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A JOURNAL OF FRENCH LITERATURE

OF KANSAS

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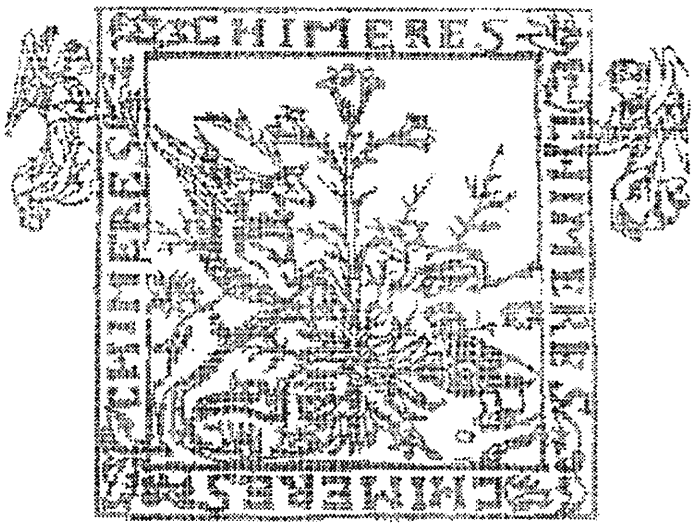

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We extend our appreciation to the Faculty and Staff in the Department of French & Italian, the Graduate Student Organization Fund, and Ms. Pam LeRow from the College Word Processing Center at the University of Kansas for their generous assistance and support of this journal.

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From the desk of the editor

Tina ISAAC

The Department of French & Italian at the University of Kansas is pleased to present our new issue of *Chimères*. This issue has been a collaborative one that bridges two separate groups of editorial members. The first team, composed of Ingrid Horton, Florence Lenotte, Mirielle Machefert, Laurence Thomas and Allyson Zinder, worked harmoniously as young professionals to select and edit the current articles. I thank them for their time, energy and generous sense of professionalism. The second team, whose members include Malika Alaoui, Ingrid Horton, Gloria Malgarero, Stéphanie Richard and Daniela Teodorescu, also contributed to the final editing of what I believe to be an excellent issue.

Our publication includes articles that cover various perspectives and topics in French Literature. These articles are original in thought and testify to the abundance of advancing critical talent in our profession. The first selection, written by Professor Florence Goulesque, deliberates on the works of Marie Krysinska, a relatively unknown figure in general French literary discussions. Professor Goulesque brings Krysinska's œuvre to life through a suggestive, critical style that echoes the fluidity of the poet's own composition. I am proud to announce that her completed study on Krysinska will be published by Honoré Champion in the near future. Following, Ms. Annelie Fitzgerald delivers a new and profound twist to Voltaire's celebrated and infamous tale, "Candide." As readers, we will never again laugh as heartily without remembering Ms. Fitzgerald's insightful comments on this amazing and popular short story. Professor Thierry Durand, in our third selection, furnished us with a stimulating examination of one of France's most enigmatic poets. His essay contains critical ideas that encourage us to reconsider the mysterious nature of the erudite writer, Maurice Blanchot. And finally, Professor Linda Rouillard's comparative essay on Jean Renart, with its catchy title, reminds us that literature from the Middle Ages continues to provide us with ancient lessons applicable to modern living. Thanks to all of our contributors for their fine examples of academic scholarship.

Most importantly, I am pleased to present to our readership a very unique *carte blanche* written by our department's newest faculty

member. Professor Maureen Gillespie comes to the University of Kansas with impressive credentials from New York University, Middlebury College and Rutgers University. She has distinguished herself by presenting original interpretations of French literature from the Medieval and Renaissance periods. Equally, as the Director of our department's French Language Program, she demonstrates the uncanny ability to energize and reconfigure the changing demands of the introductory and intermediate courses. Her practical approach, motivational skills and high expectations for excellence are not unnoticed by those who work with her. I extend a special appreciation to Professor Gillespie for her contribution to our publication.

Carte blanche

Maureen GILLESPIE

I warmly thank the editorial staff of *Chimères* for giving me *carte blanche* to introduce this issue. I applaud their efforts as they produce their journal and support their engagement in professional endeavors. Before heading into the office this morning, I will do my best to compose my thoughts on our profession. As I have found during my first year as a tenure-track faculty member, words of wisdom are not likely to spring forth before my deadline. And, if muses were to visit me, they would probably lose patience and leave rather than wait in the long line that forms outside my office door.

I feel particularly *blanche* as I write at the very end of the academic year at the University of Kansas, tired not only from the rigorous pace of the semester but also from a recent job-search experience. Thinking about all that I need to do to keep (and on good days, to advance) in my position also drains the color out of my cheeks. So, have I entered a profession in which I am destined to be a pale, weary academic who would answer the innocuous "how are you" with a depleted "I'm so busy," or an anguished "who wants to know?"

Perhaps I am also *blanche*, as in naive, thinking that, no, this will not happen to me, that I will bounce back renewed and restored for year two. I am optimistic because during summer vacation, now only days away, I will catch up on reading, research, and rest. I am also energized having just presented at the International Congress on Medieval Studies, where having seen so many of the people whose scholarship and collegiality have inspired me over the years, I am reminded of the reasons why I wanted to become a professor.

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Since I work with conversion narratives, I listen attentively to people telling stories of life-altering moments of epiphany, revelation, and discovery. I would bet that however busy we may be during the semester, when prompted, we could all recall when, where, and why we chose this path: our favorite professor, our most exciting reading experience, our first trip to France. But, remembrance of such things past is insufficient to move forward. The people in the profession whom I admire most keep

their passions present, develop new interests, and share their work with peers and students. Affinities, however idiosyncratic, need not isolate us from one another. There are only so many days that we can stay at home working in our bathrobe in front of the computer (I think back to my own dissertation days), before we want to, or have to, circulate our work, if for no other reason than to sharpen our arguments. We should look for novel perspectives, new audiences, and easier ways to communicate. We need feedback, both positive and negative, from peers, students, and the larger community in order to remain vibrant and productive.

The busier I become, the more I appreciate the time my mentors graciously afforded me over the years, especially during my job searches. Their involvement in my work continues to be invaluable. In a small way here, I hope to return the favor, by encouraging graduate students in French to define their intellectual and professional goals and to prepare for a very competitive job market. I suggest to them to find the people who will read and critique their CV and cover letter, who will help assemble teaching materials, and who will play the role of interviewer. I urge them to speak clearly and confidently about their work, and to retain a positive attitude during a long and difficult process. It is essential to filter out the negative voices, to transform complaints into innovative ideas, and to strive for excellence, not perfection.

From my limited experience, I have learned that a professorship is not something that just happens because it has been a life-long dream, because one is a genius, or because one gets lucky at the MLA. A career in the academy is neither a punctual event nor a solitary enterprise. Rather, it is a work in progress that requires respectful, supportive relationships. Interested, accessible colleagues make work pleasant and engaging. Such peers are even more helpful as the reality of salary review, grants, publications, and tenure comes into focus. I do not know why I underestimated the role of such evaluations and competitions. What has become obvious to me is that "professing" has everything to do with openly inviting comments and criticisms, and responding with interest and confidence. Before finding the winning combination of scholarship, teaching, and service necessary for tenure, one realizes that these three criteria are not discrete categories of performance, but rather a coherent, integrated approach to a successful, rewarding career.

This brings us back to the fact that everyone is always really busy; and that the truly happy few, besides being very hard-working, are also forward-looking. I truly respect their resilience as the university, its mission and its students, undergoes profound changes. As a medievalist, I defer to tradition: intellectual, spiritual, pedagogical, and even

institutional; and I appreciate the ideas and advice that have informed and inspired my professional work. Nevertheless, I recognize the absolute certainty of and necessity for innovation and expansion. I do not see the academy as a static, inviolate construct. In this age of technological advancement and economic prosperity, we are not the sole proprietors or arbitrators of knowledge. Borders between the university and the workplace are porous, and classroom walls are giving way to computer screens.

Many colleagues renounce these transformations as the "commercialization" of American higher education or the "consumer mentality" among students and administrators. They fear that the liberal arts will be swallowed up in a push for more profitable studies. Coming from a socio-economic milieu where we always talked about college degrees in terms of price tag (in fact, I only recently paid off my student loans!) and professional payoff, I have to admit that I do not consider the ideas of consumption, cost, and benefit as plagues visited upon the venerable study of French. Nor do I think it is beneath me, my colleagues, or my students to think of our work in such terms. Like it or not, higher education is a huge business; and on both sides of the desk, the players are very heavily invested. All parties should be able to frankly discuss their goals and expectations as well as the value and evaluation of their work.

While interviewing, these and related topics were on the table. I listened politely while faculty bemoaned the lack of students in French and/or the lack of achievement of the few students remaining in our field. I would like to think that one of the reasons I actually got a job is because I offered positive responses. We now have to find and retain students. In order to compete with other "foreign" language departments, we need to be aggressive and creative in our approaches and methods. We have to re-articulate the reasons why the study of French language, literature, and culture is an enriching venture in the 21st century.

And if students are ill-prepared for their chosen program of study, well, we have to bring them up to proficiency faster. We must teach our students with respect, while holding realistic goals and rigorous standards. It saddens me to hear faculty belittle students who struggle to catch up. I once heard a professor call a student *inculte*. Besides being mean, he missed the essential point: that it is our job *to cultivate* students. If students were to arrive at the university perfectly formed, what would we have left to do? Similarly, I often find the criticism of students too harsh and even disingenuous. It would do us good to re-read one of our own undergraduate, and even graduate, papers. Perhaps

some of us were always insightful, engaging, and motivated students. But, I suspect that upon honest reflection, most of us would admit to having been a shade darker than brilliant for much of our career. Since many of us still make the occasional mistake, search for the appropriate word, or rely on the work of others (explaining the proliferation of software, reference books, and journals) why should we be so surprised or offended when our students do the same?

I have no intention of building a career in an ivory tower where an elite merely ponders and pontificates on theories of equality, then complains about students who enter needing an education. I want to work in an environment where people of different ages, different economic backgrounds, different races, and different talents come together to pursue both individual advancement and a common good, and who will hopefully find my work as a scholar, teacher, and administrator relevant and important. I will support programming that makes higher education more affordable, accessible, and useful to more students.

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To end on a personal note, nothing is clearer to me than the importance of higher education in fulfilling personal ambitions and democratizing a society. Only one of my parents graduated high school; neither parent nor any of their siblings attended college. They, perhaps even more than the scores of excellent professors I have had in my years in the university, planted the idea that an education would change my life. They did not see a college degree, certainly not an advanced degree, as an entitlement or a dalliance. They supported me in my choice to pursue a career with a comparatively risky return. They could not have read much of what crosses my desk on any given day; they never saw the places I have traveled since studying French in earnest. But more than anyone else, they wanted me to arrive wherever my potential would be realized. Perhaps because they themselves had felt excluded from the academy and its trappings, they profoundly understood that knowledge was power, and that knowledge tempered with wisdom, wit, and patience was precious.

Generosity barely begins to describe people who can give what they do not have, and who can inspire others to achieve what they themselves will never realize. I remember this as I meet colleagues. We have been privileged with intelligence and opportunity. We mark the achievements of our lives with diplomas and publications. The least we can do is share our talent and good fortune. We must look for the glimmer of interest and potential in undergraduate and graduate students for each student has a story, each has goals, each is on a path of self-discovery. It is an honor

and a privilege for us to light their way. Our fatigue and frustration are passing; they cannot overshadow the profession.