

**FELETON GENRE IN WORLD LITERATURE: HISTORICAL EVOLUTION,
POETICS, AND COMPARATIVE DISCOURSE PRACTICES**

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ABSTRACT: The study examined the formation, historical evolution, and poetics of the feuilleton genre in world literature through a comparative literary framework. Historical-typological, comparative, discourse-analytic, and stylometric methods were applied; a corpus of 120 feuilletons and adjacent satirical journalistic texts was compiled from French, Russian, English, and German press materials dated 1800–2000. Data collection relied on bibliographic retrieval, digital-archive work, and a standardized coding protocol; findings were verified using statistical indicators (means, SD, p-values). The results showed that the feuilleton was defined by its material anchoring in the newspaper “basement” column, its rapid response to current socio-political agendas, its reliance on ironic-rhetorical devices, and its polemical strategies mediated through an authorial persona or mask. Comparative evidence indicated that the French tradition strongly linked the feuilleton to urban culture and theatrical-aesthetic commentary, whereas the Russian tradition integrated it with literary criticism and political satire; in English and German contexts the genre tended to converge with the essay and the newspaper column. The conclusion argued that the genre’s boundaries remained dynamic within a “satirical journalism—essay—criticism” triangle and that functional equivalents persisted in contemporary digital media formats. The study contributed to genre typology and to research on media–literature interaction by offering operational criteria for identifying feuilleton poetics across national traditions.

Keywords: feuilleton; satirical journalism; genre typology; discourse analysis; stylometry; comparative literature; newspaper culture.

The feuilleton occupies a paradoxical position in world literature: it is simultaneously a journalistic format, a literary mode, and a cultural institution whose borders shift across languages, political systems, and media technologies. Although often treated as a minor form in canonical literary histories, the feuilleton historically functioned as a high-frequency interface between literature and everyday life, enabling authors to test styles, shape publics, and circulate satire at scale. In European print culture, the feuilleton emerged alongside the rapid expansion of newspapers, urban readerships, and commercialized entertainment in the nineteenth century. Long-run trends in media history indicate that the nineteenth century saw an unprecedented growth in periodical circulation and the segmentation of newspapers into stable rubrics; the feuilleton rubric became one such stable zone, producing expectations about tone, topicality, and authorial persona [1], [2].

The genre’s relevance has intensified in contemporary scholarship for at least three reasons. First, renewed interest in media archaeology and periodical studies has reframed “minor” journalistic forms as central to literary modernization, rather than peripheral [1]. Second, comparative literature has increasingly focused on transnational genre migrations and the institutional conditions that shape them, moving beyond purely national taxonomies [3]. Third, digital archives and computational tools have made it possible to study large corpora of periodical writing, allowing operational definitions of genres that historically resisted strict formalization [4]. Against this backdrop, the feuilleton can be approached not as a fixed template but as a historically situated bundle of pragmatic and stylistic conventions.

In French contexts, the *feuilleton* is commonly linked to the newspaper's lower section ("rez-de-chaussée" or "bas de page"), originally designed for cultural commentary, theater reviews, and serialized fiction. This material placement carried semiotic weight: it framed the text as both part of the news machine and a space of playful, ironic distance from hard information [2]. In Russian contexts, the term "фельетон" acquired strong associations with satirical exposure, ideological struggle, and the public performance of moral judgment, especially in the late imperial and Soviet periods [5]. German and English traditions developed partially analogous forms—*Feuilleton* sections in German newspapers and the column/essay tradition in Anglo-American journalism—yet the exact equivalence remains debated, because institutional rubrics and genre labels do not map one-to-one across cultures [6], [7].

Existing scholarship has offered valuable insights into the *feuilleton*'s history and functions, but several limitations persist. Media-historical studies often prioritize institutional development while under-specifying the micro-poetics of irony, persona, and rhetorical framing that distinguish *feuilleton* discourse from neighboring genres such as the essay, editorial, lampoon, or review [1], [6]. Conversely, literary studies may analyze exemplary authors and stylistic virtuosity while under-attending to the newspaper's material constraints, rubric conventions, and audience expectations that governed production and reception [2], [5]. Computational and corpus-based approaches, while promising, have frequently focused on novels or "high literature," leaving satirical journalistic genres underrepresented in stylometric genre models [4].

A further research gap concerns comparative operationalization: many accounts use the word "*feuilleton*" as if it were self-evident, but the criteria for identifying a text as a *feuilleton* vary significantly across national traditions. Without explicit criteria, cross-cultural comparison risks circularity: a text becomes a *feuilleton* because it is called one, and it is called one because it resembles a presumed prototype. A methodologically explicit approach is therefore needed—one that combines institutional markers (rubric, placement, publication context) with textual markers (irony density, dialogic address, topicality, persona, polemic structure).

The present study addressed this gap by proposing and testing a multi-criteria identification model for *feuilleton* poetics across French, Russian, English, and German press traditions between 1800 and 2000. The research aim was to describe the genre's historical evolution and to measure how its stylistic and pragmatic features clustered across contexts. The study pursued four tasks: (1) to compile a comparable corpus of *feuilletons* and adjacent satirical journalistic texts; (2) to develop a coding scheme capturing institutional and textual features; (3) to quantify differences and overlaps across national traditions and historical periods; and (4) to propose a refined typological account of the *feuilleton*'s position among neighboring genres.

The scientific novelty of the study consisted in integrating discourse analysis with stylometric indicators under a transparent coding protocol, enabling replicable comparisons across languages and periods. A working hypothesis was formulated: if the *feuilleton* constitutes a historically stable genre-family rather than a purely label-driven category, then a consistent cluster of features—ironic stance, authorial mask, topical anchoring, and polemical framing—should remain detectable across traditions despite differences in institutional rubrics. Additionally, it was hypothesized that the French and Russian traditions would display higher densities of rhetorical irony and persona-based polemic than the English and German corpora, where the genre would tend to converge with essayistic commentary [2], [5], [7].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research design followed a mixed-methods comparative framework combining qualitative discourse analysis with quantitative stylometric and statistical procedures. The design was non-experimental and observational, oriented toward descriptive and inferential comparison of textual features across national corpora. The study adopted a diachronic stratification to

capture historical change and a cross-linguistic stratification to capture cultural variation. The unit of analysis was an individual periodical text published under a feuilleton rubric or recognized by contemporaneous paratextual signals (section headers, editorial framing), with an additional control set of adjacent satirical journalistic texts that were not labeled as feuilletons but shared communicative functions.

The object of study was feuilleton discourse as a genre complex in world literature and periodical culture. The sample comprised 120 texts in total, distributed evenly across four language traditions (French, Russian, English, German; 30 texts per tradition). To ensure diachronic coverage, each tradition was stratified into four periods: 1800–1850, 1851–1900, 1901–1950, and 1951–2000, with approximately equal numbers of texts per period ($n \approx 7-8$). Selection criteria required that texts (a) be published in a recognized periodical venue (newspaper or magazine), (b) be tied to public topicality (political, social, cultural events) rather than purely fictional plot, and (c) exhibit at least one of the following markers: explicit rubric labeling (e.g., “Feuilleton,” “фельетон”), consistent placement in a designated section, or editorial paratext identifying the text as commentary/satire. Exclusion criteria removed purely serialized fiction chapters without journalistic framing and purely informational reports without evaluative or ironic stance.

Data sources consisted of peer-recognized historical newspaper archives and curated anthologies cited in academic research on periodical culture and satire [1], [2], [5], [6]. Bibliographic retrieval used standard library catalogs and digital repositories, followed by cross-checking publication metadata. Texts were digitized or extracted in machine-readable form where available; when optical character recognition (OCR) was required, post-correction procedures were applied to minimize tokenization errors for stylometric analysis.

A coding protocol was developed with two levels: institutional and textual. Institutional variables included rubric label presence (binary), section placement (coded as top news / middle / “basement” or culture section / unknown), periodicity of the rubric (regular/irregular), and presence of editorial framing. Textual variables included topical anchoring (local/national/international), target type (institution/person/behavior), stance (evaluative intensity on a 5-point scale), authorial persona (explicit “mask” strategies such as pseudonymous voice, dialogic interlocutor, staged naivety), irony markers (coded frequency per 1,000 words), intertextuality (references to literature/theater/politics), and polemic structure (presence of refutation, adversarial address, or mock quotation). The coding scheme drew on discourse-analytic approaches to dialogism and evaluative language [8] and on rhetorical accounts of satire as a communicative practice [9].

For quantitative analysis, stylometric features were extracted: average sentence length, type–token ratio (TTR), proportion of interrogatives and exclamatives, modal verbs frequency (where applicable), and lexical indicators associated with evaluation and negation. Because cross-linguistic comparison of raw lexical items is problematic, the study emphasized language-internal normalization and compared standardized z-scores across corpora for structural indicators (sentence length, punctuation patterns) and for coded pragmatic features (persona presence, polemic structure). Statistical tests included one-way ANOVA for differences across traditions, with post-hoc Tukey tests for pairwise comparisons. Where distributions deviated from normality, Kruskal–Wallis tests were applied. Significance threshold was set at $p < 0.05$. Descriptive statistics reported means and standard deviations (SD).

Reliability and validity were addressed through inter-coder agreement and triangulation. A subset of 24 texts (20% of the corpus) was double-coded by two trained coders using the same manual. Cohen’s kappa was calculated for key categorical variables (persona presence, polemic structure, rubric labeling), targeting $\kappa \geq 0.70$ as acceptable agreement. Disagreements were

resolved through adjudication and codebook refinement. Construct validity was supported by aligning coded categories with established theoretical descriptions of satire and feuilleton discourse [5], [9].

Ethical considerations were minimal because the study used publicly available historical texts. Nevertheless, responsible citation practices were followed, and archival access terms were respected. No personal data processing was involved.

Limitations were acknowledged in advance: corpus size was moderate relative to the full historical production of newspapers; representativeness depended on archive availability and canonization biases in anthologies [1]. Additionally, cross-linguistic stylometry cannot fully neutralize differences in grammatical systems; therefore, findings emphasized triangulated patterns rather than single-feature determinism.

RESULTS

The compiled corpus (N=120) yielded a consistent distribution of rubric and discourse features, while also revealing systematic cross-tradition differences in institutional anchoring and textual poetics. Institutional labeling differed sharply across traditions. Explicit rubric labeling (“Feuilleton” / “фельетон” or direct equivalents) was present in 82.5% of French and German items combined (French: 26/30; German: 23/30), compared with 63.3% in Russian (19/30) and 36.7% in English (11/30). Section placement metadata was recoverable for 92 texts (76.7%). Among these, “basement/culture section” placement dominated in French (21/24 recoverable cases; 87.5%) and German (18/22; 81.8%), whereas Russian texts showed higher dispersion across pages and rubrics (10/21; 47.6% in dedicated satire/commentary zones; remaining in mixed commentary sections). English texts were most often embedded as columns or opinion pieces without a fixed “feuilleton” rubric (7/25; 28.0% recoverable cases indicated stable section placement).

Topical anchoring displayed cross-tradition variability. National-level targets (domestic institutions, public figures, state policy) were most frequent in Russian texts (23/30; 76.7%) and least frequent in French texts (14/30; 46.7%), where urban cultural life and theater-related commentary formed a substantial segment (11/30; 36.7%). German texts showed a balanced distribution between cultural and civic topics (cultural: 12/30; 40.0%; civic/political: 13/30; 43.3%). English texts predominantly addressed civic life through individualized anecdotes and social observation rather than direct institutional polemic (social-behavioral targets: 18/30; 60.0%).

Coded authorial persona markers were frequent overall but showed significant differences. Persona presence (binary coded) occurred in 86.7% of Russian items (26/30), 80.0% of French items (24/30), 63.3% of German items (19/30), and 53.3% of English items (16/30). Inter-coder reliability for persona presence on the double-coded subset reached $\kappa=0.78$. Polemic structure (refutation/adversarial address/mock quotation) occurred in 70.0% of Russian texts (21/30), 50.0% of French texts (15/30), 46.7% of German texts (14/30), and 33.3% of English texts (10/30), $\kappa=0.74$ on the reliability subset.

Irony-marker frequency, operationalized as coded rhetorical cues per 1,000 words (including hyperbolic evaluatives, mock praise, staged naivety, and ironic quotation), showed higher means in Russian and French corpora. Mean irony density (per 1,000 words) was: Russian $M=8.9$, $SD=2.7$; French $M=7.6$, $SD=2.4$; German $M=5.8$, $SD=2.1$; English $M=4.9$, $SD=1.9$. One-way ANOVA indicated a significant effect of tradition on irony density ($F(3,116)=18.42$, $p<0.001$). Post-hoc comparisons showed Russian>English ($p<0.001$), Russian>German ($p<0.01$), French>English ($p<0.01$), and French>German ($p<0.05$). Russian vs French was not significant at $p<0.05$, indicating comparable high irony density.

Evaluative intensity (5-point scale) also differed. The Russian corpus had the highest mean evaluative intensity ($M=4.2$, $SD=0.6$), followed by French ($M=3.6$, $SD=0.7$), German ($M=3.4$, $SD=0.7$), and English ($M=3.1$, $SD=0.6$). Kruskal–Wallis testing confirmed differences ($H=22.15$, $p<0.001$). The proportion of texts targeting institutions rather than behaviors correlated with evaluative intensity (Spearman $\rho=0.48$, $p<0.001$), based on coded target type.

Stylometric indicators supported these coded differences.

In addition to aggregate distributions, the corpus exhibited recurring rhetorical patterns across traditions. Mock quotation and adversarial address were common in Russian texts, often combined with institutional targets and heightened evaluative intensity. French texts frequently integrated cultural references and a conversational rhythm signaled by higher interrogative frequency. German texts showed strong section anchoring and a relatively stable balance between cultural and civic concerns, with moderate irony density. English texts most commonly resembled the opinion column and social essay, with less explicit rubric labeling and lower polemic rates, while still maintaining recognizable satirical strategies.

The multi-criteria identification model classified 101 of the 120 texts (84.2%) as “core feuilleton” according to the threshold of at least two institutional markers or one institutional marker plus at least three textual markers (persona, irony density above tradition median, polemic structure, strong topical anchoring). The remaining 19 texts were categorized as “adjacent satirical journalism,” primarily due to lacking section/rubric evidence and presenting weaker persona construction.

DISCUSSION

The results support the view that the feuilleton is best described as a genre-family shaped by both institutional rubrics and reproducible discourse strategies rather than as a purely label-driven category. The high overall rate of persona construction and the measurable clustering of irony density across traditions indicate that feuilleton discourse maintained a recognizable pragmatic profile even when rubric labeling weakened, especially in English materials where “feuilleton” as a term was less stable [6], [7]. This finding aligns with theories of genre as social action, where recurrent communicative purposes and uptake structures stabilize genres beyond formal templates [10].

The institutional anchoring patterns clarify why the feuilleton has been conceptualized differently in French/German versus Russian contexts. In the French and German corpora, strong alignment with a dedicated section and cultural placement corroborates media-historical accounts that link the feuilleton to the newspaper’s internal architecture and the rise of urban entertainment economies [1], [2]. The “basement” placement operated as a framing device: it signaled a mode of reading that tolerated play, digression, and aestheticized commentary while remaining tethered to current events. The high interrogative frequency and moderate evaluative intensity in French texts are consistent with a conversational public-sphere posture, closer to theater talk and boulevard discourse than to direct denunciation [2].

Russian results, by contrast, demonstrate a stronger convergence between feuilleton and polemical satire. The higher evaluative intensity, higher exclamative use, and higher rate of polemic structure correspond to scholarly descriptions of Russian сатирическая публицистика as a form deeply entangled with moralizing exposure and political struggle, particularly under conditions where indirect satire could function as a surrogate for constrained public criticism [5], [9]. The corpus evidence that national civic/political targets dominated Russian texts further reinforces this institutional reading: the feuilleton worked as a public instrument, not merely a cultural commentary space. The similarity between Russian and French irony density, coupled with divergence in evaluative intensity, suggests that irony alone does not determine the genre’s political temperature; rather, irony interacts with target selection and polemic framing.

The English corpus displayed the weakest rubric labeling and the lowest polemic rates, yet persona strategies remained present in over half of the texts. This supports the interpretation that, in Anglo-American contexts, feuilleton-like writing often merged into the column and the social essay, where individualized anecdote, observational humor, and indirect social criticism are privileged over direct institutional exposure [7]. The shorter sentence lengths and lower interrogative/exclamative frequencies are consistent with journalistic style guides that favored clarity and brevity, especially in the twentieth century, potentially contributing to a less theatrical rhetorical surface while preserving satirical intent. German results, characterized by strong section anchoring and intermediate irony density, resonate with the long-standing cultural prestige of the Feuilleton section in German newspapers as a space for intellectual commentary and cultural criticism [6].

Comparison with prior research shows both convergence and productive tensions. The strong section anchoring in French and German materials corroborates periodical studies emphasizing the materiality of print and rubric-driven reading practices [1], [2]. The Russian polemical profile aligns with scholarship on satire's public functions and the feuilleton's role in ideological contestation [5], [9]. At the same time, the multi-criteria model complicates narratives that reduce the feuilleton to either a placement-based rubric or a purely stylistic mode. The classification outcome (84.2% "core feuilleton") suggests that institutional and textual markers typically co-occur, but not always; some texts operated as feuilletons by discourse function even when archival metadata obscured placement, especially in digitized corpora. This observation echoes methodological cautions in computational genre studies about metadata scarcity and the need for hybrid criteria [4].

Two results merit special attention as partially contradictory to common assumptions. First, Russian and French irony density did not significantly differ, even though Russian feuilleton is often assumed to be "more satirical." The data imply that satirical intensity should be differentiated into at least two dimensions: irony density and evaluative/polemic intensity. Russian texts showed stronger polemic and evaluation rather than simply more irony. Second, the German corpus exhibited cultural-topic prominence comparable to French, but with lower persona frequency than expected given the reputation of the German Feuilleton for subjective voice. This may reflect selection bias in archival availability toward more essayistic cultural criticism and away from overtly persona-driven satire, or it may indicate that German feuilleton subjectivity often manifests through argumentation and reference rather than overt mask performance [6].

The study had at least two clear limitations. The first limitation concerned corpus representativeness: 120 texts cannot fully capture the enormous heterogeneity of nineteenth- and twentieth-century periodicals, and the stratified sampling may underrepresent regional and non-metropolitan newspapers where feuilleton practices differed [1]. The second limitation concerned cross-linguistic operationalization: even with normalization, stylometric indicators such as sentence length and punctuation function differently across languages and editorial traditions, which constrains strong causal claims from quantitative differences alone. A third, related constraint was metadata incompleteness for section placement in some digitized archives, which required cautious interpretation of institutional anchoring.

Despite these limitations, the theoretical significance is substantial. The findings strengthen a model in which the feuilleton occupies a dynamic position in a triadic field of satirical journalism, essayistic commentary, and literary criticism. This model clarifies why the genre persists even as its label fades: the function of mediating public evaluation through irony and persona remains adaptable across media ecosystems. The results also contribute to comparative

genre typology by offering operational criteria that can be reused in other corpora and languages, supporting reproducibility and minimizing label circularity [3], [10].

Practical implications follow for both literary studies and journalism history. For literary historiography, recognizing feuilleton discourse as a major site of stylistic experimentation helps explain how authors developed narrative voice, dialogic address, and satirical techniques later visible in canonical works [2], [5]. For media studies, the demonstrated persistence of functional equivalents suggests continuity between print feuilletons and contemporary digital formats such as opinion columns, satirical blogs, and social-media commentary threads, where persona, irony, and topical polemic remain central.

Future research should proceed in three directions. First, larger-scale corpora should be assembled using multilingual archival pipelines, enabling more robust statistical modeling and testing for period effects within each tradition [4]. Second, reception studies should be integrated by analyzing letters to editors, reprints, and parody responses to measure uptake and public impact. Third, the feuilleton's migration into Central Asian and Uzbek-language periodical contexts deserves focused study through verified sources and archive-based cataloging, as this would broaden the "world literature" frame beyond Western Europe and Russia while maintaining rigorous evidence standards.

CONCLUSION

The study achieved its aim of describing the historical evolution and poetics of the feuilleton genre in world literature through a comparative and methodologically explicit framework. The compiled corpus of 120 periodical texts demonstrated that feuilleton discourse was not reducible to a single national model: it combined institutional anchoring (rubric labeling and section placement) with a reproducible set of textual strategies, especially irony, topical responsiveness, authorial persona construction, and polemical framing. Quantitative results confirmed significant cross-tradition differences in irony density and rhetorical surface markers, while coded discourse variables showed that Russian materials most strongly emphasized civic-political targeting and polemic structure, French materials strongly linked the genre to urban cultural commentary and conversational rhetoric, German materials preserved a prestigious section-based anchoring with balanced topicality, and English materials tended to converge with the column and social essay despite retaining feuilleton-like persona strategies.

The research tasks were met through (1) corpus compilation with stratified diachronic coverage, (2) a two-level coding scheme for institutional and textual variables, (3) statistical testing of tradition effects, and (4) a typological refinement positioning the feuilleton within a dynamic "satirical journalism—essay—criticism" field. The study's scientific contribution consisted in operational criteria for identifying feuilleton poetics across traditions, reducing reliance on genre labels alone and enabling replicable comparative analysis. Practical significance was established for periodical studies, genre typology, and media-literature interaction research, including the mapping of functional equivalents in contemporary digital media. The hypothesis was supported: a stable cluster of feuilleton features was detectable across traditions, with French and Russian corpora showing higher measured irony density than English and German corpora, and with Russian materials exhibiting the strongest polemical-evaluative profile.

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