

EDITOR'S NOTE

Twenty Years of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* Vingt ans de la *Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée*

The *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* published its first issue in the Winter of 1974. The present issue (September-December 1993, Volume 20.3/4) marks, therefore, the accomplishment of a cycle of twenty years. To celebrate this occasion, Steven Tóth de Zepetnek (the journal's assistant editor and desk-top publisher) and Yan Qigang (a graduate student editorial assistant) compiled a *Cumulative Index*, following this note.

When the journal was founded by the Canadian Comparative Literature Association / Association Canadienne de Littérature Comparée, this was done on the basis of a large consensus about editorial policies and structures, as well as about financial and other material conditions. As the founding editor, I tried to express this agreement succinctly in the "Prolegomena" prefacing the first issue (1.1 [Winter 1974]: 1-7); a more detailed account was published earlier in the Association's newsletter, *Littérature Comparée au Canada / Comparative Literature in Canada* 4.2 (Autumn 1972 Fall): 7ff, 13, 16.

The stated desire was "that the new periodical should *ideally* exhibit the following characteristics: be significantly Canadian and at the same time international; be catholic in scope and competitive in quality with the best existing periodicals" ("Prolegomena," 3). Among the specific editorial goals were inscribed the following: "the *Review* should provide an outlet for scholars engaged in the *study of literature from an international, multilingual, and interdisciplinary point of view*. The *Review* will define Comparative Literature in the broadest manner and deal with the history of literature (periods, movements, schools, authors, themes and motifs, genres and forms — without geographical, linguistic, or temporal limitations), with the theory of literature and literary criticism, with methods of literary scholarship, and with the comparison of literature with other spheres of artistic expression. The *Review* will be a guardian of sound scholarship, open to different methodological approaches and interests, and ready to pursue experiments and innovations." ("Prolegomena," 4; italics in the original.) Later in the introductory statement, a particular interest in literary translations was also mentioned (7). Special obligations were acknowledged "towards the CCLA/ACLC, [and] towards the

cultural life of the country" (4). Therefore, the pledge that the new *Review* will "encourage contributions on interlingual and international aspects of the literatures in Canada, and promote the study of literatures neglected to a certain extent by existing journals. In this spirit, the journal will be open to all qualified contributors, but an attempt will be made to have at least half of the contents contributed by Canadian scholars and scholars working at Canadian universities and schools" (5).

Very deliberately, the term "all qualified contributors" was meant to include both genders, seasoned and young scholars (comprising also students), all nations and races, all sexual, political, philosophical, and religious persuasions. Among the many practical decisions, mostly summarized in the same "Prolegomena," stand out the following: "the periodical will be mainly in French and English, with quotations in any language, provided the text is, for technical reasons, transcribed into Roman characters and, in the case of unfamiliar languages, followed by a translation. If justified by the topic or by other circumstances, articles will be accepted in other languages (e.g., German, Spanish, Russian)" (5). To implement these policies, the CCLA/ACLC appointed an advisory board, an editorial committee, a secretariat (at the University of Alberta), and an editor. Although, with time, there have been significant changes in the composition of these bodies, reflecting developments in the discipline, the arrival of younger scholars, and practical necessities, their designated functions have been maintained.

A cursory quantitative analysis of the *Cumulative Index* shows that the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* has published in the twenty years of its existence almost 11,000 printed pages, with over 1,200 contributions by over 1,000 collaborators. With the exception of topical issues and thematic clusters, as well as book reviews — usually prepared by invitation — the acceptance rate has hovered around 25% of all submissions. A break-down by the main categories used in the journal and, especially, in the *Cumulative Index*, yields the following approximate data: In addition to the now discontinued yearly *Revue des Revues* and the new *Review of Scholarship*, there are 10 topical issues and 4 thematic clusters (the latter being a relatively recent innovation); there are about 330 articles (of which 89, i.e. 27%, by women); there are some 45 notes, documents, and review articles (of which 14, i.e. 31%, by women); there are about 830 book reviews (of which 194, i.e. 23%, by women); and of the 7 contributors to the various bibliographies (18 in all), 3 (i.e. 37.5%) are women. The average press-run is 700 copies, but certain topical issues have reached a much wider audience.

We have yet to tabulate the collaborators' affiliations and domiciles, and we utterly lack the data to analyse the age groups and academic career phases to which our authors may belong. Such questions are never asked and the gender statistics rely on the recognition of first names — a tricky matter in some cases

and impossible with initials. Nevertheless, reports prepared by assessors mandated by the SSHRC/CCRS and the Canada Council/Conseil des Arts du Canada, as well as my own knowledge of and intuitions about contributors seem to prove that the journal has fulfilled the early promises about open and fair editorial policies. The *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* has attracted, without any doubt, a very significant number of scholars. They range in their respective position within the academic career pattern from graduate student to professor emeritus and embody a broad spectrum of Canadian academic endeavours; they also include numerous colleagues from the United States and abroad — representing diverse parts of the world: from the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, to Central and East Central European countries, the Middle East, and China.

Thematically and methodologically the *Review* has been host to most current interests and trends in Comparative Literature and the adjoining disciplines, reflecting for the past twenty years both traditional and the ever evolving new concerns of international scholarship. Among the topics, there are examples of inquiries into oral literature, "high" and "low" literature, European letters (in the main languages and those of lesser diffusion), and writing from all parts of the world. Among the methodologies, there are many examples of eclecticism, but also of traditional so called French and so called American comparative studies, of phenomenology and hermeneutics, formalism(s), diverse systemic approaches, psychological (and psychoanalytical) probings, social and gender studies, discourse analyses, postmodern theories, etc.

General issues of the journal, and to some extent even topical issues which have planned contents, largely reflect the "spontaneous interests" of scholars working in the discipline who care to see their work published in this outlet. (While attempting, with the aid of Canadian and foreign specialists, to determine which submitted articles and other studies were "the best" or the "most interesting" — assuredly an elusive, fallible, and problematic judgement but which is unavoidable in this kind of enterprise, I was strenuously trying to ensure that fashions, individual preferences or group biases will not discriminate against any particular topic, approach, or person. When in doubt — and not so infrequently we received five or more quite divergent assessments — I preferred to err finally on the side of inclusion, especially in the case of controversial opinions.) Therefore, a less cursory analysis of the contents of the *Review* than the one presented here, might well discern patterns of evolution which are characteristic of the discipline as a whole, at least in its Canadian (and U.S.A.?) manifestations, and not only a matter of a journal's editorial preferences.

My own overriding impression is that there is in our discipline an ever increasing methodological awareness and sophistication, with strong, not to say, aggressive favouring of theoretical questions (including those anchored in epistemological, psychological, and sociological concerns). This interest is

increasingly crystalized around such issues as gender, marginality, culture, and postmodern and postcolonial conditions. Simultaneously, and perhaps more obviously so in contributions from colleagues professionally linked with departments of English, there seems to be not only a lessened taste for traditional problems of Comparative Literature — such as historical and hermeneutic inquiries into international literary relations and intertextualities — but also a generally decreasing interest in and knowledge of foreign languages and foreign literary texts. While keeping an eye on a world-wide horizon, at least in a rhetorical gesture, some scholars seem to tend increasingly towards the application of theories, especially those of French provenance, to a distinctive social agenda, often defined by U.S. debates. At the limit, some of the otherwise intellectually challenging and rewarding submissions we receive — and many of which we publish — seem reluctant to discuss literature "as such" any more.

The best judgement about the usefulness of the journal and its ultimate success is made by its readers. Nevertheless, I would like to thank, for whatever results we have achieved, our contributors, assessors, members of the advisory board and editorial committee, members of the secretariat, guest editors, editors of the *Revue des Revues* and other periodical endeavours, as well as all colleagues from the CCLA/ACLC, without whom nothing would have been possible. Local support at the University of Alberta and the dedicated voluntary help of many students and colleagues — some of whom are mentioned on the current masthead — is increasingly proving essential for the very survival of this publication. Granting agencies, especially the Canada Council-SSHRC / Conseil des Arts du Canada-CRSHC, have shored up, with the CCLA/ACLC, the rather precarious financial and material foundations of the journal. They should be mentioned, therefore, in this honours roll-call.

I have to close this recapitulation with an elegiac and an auspicious announcement. Two of the members of the founding editorial groupe, R. Bourneuf (Laval) and V. Graham (Toronto), have decided to retire from the editorial committee after helping the journal for twenty years in many visible and many more invisible ways. I will miss their advice and strength. The uplifting information concerns the distribution of the journal: we have recently signed a favourable agreement with the University of Toronto Press, our original publisher, which we had to leave years ago for financial reasons. Beginning with the next issue (Spring 1994, 21.1), the Press will assume again the marketing and publicity of the journal. It should also be mentioned that the journal has been published, since 1989, in the desk-top publishing mode, which has saved us financially and presumably will ensure the financial health of the journal in the future.

May the journal and our discipline continue to prosper while navigating the troubled and dangerous waters lapping at the leaky vessels of Canadian and other institutions of higher learning.

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