

# Editor's Introduction: An Intellectual Map of Scholarship in RhetCanada

DAVID BEARD, EDITOR OF SPECIAL ISSUE

RhetCanada, also known as the Canadian Society for the Study of Rhetoric, is an international association for the study of rhetoric. Our membership is international; our intellectual scope is international. At the same time, our study of rhetoric is inflected by Canadian history and culture. This special issue maps rhetorical study in Canada as an intellectual and institutional formation with RhetCanada at its core.

## **A Partial Intellectual History of RhetCanada, the Canadian Society for the Study of Rhetoric**

It might be helpful to offer a partial intellectual history of RhetCanada as our starting point. There are other histories of rhetoric in Canada possible; the most commonly told begins with Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan and runs through contemporary communication studies in many Canadian universities. Another runs through the history of writing instruction in Canada, a history manifest in the many Canadian academic associations devoted to the study of writing (including the Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning, the group of scholar-teachers who pioneered “inkshedding” as a conference format, the Canadian Association

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of Teachers of Technical Writing, later the Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse and Writing, and the Canadian Writing Centres Association). In contrast, RhetCanada derives from a different intellectual tradition, and its members manifest that tradition differently in their research.

The Carleton University Centre for Rhetorical Studies, under the direction of Albert Halsall (one of the founders of RhetCanada) is one starting point. Halsall was winner of a Governor-General's award for the translation of Bernard Dupriez's *Gradus (Les Procédés Littéraires)*. The translation was released as *A Dictionary of Literary Devices: Gradus, A-Z* (University of Toronto Press) in 1991. In *Gradus*, Halsall had a transformative project in mind: not just to catalogue figures, schemes and tropes, but "to encourage the personal involvement that readers achieve with literary texts by increasing their understanding of rhetorical forms, and by helping them to produce their own readings" (xv). Halsall believed that "having learned to recognize the interplay of literary forms, readers will perhaps be no longer satisfied either to remain passively subject to the text" (xv). Halsall made the tools of the tropes and figures available to a Canadian reading public using new examples from Canadian literature and pop culture – connecting rhetoric to a new readership.

Halsall was a powerful force in the French department at Carleton University and, beyond serving as a founder of the CSSR, Halsall was President in 1986-1988 (when the Society was called the Canadian Society for the History of Rhetoric) and 1990-1993 (in its current incarnation, as the Canadian Society for the Study of Rhetoric). His spirit was shared by Shannon Purves-Smith and Michael Purves-Smith, who led the society into the twenty-first century.

The impulses in Halsall's work were twofold, and both of those impulses shape the work of RhetCanada today. First, Halsall sought to make an international tradition in rhetoric accessible to Canadians. Second, Halsall was no mere importer: he also sought to recreate the work of rhetoric within

the Canadian context. In the same way that rhetoric changes as it migrates from Greece to Rome, from France to the United Kingdom, so too does rhetoric change as it finds roots within Canada and within RhetCanada.

### **A Partial Institutional Map of RhetCanada, the Canadian Society for the Study of Rhetoric**

RhetCanada is a unique community, and in this special issue of *Rhetor*, individual members of the society were invited to reflect on one question. “What makes you a ‘Canadian’ rhetorical scholar?” was our starting point, but the answers came to reflect more than that. (Other members, from the US and Europe, reflected on the ways that their national identity inflected their work.) These brief essays reflect the scope and nature of rhetoric as studied by the diverse body of international scholars in the society, each with complex, intersectional identities.

In collecting work for this issue, we have constructed a kind of map of some of the institutions of higher learning in Canada that serve as sites for rhetorical studies in Canada: the University of Waterloo, the University of Alberta, the University of Saskatchewan’s Graham School, and the University of Winnipeg. The University of Waterloo has been in existence only since 1957, but is now home to two centres for rhetorical studies in Canada. Its English doctoral program integrates literary studies, rhetoric, and new media. (These doctoral concentrations build upon autonomous master’s degrees in Literary Studies, Rhetoric and Communication Design, and Experimental Digital Media). The program in Drama and Speech Communication at the University of Waterloo has developed strengths in rhetorical studies as well.

The University of Alberta houses rhetoric and writing studies at the intersection of multiple disciplines, with a primary home in the Writing Across the Curriculum program. In that way, Alberta is a culmination of

another kind of rhetorical tradition in Canada, one traced in *Writing Centres, Writing Seminars, Writing Culture: Writing Instruction in Anglo-Canadian Universities*, edited by Roger and Heather Graves.

The Ron and Jane Graham School of Professional Development is located in the College of Engineering at the University of Saskatchewan, placing the civic dimensions of rhetoric, as well as the dimensions of rhetoric as *techne*, at the centre of a vibrant research program.

The University of Winnipeg's Department of Rhetoric, Writing, and Communications was the first independent writing program in Canada. It launched a BA in Rhetoric and Communications in 2003 and offers an innovative Joint Communications program with Red River College, one which allows students to bring critical rhetorical frameworks to a career in journalism, advertising, public relations, and broadcasting.

In this special issue, we also hear voices from scholars teaching in other institutions, from liberal arts colleges in the maritime provinces to research centres in Belgium. In the pages of this special issue, we hope to make clear the diversity of identities that inform the study of rhetoric and the diversity of research programs that flourish in RhetCanada.

### **Thematic Overview of the Issue**

The contents of this issue address three broad themes. Some essays introduce Canadian scholars who participate in an international research agenda in rhetorical studies, like Harris's work in cognitive rhetoric and Mehlenbacher's work in genre studies. Other essays address research programs studying either Canadian rhetorical practice (Moffatt's and Whalen's works exemplify this) or transnational rhetorical practice from a Canadian perspective (Wills and H. Graves offer examples of this). Others, finally, address experiences of migration and of intersectional identity as formative of rhetorical research and teaching among the RhetCanada

community (e.g., Moriarty, Gerber, Brey, Graves, Corry and others). All together, they produce a map of research in rhetoric in Canada, as centered in RhetCanada, the Canadian Society for the Study of Rhetoric, and the institutions of higher education that it brings together. The map is partial, but it reflects the diversity of the society. RhetCanada is, as past-president Tania Smith articulates, “an international society grounded in Canada.” We hope you find this collection useful.

### **Acknowledgements**

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This project was assembled over the course of four years, connecting scholars in several disciplines on two continents. In pieces by Belgian authors, where appropriate, we *have retained European punctuation practices*.

In pieces by scholars who self-identify as social scientists, we have retained social scientific citation systems. These gestures reflect the diversity of membership of the society in this extraordinary compilation.

### **Works Cited**

Dupriez, Bernard. *A Dictionary of Literary Devices: Gradus, A-Z*. (A translation of *Gradus (Les Procédés Littéraires)*, translated by Albert Halsall. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1991.

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