature in traditionally French-speaking or bilingual countries, for example, in universities in Quebec (and in Canada), in Switzerland (both German- and French-speaking), or in Belgium (Flanders and Brussels-Wallonia), has long been focussed on France, while simultaneously striving to give prominence to national authors either barely acknowledged in Paris or assimilated into the French canon only upon achieving a certain notoriety.

That phase has passed. In the southern hemisphere as well, major authors have emerged and French literature is now resolutely open to outside influences. The French literary imagination increasingly resembles a mosaic whose common thread is not a country but rather a language. Universities in non-Francophone countries —starting with those on the immediate borders with France— have not hesitated in reflecting these changes. While they may still privilege the French canon in teaching literature and literary history, they more readily look to the wider context of Francophone literature when it comes to the teaching of contemporary literature. The literary production of the Caribbean, the Maghreb, or Sub-Saharan Africa features prominently in courses devoted to current literature, more so even than texts from Quebec, Switzerland or Belgium.

Contemporary Literature
Unsurprisingly, the inverse situation prevails in France. That is, where universities have embraced the study of contemporary literature, they tend to focus first and foremost on literary production within France’s boundaries. The world of Francophone literature is as under-represented here as French literature (from France) is in American or European curricula. There is a clear division in the field of contemporary studies, as witnessed by the name given to numerous departments in English-speaking countries: “French and Francophone Studies”. This distinction goes hand in hand with divergent (and
often mutually exclusive) critical perspectives. Texts emanating from the Francophonie, starting with those produced in former colonies, are subjected to methodologies primarily shaped by “postcolonial” and “cultural studies” approaches, critical frameworks as respected in Great Britain and the Americas as they are mistrusted in France. This mutual ignorance of literary fields and theoretical perspectives is all the more regrettable for running counter to current reading practices which are resolutely decompartmentalized.

**Multiple legitimacies**

Admittedly, various issues related to ideology and authority are at stake, which explains, but in no way justifies, the current state of affairs. Nothing prevents us from acknowledging the existence and legitimacy of the Anglo-American perspective along side of French universalism. Their approaches are different, but both are the offspring of the Enlightenment and, although they may choose to stress different aspects of literary production, they are nonetheless far more similar to each other than some would have us believe. The caricatured oversimplification of the Anglo-American model as “communitarianism” or “identity politics” and the exaggeration of the supposedly harmful consequences of these approaches to the literary sphere are largely based on a flawed understanding of the realities and principles that underpin the Anglo-American world.

Similarly, the unflattering reputation for elitism attached to contemporary French literature completely disregards the extreme diversity of current literary production. Literature in France no longer confines itself to the rarefied world of the “cabinet des lettrés”. On the contrary, it is particularly vibrant with regard to emerging genres too long assimilated by the category of “para-literature”. Fantasy, the “fantastique”, magic realism, the thriller: these all constitute genres which represent not only the current state but the future of French literature. Contemporary literature written in France is no less readable than the supposedly more accessible and democratic literatures of the Francophonie, of Latin America, of Great Britain, of Canada or the United States. The charge of intellectualism is as unjustified as the charge of exoticism would be for the literature of the Francophonie. We cannot help but regret the fact that, under the guise of adhering to principles, detractors on both sides of the debate seem simply to be looking for reasons to exclude certain authors, critics, languages.

**Evolutions**

In 2007, *Le Monde* published the “Manifesto for a World Literature in French”, a document signed by more than forty authors seeking to free literature from traditional national and academic categories. In particular, they sought to propose an alternative to the vision promoted by the notion of “Francophonie”, the category into which all literary production in French emanating from outside of France (or produced by authors whose first language is not French) has traditionally been relegated. Stemming from the “literature voyageuse” movement, the Manifesto highlights the issues raised by the notion of a global French literature, including of course, creolization. The desire to promote subjects and authors from different geographic regions to which the navel-gazing French literary establishment accords little attention is, of course, understandable. However, the emphasis on the theme of the far-flung place or the “elsewhere” which underpins the project seems to create more barriers than bridges.

It is worth remembering that one can perfectly well read or write in French anywhere in the world without being interested in questions of travel, identity, or the mixing of cultures. And the writer from the Creuse or Corrèze departments in central France is no less a part of contemporary literature in French than the globe-trotter from Pointe-à-Pitre, Pointe-Noire ou Port-au-Prince, or than the author who takes his reader on a literary journey. The Manifesto no doubt provoked a false debate: the signatories had never intended to exclude anyone, and their own works testify to their rejection of facile exoticism.
French/English.

Since at least the advent of the French New Novel, many of whose best commentators came from English-speaking countries, there has been a vibrant tradition of literary criticism which, although written in English, takes as its object of study French literature; a similar tradition exists in Germany. A keen interest in contemporary French literature can be observed in North America and Great Britain, as well as in northern Europe. In conformity with current tendencies in the academic world, this attention is more likely to be focussed on writers of the Francophonie rather than on writers from France. Yet here too we see professors and researchers proposing essential analyses and innovative perspectives.

Their scholarly work, with its own editorial practices, barely registers in France for several reasons: they often publish in English, they explore a different corpus and they adopt critical methodologies that are not current in the French academic context. In failing to take into account these perspectives, literary criticism in France is depriving itself of an important contribution which, in particular in the field of contemporary literary studies, would contribute to enriching reading practices.

The Review

The Critical Review of Contemporary French Fixxion is an internationally oriented scholarly review that welcomes contributions on contemporary French literature published after 1980. Open to the literature of France as well as that of the Francophonie, this bilingual journal brings together academics and authors to reflect on the forms that writing takes today.

The exceptional richness of current literary production fully justifies the creation of a specific publication dedicated to its study. “Contemporary French Fixxion” should therefore be understood to mean all literature written in French, whether produced in France or elsewhere. Focussing on the pivotal period straddling the 20th and 21st centuries, the journal will accept submissions in both French and English and hopes to attract contributions on a wide variety of authors and approaches.

Taking as its starting point the notion that disciplinary distinctions are founded on principles foreign to actual reading practices, the journal seeks to provide a forum for the interdisciplinary study of literature. Hoping to promote multiple points of view, we also encourage submissions adopting cross-cultural perspectives to examine the relationship of recent French literature to other contemporary literary production, and invite contributors to be attentive close-readers of texts. As such, the appropriateness of the methodology and the rigour of the analysis will carry more weight in the evaluation of submitted manuscripts than the simple fact of one's adherence to a particular critical school or respect for a particular literary canon and its established traditions.

The arbitrary cut-off date of 1980 allows for a thirty-year retrospective glance back to the earliest texts covered. This distance is favourable for scholarly research which, although perhaps not primarily concerned with examining the present moment, has nonetheless forged tools and developed competencies which permit it to examine in a timely fashion current literary production. If this temporal limit has the disadvantage of not referring to a particular historical or literary event, this date nonetheless inaugurates in France a period marked by two simultaneous trends. First, the advent of works produced by the New Novelists demonstrating a new type of literary construction; and second, the emergence of a new generation of writers more open to traditional novelistic forms. Outside of France, this period also gave rise to a host of new authors born of decolonialization, the first generation of authors to be qualified as being “Francophone”.

Fixxion is not fiction... If the title evokes one of the major routes by which literature has sought to redefine itself since in the 1980s, the allusion justifies itself for lack of anything better. To paraphrase a famous quotation, it is no doubt “the worst of all (literary) forms, with the exception of all the rest”. Protean, the category has the advantage of being all-inclusive, applicable to a variety of works as disparate as
adventure novels, historical novels, thrillers, certain forms of life-writing, not to mention different forms of prose: narrative, philosophical, poetical. If it does not include either theatre or poetry—which each have their own forums—the *Critical Review of Contemporary French Fiction* nonetheless seeks to be open to a wide variety of writing practices.

**Rubrics**

Each issue of the journal will publish contributions in the following categories.

**Articles:** Constituting the core of the journal, this category invites submissions of studies of about ten pages in length, to be published upon the recommendation of the editorial committee after undergoing a double-blind peer review. Well aware of the exigencies of bibliometrics, we are working towards obtaining recognition of the journal in these terms.

Each issue will have a specific theme in order to encourage multiple perspectives on a given topic. Scholarly in tone and presentation, articles should nevertheless also be more generally accessible to interested readers. In addition to the central question addressed in each issue, other stand-alone contributions may also be proposed.

**Carte blanche:** This space gives contemporary authors the freedom to express themselves not only through the written word, but also through images or sound.

**Interview** proposes an interview of an author by a specialist in the field attentive to issues that literary journalists might ordinarily overlook.

**Correspondence** invites a writer or an academic to address another writer in the form of a letter. This type of written exchange will permit a more elaborate exploration of a specific question than would be possible in an interview. A writer may also wish to engage an academic on the topic of his or her critical approach to literature.

**Re)Reading** shines a spotlight on a particular author in order to introduce his or her work to a wider audience.

Pierre Schoentjes and the Scientific committee