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Gossip, So Much More than Hearsay / Le Potin, tellement plus que des racontars

Preface

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Truthful and slanderous? Artistic and scientific? Ancient and modern? Good and bad? Building on the work begun in November 2007 by the Université de Perpignan's Équipe de Recherche VECT's (Voyages, Échanges, Confrontations, Transformations) colloquium, "Potins, cancans et littérature", the University of Guelph, in May 2012, organized a second conference, "Gossip, so much more than hearsay / Le Potin, tellement plus que des racontars" with the aim of pushing the scope of inquiry beyond literature to include a wider variety of contexts, as well as the function(s) of gossip within those contexts. Indeed, a variety of quick Internet searches can show just how prevalent, far-reaching, and multidisciplinary the phenomenon can be. Enter 'gossip' into Google.co.uk yields more than 90 million results; Scholar.google.co.uk offers 278,000; and the University of Guelph's library, more than 117,000. In this volume, we will add an additional eight articles, ranging from literature to media studies to academia.

The issue opens with "Ragots, rumeurs, légendes urbaines, et e-canulars : vers un éclaircissement des genres" co-written, in French and English by Aurore Van de Winkel and Ian Reilly, which examines the ubiquity of cultural forms such as gossip, rumours, urban legends, and hoaxes. This study addresses each cultural form as genre, pointing to their overlapping features and characteristics and situates these forms and practices as vibrant, compelling, and complex forms of discourse that initiate dialogue and deliberation in numerous settings to a broad (if amorphous) public. Following this, in "The Erasure of Empowered Gossip in Academia" Karen C. Adkins offers an examination of the treatment of gossip in academia by analyzing two recent instances of academic gossip becoming publicized, and suggests that the varying results of these case studies reflect the fragile nature and tenuous status of institutional gossip. It is both a crucial tool for individuals to understand and function within workplaces, but its very effectiveness in popularizing critique makes it easy for those with status to critique it. Subsequently, David Fishelov offers a favourable view of gossip Stefan Heym's *In The King David Report*, notwithstanding biblical censuring of that activity. In "Gossip as a Channel for Circulating Subversive Truth: In Heym's *The King David Report*, the GDR and the Jardin du Luxembourg", the author cites Robert Darnton's systematic historical research into the diverse channels for communicating news in Paris of the eighteenth century to substantiate Heym's literary portrayal of gossip as a channel for communicating subversive truth in authoritarian regimes.

Brigitte Denker-Bercoff, in "Des bruits qu'on ne peut contenir," considers the role of gossip in the oral tradition with the Senegalese tale "N'Gor Niébé," which suggests a relationship between gossip and flatulence, arguing that the former is the equivalent of the latter, in that it is basely physical in its contents, its function, and its social role, since it is simultaneously empty, inconvenient and vital. With "Gossip Girl: le potin dans des romans pour adolescentes," Daniela Di Cecco considers the current social functions of gossip in American and Canadian fiction aimed at teenage girls. In her analysis, she argues that while gossip may be considered distinctly female - as opposed to male physical violence - it cannot be easily classified as simply a negative phenomenon. Anne Chamayou analyzes the role of gossip in one example of French *autofiction* by Michel Houellebecq. In "*La Carte et le Territoire* : du potin à l'*autofiction*," Chamayou deconstructs and analyzes Houellebecq's incorporation of media portraits of himself and others into his 2010 novel, thus continuing to expand the territory covered by *autofiction*.

The final two articles examine the relationship between gossip and creation. Novelist Catherine Bush's text, "The Body Not in the Room: Reading Gossip as Fiction" proposes some lines of thought about what we do when we read fiction in order to consider gossip as an act of creative reading. By discussing what happens when we imagine something about someone else, Bush demonstrates how the engaged creativity of the recipient is essential to the act of gossiping. The volume closes with Nathalie Solomon's "Le Potin créateur" which delves deeper into the relationship between gossip and literature and the perceived hierarchy between the two.

In this age of social networking, Internet blogging, electronic surveillance and the ability to instantly disseminate information across the street and across the globe, gossip can seem like a rampantly modern, almost exclusively trivial, phenomenon, but a moment of reflection on the topic proves the contrary. With this issue of *Nouvelle Revue Synergies Canada (NRSC)*, we hope to offer insight into some of the other ways to consider gossip.