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How to Read the French Press
(and A Letter of Au Revoir)

By Jean Benoît Nadeau

PARIS, France MAY 2001

As I prepare to leave France and return to Canada, I'm going through two filing cabinets of clippings that have accumulated over the last two years and half. Yesterday night, to my great surprise, I came across one clipping dating from the year 1974. This means I had clipped a newspaper dealing with France at the age of nine. Given that I was not much interested in the topic back then, it proves I was already compulsive about clipping.

Every other year, I get swamped in clippings and I have to do a general cleanup.

Boy, do I ever clip! I clip for the newsletters I write, wrote, will write, should write, and won't write. I clip for books underway, books projected and books I'll never write. I clip for my personal files. I clip for my wife Julie. I clip for friends. I clip for my parents. I clip all the time. I'd be like a squirrel if squirrels clipped. I gather nuts of information. I bury them in files and files of documentation under the most absurd categories: prehistory, homosexuality, Algeria, Judaism, aviation, World War I. Every two years or so, I go through every single file and article, reclassify them and throw out about half of them. Don't ask me how that 1974 article got through 27 years of reclassification!

Why clip nowadays, when we have the fantastic resources in electronic databases and the extraordinary power of the computer? Because it's not the same thing. When I find an article interesting, I want to keep it. It's much more efficient than trying to find it five years later. Besides, it's pretty hard to find this or that great article when you can't quite recall it, or don't remember exactly where it appeared. As a matter of fact, clipping is part of my thinking process. It's accumulative.

The gem of two years of clipping the French press has been two versions of the same story. They appeared in the April 15 edition of *The International Herald Tribune* and in the April 13 edition of *Libération*. The English headline and subhead say it all: "VERSAILLES STRIPPED OF TREES AGAIN — Gift of U.S. Seed-

That's what was left of George Washington's tulip poplar at Versailles, after the great windstorm of December 26, 1999. Direct all applications for replacement to: King Louie, Château, 78000 Versailles.

lings Sent Back for Violating EU Regulations."

The International Herald Tribune's story follows all the canons of the short feature. It starts with the context: at the end of 1999, two powerful windstorms toppled millions of trees in France, including 10,000 in Versailles alone, among which were two tulip poplars given by George Washington. In the aftermath, as the story goes, the students of Fayette Middle School, of Fayetteville, Georgia, took it personally and convinced the U.S. Forestry Association to give 5,000 trees to France and have them sent as a donation. Unfortunately, the French returned 3,000 seedlings because they failed to meet European Union regulations. According to the rules of the genre, the journalist leaves you to conclude that EU regulations can be nasty to well-meaning American kids.

Naturally, *Libération*'s version gives another picture. The title has an obvious undertone of glee: "3,200 AMERICAN TREES TURNED BACK AT THE FRONTIER" (my translation). The article then explains what was wrong: The 3,200 trees were evergreens, which can carry parasites that are unknown in Europe. EU regulations exist in order to avoid a repetition of history, namely when French nurserymen introduced a New-World grape vine parasite called phylloxera in 1863. Ten years later, phylloxera had destroyed 100 percent of the European wine industry. Obviously, the feelings of Georgia kids matter little in the equation, which isn't nice to say and it takes a Frenchman to say it.

The first moral of the story is: don't bother reading dailies if you're not ready to read two. The second moral is: never trust journalists. You can take a journalist's word for that!

Many of my previous newsletters have made it clear that my friends from the hiking club turned out to be a great source of information on France. But in truth, my most regular source have been two dailies, three weeklies and one monthly. Compared to other Fellows of the Institute, I admit that I've had it easy: opinion has been running freely in France for a long time. Three thousand six hundred twenty-six French periodicals make an abundant source to clip. And clip I did.

The problem with French information is that it's *so* French. How many times have I heard Canadian and American friends bitch and whine about the French press! Where are the facts? Where's the context? Why are they so intellectual? Can't they maintain some distance? Where's the perspective? Why are they *so* French? Before I came, I held a different, less heated opinion: some publications seemed less bad than others.

It didn't take me long to realize that French papers do very different things and read differently from those in North America mostly because they're made for the French, who have special needs of their own. Since I'm a journalist, I thought you might want to hear my take on what I see in the press.

* * *

My love affair with *Libération* dates back to when I was a rookie journalist at *Voir,* a nascent cultural weekly in Montreal. *Libération* was our model for editorial policy, tone and general layout, and I read it religiously for about a year in order to assimilate the form. To speak in "Journalese," *Libération* is a hybrid: It's a daily paper with a strong weekly feel, producing more feature than hard news. Its editors indulge in irreverent headlines and word play, and they use very creative, not to say daring, photography. Founded in 1973, *Libé* definitely leaned toward the left, with strong sympathies for the anarchistic and libertarian. Nowadays, you would say it's clearly Bo-Bo (bourgeois bohemian).

Why *Libé* and not another? Over the years, *Libération* has evolved towards a more centrist attitude, but it remains much less conservative than *Le Figaro*, the boring paper par excellence. *Le Parisien* is not bad, but too Parisian. *France-Soir* is all trash and murder, which is fun for relaxing at lunchtime but no more than that. As for *Le Monde*, I've never been able to read that paper: it irks me. Besides, *Le Monde* has no illustrations, or hardly any; it has only recently discovered the camera.

The International Herald Tribune is my Voice of America. I need this because, although I write for U.S.

Americans, I don't know them all that well. Daily reading of the *Herald* has helped me assimilate some of the intellectual and cultural reflexes of Americans, which is important if I want to be read and understood. In the weekly category, *Le Journal du Dimanche* (a Sunday paper) is the closest thing in France conforming to Anglo-American paper tradition: It doesn't mind the anecdotal, and gives straight reporting. *Le Nouvel Observateur* is the weekly equivalent of *Libé*. Other weeklies have better coverage of public affairs and economics, in my opinion, but they are weaker in culture. *Le Nouvel Obs* also publishes articles that are quite long, sometimes up to the length of one of my newsletters. As to *Courrier International*, it's a French weekly digest of all that's been written in the foreign press that its editors deem of interest to the French — be it about France, or the world. (I find it more useful than the *Economist*, which has great story titles, but whose ideological bent makes it predictable — like *Le Monde*.) I also subscribe to a monthly called *Historia*, which gives historical insights into current events, often in relation to pop culture and cinema. Fun.

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Like most North Americans, I used to be irked by the French press. It doesn't give you context. Articles are written any old how. They're thin on facts, etc. But appearances are deceptive.

Admittedly, most French dailies give relatively little space to factual information like interest rates, currency markets or the stock exchange — objective stuff. Expatriates in serious need of hard news read the business dailies — *Les Échos*, *La Tribune*, *Le Figaro*. But even there, they'll find the papers rather short on miscellany, like: Man Butchers Wife, Stabs Her 246 Times; or How To Survive A Bear Attack; or Man Cements Himself To Floor of Home. You know, fun trivia — boy, do I miss that! What this says is not that the French are impermeable to trivia — they love it in conversation. They just have a different idea of what the press should do.

Foreign news is one thing the French cover well, especially *Libération*. France lost its colonial empire and superpower status two generations ago, but it has kept many ties with former colonies. I've never read more about Africa than since coming to France. *Libé* dedicates at least four pages out of 40 to foreign news and features — and no wire-service snippets. It's generally of good quality: six months before the presidential elections, *Libé* was already pointing out that American presidents are elected by an electoral college — a commentary that was premonitory, to say the least. It also indulges in articles that are completely beside the news. A year ago, *Libé* published Salman Rushdie's journal of his trip to India. As for *Nouvel Obs*, I remember an eight-page special on Saint Augustine, a fifth-century Christian philosopher. From a compulsive clipper's point of view, this is heaven.

French papers are often criticized for not putting facts into context, but I beg to differ. French papers are meant for the French, primarily, and they provide facts and context that suit the French. I used to think that American and Canadian papers were far superior regarding context until I returned to North America last June for two weeks. After a year and a half in France, I knew next to nothing about Canadian news. And guess what: I didn't know what most of what I read in Canadian papers was about. They were full of jargon. In that regard, *The International Herald Tribune* is in a class of its own, very much apart from the French or North American press, because it addresses readers of all horizons living in all sorts of societies. So they have to explain. When the French explain, they are pretty good at it: a newswire service like Agence France-Presse (AFP) ranks number three worldwide after Reuters and Associated Press, and its 2,000 employees do a good job at supplying solid news in more than one language. But French readers obviously seek something else.

These are my daily readings, which I do at the hour of my daily bread and my daily yogurt.

No matter how much context an article provides, if it's doesn't match your interest, you won't even see it. Five years ago, a group of very good Canadian friends offered me *Le Petit Robert des Noms Propres* (Robert's Dictionary of Places and Names). In theory, a dictionary is all context. Robert's is a very compete dictionary, but French: at least half the time it didn't have the places and names I was looking for. But when I got to France, it answered all I needed to know. In the second year of my fellowship I even realized that the odd, five-

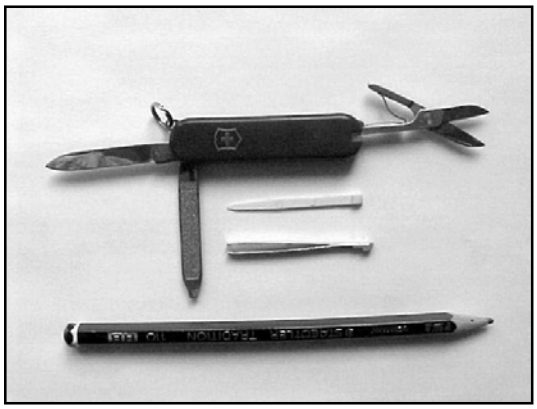
digit numbers next to French town names were simply the zip code!

The best source for French context is named *Quid*. This 2,000-page book, updated every year, provides subtext for your dictionary. It's a sort of intellectual almanac: Anything you want to know from Astronomy to Zionism is in there, sometimes in great detail. For example, *Quid* is where I got the information that AFP is the third biggest newswire service worldwide and employs 2,000 people. This book is absolutely extraordinary, and if you're at all interested on the French perspective, this is *the* reference. In my shelf of reference books, this one is now closest to me.

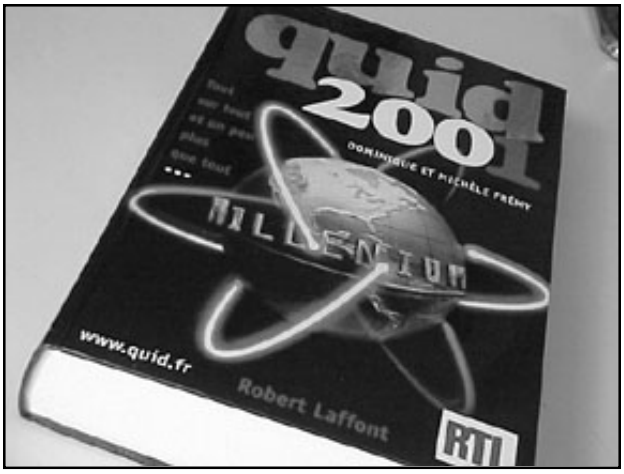
Naturally, there's a vocabulary problem, and French context can be difficult reading for even a French-speaking Canadian. Political reporters, for instance, tend to create words to make articles shorter. For instance, *la Chiraquie* stands for Paris-under-the-reign-of-mayor-Jacques-Chirac-before-he-became-President. And Prime Minister Lionel Jospin's government is labeled *la Jospinie*. Instead of saying "Chirac's thinking...", they will just say *le Chiraquisme*. And, naturally, *le Jospinisme*. Their argumentation becomes *chiraquienne* or *jospinienne*.

The ability of the French to come up with adjectives is absolutely striking. Anything in relationship to President Georges Pompidou (1969-74) is dubbed *pompidolien*. President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1974-1981) was *giscardien*, naturally. Adjectives like *rocardien, barriste, maurien* and *juppéen* refer to the governments of Prime Ministers Michel Rocard, Raymond Barre, Pierre Maurois and Alain Juppé. Even some ministers are granted special adjectival status, like *fabiusien*, *chevènementiste*, *pascuaien, magdalenien* for Ministers Fabius, Chevènement, Pasqua and Madelin. I cannot help bringing one ultimate adjective to you: *bourdivin*, relating to philosopher Pierre Bourdieu. Divine!

Naturally, this tendency to raise any kind of difference to the level of a school of thought brings on the most horrific spells of hair splitting. De Gaulle, for instance, generated *Gaullisme*, which is straightforward. A politician belonging to his party is said to be *Gaulliste*, naturally. Sympathizers are dubbed *Gaullien*! No doubt there's a lot of intellectual posturing in all this word-making, but you have to be French to cut through it, and, no, you won't find any of this in a dictionary — except for *Gaullisme, Gaulliste* and *Gaullien*.



Two essential tools for my breakfast.



If you only have the money for a single book, this is the one: le Quid*, a 2000-page reference book on anything French.*

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French newspapers are notoriously short on facts — according to American and Canadian readers.

Two years of reading the American and French press daily have taught me a thing or two about facts. The contrast I made earlier between *Libération*'s and *The International Herald Tribune*'s version of the same story shows plainly how facts and quotes can be used to hide biases. *The International Herald Tribune*'s version, by extensively quoting kids, teachers, school directors and public-relations officers, organizes facts to make it clear that EU regulations are nasty toward well-meaning kids — without ever saying so. The IHT article omits a key fact: those regulations were set primarily to prevent the spread of tree diseases. The well-meaning kids could have created an arboreal foot-and-mouth-style disaster had it not been for the regulations.

I don't blame the reporter for this omission. Her editor could have edited out the key information. But it's odd that they didn't see how important it was. The *Libération* article was published two days before. Besides, there was so much factual detail about other things in the IHT version. Did you know that "Scotts Co., maker of Miracle-Gro plant food, contributed 106 mature trees, including a direct descendant of one of Washington's tulip poplar"? The point is clear: facts are not objective.

The French have a different attitude toward facts. Because they are more up-front about opinion, reporters will state their own views clearly, without attempting to hide the fact that they're doing it. This doesn't mean that French articles are devoid of "facts" — some are quite full of them indeed — but opinions and impressions are

also regarded as fact, strange as it may seem. The reason for this is that, culturally, they have no time for understatement and have no illusions about objectivity. But if you come from an American tradition that values fact over opinion, then you understate your own judgment and let the facts "speak" for themselves." When French journalist consider the "Anglo-Saxon" emphasis on fact, they call it manipulative.

One thing the French are never factual about, in any sense of the word, is privacy, especially that of politicians — but not only politicians. They don't think it's interesting to know about the intimate relations of presidents, and what they do with cigars. The political class is so tightly knit in Paris that you don't start asking too many personal questions because you might anger just about everyone who matters. Besides, privacy laws are extremely stringent in France, and journalists clearly self-censor themselves for fear of libel. In the case of an action for defamation, the reporter must not only prove that his facts are straight but that he had no intention of harming the plaintiff.

For the French, words are facts too, and the *way* a thing is said is part of the fact. Naturally, there's some decoding to do, and learning of terms and catch phrases, but that's the whole point of doing a fellowship. There's no dictionary for that.

The French love rhetoric. It's their secret art. They love debate. They expect their Presidents to be authors of books and to read poetry before G-7 conferences. They cover politics as a function of who had *une petite phrase* (a clever little sentence, meaning a jab). For instance, last fall, a former assistant to President Jacques Chirac had recorded a testimony on videotape before his death. He was accusing Chirac of having organized a network of corruption that collected 100 million dollars, and of having been witness to at least one exchange of a briefcase that contained one million dollars. Naturally, the press went berserk. A few days later, Chirac qualified the allegations as *abracadabrantesque* (a neologism I translate loosely into "preposterifying"). The press liked the term so much (a borrowing from Dumas) that they talked about the word and what there was in it and behind it and beneath it for two days.

Another example is the ritual of the President's or the Prime Minister's New Year Greetings on TV. What did the president mean in his vows? Was it a dig at the Prime Minister? Is he sending a message on the budget? In 2000, the press expounded on this for two weeks until yet another oil tanker had the decency to sink off the coast of Brittany.

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The French press is no less French than the French themselves, and the very way they write proceeds from a different spirit.

My former editor-in-chief at Montreal's *L'actualité*, Jean Paré, used to say in his customary syncretic fashion: "Don't express yourself, communicate!" This is a fundamental notion in journalism and this distinction is at the root of the difference between French papers and Anglo-American ones.

Communication is a mental exercise by which the writer interrogates himself on three levels: What do I have to say? What's the best way to say it? How will it be received? It's not by chance that the same word, communications, is applied to broadcasting. A radio station can transmit whatever it wants, but there's no communication if there's no receiver tuned in at the other end. You read me?

Expression is something else. With transmission, nobody cares whether receivers are on or not, or whether the transmission is appropriate. Most good articles blend communication and expression, to a degree. And sometimes, in bad writing, it's clear that the writer has been figuring out what he meant as he wrote and, if he succeeded, was too lazy to edit himself. Pure communication and pure expression are boring. The difference between the French and the Anglo-American is mainly one of emphasis.

Communication is the main aim of the Anglo-American press. Strangely, it's analogous to the principle of communication in advertising, where the message must be received, otherwise consumer won't buy the soap. The relationship between the two is not innocent because the US and Canadian press are literally littered — if you al-

This is a very silly habit in the French press: no indentation. It makes all writing look like a single mass of words, where ideas have no beginning or end. Libération, Le Nouvel Obserateur *and* Historia *are subject to this particular phobia, but* Le Journal du Dimanche *and* L'Histoire *are converted to good sense. But hey, what matters is to express yourself, right?*

low me this alliteration — with advertizement of all types.

Many attribute the worldwide penetration of English-language culture to some innate quality in the language itself. In my opinion, it's rather the spirit of communication that is behind the penetration of American media — although lurking military and fantastic growth might also help..

French dailies (Parisian ones, anyway) are almost completely devoid of advertizement. The definite impression that comes out of it is that reporters are hired to express themselves. Some are better communicators than others, but it's not a principle they adhere to uniformly.

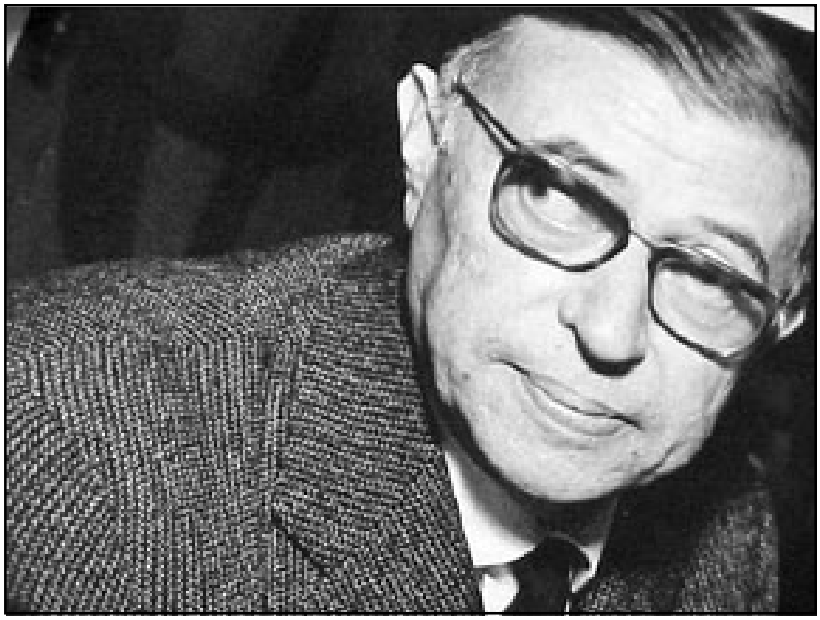
Consequently, confusion of genres in the French press is extreme. There are five basic genres. *News* is straight reporting. *Reportage* is more impressionistic reporting. *Analysis* is meant to explain the news. A *Column* is a privilege of self-expression given to deserving journalists. *Editorial* is the voice of authority. In the Anglo-American tradition, papers label each article by genre and expect writers to stick to the format. This is perfectly logical in a world of *communication*, where clarity and readability are paramount.

In the French press, genre limits are fuzzier. In very bad cases, reporters try to do news, reportage, analysis and columnizing all at once. Most of the time, reporting is interspersed with commentary, and impressions. This makes the writing difficult to decode by a North American reader attuned to the rules of square communication — square in all senses of the word, the French would say.

It took me a good year to figure out what French journalists were trying to do amid all this confusion. They were simply trying to develop a thesis with two or three points, and sub-points. This is plain chivalric prowess: ordinary reporting is difficult, but it's even harder to do reporting with a thesis. French readers appreciate the attempt. Unfortunately, not all reporters have the brio to do such a thing, so it can lead — it *does* lead — to confusion. When you find yourself in a situation where you have to wait for the fifth or seventh paragraph to understand what the thesis of the article is all about, it's just bad writing.

This strong emphasis on self-expression and thesis development comes, in my opinion, from the place of the intellectual in French society. Intellectuals are people who can express forcefully or brilliantly any idea, because they have studied it thoroughly or because they feel strongly about it. They are not experts — a big plus in the Anglo-American press, which holds intellectuals in disregard. Experts are expected to express themselves only in relation to their expertise. There are experts in the French press, but also a lot of intellectuals — and since intellectual readers keep a close watch on papers, papers tend to conform to their taste.

There are advantages and disadvantages connected to the strong status of intellectuals. A definite plus is that writers and editors do not necessarily aim at the lowest common denominator. So writers tend to express themselves more precisely — even financial analysts — and sometimes with affectation. They will not write *exit les politiciens*, but *exunt les politiciens*. However, overdone affectation can lead to very bad writing. You should see the sentences I read. Unbelievable. With inversion of subject, object and verb, including commas, colons and semicolons, five or six layers of subjunctive clauses, the whole gamut. It reads like German translated literally. Because of the strong French emphasis on expression, editors don't necessarily attempt to make sure that the rules of good communication are respected.



Meet my pet peeve, Jean-Paul Sartre himself. In spite of the fact that he had many contradictors, the general say in the intellectual milieu was, "better be wrong with Sartre than right with anyone else." It just goes to show you what sort of spirit French journalists have to overcome.

One sad consequence of this aspect of French writing, in journalism and books, is that it leads people to conclude that the French language is a much less effective instrument of communication than, say, English. I disagree with this, at least in the case of classic French writing, and I have an example that proves the contrary. Back when I lived in Montreal, I had three encyclopedias: one Larousse 1898, one Britannica 1960 and one Universalis 1984. About 10 years ago, after reading a few pages of a novel by Honoré de Balzac, I thought it advisable to read the article on Balzac in my 1984 Universalis. I thought: "They're French, he's French; they'll say something intelligent." In fact, it was so intelligent I couldn't

get through the 20-page article, which addressed the metaphysical meaning of Balzac and his white suit. So I turned to my 1960 Britannica. It told in six pages the life of Balzac, his work and the meaning of his work. Cut and dry. As to the 1898 Larousse, they achieved this in two thirds of a page. That's writing.

Something happened to French writing about 50 years ago that made it clumsy and hermetic. I've spoken to many people about this and there are many explanations that all point in the same direction. In the post-war years, Communism took a very dominant position among intellectuals and artists and it imposed not only a type of discourse but an aesthetic of denseness very close to the style of Marx. One person I spoke to insisted that they were trying to use German structure with French words. Then the *Nouveau Roman* imposed the total deconstruction of traditional structures. Somehow it got into the heads of writers that you had to be original, even at the cost of intelligibility, and that sticking to formulas and tested forms was old fashioned, conservative and out of it. It trickled down to the way they wrote books (just try to read Foucault), screenplays and journalism, naturally. In such a tightly-knit society where much of taste is decided in salons and among precious groups of intellectuals close to political circles, it contaminated everything. But really: this is not the way the French language is. Just read Zola or Camus to convince yourself.

It is easy to believe that what's written in the press is true, and therefore a good mirror of reality — be it content or form. The entire self-justifying discourse of the press is based on this. Supposing that all is 100 percent true, it cannot be a complete (or a good) mirror of reality, in my opinion. So you can imagine what happens when the facts are not true, or partial. To determine what's reality, journalists and editors rely mainly on what other journalists have written and what other editors have edited. Reality tends to become what they've read about what they cover. It's pretty much like a bunch of intellectual sheep: Nothing happens, nobody moves, then one goes, a few follow and then the entire herd rushes, until there's nowhere to go and nothing happens again. This applies no only to the news, but also to context, and to form and even to taste.

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Lack of perspective is another issue often raised about the French press. When I read a Paris paper, I never forget that it's a Paris perspective, not a French one. The circulation of *Libération* is a mere 170,000 copies. Figaro sells twice as many. *Le Monde*: about the same, at 390,000. This is half the circulation of a regional daily like *Ouest France*, whose market is Brittany and some of Normandy. Truth is, few Paris papers are sold outside of Paris. They are regional, and they cater to their local elite, which happens to be the one elite running the rest of the country.

The sociology of the French press has another peculiarity: everybody is French from France. Maybe here and there you'll find the odd Swiss or Belgian reporter, but there certainly are no Quebeckers — not a single one. The only one I know at Radio France International is there because he speaks about half a dozen languages, including beautiful English. But in the print press, nobody. Which is odd, because in the Anglo-American press, circulation between countries is important. The fact that Rupert Murdoch and Conrad Black are Australian and Canadian is not an obstacle to being media tycoons in the US and Great Britain. And I won't even bother to name the number of Canadians in the US press, including anchormen. Trans-national circulation in the movie business is even more important.

This sort of external input is unthinkable in France. Why? Because most top journalists come from the top *écoles*. Foreigners, who most certainly didn't attend those schools, don't belong to the right circles. They don't understand how to question a French politician or businessman, because they have peculiar rules of politeness and conduct. French-speaking Quebeckers, who haven't gone through this acculturation, are flawed by "writing like Anglo-Saxons," which irks the French.

I won't probe too deeply into the problems of perspective because, to be frank, most journalists, be they French or Anglo-American, are condemned to write very short articles of 500 words or less (this one is 6,000). If they do have perspective, they must drop most of it in order to fit the space they have. And if they don't have 6,000 words to say, they can't have much perspective.

Lack of perspective leads to what I call the weather-forecast syndrome. Lately, there has never been more reportage on nature going wrong (floods, storms, hurricanes, landslides). All this is very exhilarating, but I don't believe for a minute that nature is angrier nowadays than it *ever* was. Measurements do not date more than 125 years — how then can we believe that this month is the worst *ever*? And what does it prove if this is the worst flood in 125 years? What has changed is the number of media that report these weather disasters (in particular the hundreds of new TV chains hungry for good, spectacular footage). The difference: there are more weather-reporting sheep in the flock. And naturally, the weathermen also have the incentive of economic pressure. How so? Well, think of all the public and private institutions that monitor the weather and that depend on funding in order to exist. They get more funds if everyone is convinced that it's the end of the world and that the weathermen can tell you when the sky will fall. This leads everyone to exaggerate. I don't debate the objectivity of storms: I just say that coverage is very interpretative.

Whenever the French start talking about a titillating issue — abuse, rape, poverty, policy on preventive detention, use of torture in questioning, and so on — I always question the article itself in order to find the agenda

between the lines. Why now? What's new about this? Often, it boils down to a form of journalistic intoxication with sensation, and I know the topic is something else. That saves time. And it helps if I'm asking the right question. Result: I am not at all convinced that there's a greater proportion abuse, rape and pedophilia among populations now than, say, 50, 150, 250 or 850 years ago, whatever they say. So, the real question is, why the awareness now?

Five years ago, the French Extreme Right captured 15 percent of the vote in Regional elections. The press — French *and* foreign — expanded on this for about five years, asking what was wrong with the French? Were they turning fascist? How long before France collapsed into a totalitarian regime? In my opinion, there was no big deal. It's difficult to believe that there aren't 15 percent of racists in the US or in Canada too, but can they cast their votes so distinctively? I am not trying to downplay the gravity of the Extreme Right. I'm just saying that nobody asked the right question: How do the French manage to "affirm" racism in a single party, and the others not? This is a much more interesting question but one that is rarely asked.

Anyway, if you ever find an article on this, please send me the clipping: I have a place for it. ❑

Paris — May 3, 2001

If you've come this far in your reading, I simply wish to thank you for the attention. I know this sounds corny, but you've occupied most of my thoughts for two years. I simply cannot leave without acknowledging my debt to you, to the Institute and to Peter, especially.

By the time you read this newsletter, I'll probably have left France and pronounced my returning-fellow's speech. There are many topics I wish I had had the time and chance to write about — privacy, schooling, family, labor relations, self-employment, anti-Americanism, Germany and Europe. At the risk of sounding predictable, I wish I had had two more years. But enough self-pitying. This is embarrassing.

I'm glad to say that much of what I had not time to write will find a place in the two books that were assigned to me this year and that should appear sometimes in 2002 (or 2003, you know how publishers are). All winter, I've been working on a book for French publisher Payot. It's a humorous travelogue that shows impressions, people and anecdotes as they occur. Directed primarily to a French-speaking public, the book for Payot contains a lot of material that didn't appear in the newsletters for lack of space and time. Regarding an English version, the decision is out of my hands, but rest assured I'm doing my best to make it an obvious decision.

The other book, for US publisher Sourcebooks, is closer to the newsletters, although it's to be signed jointly with my wife Julie Barlow. It analyzes the French character, with a focus on values and their conception of the State, and attempts to answer why the French (don't) resist globalization although they seem to. I also have plans for three more books and many magazine articles. This should keep me busy for a while.

So, to paraphrase Bogart and Hemingway, I will always have Paris, for Paris is a moveable feast.

Now, to the moving feast!

Jean Benoît Nadeau

INDEX

Entries refer to ICWA Letters (JBN-1, JBN- 2, etc.) and page, with Letter number given before each page entry.

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