

Lettre de la présidente

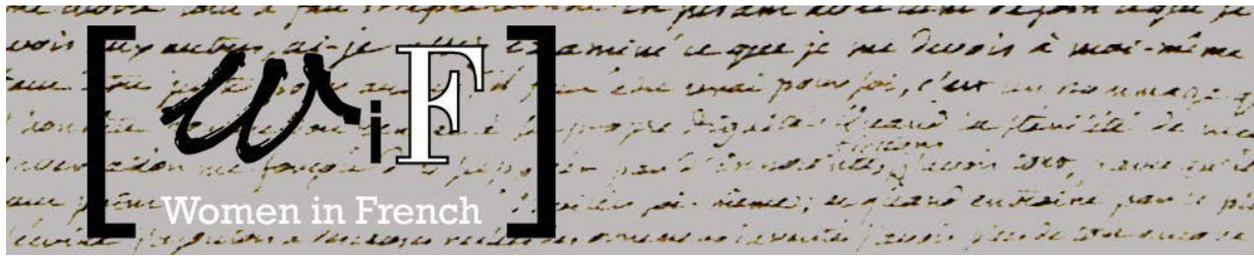
Fall 2017

Dear Members of Women in French,

Forty years ago, in 1977, soon after receiving her PhD in French from Washington University in St. Louis, Lucy Schmitz Morros was invited by Women in German, an organization created in 1974, to speak at their conference at Miami of Ohio about Madame de Staël. Inspired by the intellectual stimulation and supportive interaction among the members of Women in German, Lucy recognized the importance of creating a similar organization for women in the field of French. Demonstrating her leadership skills early in her career—she would go on to have an illustrious career as Vice President and Dean of Student Affairs at the American College in Paris and eventually President of Barat College in Lake Forest, Ill.—Lucy mobilized a group of about fifty women the following year at the MLA to discuss the possibility of founding an organization that would “draw attention to the academic work of women in French, provide a structure that would support women’s networking and collaboration in French studies, help women secure employment in the difficult academic marketplace produced by a recession, connect women intellectually and socially, and promote women’s growth and impact within higher education settings by welcoming women’s leadership in departments, divisions, and the university hierarchy” (<http://www.english.womeninfrench.org/history/>). Women in French was thus born first as a sub-committee of the Women’s Caucus for the MLA with Jean Hardy Robinson and Lucy Schmitz Morros as co-Chairs. Though Women in French became an independent organization in 1991, we have maintained close ties with the Women’s Caucus as an allied organization of the MLA. Each year Women in French participates in a reception at the MLA Convention cosponsored by the Women’s Caucus and other sister organizations like Women in German and Feministas Unidas.

I begin my letter this year with this reminder of our history in order to celebrate our resilience and continued vitality over the past four decades. In spite of attacks on the Liberal Arts, cuts to language programs in schools and universities throughout the US, and backlash against feminism and women’s rights, Women in French has nevertheless persisted! In fact, we have thrived. We have more sessions than ever in regional MLA conventions, as well as at a variety of French conferences like Nineteenth-Century French Studies. *Women in French Studies* is drawing more and more attention to the academic work of women in French thanks to the availability of our journal on Project Muse. And next year’s Women in French conference attracted over 200 submissions from all over the world.

I know from my own teaching that young women today are interested in the material we bring to our classrooms and that we focus on in our scholarship. The students in my undergraduate course this fall on Women and Social Justice, though struggling with the difficulty of the texts—are totally engaged in the type of critical thinking and open-minded inquiry that will be necessary for us to move forward as a profession. The number of graduate students who have attended our recent Women in French conferences and the quality of their work makes me equally excited and optimistic about our future. We have a particularly active graduate student



network this year thanks to the excellent work of our enthusiastic graduate student representative Leah Holz.

In addition to our continued support of emerging scholars through our mentoring program, mock interviews, conference travel grants, and essay awards, I am pleased to announce a new award: the WIF Early Career Conference Paper Award, which will be given for the first time in 2018 for a paper given at the WIF Conference by a member who is either a graduate student or in their first 5 years of teaching. Please see the call for submissions below (p. 5).

This brings me to the highlight of our 2017-2018 academic year: the WIF conference in February 2018 at Florida State University in Tallahassee, organized by Aimée Boutin around the theme of *Le Bruit des Femmes*. The interest in the conference was unprecedented and I very much look forward to seeing many of you there. Many thanks to Aimée, to the Women in French board members, as well as to all those who contribute to our organization in less visible ways. Your efforts are much appreciated!

Cecilia Beach

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