The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful

The Department of French was pleased to host the 26th annual Colloquium in Nineteenth-Century French Studies. It was held on campus October 19–21, 2000. Approximately 225 people attended the conference, which included numerous talks, two plenary sessions, a reception, and a banquet.

For the past quarter-century, academics from the United States and abroad have met annually to discuss 19th-century French studies. Each year organizers announce a general conference subject, but participants are free to submit papers on any aspect of the field. Last fall the subject was “The Good, The Bad, and The Beautiful,” and the conference focused to some extent on aesthetics and values in 19th-century French literature, culture, music, and art. Papers covered subjects ranging from Balzac to Rimbaud, from bad art to the depiction of revolution, from children’s literature to antique collections. People came from all over the United States and Canada, as well as from France, Belgium, Great Britain, and the Netherlands.

While some sessions were devoted to one author, others were organized around a theme, with presentations on several authors or subjects. Canonic authors such as Balzac, Hugo, and Zola received a lot of attention, but there was also much work that brought to light lesser-known figures such as Octave Uzanne, Louis Bertrand, and Albert Robida. In one session, devoted to “Rewriting Flaubert,” the three speakers showed how the 20th century had revised and revisited Flaubert. Another session was devoted to the ideas of the eminent sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, and the three panelists showed how his work could illuminate 19th-century figures. Yet another session focused on teaching literature and culture, and one was devoted to 19th-century lexicography.

Chantal Thomas, a researcher at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Lyon, gave the first plenary talk, which was devoted to Germaine de Staël’s passion for conversation. Thomas has published extensively on literature and culture of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, with work ranging from Marie Antoinette to Thomas Berger. Professor Laurence Porter (Michigan State) gave the second plenary talk, entitled “Gender and Evil.” In it he examined the depiction of evil in female characters in the work of Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola. Porter has published on a wide range of material in 19th-and 20th-century French studies.

Participants had the chance to attend many sessions for their edification but were able to meet more casually as well. On Friday evening, a buffet banquet brought people together to meet, chat, eat, and drink for several hours. Wherever one looked, there were animated conversations, laughter, and new friendships being made, just as old ones were renewed. On Saturday two faculty members at the U of I gave a wonderful concert with a lovely selection of 19th-century French music. This was followed by a banquet featuring soupe au potiron, salade de mesclun au roquefort, magret de canard –continued on page 2
The Good, The Bad, cont’d

à l’orientale, and crème brûlée. Participants left Sunday with well-fed minds and bodies, already eagerly anticipating the next colloquium.

The next NCFS colloquium will be held in October at the University of Wisconsin and will be organized around the theme of retrospection.

And the Department of French at Illinois, building on its recent experience with conferences, will host the Twentieth-Century French Studies colloquium, the twin of this year’s event, in the spring of 2003. Before that, in fall 2001, there will be a state-of-the-art conference on French Cultural Studies, showcasing recent work in the forefront of cultural studies.

The Good, The Bad, cont’d

It Was an Excellent Year

Dear friends,

2000-2001 was an excellent year for the Department of French. Our faculty and graduate students received numerous awards and the department hosted the annual Colloquium in 19th-Century French Studies in the fall, a few months after the very successful Proust 2000 Symposium.

The quality of our graduate and undergraduate programs continues to attract the best teachers and scholars in the nation. Larry Schehr joined our faculty in August, coming to Illinois from North Carolina State University, where he was a professor of French and head of the department of foreign languages and literatures. Professor Schehr specializes in 19th- and 20th-century French literature and culture. He is an outstanding scholar of impressive breadth and productivity, the author of five books, two edited volumes, and more than 60 articles. He will shortly become the new editor of the journal Contemporary French Civilization.

The French Department once again received financial support from the Cultural Services of the French Embassy as one of 15 “Centre d’Études Pluridisciplinaires” in the country. Funding from the French government helps us promote the study of French and Francophone language, literature, and culture at Illinois through a variety of events and activities, from our annual French Means Business Day to visits from prominent international scholars and writers. In the fall, Professor Jean-Louis Fabiani, who teaches at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Marseille, presented his sociological study of the Festival d’Avignon; in the spring, the acclaimed Senegalese novelist Ken Bugul shared her experience as an African woman and writer with faculty and students.

A group of Illinois faculty specializing in French and Francophone Studies have come together under the umbrella of the “Centre d’Études Pluridisciplinaires.” This new research and discussion group will sponsor lectures by faculty and graduate students, conferences, and other events related to French and Francophone Studies. Departments involved include French, History, Anthropology, Art History, and Music. The French Cultural Services have increased the amount of their financial support for the coming academic year, a sign of their confidence in our ability to promote interdisciplinary French studies.

Our study abroad programs continue to attract a steady number of undergraduates. Last June, we added a four-week intermediate French language program in Avignon to our already existing yearlong Illinois Program in Paris. The Avignon session received positive reviews from the students involved, and we are offering it again this summer.

These are just of few of the many opportunities and events associated with the Department of French this year. Many others are featured throughout this issue of The French Connection. Our department remains one of the major French Studies programs in the country and we are grateful for the continued interest and support of our alumni and alumnae.

Jean-Philippe Mathy
“I miss Paris. I miss absolutely everything about it.”

Sound familiar? This time the sentiment is voiced by Ashley Maier, an undergraduate double major in French and psychology at the University of Illinois. She and her twin sister, Elizabeth, who is also double-majoring in the same subjects at Illinois, recently returned from a semester in Paris through IPP (Illinois Program in Paris). While there in the spring of 2000, the twins attended classes primarily in literature and language at the Institut Catholique. They also took a class from Nancy Blake, a University of Illinois professor, which met in the Centre Pompidou.

This was the first time that Elizabeth and Ashley, from Belleville, Ill. (near East St. Louis), had the opportunity to travel outside the United States. Elizabeth says of the experience, “I became a lot more independent. It helped me overcome my shyness.” Also speaking of her time abroad, Ashley says, “It gave me the desire to do what I really want to do and not just what is expected of me.” Earlier on in their undergraduate days, neither twin had planned to spend time abroad. But at the urging of Professor Alain Fresco in the Department of French, they decided to give it a try. And neither one is sorry!

While abroad, Ashley and Elizabeth were surprised — and very happy — to learn that they had been chosen as recipients of the C.K. McMillan Scholar Award, which included a $600 prize for each of them.

Both twins are convinced that learning a foreign language is important. Elizabeth is disappointed that many Americans expect everyone else to know English. Ashley adds that she disagrees with the idea that the U.S. is the number one country in the world. She is against the attitude that the U.S. should “set all the rules for the rest of the world.” The twins’ high-school French teacher instilled in them the importance of studying a foreign language as a precursor to accepting other cultures. In this spirit, the twins have started learning Spanish as well.

Elizabeth and Ashley will be graduating in May 2001. Although they will be finished with their formal study of French, both plan to continue to make it a part of their lives. Elizabeth, who is considering a career in criminal investigations, perhaps with the FBI, hopes to use her French skills on the job. Ashley’s career plans are a bit more uncertain, but they involve writing — especially poetry — and working with women’s issues. Although she perhaps will not use French in her career, she definitely wants to remain connected to the French language and culture. As she was preparing to leave Paris, she wrote a song in French, expressing her mixed emotions in leaving such a wonderful place.

When asked when they would be returning to Paris, Ashley replies wistfully and with a smile, “Tomorrow!”

“It gave me the desire to do what I really want to do and not just what is expected of me.”

— Ashley Maier
Did you know that there is no word for “boredom” in the Wolof language? Fallou Ngom, a doctoral candidate in the Department of French at the University of Illinois, explains that in his native country of Senegal, the concept of boredom does not exist because you can always find someone to talk to.

Working on a doctorate in linguistics, Ngom doesn’t have time to be bored on this side of the Atlantic either. For his dissertation, which he hopes to defend in 2002, he is looking at lexical borrowings as sociolinguistic variables in Senegal. He wants to discover more about how certain groups borrow and use certain words, specifically the lexical borrowings in Wolof from the French, English, and Arabic languages. His studies should have interesting ideological and linguistic implications.

Having recently returned from a three-month research trip to St. Louis, Senegal (supported by a dissertation travel grant from the University of Illinois), Ngom has plenty of data to analyze and interpret. While there, he recorded the speech of 200 people, 100 of whom were at least 59 years old and 100 of whom were between 20 and 35 years old. He wants to see if there are differences in lexical borrowings between the two age groups. Since the younger group generally has more exposure to other cultures and is more educated (especially in French), Ngom hypothesizes that the way they use words will differ from the usage in the older group.

Getting these interviews was not easy, says Ngom, especially with the older people, many of whom had never been recorded on tape and were naturally a bit suspicious of it. Ngom had to closely observe certain cultural rules to gain access to this group. In Senegal, status is connected with age, which is something Ngom understands and had to respect. He explains that older people consider themselves to be “libraries that will burn when they die.” Keeping this in mind, he approached them with an appreciation of their knowledge and a request for advice from them. Even so, the job was challenging. Ngom says that when approaching a group of older people talking outside, he had to identify the oldest person (the leader) and address this person first. Gaining the approval of this individual would then win the approval of the entire group. Some techniques Ngom used included wearing traditional African clothing, sitting lower than the older people, not looking directly into their eyes, and offering cola nuts, which embody respect. Ngom was pleased that many of these people who initially resisted talking with him ended up becoming friends with him and even invited him to their homes.

Growing up in Senegal, Ngom learned many languages. He is fluent in Wolof, French, Pular, Mandinka, and Portuguese Creole. He also has a conversational command of English, Mankagn, Serer, Spanish, and Arabic, among others. While working on his master’s degree in French linguistics at the University of Montana at Missoula, Ngom met his wife, Stephanie. They both came to Illinois to continue their graduate studies. Ngom hopes that while living in the U.S. he can hold on to his Africantité and values such as communal life and sharing everything—both joy and sadness—with his brothers.

After completing his doctorate, Fallou Ngom will be looking for a job in which he can continue to grow and to help his family—as he says, “a job that would allow me to pay tribute to all those who have contributed in one way or another—either through education or my family, especially my mom—to making me the man that I am today.” Ngom would like to leave his mark in the field of linguistics, just as he left his mark on a dormitory wall in Senegal, where students continue to enjoy reading the poetry he inscribed there years ago.
Lawrence R. Schehr—Full Professor Fits Right in at Illinois

In one of the first appointments at the senior level that the Department of French has had in many years, Larry Schehr joined the faculty in August 2000 as a full professor, after an already distinguished career as a professor of 19th- and 20th-century French literature. Schehr spent his early years in New York, where he grew up bilingual, speaking English and Brooklynese (so he says himself!). French came a bit later. After finishing high school in New York, he attended Clark University where he studied foreign languages and literatures (French, Russian, and Spanish) and premied. He spent his junior year in Paris under the auspices of the Institute for European Studies. “I fell in love with Paris. My fate was sealed at that moment, but I just didn’t know it,” he says.

After graduating from Clark, he attended the Ohio State School of Medicine, but soon realized that he needed to turn to literature. He transferred to the Department of Romance Languages at Ohio State, where he completed a master of arts degree, with a thesis on the novels of Samuel Beckett. For his doctorate, he attended the Johns Hopkins University, where he worked on 19th- and 20th-century French literature and literary theory. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on narrative authority in the works of Stendhal, Balzac, and Flaubert.

His first job was at the University of South Alabama, in Mobile, where he worked from 1981 to 1997, moving up through the ranks from assistant to full professor. During that time, he was also bitten by the bug of campus politics, was elected to the faculty senate and was eventually chair of that body two times in a period of five years. He left Mobile after 16 years and became head of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at North Carolina State University, in Raleigh. This job involved running a department with more than 60 faculty and a total of 14 programs. “Administration was a challenge but was very time-consuming, and I didn’t have enough time for my research,” says Schehr. “When the University of Illinois invited me to join their very impressive faculty, I jumped at the chance,” he adds.

Since joining the faculty at Illinois, Schehr organized and ran the annual 19th-Century French Studies conference, held this year on our campus in October (see cover article). He is again applying his organizational skills to host or co-host three more conferences: an afternoon-long conference on women and Francophone literature in April 2001; a “state-of-the-art” conference on French cultural studies, to be held next fall; and the annual 20th-Century French Studies conference, scheduled for the spring of 2003.

Schehr’s work is wide in scope, with articles ranging from Shakespeare to Borges, but he has focused mostly on 19th- and 20th-century French narrative. His work on the 19th century deals with the range, representation, and limitations of French realism in canonic authors such as Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola. As for 20th-century French literature, Schehr has been particularly interested in gay writing, both in well-known authors—Proust, for example—and in contemporary writers such as Hocquenghem, Dusant, and Guibert. He has published six books and more than 60 articles and he is the translator of Michel Serres’s book The Parasite. This year, Schehr is publishing two co-edited volumes: an issue of Yale French Studies devoted to the work of Jean-François Lyotard and a book published by Routledge devoted to French gastronomy: French Food: On the Table, on the Page, and in French Culture.
The French Department is lucky to count several emeritus professors among its ranks. Some of them, like Bruce Mainous, often attend lectures in the department and can be seen chatting with former colleagues in the hallways of the Foreign Languages Building. Others, like Stan Gray, spend much of their time in less geographically challenged places, like Colorado and Florida. We thought you’d like to know where some of your former professors are and what they have been up to since retirement.

STANLEY E. GRAY, a specialist in 20th-century French literature and critical theory, retired in 1992 after teaching for 35 years. He has no idea how many students he might have taught, but he directed close to 20 Ph.D. dissertations and was a member of some 120 Ph.D. thesis committees in French, Comparative Literature, English, Spanish, and Classics. Besides the usual undergraduate surveys and various humanities and honors courses, he taught graduate seminars on Gide; Sartre; 20th-Century Literary Criticism; Studies in French Poetry; Oedipe et le roman français moderne; Le Nouveau Roman; La Modernité de Baudelaire à Baudrillard; Le roman depuis 1950; Psychanalyse et critique littéraire; Le Roman et l'Histoire; Cubisme et Surréalisme; L'Autobiographie française moderne; Derrida; Psychoanalytic Theory and the Arts (jointly); Postmodernism; L'écriture et le visuel.

Since retiring, Professor Gray has written a lengthy history of one branch of his family, and a comparable study of the other branch is underway. He and his wife, Lorraine, have been enjoying their second home in Colorado, and they also spend a winter month on Marco Island in Florida, where Gray gets a chance to catch up on his tennis. Aside from reading books and listening to music, he admits to the occasional moments of staring into space.

SANDRA J. SAVIGNON retired from the U of I but did not stop working. Instead, she accepted a position as professor of applied linguistics at the Pennsylvania State University, where she continues to conduct research and teach courses in second-language acquisition. The many students who have learned from Professor Savignon consider her name almost synonymous with “communicative competence,” a representation of language use and learning that has had very widespread recognition. Her most recent book is Communicative Language Teaching in Translation: Contexts and Concerns in Teacher Education (Yale University Press, in press).

Professor Savignon is the mother of three children and the grandmother of seven. For many years, starting when she lived in Champaign, she has been involved in animal welfare, serving as a foster family for cats and dogs. You can see pictures of cats, dogs, and grandchildren on her personal home page at http://www.personal.psu.edu/faculty/s/j/sjs25/.

FRED JENKINS, who officially retired as an associate professor in French linguistics on January 1, 1998, remains in Champaign-Urbana. And he continues to be as busy as he was before. Each spring, he has been called out of retirement to teach the department’s advanced translation course, French 321, because of the temporary absence of regular faculty members who give that course. This year, in the absence of the department’s undergraduate advisor, on sabbatical during the spring semester, Professor Jenkins has undertaken this much-needed task.

Professor Jenkins is also co-authoring, with Professors Douglas Kibbee and Zsuzsanna Fagyal-LeMentec, a textbook entitled Introduction to French Linguistics, tentatively scheduled for publication next year by Cambridge University Press. This project is an outgrowth of the department’s course called Structure of French, which Jenkins taught from 1965 until retirement. Finally, he is preparing an article recounting the multiple activities of the American Association of Teachers of French during the period 1978–2002. He was executive director of this national organization from 1979 to 1997, during which time he continued to teach part-time within the department. In his spare time, Fred Jenkins travels with his wife, Shirley, primarily to Western Europe.
R. LUCY AGHAZARIAN (M.A. 1966) is associate professor of French at Community College of Philadelphia. She joined the college as a founding member in 1965 and served as chair of the Foreign Language Department for eight years. She continued graduate work in English and received a master of arts in English literature in 1987. She has been, and continues to be, involved in teaching French and is working on gathering Francophone literary readings appropriate for community college students. She has two children: Aram, 30, a photographer, and Lori, 27, a theater stage manager. Aghazarian lives in Elkins Park, Penn., with her husband, Aram, chair of Speech Communication at Temple University. Aghazarian writes, "The French Department was the best in the world."

CYNTHIA HAHN (Ph.D. 1990) is secretary for Chicago Area Translator’s Association (www.chicata.org). She has published two translations of novels. The first is Wounding Words: A Woman’s Novel in Tunisia (Heinemann, 1996, written by Evelyne Accad, professor in the Department of French at the University of Illinois), and the second is The Lost Song of a Rediscovered Country/Le Chant perdu d’un pays retrouvé in a bilingual format (L’Harmattan, 1999, by Algerian author Noureddine Aba). Hahn is working on a textbook to use in the teaching of translation and interpretation. Her latest passion is vintage motorcycle racing. She has been racing a 1965 Honda 175 for six years. She recently took third place in the Masters of the Midwest national series, and came in fifth overall nationally in her class, 200 Grand Prix. See her web page for details and photos (http://www.lfc.edu/academics/languages/hahn.html; click above the motorcycle photo). Since 1990 Hahn has been faculty editor of Lake Forest College’s foreign language magazine Collage (http://www.lfc.edu/activities/collage). She writes, “Hello to all who remember me at U of I. I still keep very fond memories. I’ll be back to visit!”

SONJA WINTHER (B.A. 1990) is happy to have finally found a job that allows her to utilize her knowledge of the French language and culture on a daily basis. She is managing director of the U.S. subsidiary of an upscale French lingerie manufacturer, Chantelle. She oversees 33 people, with yearly sales in the U.S. recently at $12 million. To prepare for this job, she received her M.B.A. (M.I.B.S. degree in French and marketing) from the University of South Carolina. She writes, “I always loved my literature classes at U of I and especially enjoyed medieval studies that I covered there and at the Institut pour Étudiants Étrangers in Aix-en-Provence.”

Let us include you in our next French Connection. Drop us a line and let us know what you are doing. E-mail french@uiuc.edu or write to the Department of French, 2090 Foreign Languages Building, 707 S. Mathews Ave., Urbana, IL 61801.

A Souvenir of Professor Kolb

The recent French Connection newsletter (summer 2000) with its reference to Professor Philip Kolb brought back memories of that sweet, gentle man with the cute little sense of humor who even in the mid to late 60s was something of an institution at the university. We would see him, an unassuming figure, dwarfed by the large, solid stone edifices surrounding the Quad, making his way from the library to a classroom, carrying a black briefcase bursting with papers that must have weighed half as much as he did—or so it would seem when he opened the thing upon his arrival in class and the contents practically burst out, as the well-developed figure of a turn-of-the-century opera star might have done when released from a too-tight corset.

I took, I believe, two courses under his tutelage. Despite his being locally—and even internationally—famous (he and his work were featured in a Vogue article around that time), he was the nicest, most unassuming man I have ever met.

In the course of walking to and from our living quarters and the Quad, many of us would pass his charming little white house with its shining glass, its green front lawn surrounded by a low white fence and lots of extraordinary crisp and colorful flowers that Mrs. Kolb seemed to be working on all the time. The place had a neat, comfortable, welcoming look with an atmosphere of Old World country charm.

We, the members of a graduate student class in Proust, were invited one night at the end of a semester to the Kolbs’ house for a Proustian meal complete with crème fraîche which Mrs. Kolb had somehow managed to promote in the wilds of Illinois (I asked her where she got it, knowing crème fraîche was unavailable in the U.S., and she said she made it). It was a lovely, relaxing evening with the man and his family, and what I remember being struck by most was the fact that Professor Kolb could and did talk about things other than his work and spoke with informed intelligence about many subjects.

I wish I had the recipe for crème fraîche, but I wouldn’t trade it for the memories of having met this extraordinary, kind man and having studied in his classes.

Cher Stallman
Parisian Nightlife à la Toulouse-Lautrec

The fin-de-siècle comes alive at Krannert Art Museum this summer in a special exhibition of lithographs, posters, and drawings by French artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901). The exhibition, “Toulouse-Lautrec: Artist of Montmartre,” showcases more than 40 of his works that are part of the museum’s rich permanent collection.

Toulouse-Lautrec is perhaps best known for his bold posters, which figure prominently in the museum’s collection. Through satire and caricature, the artist portrayed the nightlife of Paris and gave social criticisms of his time. His striking silhouettes, vivid colors, and simplification in the representation of people were the means by which he documented the social complexities of Parisian entertainment and nightlife. Admiring the unconventional perspectives he saw in Japanese prints as well as the Impressionists’ use of light and color, Toulouse-Lautrec blended elements from these influences with the knowledge he gained through his formal academic training.

To provide a larger context for the exhibition, the museum will highlight works by artists who were forerunners or contemporaries to Toulouse-Lautrec and his principal concerns. In addition, Japanese prints will be on display due to the influential role that they played in Toulouse-Lautrec’s work. All of these works are also part of the museum’s permanent collection, many of which have not been displayed recently. The Toulouse-Lautrec exhibition provides the perfect opportunity to bring these other works out from storage.

Members of the museum were invited to a gala opening event, which featured a chamber concert of dance and music taken from the Toulouse-Lautrec era. Patricia Knowles, head of the Department of Dance, coordinated the event. A special inaugural presentation in the Center for Advanced Study’s Dialogue Series was held at the museum on May 3 to open the exhibition as well. Stephen Eisenman, professor of art history at Northwestern University, and Reinhold Heller, professor of art history and Germanic languages and literature at the University of Chicago, were the speakers.

The public is invited to attend another related lecture at the museum. On June 20 at 7 p.m. Robert Graves, acting head of the Department of Theatre, will present the talk “Avant-Garde Parisian Theatre and Toulouse-Lautrec,” based on Toulouse-Lautrec’s “La Loge au Mascaron Doré.” This work from the exhibition recalls Toulouse-Lautrec’s involvement with prominent figures in French theater.