

THE TEACHING SPIRIT OF UPEI



ENGLISH:

What can you say about an English department that died? Be blunt, call it boring? Be clever, say it moves, "With little motion and less speed?" Be, angry, say they rape the beauty of their tradition? Be calm, which is admitting insanity? Or be honest, maintain sanity, and try to convince others of the truth of a story that would be more at home as a headline segment in a Ripleys' Believe It Or Not article like you see in newspapers?

My story began on a sunny day in early September when I was standing in our local rink, painfully hungover, and hopelessly confused. I am, or at least was at the time, an English major. As a matter of fact, I have been here now for three years and have never before even considered the possibility of being anything but an English major. English Literature fascinates me, that may sound perverted to some, but it is true nonetheless. I was heavily involved in the study of poetics, a particular passion of mine, but in an effort to vary my studies in the tradition had decided to shift some of my emphasis to drama, to get a better perspective on the entire tradition. So I decided to do a special studies course on Wallace Stevens, and take some Shakespeare and some modern drama.

As luck would have it such courses were being offered (don't laugh, have you ever tried to take a course in continental literature from the English dept?) At this point I think I should say that I am not going to hide anything, I'm going to tell the truth, and mention people's names, I have no choice...

I enlisted in Prof. Coyle's Shakespeare course, and Prof. Frazer's more contemporary drama course. The tutorial at that time was undecided. Now we get to the action part of my story...

To my surprise, nobody in the English dept. seemed to know anything about Wallace Stevens. That seemed strange, I always thought he was quite a major American poet, but all was not lost, I was informed Prof. Beum was qualified, an interesting word to say the least, to handle my proposed tutorial.

But where was Prof. Beum? In Ontario. Well, I had little time to lose, but I decided to wait and do it with him anyway. Three

weeks went by. With the coming of the fourth week I was informed he was somewhere around the campus. Another week of cloak and

dagger operations trying to find the man proved trying but finally I succeeded in seeing him. He said he didn't want to do it. I arranged to see him anyway, and after a session of what came close to pleading, he agreed to try it. Incidentally, I was informed by him that the reason he hadn't been in his office was because he didn't like to see students. That was strange, I thought, but let it go at that...

By this time my other two drama courses were well underway. It was here that I received perhaps my greatest shock. They consisted of the respective professors reading the plays aloud for fifty minutes, three times a week. Let me explain that the last time anyone had read plays to me was in grade nine, and then it was seldom. I didn't know how to accept this approach to the subject of drama, and it was here that I made a fatal mistake. I simply ignored it. I very seldom went to classes, and when I did I composed poems while in the background professors read, or asked such pointed questions as the meaning of the word improvisation. My first test in subject matter was in Prof. Coyle's Shakespeare class. I arrived ten minutes late with a pen that was out of ink, ran out of time on the question I was doing, and was given a 55 for not answering Part B. I thought of going to see Prof. Coyle, but the last time I had done that I had been sternly about taking tutorials. Despite his suspicions I was given 84 in the tutorial (my English marks last year were between 85 and 90.) I was indignant about all this, and totally alienated from Prof. Frazer's course as well, so when the time for her mid-term paper came along I told lies, bullshitted and wrote clearly the worst paper of my academic career. She caught

me in the lies, and wondered how I could dislike George Bernard Shaw, having only read three full plays of his, plus excerpts from a half a dozen more. I was caught offguard and remained silent...

Things just went from bad to worse. I fell into a pit of seemingly endless dep-

ression over the whole thing, my drinking grew worse, and my studies came to a complete halt. By the time final exams came around I was a confirmed alcoholic, disgusted with university in general, and totally alienated from the English Dept. Second, Frances Frazer. Prof. Frazer taught me to hate Shaw instead of dislike him. She defined words like improvisation, phrases like phallic symbol, and generally succeeded in convincing me that contemporary drama must be very boring indeed. I was working on the wharf in Summerside a lot, going to see my dying grandfather a lot, was late with my term paper, and before, I could explain was informed that my paper would start with the grade C-. Talk about adding insult to injury. In any event, my English marks were a 50 in Shakespearean drama, a 55 in more contemporary drama, and an 84 in study of Wallace Stevens. I no longer take English courses, I take philosophy, political science and history courses...

In conclusion, let me evaluate the people I have mentioned. First, Robert Beum, Prof. Beum taught me nothing. We only talked twice, and I have no idea why he gave me an 84. Perhaps it was for sheer patience under pressure.

Finally, J.J. Coyle. Prof. Coyle taught me the complete lyrics of Danny Boy, which he sings before and after every class, plus a sadness if that is all William Shakespeare means....

To write this article has given me a great deal of pain. I feel dirty having to do it, but am somewhat desperate to make my views public. I don't know what's to be done about the English Dept. Perhaps they are giving satisfactory service to hundreds of other students, but if you feel like I do about the department do what I should have done, and I will do Ignore them.

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