

HOMMAGE À ROLAND

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Roland Le Huenen was a friend, colleague, and mentor who made his first impressions on me as a doctoral student in the late 1980s, and for the past 26 years I have received the great privilege of his support as a close friend and colleague at the University of Toronto, Victoria University, the Department of French, and the Centre for Comparative Literature. Confirmation of Roland's large academic footprint is reflected in the beautiful homages recently written by friends and colleagues throughout France and Canada. Roland exemplified the rare ability in academia to excel not only in his many fields of research but equally in administrative leadership and dedication to an endless lineup of doctoral thesis directions while always having time to care for close relationships with so many colleagues. His notoriety at the University of Toronto as a scholar and gifted pedagogue attracted the attention of numerous International institutions (Paris 7, la Sorbonne, Tel Aviv University, Université de la Réunion, etc.) and Canadian universities who solicited him as visiting professor and guest-lecturer. For almost a decade he held the Distinguished M.E. Jones Chair of Modern Languages and Literatures at the University of New York in Buffalo. Roland had a rich world: his French academic family, his close colleagues in France, nineteenth-century specialists, his collaboration with the Société des études romantiques et dix-neuviémistes, the "Groupe international d'études balzacziennes," his world-renowned publications in prestigious French venues on travel narratives (PU Paris-Sorbonne, Presses de Rouen, PU d'Angers, etc.), his publications in collections of essays and numerous academic journals published in France. At the University of Toronto, where his scholarly achievements and international reputation were recognized by all who knew him, other facets of his academic life came to life: his role as a dedicated professor, thesis director, and gifted administrator that touched the lives of so many.

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Honouring Roland in the journal of the Canadian Comparative Literature Association is fitting, as his last administrative position at the University of Toronto was as Chair of the Centre for Comparative Literature. Roland was passionate about the responsibilities that had been entrusted to him by the Faculty and was relentless in his dedication to the Centre, its many colleagues, graduate students, and long-serving administrators. My homage to Roland will hopefully accentuate some of his admirable accomplishments as an academic at the University of Toronto. He was an indescribably adept academic researcher and professor in so many fields of inquiry such as nineteenth-century literature, Balzac, travel narratives, and literary theory, a dedicated thesis advisor to numerous PhD students, and an effective administrator, as Graduate Chair in the Department of French and Director of the Centre for Comparative Literature for two terms. Roland completed all of his academic duties with the same degree of dedication, intensity, and ease, demonstrating total comfort and confidence. Through our many collaborations over the years including thesis directions and research endeavours, Roland was reliably generous, selfless, and kind, and naturally became a close friend and a mentor. I feel extremely privileged to have known him in these different capacities as he was a uniquely genuine person, a brilliant academic, a kind and compassionate person, whose human qualities will never be forgotten.

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Although we worked in different fields of inquiry, our intellectual paths crossed with our passions for autobiographical and travel narratives, literary theory, and genetic criticism, as well as our interest in visual art as it pertained to our interest in life-writing and Comparative Literature. These areas of expertise transpired into the co-direction of numerous doctoral theses focussed on a vast range of topics, and the creation of an international research group dedicated to the interdisciplinary and cultural interplay of word and image interactions in literary and theoretical contexts. In keeping with Roland's pedagogical values, our mandate was not only to foster the interdisciplinarity of word and image studies through thought-provoking research, but also to promote teaching in this field of inquiry and directly involve students from the University of Toronto and other institutions of higher education within Canada, Europe, and the United States. Scholars from France, England, Italy, Holland, Germany, Canada, and the United States collaborated as guest lecturers and keynote speakers at events we organized and which were reciprocated by international invitations we received independently to disseminate our ongoing interdisciplinary research endeavours. Our shared interests gave rise to other research endeavours, internal research grant applications, and a memorable SSHRC proposal in which Roland anticipated expanding his work on nineteenth-century literature and travel narratives into a new field of inquiry focussing on the collaboration between texts and images—drawings, paintings, engravings, etc.—executed by Victor Hugo, Eugène Fromentin, and many other writers who personally illustrated their own travel narratives. It is in Roland's own words, renowned for his poetic language and profound analytical and theoretical insights, that I would like briefly to

present his intellectual contribution to our collaborative work on illustrated autobiographical and travel narratives:

Mes objectifs sont d'abord de mieux comprendre et de décrire la manière dont s'établit, se négocie et se problématise dans les récits de voyage la relation entre l'image et le texte, d'autant plus qu'ils sont l'un et l'autre le produit de la même main et que leur cohabitation résulte d'un travail conscient et affiché, tantôt dans une optique de convergence, tantôt dans le maintien d'une autonomie relative.¹

Last but not least, I will never forget the beautifully written “Postface” Roland so graciously accepted to write for my book *Genèses de soi*, and the engaging telephone conversations we had while he was on sabbatical in Paris about the title that should be given to my monograph. His poetic style, so prominent in his numerous publications, and his generosity were once again displayed in this synthesis of my research, which I had the great honour of quoting, shortly after his passing, at the Institut des textes et manuscrits modernes de l'École normale supérieure:

Les études génétiques nous ont entraînés dans la mouvance quasi sans limites du texte [...] en s'inscrivant dans la poétique du texte elles visent à en élargir les bornes en y ajoutant un autre paramètre, celui de la temporalité de l'écriture, de ses phases, de ses étapes comme de ses formes [...]. Sous le scalpel du généticien [...] les mouvances quasi sans limites du texte [...] cessent d'être des jalons inertes, dont les variantes illustrent bien la contribution atone, sorte de mémoire morte au statut fragmentaire pour devenir à leur tour du texte dans une reconstitution en amont ou en parallèle qui vient compléter et complexifier tout à la fois le produit de librairie apparemment plénier et accompli tel que nous avons l'habitude de l'appréhender. (254)

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Roland shows encyclopedic knowledge, methodological rigour, and sheer talent at bringing together so many different fields of inquiry within a thought-provoking and intellectually challenging text, which, as always, is also beautifully written with analytical depth and poetic sensitivity. Roland's publications will forever enrich our lives and will serve as a constant reminder of his brilliance and generosity.

José-Luis Diaz, Paul Perron, and Jill Ross, amongst many who have written beautiful homages to Roland, all stress his academic brilliance and human qualities. Many more celebrations of Roland's academic life in the form of dedicated volumes, journal issues, academic conferences and guest lectures are forthcoming in France and will be planned with the collaboration of Roland's wife, Johanne Du Berger, and colleagues at the University of Toronto during the next academic year to honour his memory.

NOTE

1. This is a small fragment of a research proposal partially written by Roland Le Huenen and myself.

WORK CITED

Le Huenen, Roland. "Postface." *Genèses de soi: L'écriture du sujet féminin dans quelques journaux d'écrivaines*, by Julie LeBlanc, Éditions du remue-ménage, 2009.