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Sam Ferguson, *Diaries Real and Fictional in Twentieth-Century French Writing*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. xvii + 245 pp. Tables, figures, bibliography and index. \$88.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9780198814535.

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In *Diaries Real and Fictional in Twentieth-Century French Writing*, Sam Ferguson's ambitious aim is to "reveal the historical developments that diary-writing has undergone in France over the twentieth century" (p. 21) by considering two distinct periods which determine the layout of his book in two parts. The first part, "André Gide's Diary-Writing," focuses on *Les Cahiers d'André Walter*, *Paludes*, *Le Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs* and *Journal 1889-1939*, while the second, "Diary-Writing after Gide," brings us to the present time, with Raymond Queneau, Roland Barthes and Annie Ernaux who exemplify "the changing nature and role of diary-writing" and are all indebted to Gide (p. 22).

In an extremely detailed introduction, Ferguson first analyses the complexities of diaries and their place in a writer's *oeuvre*. He underlines the difficulty of providing clear definitions due to the varied writing methods and subject matters and different perceptions of the practise itself, either seen as a secretive endeavour revealing the inner self, or as a constructed literary work imbued with self-reflectivity, two "myths" which merit close scrutiny (p. 12). After examining key Francophone studies on diaries (Leleu, Girard, Didier, and Pachet), he establishes, after Pachet, the starting point of his corpus at the juncture of 1887-1888, a "shift towards a more self-conscious, potentially literary use of the *journal intime*" (p. 9).^[1] More recent scholarship is also mentioned, including Lejeune's article "Le Journal comme 'antifiction,'" Braud's *La Forme des jours*, Rannoux's *Les Fictions du journal littéraire* and Simonet-Tenant's *Journal personnel et correspondance (1785-1939)*.^[2] Regarding studies in English, Ferguson mentions, among other work, Prince's analysis on diary novels, Raoul's *The French Fictional Journal*, Abbott's work on "diary fiction" and Martens's historical perspective in *The Diary Novel*.^[3] His goal is to address "a common failure, even reluctance, to pursue the relationship of these fictional diaries with real diary-writing" by focusing on three specific areas: paratexts, reading pacts and relations with the author's real diaries (p. 16).

Comparing *journal intime* and autobiography, Ferguson comments on Rousseau's writing to illustrate the epistemological shift at the end of the eighteenth century, which marks the beginning of modernity and its attempt at classification and totalisation. He notes how autobiography reflects this effort at synthesis and interpretation, as opposed to the *journal intime*, whose fragmentary aspect and daily notations stress the instability of the self. Both however, are

“impure in form” (p. 21) and he observes that authors are no more likely to achieve their ideals in diaries than they are in autobiographies. In a final theoretical section, he underlines several important aspects of diary-writing and refers to Genette, May, Cohn, Lejeune and Gasparini, among others, to gauge the “truth status” of the journal and the notion of fictivity. Drawing on Foucault’s lecture “Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur,” he examines the various interpretations of “author” and its relation to “the material existence of the writer” (p. 33), including the case of *auteur supposé* found in Gide (André Walter) and Queneau (Sally Mara). Finally, he identifies the “supplement,” a term borrowed from Derrida, as a key concept to fathom the interconnection between *oeuvre* and diary.

Part one compellingly explores the intricacies of Gide’s writing project, in particular the complex relationship between fiction and non-fiction, the endless permutations made possible by the ambiguous nature of the reading pact and the multi-layered use of diary-writing. The four works selected allow Ferguson to follow Gide’s use of diary-writing in both fictional and nonfictional forms and show its significance.

Les Cahiers d’André Walter (1891) is located at a turning point in literary history when the *roman* is influenced by other types of writing. It follows a tradition of *auteurs supposés* while showing innovation in its use of the diary. A close study of press reviews reveals how Gide’s texts were read at the time and how the literary devices of diary-writing and *auteur supposé* were interpreted, depending on the degrees of truth granted the diary and its author. Ferguson convincingly explores the layers of truth and/or *supercherie* and intricate intermingling of genres, looking in turn at the possible reading pacts and their variations, ranging from nonfictional to fictional.

Paludes (1895), “a second stage in Gide’s experimentation with published diary-writing,” is considered next (p. 67). Ferguson first examines its “unusual” paratext and looks at the devices leading to a “generic indeterminacy,” including the importance given to the reader whose “collaboration” and interpretation are emphasized (p. 71). A close comparison between *Paludes I* and *Paludes II* shows how the narrative structure is also characterised by ambiguity, associating fictional diary-writing with other forms of fictional narrative. One telling quotation illustrates such indeterminacy: “arrang(er) les faits de façon à les rendre plus conformes à la vérité que dans la réalité” (p. 75).

Les Faux-monnayeurs (1925) marks a further step in Gide’s exploration of diary-writing. Ferguson analyses the elaborate associations between the novel and *Le Journal des Faux-monnayeurs* (1926). A quotation from Lacretelle’s *Colère: suivi d’un journal* (1926) throws interesting light on the connection between art and life and the blurring of boundaries between reality and fiction: “Je crois qu’un bon moyen est d’écrire de temps à autre des récits sur soi-même et de les publier comme s’il s’agissait de récits romanesques. Ainsi on prendra l’habitude de transcrire des choses vues et des sentiments éprouvés....Ce jeu mixte ne saurait être mauvais. On y gagnera ceci, de mettre plus de vie dans son art et peut-être plus d’art dans sa vie” (quoted on pp. 90-91). *Le Journal des Faux-monnayeurs*, “an author’s diary accompanying a literary project,” reveals similar interests (p. 93). After identifying its different functions, Ferguson focuses on the creation of characters drawn from real life and on the way Gide subverts the opposition between reality and fiction, which brings to mind Gide’s famous declaration from *Si le grain ne meurt*: “peut-être approche-t-on de plus près la vérité dans le roman” (Gide, cited on p. 102). Such devices create an “unstable relationship between diaristic reality and novelistic fiction” which leads to a “more open form of literary *oeuvre*” and confers a more active role to the reader (p. 103). Ferguson

concludes by showing how *Le Journal des Faux-monnayeurs* adds a “supplement” to the novel already published, thereby producing a “more complete structure” and opening up a range of possibilities, both in terms of creation and interpretation (p. 105).

In a final chapter, Ferguson reassesses the importance of Gide’s *Journal 1889-1939* in the history of diary-writing. He examines in particular the “secret legacy by which it exerted an influence long after Gide had fallen from favour” (p. 109) despite earlier publications of most of its contents in the *Oeuvres complètes* (1932-1939) which, for the first time, present Gide’s *oeuvre* as a coherent literary work “centred around a diaristic author-figure” (p. 110). Ferguson stresses the significance of the publication of a *journal intime* as an independent work by a living author in the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, which greatly contributed to viewing it as a literary *oeuvre* in its own right and placed Gide alongside canonical writers. He comments on *Les Pages immortelles de Montaigne*, where Gide identifies his own diary-writing with the *Essais* and remarks how fragmentary writing can serve a self-reflexive project, presenting a portrait of the writer who remains, however, elusive and unstable, “dans un insaisissable devenir” (Montaigne, as cited on p. 116). Finally, to show how the *Journal* continued to exert an influence after the Second World War, Ferguson looks at Sartre’s *Carnets de la drôle de guerre* and Barthes’s “Notes sur André Gide et son *Journal*.” Sartre’s interest in the *Journal* appears in his many comments and reflections on diary-writing, his concern for the “rapports de l’art et de la vie” (Sartre, cited on p. 128) and his ideal of *authenticité*. Another form of legacy appears with Barthes, who adopts a similar posture to Gide’s in his own fragmentary writing, and primarily approaches the *Journal* as *oeuvre* and how it relates to Gide’s other works.

Part two is devoted to “Diary writing after Gide.” While Gide towered over the first part of the twentieth century, the period from the Second World War onwards “was not dominated by any one diarist, except perhaps the spectre of Gide himself” as he became a reference for later authors despite a changed literary landscape (p. 135). Ferguson underlines the contradictory views on diary-writing in that period, with a resurgence of interest among readers from the 1950s; a suspicion, even rejection, from the literary avant-garde; and in the mid-1970s, a marked increase in the publication of subjective writing, often by the very writers who had distanced themselves from it. He convincingly justifies his selection of Queneau, Barthes and Ernaux among the many writers who produced experimental work at the time (one could think of Perec, Sarraute or Robbe-Grillet as likely candidates, to name but a few).

Queneau’s unique position as a bridge between two conflicting views on diary-writing is first considered. Suspicion of the writing subject, which he shared with his generation, did not prevent him from exploring the diaristic author-figure in his writings attributed to Sally Mara: *On est toujours trop bon avec les femmes* (1947), *Journal intime* (1950) and *Oeuvres complètes de Sally Mara* (1962). Ferguson stresses the significance of these works and especially the development of the *auteur supposé*, a strategy reminiscent of Gide. He provides an in-depth analysis of “the author’s disguises and identification with the text” (p. 144) which follow the meanders of literary creation and explore the potentialities of diary-writing, and studies how Queneau, over the course of his three works, plays on the roles, functions and interactions of the three signatories, Sally Mara, Michel Presle and Raymond Queneau. After unravelling the intricate processes involved, he draws a most interesting parallel with Foucault’s lecture “Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur?”: “On en arriverait à l’idée que le nom d’auteur ne va pas comme le nom propre de l’intérieur d’un discours à l’individu réel et extérieur qui l’a produit, mais qu’il court, en quelque sorte, à la limite des

textes, qu'il les découpe, qu'il en suit les arêtes, qu'il en manifeste le mode d'être ou, du moins, qu'il le caractérise" (Foucault, cited on p. 159).

Barthes is the second writer chosen to illustrate "a turning point in the history of the *journal intime*" (p. 163). His interest in Gide's *Journal* first appears in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, although his earlier writings show an inclination for short forms and fragments which he himself attributes to Gide's influence. Ferguson recalls that Barthes's practice of diary-writing took place late in his career, when a period of intense mourning after the death of his mother led him to write *Journal de deuil* (published posthumously in 2009) and influenced his "Vita Nova" project. Like Gide's own literary project, "Vita Nova" encompasses *journal intime* and the novel with the view to "unifier une vie d'écriture" (Barthes, cited on p. 163) and raises complex issues about the connections between life, *oeuvre* and the author-figure. It inspired "une nouvelle pratique d'écriture" (p. 169) with two further works by Barthes, "Délibération" (an article on the *journal intime*) and *Soirées de Paris*, which stem from the realisation that mourning "cannot be generalised, published and turned into a literary *oeuvre*" (p. 180) and lead to a type of writing pertaining to both *journal intime* and *récit*, evocative of Gide.

The final writer considered is Annie Ernaux, whose works belong to the diverse field of life-writing. Ferguson focuses on three types of diary-writing practised by Ernaux up until the publication of *Écrire la vie* in 2011. The first category (*journal extérieur*) is illustrated by *Journal du dehors* (1993) and *La Vie extérieure* (2000). The paratext offers useful insights on Ernaux's approach, characterised by a *transcription* of reality which effectively eliminates the writing subject ("J'ai cherché à pratiquer une sorte d'écriture photographique du réel") and a record of the diarist's relation with the outside world reinforced by the quote from Rousseau featured in the epigraph: "Notre *vrai* moi n'est pas tout entier en nous" (author's italics, p. 201). This double approach leads to "a first diaristic authorial posture in Ernaux's work" where the writer is both subject (who seeks to understand the word and herself) and object (which is read, interpreted and appropriated by others) (p. 203).

The second category (*journal intime*) includes *Je ne suis pas sortie de ma nuit* (1997) and *Se perdre* (2001), which mark a departure from *journal extérieur*, as the diarist now writes "dans la violence des sensations" (p. 205). Ernaux adopts a new strategy: the events both texts refer to have been dealt with in previous books, which they supplement (*Une femme* and *Passion simple* respectively); besides, the authorial voice, via the prefaces and the decision to publish ten years after the events, creates a distance which allows her to "considérer le 'je' comme un autre, une autre" (Ernaux, cited on p. 205). Ferguson observes that, contrary to Barthes's *Journal de deuil*, Ernaux's diary of mourning is "open to exploration through writing, without any possibility of being exhausted, finalised, or fixed" (p. 209). It is part of an *oeuvre* characterised by Ernaux's constant reflections on her life events, which remains open to readers' individual interpretations.

The last of Ernaux's works analysed by Ferguson are *L'Atelier noir* and *journal d'écriture*, published in 2011, the same year as *Écrire la vie*. *Écrire la vie* includes a preface, a "photo-journal" and Ernaux's works in chronological order of the events they relate, thus appearing as a coherent whole providing an "objective account of a *vie*" (p. 212). The preface underlines the universality of the individual life portrayed in the volume: "Non pas ma vie, ni sa vie, ni même une vie. La vie, avec ses contenus qui sont les mêmes pour tous..." (Ernaux, cited on p. 213). *L'Atelier noir* and the *journal d'écriture*, which concern the experience of writing, not only supplement *Écrire la vie*, but also provide information on the place of diary-writing in Ernaux's literary project. By laying

bare the processes at work in writing, they create a more formal authorial posture than the other diaries and call for a comparison with Gide. Ferguson ends his study by highlighting parallels and differences between the authorial postures, desires and writing practices of both diarists.

Ferguson's book offers a valuable study for diary-writing scholars, which explores fascinating issues also relevant to life-writing in general. It is a pity that the erratic footnote layout is a distraction to an otherwise well-presented publication with only the occasional mistake and typographical error. Some readers may find the introduction overly fragmented and detailed (the book derives from a doctoral thesis and associated articles). It is longer than any of the chapters in part two, and these are crucial in providing "an overview of diary-writing across the twentieth century" (p. 3). It is fair to say that the study is in fact more about Gide, his significance and influence, as indicated by the photograph on the cover and by the study itself, but not the title, which points to a much wider scope. However, these remarks do not detract from the meticulous research, insightful analysis and overall quality of a volume which is a welcome contribution to French diary-writing studies.

NOTES

[1] Michèle Leleu, *Les Journaux intimes* (Paris: PUF, 1952); Alain Girard, *Le Journal intime* (Paris : PUF, 1963); Béatrice Didier, *Le Journal intime* (Paris: PUF, 1976) and Pierre Pachet, *Les Baromètres de l'âme: naissance du journal intime* (Paris: Hatier, 1990).

[2] Philippe Lejeune, 'Le Journal comme « antfiction »', *Poétique*, 149(2007); Michel Braud, *La Forme des jours : pour une poétique du journal personnel* (Paris: Seuil, 2006); Catherine Rannoux, *Les Fictions du journal littéraire : Paul Léautaud, Jean Malaquais, Renaud Camus* (Geneva: Droz, 2004) and Françoise Simonet-Tenant, *Journal personnel et correspondance (1785-1939) ou les affinités électives* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Academia-Bruylant, 2009).

[3] Gerald Prince, "The Diary Novel: Notes for the Definition of a Sub-Genre," *Neophilologus* 59/4(1975); Valerie Raoul, *The French Fictional Journal: Fictional Narcissism / Narcissistic Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980); Hans Porter Abbott, *Diary Fiction: Writing as Action* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984) and Lorna Martens, *The Diary Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

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