

International Association of French Studies (AIEF)

Association Internationale des Études Françaises

Louis van Delft

The AIEF was founded in 1948. Historically, its creation was part of the movement of outreach and international cooperation for which a definite need was felt following the end of the Second World War. Of course the idea of bringing together in an Association specialists in French language and literature from across Europe and the world was also a response to a more strictly academic need: it appeared that, however faithful linguistic and literary studies claimed to be to the well-established French tradition of basing study and research in French language and literature on Greco-Latin foundations, these studies could and should themselves take advantage, more than they had done hitherto, of work being done abroad, and even draw inspiration from certain other models, such as the Romanists, by paying substantially more attention to reciprocal relationships between the different branches of the tree called 'Romania'.

The body that was set up wished quite deliberately to be as light and unrestrictive as possible in order to perpetuate, as far as was feasible in the 20th century, the humanist tradition of conference, discussion and dialogue. Originally the Association was conceived with the objective of promoting regular meetings between a number of colleagues wishing to compare the results of their work and exchange information. We must remember that at that time research, especially in the humanities area, resembled a kind of cottage industry much more than it does today. The risk of isolation had appeared, particularly because one could be unaware of allied research being carried out in other countries. In the arts and literature it was not yet the era of colloquia, seminars and conferences. So the Association set itself the task of transforming what had hitherto been a sort of 'invisible academy', like the one described by Bacon, into a fraternity, a place for friendship as much as knowledge, that would allow individual researchers to escape from isolation and become aware not only of their affinities but also of their common interests.

The Association's statutes, which have been recently amended (in 1994), are revealing in two ways. The document reflects, on the one hand, the concern to preserve, as far as possible and more than 50 years after the foundation of the Association, a flexible organization that is not bureaucratic, formalistic nor legalistic (in this regard note the very small number of articles); but also, on the other hand, the development the profession has undergone (witness the quite large number of members now making up the council). But after 50 years of existence it is clear that the Association's main concern is outreach and internationalization. And in practice there has been a longstanding tradition whereby the president comes alternately from France and then another country. In the latter case Article 5 provides for a kind of management in tandem with a vice-president living in France, thus ensuring that current business is dealt with efficiently.

Indeed over the years the AIEF has had to adapt to new conditions for carrying out teaching and research. It certainly did not expect such a thoroughgoing upheaval. For quite a long period it hoped to remain faithful to its original intentions as an association bringing together specialists who would continue to see themselves as 'honourable folk' and would resist the unstoppable increase in numbers of scholarly gatherings, valuing above all other criteria the need for depth which, at that time, French universities still seemed to prize, for

instance in their fidelity to the model of the *doctorat d'état*. However, the Association came to realize, quite gradually and in particular because of the veritable explosion of critical methods in the 1960s and 1970s, that, unless it wished to cut itself off from live research as it was understood in other advanced countries, unless it wished to see its members grow old with a maybe too exclusively historicist notion of French studies without really ensuring that a new generation could take up the baton and without being sufficiently open to renewal in the discipline, it would be well advised to welcome into its midst colleagues from even more diverse areas and to pay greater attention to 'approaches' that it was not traditionally inclined to.

For this reason initiatives were begun on several fronts: more notice was taken of research outside the 'western' arena (thus it is that, for a few years now, a day or half-day at each conference has been devoted to the situation of French studies across broadly defined or in far flung geographical regions); methods of communicating knowledge have been changed (for instance by the introduction of round tables); an annual prize was set up five years ago to be awarded to a young researcher from a different country every year; an Internet site has of course been created; younger colleagues have been invited to join the council; at conferences, researchers who are not yet intimidating 'authorities' have more often been given the floor; topics that are sometimes more relevant to the contemporary world have been included in the programme for meetings; fundraising methods have been, if not discovered, at least examined; cooperation is being attempted with 'twinned' organizations and with the FILLM.

The chief function of the AIEF and its main achievement, however, remain those of organizing the annual conference and producing, uninterruptedly for 52 years, the annual volume of *Cahiers de l'Association Internationale des Études Françaises* (CAIEF), which has a print run of 1000 copies. This is very much more than a 'shop window'. Without wishing to appear self-satisfied the Association believes this is its contribution to the progress of knowledge. The *Cahiers* series has an important place in many libraries, and constant reference to it is made throughout the world in the most diverse subject areas across all the periods our discipline is concerned with. The most prestigious names appear in these volumes, which the Association makes it a point of honour to publish in a remarkably short time (nearly always within 10 months of conferences). When the moment comes for the AIEF to draw up an even fuller account of its editorial activities than the one that appears in the Tables of its *Cahiers* and when it undertakes to produce, as for example the Société d'Histoire Littéraire de la France did for its centenary, or the Société d'Étude du XVIIe Siècle for its 50th anniversary, a synthesis of what it has contributed, it is a safe bet that it will be able to pride itself on having provided a complete, precise panorama of the discipline's development.

www.aief.eu.org

International Association of Lusitanists (AIL)

Associação Internacional de Lusitanistas

Cristina Robalo Cordeiro

Although I may need to introduce our Association, a member of the FILLM since 1997, it is probably unnecessary to introduce the Portuguese language at the end of a year in which our