

ROLAND LE HUENEN: HIS LIFE AND WORK

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Roland Le Huenen made a big difference as a teacher, scholar, colleague, and friend. He was much admired in France and Canada, which is appropriate for someone born in Saint-Pierre who had a great-grandmother from Newfoundland, who studied in France, and who came to work at the University of Toronto. Roland achieved the highest reaches of French and Canadian universities with the greatest honours each country could give a scholar.

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But above all, Roland was a person, someone of kindness and generosity to go with his great talents. When all is said and done, that is what matters most. I watched Roland help colleagues and students in French and Comparative Literature in Canada, France, and elsewhere.

Collegiality and caring about students were ideals of the university in the 1960s and 1970s, the university in which Roland and I studied and began to teach. Before I knew Roland personally—he was at Victoria College and I was at Trinity and Massey—I knew the University of Toronto, to which he came six years before I did. It was a place where undergraduate teaching mattered most. In those days, the University of Toronto was more decentralized in the humanities, as Oxford and Cambridge were and are, and this allowed students and faculty to work in small communities, where the colleges had their own departments in the humanities. This was the context into which the young Roland Le Huenen began his life as a university professor. This was the beginning of a distinguished career as a teacher and scholar both at Victoria and at the university. The commitment to teaching was palpable at Toronto, with teachers like Northrop Frye, Marshall McLuhan, Allan Bloom, C.B. Macpherson, and Natalie Zemon Davis. Roland's college, Victoria, also had great students in literature, such as Margaret Atwood and Dennis Lee, who came to be leading poets, and the college continues to be a leader in humanities and literature at the university, in Canada, and

internationally. Roland embodied excellence in a milieu of excellence.

Toronto, which is often considered one of the top universities in humanities and literature in the world, brought together an accomplished group of teachers and students. Roland added a great deal to his college and university and contributed so much to France, Canada, and the international community. His training was exemplary: a Baccalauréat ès Lettres, Lycée Émile Littré, Avranches, France; a Licence-ès-Lettres, Université de Caen; a Diplôme d'Études Supérieures, Université de Caen, France; and a Doctorat ès lettres, Université de Strasbourg. Before arriving in Toronto to be a professor in 1968, Roland had already taught at the University of Toronto Summer School in Saint-Pierre et Miquelon for five years. At Toronto, Roland took up a number of key posts that reached beyond Toronto but had national and international impact. In 1980, he taught a graduate seminar, "Théorie grei-massienne des modalités," at the International Summer Institute for Semiotic and Structural Studies (ISISSS), University of Toronto. In 1982, he became the Director of the Victoria College Program in Semiotics, and the next year he was cross-appointed to the Centre for Comparative Literature, whose founding Director in the late 1960s, about the time Roland Le Huenen came to teach French, was Northrop Frye, who also taught at Victoria College. In 1987, Roland gave a graduate seminar, "The Cliché in Discursive Strategies," at ISISSS. Moreover, in 1998, Roland was made Director of the Centre for Comparative Literature, a post he held for eleven years, a key role in Canada and internationally.

Roland Le Huenen also held many visiting posts. In 1978, he was Visiting Professor in French, at the Université de Montréal, and taught a graduate seminar on Balzac. In 1986, he became Visiting Professor in French at the University of Tel-Aviv and taught travel literature and lectured at the Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics (Tel Aviv) and at the Universities of Haifa and Ben-Gurion at Beer-Sheba. From 1986 to 1994, Roland was the Distinguished M.E. Jones Chair in French Literature at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo, held also by André Maurois, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Michel Foucault, Louis Marin, Michel Butor, and Michel Serres. At SUNY Buffalo, he was also in Comparative Literature. Later, in 1988-89, Roland was Visiting Professor of French, Queen's University (Kingston). In 2000, Roland was Visiting Professor in "Sciences des Textes et Documents" at Paris 7-Denis Diderot, and in 2005 in "Littérature française et comparée," University of Paris 4-Sorbonne, where he gave public lectures on nineteenth-century French travel narratives. Roland received many awards and performed so much public service in Canada, France, and elsewhere that only a few instances can be mentioned here. He received the France-Acadie Book Prize in 1986 for *Contes, récits et légendes des Iles Saint-Pierre et Miquelon* and became "Chevalier des Palmes Académiques" in France in 1995 and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 2003. He was also a member of the Editorial Board of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée*.

The research interests that Roland Le Huenen pursued are narratology, theory

of literature, nineteenth- and twentieth-century French literature, Chateaubriand, Balzac, Sand, Romanticism, and travel literature. His monographs and co-authored books as well as his essays, book chapters, encyclopedia articles, and other scholarly contributions enriched these fields. One of his recent works, *Le récit de voyage au prisme de la littérature* (2015), shows the admirable scholarship and clarity that characterizes his work. Roland speaks of consecrating thirty years to the literature of voyages and of questioning (exploring) this type of narrative that seems to escape attempts at classification. He describes this varied and unruly genre well:

Genre ouvert, éclaté, constitué d'une multitude de discours, le texte de voyage accueille, au sein d'une forme nécessairement plastique, les relations du navigateur, du naturaliste, du colonisateur, du marchand, de l'économiste, celles du missionnaire, du diplomate, du savant, de l'amateur d'œuvres d'art, autant de discours dotés de leur propre langue et révélant le préconstruit de leur découpage idéologique du savoir. (*Le récit* 17)

The openness, refractoriness, and multiplicity of this genre needed a skilled “chercheur” like Roland Le Huenen. He never shied away from difficulty and the richness of texts.

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Roland was also a distinguished editor: for instance, his recent collection *Balzac et la Chine*, co-edited with Véronique Bui (2017), brought together his interest in Balzac, alterity, and geography. A productive scholar over many decades, Roland was ever active, for example with his contributions to *Dictionnaire Balzac* and his article “Roland Barthes: Une sémiologie en attente” in *Recherches sémiotiques/Semiotic Inquiry*, both forthcoming. As an exemplary colleague, Roland Le Huenen was a book reviewer, an internal and external examiner, a supervisor, and an active member of the community of French Literature and Comparative Literature. Above all, he was humane and a humanist who taught and wrote about theory and practice, for the benefit of his students and his readers in the republic of letters. Like Cicero and Montaigne, he explored friendship in his writing, teaching, and life. That was his community.

WORKS CITED

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