

## Letters to the editor

Dear Editor,

During the recent referendum rallies held in both Charlottetown and Montreal, I noted with great pleasure the leadership provided by UPEI students. As I watched the television coverage, read the news, and observed on campus, there were a few individuals involved in key leadership positions. Primarily I would like to recognize and congratulate Chris Burns and Ross Williams of Marian Hall. These two individuals, assisted by several other students, headed a rally to support Canadian unity that brought the province

together at Province House. It was no small feat to attract the major politicians and other local leaders to rally round the flag at Province House, and to show the unity that we desire for our country.

With individuals such as Ross and Chris on our campus, we have demonstrated leadership that will bring us prosperity in the future. May I congratulate these individuals, as well as all others who helped organize and participated in this great event.

Sincerely,  
Blaine Jensen  
Director of Student Services

## UPEI GETS NEW OMBUDSPERSON

by Amy Gallan

For the first time in four years, UPEI has an ombudsperson. On October 26, first year arts student Chris Burns was elected to the position.

The job of the ombudsperson is to act as a neutral mediator between two people or groups on campus who are having a problem and are looking for an independent, completely confidential advisor to offer solutions to the problem.

One of the goals of the mediator is to keep numerous records and observe whether certain problems are consistent. If these problems are consistent, the ombudsperson works with the president of the university, Dr. Epperly, to resolve them.

His future goal of being a lawyer and working in mediation was one of the reasons Burns ran for the position as ombudsperson. "But more importantly," explains Burns, "I see a lot of student apathy on this campus, and I think that in this position you can make people care about really tough issues. . . you can see that if they actually speak up, that things will change. . . and change is usually a good thing." Burns has already helped students raise their voices for what they believe in by helping to organize the pro-Canada rally held recently at Provincial House.

Burns says that as of yet he has received no complaints from the students of UPEI. There are, however, issues which he plans to look into because they both interest and bother him. "For instance, the voting procedure at the university for student union election. . . Only about 9% of the student body voted -- 187 people. . . that's embarrassing." Burns also says that the voting system at UPEI is not up to par with those of other universities. "I'm not saying that we should be exactly like other universities, but it's just undemocratic the way it is," he explains.

Although Burns' home, Port McNickell, located on the shores of the Georgian Bay, is only one third the size of Charlottetown, he sees Prince Edward Island as a relatively small place. It was this smallness of the Island and the university that brought Burns to UPEI. "I came to PEI because I was looking for a small university where I could do what I wanted and do things like this," reflects Burns. "I didn't plan to stay here, I planned to do one year here and then to go to a 'real' university, but now I know that this is a real university and it's some place where I think I'm going to be pretty happy, so this is where I'm going to do my degree." Burns is looking forward to the challenge of handling problems that university students may have and any problems that the system might have.

## Drag Queens, Cross-Dressers, and Effeminate Boys: From Shakespeare to the Present

by Shanna Ramsay and Stacy Dunn

Provocative is the word that sums up the recent guest lecture organized by the Women's Studies Program on "Cross-dressing Women, Effeminate Boys, and Displaced Masculinities: Sexual Anxiety in Early Modern England". The speaker, Dr. Goran Stanivukovic of the University College of Cape Breton, had an attentive audience of students, faculty, and staff think about sixteenth century attitudes towards boys, men, women, and sexuality. Having taught and researched Renaissance sexuality at universities in Germany and England, Stanivukovic noted how these attitudes were "invisible" before, but current study in Renaissance romance in drama and prose fiction is bringing these attitudes to light.

Introducing themes of love and gender construction in sixteenth century England, Stanivukovic explained that the English had no concept of homosexuality and heterosexuality. In fact, society did not acknowledge the idea of a same-sex relationship. Most surprising, Renaissance sex crimes were rarely prosecuted; extreme forms of sexual behaviour were not an issue.

However, according to Stanivukovic, if a man fell deeply in love with a woman, he feared that he would acquire effeminate traits or his lover would fool him by committing adultery. The Early Modern fantasy of female sexuality was "voracious, uncontrollable and, in short, male sexuality out of control". Due to these fears, males felt the need to socially construct femininity to fit patriarchal power. This construction of gender role may explain why boys were used as women in Renaissance plays. Here, men could control and play with the way women were "supposed" to be.

According to Stanivukovic, the boy provided the "safety of male gender but also concealed the softness of female gender which masculine man desired but couldn't possess [due to] fear of masculine effeminization". Indeed, one of the persistent masculine fears involved the man's loss of his "male identity and [reversal] to being woman". The claim of universal masculinity thus overlies the anxiety that "we are all in essence really women".

On the other hand, Shakespeare's plays and other Renaissance poems also demonstrate female power. In many of these works, women challenged and gained independence from male authority. For instance, the cross-dressed women of *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It* are challenging men's perception of themselves -- they are redressing the problems associated with patriarchy. Also, the woman in Andrew Marvell's *They Flee From Me* is controlling the sexual relationship; she is challenging the man's authority and taking pleasure from it.

Stanivukovic's speech thus revises the sixteenth century woman's place in romance. She is not just a secondary character. Instead, she has a special sexual power over men and does not fear addressing the disadvantages of patriarchy. Effeminacy was a great threat to Renaissance man and perhaps the reason why critical analysis of this topic was on the sidelines of valid criticism.

The discussion after the talk focused on the dominant preoccupation with cross-dressing and gender role reversal in our own society. Dr. Irene Gammel, Coordinator of Women's Studies, commented that our popular culture is attracted to the image of effeminized man (e.g. Michael Jackson), which parallels with the concepts of Shakespearean boy actors. Such contemporary representations, Stanivukovic noted, are more anger-driven with a purpose of going against the norm to "annoy the establishment and authority" of a patriarchal society. Dr. Shannon Murray, who has taught a special seminar on cross-dressing, pointed out that the "cross-dresser becomes not a man and not a woman but a third possibility, a cross-gendered character". This is illustrated in such recent films as *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* and *To Wong Foo*.

Students, including ourselves, agreed that Stanivukovic's insights are helpful and imperative in understanding the complexities of gender and sexuality in Shakespeare and other works of Early Modern England. Moreover, this kind of revisionist criticism is incredibly asserting for women. Since, to quote Stanivukovic, "What can be threatening to men can be empowering to women". What Shakespeare has given his female audiences is something to be proud of -- a sense of empowerment.