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## Laëtitia, or the end of scientific inquiry

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## ***Laëtitia*, or the end of scientific inquiry**

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**Léonore Le Caisne**

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## Reading: In quest of method

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### *Laëtitia, or the end of scientific inquiry*

**IVAN JABLONKA,**

*Laëtitia ou la fin des hommes*

(Paris: Seuil, 2016), 400 p., ISBN 978-2-02-129120-9

Léonore LE CAISNE

*Translated by Cadenza Academic Translations*

The popular success of Ivan Jablonka's latest book, *Laëtitia ou la fin des hommes* [*Laëtitia or the End of Men*], is due to more than just the subject matter, namely, the crime perpetrated against a beautiful young girl, told in a well-written, straightforward style. The author has also been able to draw greater attention to the book by presenting it as both a literary work and as a social science study conducted as a historian, "sociologist," and even "ethnologist" based on "fieldwork."<sup>1</sup> Defending his mixing of genres, he ignores researchers who have questioned the scientific value of his work. My aim in this article is therefore to give serious consideration to the scientific nature of the book, without analyzing its literary qualities, concerning which there is little doubt. As an ethnologist, I too have worked on a criminal affair that received significant media coverage: the "Gouardo affair," the story of a father openly committing incest with his daughter over twenty-eight years, without anyone intervening, and which in the end produced six children.<sup>2</sup> Over the course of a year, I met with the victim and her family, as well as the inhabitants, shopkeepers, and elected officials of the village in the Paris region where the events took place; I read the regional and national press and talked with journalists. This work, to which I will return at the end of this article, will allow me to illustrate my argument that Jablonka abandons a scientific approach anchored in the human and social sciences in favor of a literary exercise.

1. *La fabrique de l'histoire*, France Culture, January 5, 2017.

2. Léonore Le Caisne, *Un inceste ordinaire. Et pourtant tout le monde savait* (Paris: Belin, 2014).

### IN SEARCH OF THE "TRUTH" OF LAËTITIA

During the night of January 18 to 19, 2011, in Pornic in Loire-Atlantique, nineteen-year-old Laëtitia Perrais was kidnapped and murdered by Tony Meilhon. The "affair" occupied the media for several weeks. Nicolas Sarkozy, then president of the French Republic, accused magistrates of failing in their judicial supervision of the criminal. During the criminal investigation, the father of the foster family that had taken care of Laëtitia and her twin sister Jessica was indicted for sexual assault against Jessica.

Jablonka refuses to allow the criminal to take the life of his victim a second time through his newfound "celebrity." He seeks instead to pay "homage" to Laëtitia Perrais by bringing her back to life not in relation to her death and murderer, but "to reestablish Laëtitia as she existed" (8).<sup>3</sup> He thus attempts to reconstruct the ordinary life of the young woman, a victim of male violence, up until her funeral: her childhood in her biological family and her relationship with her twin, interactions with child welfare services during childhood, her foster home and family, her school years and professional training, friends and lovers, her first job as a waitress, life in the suburbs of Nantes, the meeting with her murderer, and finally the crime.

Like an investigative journalist, police officer, and examining magistrate, "motivated by a passion for the truth" (335), the author seeks "the truth" of Laëtitia, the sole "heroine" of his book (8), no longer as victim but "as she existed." Like them, he "is investigating." The similarity of their approaches provides the foundation for an elective affinity that borders on communion as he relates his meeting with one of the examining magistrates:

I sensed right away that this investigator was an alter ego who, to answer the questions he was raising, met with witnesses, gathered evidence, thought logically, followed leads, and eliminated hypotheses, both as part of a team and in the solitude of his office. When I suggested the idea to him, he accepted the idea of a "community of methods": like the historian and the sociologist, the examining magistrate implements models to get as close as possible to the truth of the matter (224).

The author conducts both a "criminal investigation" and a "life investigation" (72). He gathers information about the crime—How was Laëtitia killed? Was she raped by Meilhon? Had she, like her sister, been raped by "M. Patron," the father of her foster family?<sup>4</sup>—and about how it was dealt with in the courts and the media, and by magistrates, investigators, and journalists. He searches through Laëtitia's life with child welfare services and in her file (school report cards, childhood drawings, and no doubt other unspecified documents), and with her acquaintances and friends. He looks at photos, reads her letters, and gains access, thanks to her sister's lawyer, to the young woman's Facebook

3. Translator's note: Unless otherwise stated, all translations of cited foreign language material in this article are our own.

4. "Our burning question: and Laëtitia?" 132.

account. He also attends the trials of both Tony Meilhon and the foster father. Based on what he considers to be a “meta-investigation” (10), he assesses the work done by various people, evaluates what is “true” or rather “false,” and always “faces” the information before incorporating it into his account. He reconstructs and interprets the life of this young woman, who has difficult moments but upon whom, sometimes, “life seems to smile” (274) and who “spreads her wings” in spite of suicidal tendencies revealed in testimonial letters written a few days before her death. He acquires “convictions” (27) and, with his sensitivity and a few readings in psychology, “imagines”:

To understand Laëtitia’s turning point, and because her voice has forever been lost, it is necessary to use a fictional approach, that is to say, hypotheses that, due to their imaginary nature, are able to penetrate the hidden part of a soul and establish the truth (253).

Buoyed by his historical research dedicated to children in welfare services, which he takes advantage of to justify the scientific nature of his approach, Jablonka dismantles President Sarkozy’s denunciations of judicial failings in dealing with the scourge of recidivism. He reviews the evolution and operation of the institutions responsible for freeing Tony Meilhon: the JAP (*juges d’application des peines*, or enforcement magistrates), the SPIP (*Service pénitentiaire d’insertion et de probation*, the penitentiary rehabilitation and probation service), as well as, with regard to the investigation, the IRCGN (*Institut de recherche criminelle de la gendarmerie nationale*, the forensic science department of the French Gendarmerie) and, concerning Laëtitia’s life, the reports, juvenile magistrates, and child welfare services with their educational measures, homes, and foster families. The author alternates between chapters on the “life investigation” of Laëtitia Perrais and chapters on the police and journalistic investigation and judicial handling of the case, up to the victim’s funeral and the murderer’s trial.

His writing is cluttered with admiration: “This princess” (48); “Laëtitia was graceful. She was slim, slender. Her chestnut hair, full and silky, was combined with harmonious facial features, lit up by a smile and radiant eyes” (168); a “romantic and fragile young woman” (284), her “kindness combined with timidity, her generosity with reserve” (170). Her twin sister Jessica, meanwhile, is a “heroine of our time, whose moral strength serves as a model in dealing with the great and small misfortunes of life” (332). The stylistic effects create a breathtaking account that emphasizes the horror of the crime. “She was almost there. She was getting out” (303), writes the author while giving vent to the horror of the killing in order to generate suspense and empathy. It does not fail to arrive. Caught up in the account, it is difficult for the reader to resist the temptation to look up the faces of Laëtitia and her murderer online in order to better imagine the fatal encounter and the tragedy—which in fact confirms the failure of the author’s intention to restore life to the young woman, by going beyond just her death and the perpetrator of the crime. It also confirms the failure of his scientific project.

The main problem with the book is the way in which Jablonka seeks to understand and report the “truth” of Laëtitia Perrais’s life. He lays claim to “truth” in his very writing: “As a novelist ten years ago, I wrote non-truth; as a PhD student also at that time, I unwrote truth. Today, I would like to write *truth*. This is the gift I offer Laëtitia” (398). To do so, he knows ahead of time what he is seeking. While an anthropologist would have worked on this slice of contemporary life based on elements of knowledge that would have come to him through observation and relationships developed in the field, which he would have then contextualized and connected, Jablonka uses an investigation centered on the crime and life of the young woman based on decontextualized elements of pre-determined relevance.

While the affinity with the examining magistrate and the police officer claimed by Jablonka has naturally been very popular with readers and journalists—since it places the researcher in the real world and appears to ensure the truth of his results—it is an anthropological untruth. Conducting an investigation like an examining magistrate or investigative journalist involves thinking based on one’s position and integrating observations into a search for the truth required by this position—here, the legal truth. What truth is Jablonka seeking? The truth of the crime and Laëtitia Perrais’s life, clearly. But whose truth? That of the police officer, the magistrate, Tony Meilhon, Laëtitia, M. Patron, or Jessica? That of the historian and/or the sociologist? But if so, which “truth” is then at issue? The truth, without any other qualifier, is both multiple and individual, and is only valid for a socially occupied position at a specific moment in time.

Social science researchers, for their part, adopt an approach that seeks to understand the other and the rationales in which both they and the other are and/or were involved. Anthropologists, for example, try to understand from within social life, thus going beyond the information of a particular point in time gathered by investigators, examining magistrates, and journalists. They seek less to establish the facts and their truth and focus instead on the social conditions for their existence.

### **A LACK OF CONTEXT**

Ivan Jablonka also views his sources as bearers of truth. Not only does he not quote all of them, but he never questions their conditions of production, being content to “verify, confirm, combine” (94) in order to ensure the “veracity” of their information. Why use this source rather than another? By whom and for whom was it produced, and—an essential question in a criminal investigation—was it produced by the prosecution or the defense? What rationale lies behind it? This is a very familiar approach for both anthropologists and historians, as indicated by Jean-Clément Martin’s observations on historical research on court records:

The archive file is not a transcription, in the legal sense, of “what actually happened”; it is the interpretation of a reality in a collective discussion, which used the fixed framework of justice to resolve problems related to the customs and protection of the most vulnerable people, and to rivalries that are economic, social, and involve prestige.<sup>5</sup>

Each related piece of information and fact is only valid in its context and relationship to other pieces of information and facts. The information contained in a court record or a child welfare services file was produced by a member of staff in a particular context and/or based on a certain rationale, and it is only valid as such. The same goes for the people with whom Jablonka meets and whose statements he views simply as information, not as material to be studied while taking the speaking situation into account. The words that researchers gather come from the place(s) that their interlocutor and themselves (intentionally or unintentionally) occupy. Who told them what, when, and for what reason? The elements they study can only contribute to the knowledge of their subject once they are situated in the investigative relationship. This particular researcher in that particular place and in that particular relationship collected that particular word situated in relation to this other word.

Jablonka confides his belief that it is because he is a “historian,” not a journalist, that Jessica and the others agreed to speak with him. But we learn nothing more because beyond the story, the author is not very interested in the view that those he meets have of him. In the statements he gathers, he does not take into account the investigative relationship. The other party seems devoid of intention. When very little is said, rather than examining the reasons for speaking with the researcher, the author integrates the “silence” of those he meets into his heroization of Laëtitia and those close to her. “For some, silence means emptiness, while for others, it indicates modesty” (144), he observes after meeting with one of Laëtitia’s friends.<sup>6</sup> Was no-one surprised, then, to find a historian working on such a recent crime? In particular, what does “historian” mean for Laëtitia’s sister and friends, for the wife of “M. Patron”? It seems likely that the author represented something other than a “historian” to them, but we do not know exactly what. In relation to Jessica, Jablonka provides some indication at the end of the book: “One time, after I had seen Jessica in relation to some procedural questions, Cécile de Oliveira [her lawyer] told me: ‘She calls you *the writer* and she trusts you.’ I felt a great relief” (334).

It is also unclear whether or not the author was presented with any refusals, given that his “fieldwork” seems to have gone so well, which for him was no doubt an indication of a successful investigation. Jablonka, who meets Laëtitia’s sister “with her computer open” (336), presents himself as the master

5. Jean-Clément Martin, *La machine à fantômes. Relire l’histoire de la Révolution française* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2012), 202.

6. “This [investigative] relationship emerges from a base of silence: in front of an ethnographer, we submit that there are always good reasons to say nothing”: Michel Naepels, “Note sur la justification dans la relation ethnographique,” *Genèses* 64 (2006): 110–23, here 110.

of his investigation from beginning to end. He does, however, concede, with the benevolence of the master, that he may have committed some blunders:

I received the informed consent of Jessica and her friends and family: I did everything to respect their words, their dignity, and their pain; I replaced certain names with pseudonyms; I have left out hatred and insults; before writing, I was the listener. But I cannot exclude the possibility that I was myself intrusive and awkward. It is not easy to sidestep these shortcomings when conducting an investigation (336–37).

Anthropologists and sociologists working in the field are however well aware of the challenges of any approach, the use of their person and research by those being studied, their missteps, the influence of their networks—which they do not often realize until the end of their work—the changes in direction, the silences that speak and the words that silence, discouragements, and new developments. It is down to them to use and analyze their own experience: to understand the place that has been made for them or taken by them, their relations with the people studied (other than simply indicating a “friendship” here or there), explain their access to the elements they are working with, and situate the statements gathered and observations reported. They also have to take emotions into account. Jablonka, on the contrary, congratulates himself, in relation to the examining magistrate, and therefore most likely also the “historian” conducting the same investigation, that “human emotions never invaded the professional realm” (224).

Unlike the author, ultimately the field researcher does not so much lead the investigation as be led by it. As Alban Bensa writes, he:

participates in the life of his hosts less as the cunning master of the situation, who pretends to be a native while at the same time maintaining, in a hidden but vigilant way, his reserve, than as the naive pawn in a game whose players and outcomes encompass and often overwhelm him.<sup>7</sup>

As such, and provided they are interested in doing so, the people the researcher meets teach him what matters to them and, more generally, what he has to learn.

Furthermore, it is for scientific reasons that anthropologists often use “I” and description. When Jablonka uses the first person singular, he includes himself in the scene. With concern, he speaks of his apprehension before meeting with Laëtitia’s friends and family, who come from a very modest social background. Politely, he wonders whether he will be able to understand twin sister Jessica’s experience, given that he is a historian from the Parisian intellectual bourgeoisie, of another sex and another generation. But he produces no scientific analysis from these questions.

In the same way that he does not question his sources or the nature of his relations with them, Jablonka views the male violence that Laëtitia experienced,

7. Alban Bensa, “De la micro-histoire vers une anthropologie critique,” in *Jeux d’échelles. La micro-analyse à l’expérience*, ed. Jacques Revel (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 37–70, here 44.

directly or indirectly, primarily as factual: the rape of her biological mother by her biological father, the sexual assault of her twin sister (and perhaps of Laëtitia?) by the father of their foster family, and her murder by Tony Meilhon (did he rape her beforehand?). However, as Jean-Clément Martin again writes, “neither recording the hard ‘facts,’ nor taking care to distinguish the ‘truth’ from the ‘falsehood’ or the ‘possible’ is enough to account for the individual and collective mental process, which becomes the key element of the investigation.”<sup>8</sup> Jablonka recounts the violence, but ultimately has little interest in what allows it to happen beyond the general institutional context of a child placed in care, patriarchy, and misogyny, which are pre-determined. Even when he arrives on the scene—during the intense media coverage—he never investigates the precise local, institutional, or media context of the information he gathers and the facts he relates. Once stated and established, the violence committed and experienced is less important, if one wants to understand it, than the social conditions for its existence.

While, for example, Jablonka does ask himself, once the allegations of sexual assault against the father of the foster family are revealed, “who really is M. Patron?” (128), he does not attempt to find out why he was allowed to continue taking in foster children without being investigated by child welfare services. This was the case in spite of allegations of sexual assault by three young girls, one of whom was under his care, and a report to the police. Why was the case closed? As the author himself points out:

The story could have been different. Having known of a report against a foster parent, the general council could have fast-tracked an in-depth investigation, and temporarily removed the girls during the investigation. After all, the department was M. Patron’s employer (205).

After referring to the young girls in child welfare services in the nineteenth century, Jablonka merely notes that their fate was “tragically banal.” What then was “M. Patron’s” position in local and family life? How was he seen by educators, parents, neighbors, children, grandchildren, etc.? How were these young girls in care viewed? What was the significance, for the people they met, of the sexual assault they were subjected to? The answers to these questions would all have provided some understanding of what conditioned, at least in part, the violence committed by “M. Patron” against the Perrais sisters.

As for Tony Meilhon, Jablonka deconstructs his characterization as a “repeat sexual offender” and the accusation that the legal system was too lax in dealing with his case. He notes that Meilhon was freed at the end of his last sentence and that there was, among his numerous crimes and misdemeanors, only one sexual assault, against a fellow inmate with whom he shared a cell. While Meilhon was not “monitored” by rehabilitation and probation officers, as he should have been since his last sentence for contempt of court was accompanied by a suspended prison sentence, this was because the penitentiary

8. Martin, *La machine à fantômes*, 194.

rehabilitation and probation service was overworked and did not consider his file as a priority. Aside from an institutional error (in particular an overloaded system), what judgments and assessments were made to evaluate Meilhon's file? What can rehabilitation magistrates and officers tell us today? Jablonka never seems able to see the "truths" as other than the facts involving the people and situations he encounters, and which, however, would constitute (viewed from a distance or close up) Laëtitia Perrais's quality of life. Instead, he looks to the young woman's behavior to understand what led her to follow Tony Meilhon on January 18, 2011, on what was to be her last night alive:

A romantic and fragile young woman, who had barely emerged from adolescence and high school, shocked by the strategies of mean boys who "do bad things to us in doin' that," she lived for texting and television, did not drink or smoke, went out very rarely and only with her friends. And yet on January 18, 2011, all the taboos were broken [. . .]. Why this huge failure on her part? Why that day? We do not know what so violently disrupted her daily routine (284–85).

The author speaks to us about Laëtitia and those who knew her based on his own views and the various positions he occupies: that of a man, father, historian, writer, Parisian bourgeois,<sup>9</sup> reader of current affairs, friend of the lawyer, and adult, without ever making distinctions between them. At the same time, his voice becomes mixed up with that of the actors encountered. He describes scenes in which he did not play a part, like the murderer's initial detention (36), and more generally, slices of the two sisters' daily life. He paints pictures of people he has never met, such as Meilhon's father, describing him as "lazy, alcoholic, violent, pathologically jealous" (149). He appears to designate the actors in the tragedy using "local" names—"Laëtitia," "Jessica," and yet "Tony Meilhon" and "M. Patron"—which are also indicative of positions. We never know who is speaking. The author? If so, in what position? Or his interlocutors? But then which ones?

The story also constantly goes back and forth between the presentation of Laëtitia's life and her unique "truth" (this is the writer and father speaking), and the presentation of Laëtitia's fate as the *case* of a foster child and female victim of male violence (here it is the historian who speaks, as well as the man and his "shame" of being a man).

Jablonka reconstructs the path Laëtitia Perrais took in this "patriarchal society," using a clear narrative method. Studying the violence in its context would have made it possible for him to go beyond merely describing the facts and individual journey and approach the young woman's experience, without the artifice of imagination. This would have been a particularly interesting approach since media coverage of an event breaks through the routine nature of the social order and allows the researcher to dive into what, as it breaks apart, opens up to him.

9. "Working-class meals, that's what Laëtitia served on the last day of her life," 33.

**VARIOUS POINTS OF VIEW AND MORAL JUDGMENTS**

The crime and its coverage by the media provide an opportunity to see and hear how many actors directly or indirectly concerned by the event position themselves. These include journalists (with their differences, the choices they make in covering the event, etc.), direct protagonists (the attacker, victim, and potential witnesses), inhabitants of the place where the event took place, and also the people who have to deal with it (investigators, magistrates, social services, and prison guards). Many spaces that differ in language and experience, that follow their own type of logic, are revealed: the public space and the local space, the various institutions concerned (court, prison, and social services), and the village and its social relations. The actors and spaces, and the juxtaposition and connections made between the representations of violence against women, form the social configuration in which Laëtitia Perrais lived and was killed, and in which everyone (including the author in the midst of writing) evolved. Ethnographic fieldwork with these actors and in these spaces would have made it possible to show different points of view, modes of action, and moral experiences, at the intersection of which the violence suffered by Laëtitia Perrais took place.

My work on the “Gouardo affair” also concerned violence against women. During the twenty-eight years that this incest took place, inhabitants of the village, elected officials, and shopkeepers gossiped about the family, but nothing was done to save the young woman. In the aftermath, journalists denounced the “silence” of the inhabitants.<sup>10</sup>

To understand what had been allowed to happen in this case of incest, and in particular the experience of Lydia Gouardo, the victim, I spent a year in the village where the family lived and in the housing project in the neighboring town where her father, an itinerant printer, worked. At the time, I was not really seeking to discover the facts and whether the inhabitants “had known” and what they “had known,” that is, to question the information itself and those who provided it, as had been—and was still—the case for journalists, police officers, and magistrates. Instead, I was trying to understand how information and those who circulated it were a part of local life—which included the way in which inhabitants viewed this act of incest.

As is usual for anthropologists, I allowed myself to be guided by the field in which I was working; I agreed to listen to whatever the inhabitants, elected officials, and shopkeepers wanted to talk about, even if it had nothing to do with why I was there. I had planned to talk to them about the “Gouardo affair,” but they talked to me about the latest municipal elections. I expected them to bring up the “crime,” but they talked to me about the “father who had children with his daughter.” The “Gouardo affair” hardly interested them. It belonged

10. It was not incest (and its discovery) that made it an “event”—it was not considered a crime there—but instead the trial that led to media coverage.

to journalists and their readers. Through their normalization of the facts and their indifference, the inhabitants, shopkeepers, and elected officials almost made me doubt the merit of my research. I had to work hard to stay focused on my subject. One of the results of the study was to understand this “indifference.” The incest had become a part of local life to the point that it had almost become normal, a practice that was just original enough to be the subject of local gossip. The incest had never been considered a “crime” as it was for journalists, their readers, and the anthropologist who had just arrived. The representation of violence in normal local life thus had nothing to do with the violence spoken of in the public space, and about which I had come to inquire.

Views on this incest also varied from one place to the next, depending on whether someone was an “old” or “new” inhabitant, a neighbor that was close to or more distant from the family, and from one period to the next, depending on the situation. Various situations included whether someone was responding to accusations from the press, defending his or her position in local life, attempting to protect his or her honor, talking with a neighbor or acquaintance, journalist, or the ethnologist who was viewed, depending on the case, as a researcher investigating life in small villages, a snooper, a confidante, a stranger, or an anonymous investigator who would only be there to talk for an hour and never be seen again. I also gathered contradictory statements: “We knew,” but “we couldn’t know;” “Of course she was raped,” as well as “She’s lying!”; and “Rape is bad,” or “Well! She must have wanted it.” This shows that there is what the law says, what has been publicly denounced, and what is said, what is done or what is allowed to happen, what is said after the fact; external reactions and local reactions (uneasiness, disapproval, reference to the law, indignation, and indifference). It was from this point, from this normalization, just as much as from the facts themselves, that the violence committed against Lydia and women in general had to be approached. To investigate in the manner of a police officer or journalist (as Jablonka did in the case that interested him), insisting on viewing and speaking (as they did) of this incest as a crime, would have become a barrier to understanding the experience of Lydia Gouardo and the inhabitants of the village.

In the same way, the statements gathered by Jablonka were obtained in different contexts (before or after the discovery of the body, before and after the announcement of the sexual assault committed by the father of the foster family), from various actors (neighbors, investigators, men, women, a social worker, a mother, the town’s inhabitants, and journalists). Each person most likely used various registers (institutional, male/female relations, differences in social class, cultural origin, moral values) and relied on values that changed from one situation to the next. If he had considered his interlocutors in this way, Jablonka would have seen how they intersect, connect, and contradict each other, according to the positions they occupied (sister, father, social worker, juvenile magistrate, neighbors, elected officials, etc.). The dominant voice of the author describing the extraordinary person of Laëtitia Perrais and the

excellent work of the investigators, lawyers, and magistrates who judge Tony Meilhon as a “normal guy” (232), would then no doubt have given way to a cacophony of judgments that had determined, directly or indirectly, the life of Laëtitia Perrais that the author was seeking to trace.

On rare occasions, Jablonka allows divergent voices to be heard. But they serve to illustrate the main focus rather than help in its construction. For example, the author reports that close to the area where investigators were looking for the body of the young woman, he met “a lady who felt that they had done too much.” “Do we make such a fuss for all the young girls who disappear?” she appears to ask Jablonka (177). However, caught up in his own view of the facts, rather than trying to understand another person’s point of view, the author ignores the question. Due to its apparent lack of relevance, in his text these words simply emphasize the scale of the resources implemented for the investigation and the quality of the work done by investigators and magistrates.<sup>11</sup> The author does not hear “those who are silent,” to whom, however, he believes he is giving voice through the reconstruction of Laëtitia Perrais’s life. Fully occupied in recounting his “truth” of the young woman, he fails to perceive the different positions occupied by the various actors and the discourses associated with them. We also almost never truly hear from the police officers, magistrates, Jessica, the Patrons, neighbors, friends, relatives, etc., whose statements he rewrites.

When he is unable to know the facts, such as the psychological condition of the young woman at each moment he describes, Jablonka fills in the gaps by “imagining” them. Why not also have questioned what could not be known about the subject? Was Laëtitia Perrais’s life not also built *in* and *with* these absences and inability to understand?

Such work would have made the story more gripping. The text would certainly have been more contradictory and lost some of its fluidity and literary quality. The narrative would have become more documentary in nature. But it would have provided readers with ways to interpret what had been presented to them, and potentially contest certain analyses. It would then have been a scientific work.

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11. “The little girl on welfare, they acted like she was a queen,” 178.