

The French Review

From the Editor's Desk

In spite of a low turnout, the eighty-second annual meeting of the American Association of Teachers of French held in San Jose from 2–5 July was a big success. Michel Robitaille, Président-directeur general du Centre de la Francophonie des Amériques, presented a particularly moving video of Inuit children learning and speaking French in remote regions of Canada. The children backed up their French rap songs with throat sounds used in the Inuit language. This video was a tour de force and reinforced the notion presented on the cover of the May special issue of the *French Review* that children of all nationalities, ethnic groups, and colors hold the future of French and the world on their tongues. The film of Louisiana children who had created their own songs in French with the help of a musician-song writer was also touching and reminded us of our ground-breaking convention in Louisiana and the special issue of May 2007 devoted to Francophonie in the United States.

For those of us interested in the French educational system, Jean-Pierre Cuq, Président de la Fédération internationale des Professeurs de français, gave a séance plénière entitled “La Formation des professeurs de français en France: le faux débat du choix disciplinaire ou pédagogique.” His presentation helped us to understand the stakes tied to the major reforms proposed by President Nicolas Sarkozy and passed by the Assemblée Nationale. As Cuq demonstrated, these changes in how teachers are trained will have a profound impact on the future of French education and the quality of teaching as will the decision not to replace the thousands of teachers who will retire in the next few years.

Another highlight of the convention was the screening of Laurent Cantet’s *Entre les murs* (*The Class*), the 2008 French winner of the Palme d’or at the Cannes Film Festival. Catherine Pétilion, the Attachée de Coopération éducative à l’Ambassade de France à Washington, introduced this film about French Junior High Students (collège) in a ZEP (Zone d’éducation prioritaire) in Paris (collège Dolto) based on the semi-autobiographical novel of the same name by François Bégaudeau. Bégaudeau plays the role of the teacher in this provocative film which highlights the diversity of French students today and difficulties they face both at home and in school. Pétilion also moderated an animated discussion of the movie and how to teach it in a session the following day. Two other sessions also examined *Entre les murs*.

Unfortunately, Jean-Pierre Cuq’s session in the afternoon of the opening day was placed at the same time as the other “sémi-plénière,” which was called “Pour l’amour de lire: comment transmettre aux jeunes la passion de la lecture,” a topic as important to university professors in the age of the tweet and the texto as to grade school, middle school, and high school teachers. Although I was unable to attend this session featuring Nicole Cage-Florentiny, an author from Martinique, Martine Noel-Maw; a writer from Saskatchewan, and author Françoise Lepage from Ontario, all the reports I heard were very enthusiastic.

As usual, Québec played an important role at our annual conference, and many Québécois and Québécoises served as presenters and moderators. There were also sessions on Belgium, racism in the French-speaking world, Martinique, Sénégal; a screening of the Québécois film, *Babine*, a presentation on the Algerian cartoonist, Dilem; and one on Switzerland. Marie-Simone Pavolovich gave her scintillating annual dictée, where everyone is a winner!

The editors of the *French Review* had a delicious luncheon and lively discussion at the Left Bank Brasserie, but just missed the pétanque tournament. Some of us were able to join the

post-conference excursion to San Francisco and the Sonoma Valley. Visits to Haight-Asbury and the Castro district took some of us back 40 years to the summer of love, and on one of the rare clear days of the summer we went to Twin Peaks hill and enjoyed spectacular views of the city, the bay, and the Pacific Ocean. The Golden Gate Bridge was as awesome as ever, and the sea lions on Pier 39 served as a chorus of foghorns from their perches on docks especially built for them.

I hope that more of you will be able to attend the convention in Philadelphia next year as the financial crisis begins to ease. Our conventions always provide plenty of food for thought, a chance to see old friends and colleagues, and a chance to rediscover our sense of community and esprit de corps as teachers of French. Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love and the Independence Bell, as well as the home of Mary Cassatt, should inspire all of us.

Bonnes vacances à toutes et à tous! Et Bonne Année 2010!

Christopher P. Pinet, Editor in Chief