

T H E U N I V E R S I T Y

Chimères



Volume XXVI

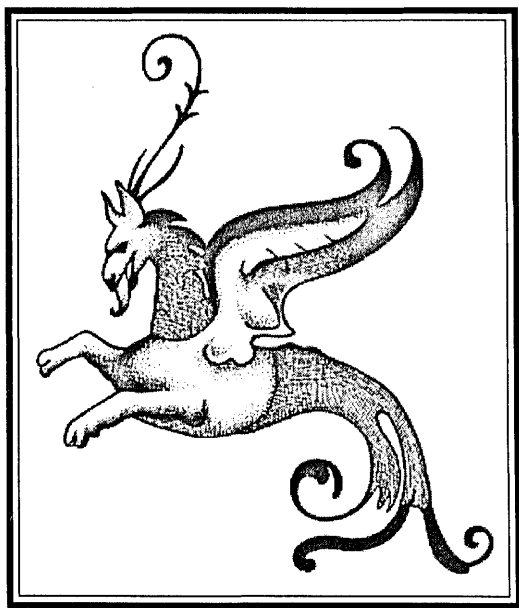
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O F K A N S A S

Chimères

A Journal of French Literature



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— Gloria MELGAREJO —

“La littérature permet de conserver sa conscience d’homme”¹

Gao Xingjian

Lorsqu’en août dernier nous avons commencé une nouvelle année de travail avec *Chimères*, j’ai voulu partager avec mes collègues quelques réflexions de Gao Xingjian, le premier écrivain de langue chinoise couronné par le Prix Nobel de Littérature en 2000. C’était surtout parce qu’elles venaient de quelqu’un qui avait choisi le français pour s’exprimer et révéler son écriture, une écriture qui est née de l’exil et de la dissidence, de quelqu’un qui croit toujours à la force de l’individu comme dernier appel à une conscience universelle et qui revendique la création sans contraintes. Quelques mois plus tard, c’est toujours le moment d’y adhérer, d’abord en raison des événements qui ont eu lieu aux États-Unis le 11 septembre 2001, mais aussi par rapport aux grandes questions qui interrogent le domaine de la conscience et de l’idéal d’une Paix universelle.

Pour le présent numéro de la revue, j’ai eu le privilège de travailler avec une équipe très motivée. D’autres collègues étudiants du département y ont participé très volontiers. Cette fois, notre choix d’articles se fait en éventail et nous permet de vous présenter des analyses très diverses et passionnantes telles que : « Jacques Réda and Jazz : Making Poetry Swing, or Being There, Almost », par Aaron Prevots, récent diplômé d’un doctorat à Brown University ; « Enfin Sartre vint : D’un théâtre de la fatalité à un théâtre de la liberté », par Dennis Gilbert, étudiant de doctorat à Boston College ; « Mémoire et imagination dans la *Vie de Henry Brulard* », par Zahi Zalloua, étudiant à Princeton University ; « Le théâtre ruine de *Savannah Bay* », par Vassiliki Flenga, Professeur à Ramapo College of New Jersey ; « Cracking the Codes : Social Class and Gender in Annie Ernaux », par Bethany Ladimer, Professeur et Chef du département de Français à Middlebury College et « La société esclavagiste vue par une Bekée des Antilles », par Benjamin Ngong, étudiant de doctorat à l’Université du Minnesota.

¹ Entretien publié dans *Label France* N 43, avril 2001.

Je remercie très spécialement le Professeur Bruce Hayes, récemment incorporé au Département de Français et Italien de notre université, qui a si gentiment accepté d'écrire notre *Carte Blanche*, et le Professeur Caroline Jewers, pour son appui permanent et enthousiaste au niveau des idées et des suggestions pour la revue. Ma reconnaissance va aussi à Daniela Teodorescu, qui a trouvé du temps pour collaborer à la révision finale, et à Angela Fines, créatrice de notre page sur Internet, qui nous quitte bientôt pour faire une maîtrise en Etudes Médiévales à l'Université de Toronto.

Au plaisir de lire, de vivre de littérature, si l'on peut, et fidèles à l'esprit chimérique, toujours en quête de la meilleure des consciences...

University of Kansas

C a r t e b l a n c h e

Bruce HAYES

As the newest faculty member in French at the University of Kansas, I am delighted to be asked to contribute a 'carte blanche' piece for *Chimères*. After reflecting on the many possible pertinent subjects I could address in this forum, I have decided to write about the classroom. One of the things that made an academic career enticing to me early on was the somewhat simplistic idea that it was a field devoid of the hierarchies of traditional corporate institutions, and as I naively used to brag to friends before the era of business casual, being an academic meant not having to wear a tie to work and not sitting in a cubicle. I have since learned that hierarchies exist wherever you are, along with their inherent conflicts, and while my friends working on Wall Street have donated their suits to charity, I often find myself wearing a tie to school and sitting in an office with four walls and no windows.

The hierarchies we encounter in academia take many forms—students and teachers, faculty and administrators, graduate students and everyone else (undergraduates, faculty, administration, to name a few), or the more subtle hierarchies such as tenured faculty and junior faculty, tenure-track faculty and adjunct faculty, instructors and graduate students, new graduate students and their veteran counterparts, and the list goes on. Earlier this semester I was at the bookstore checking to see if books I had ordered for a class had come in, and I noticed something I have seen year after year, first as an undergraduate, then as a graduate instructor, and finally as a professor—the generic use of the word “Instructor,” followed by either the eponymous “Staff” or the instructor’s name. My thought was that the classroom is one of the great equalizers of many of our self-created hierarchies; students, specifically undergraduate students, aren’t terribly interested in understanding the nuance between a full professor and an assistant professor, or between an associate professor and a graduate instructor. Whatever our position at the community college, college, or university where we teach, we are all ‘Instructors.’

For many of us, teaching and learning is our passion and our *raison d'être*. It is often a welcome intrusion when we must leave our cloistered existence of the library and enter the classroom. In recent years, I have

heard much about the need to integrate teaching and research, as demands on our time are great and efficiency is a necessity. With interdisciplinary studies on the rise, the classroom becomes a marvelous laboratory to experiment with concepts and ideas outside of our own more narrowly defined specializations. As someone who specializes in French Renaissance literature, I have had the interesting experience this year of teaching culture classes, including one on contemporary France. I am not trained as an historian, an economist, a sociologist, or any other number of disciplines, and yet by teaching such classes, I have been prodded into becoming more proficient in all of these areas. I have always thought of scholarly work as being the business of decoding signs and inserting them into larger contexts, and the classroom is an optimal place to move out of one's comfort zone and explore new areas and make new connections.

In the classroom, being a foremost expert on the topic at hand is not necessarily even an asset; rather, students often form a collective *tabula rasa* that will be filled not by our pedantic pontifications, but by our enthusiasm and interest in the subjects being presented. Yes, students expect us to know what we're talking about, but also, and perhaps more importantly, they want us to *like* what we're doing and to be interested in them and their progress. Once they believe that we care, they are willing to forgive many of our idiosyncrasies and imperfections.

It is worth remembering that when all of the hierarchies are set aside, all of the academic specializations dismantled, we are all 'Instructors'. As humanists, we should care about our role as instructors. Most of the research we do, although personally satisfying and invigorating, will soon be forgotten by all but a few, falling into an infinite abyss of erudition; teaching, on the other hand, is the one aspect of our profession in which we have the chance to have a lasting influence. I am grateful to hold the title of instructor; while I may not have the carefree life I had envisioned as an undergraduate contemplating this career, I still think I have one of the best jobs in the world.

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