

The Letters/Opinions section of the Gazette is meant as a campus forum for all Dalhousie students. The opinions expressed within may not necessarily be those of the Gazette staff or editorial board. We welcome all submissions, but reserve the right to edit for style and content. It is the Gazette's mandate not to print racist, sexist or homophobic material.

# Freedom of speech overshadowed by passion

Last Thursday evening I wandered into the McInnes room, fully aware of the impending tumultuous scene — a panel of four speakers and a room full of agitated listeners just waiting to embrace the opportunity to voice their opinion on the subject of *Playboy* reps on campus.

I walked into the discussion very much on the side of the two panelists, Dr. Marjorie Stone, a Women's Studies professor at Dal, and Bruce Wark, a professor of Journalism at King's. I walked out of the discussion feeling a little disconcerted, maybe even slightly sympathetic, towards outmatched panelists Bruce Yip and B.W. Wildsmith, the two *Playboy* reps.

## Courts, society and witchcraft

I was intrigued to see two heated letters berating me for my ignorance and wilful denial of the "women's holocaust". My off-the-cuff comments made to Janet French were not misrepresented in the article, but they were very summary, and I would like to make a further, final commentary here.

In the animist civilization that was Europe's prior to the eighteenth century, almost everyone believed in a spirit universe that could be manipulated by words and gestures, a lore that was, if not secret, then at least reserved for initiates. Witches were indeed consulted as healers, who operated on both empirical and symbolic planes. But they foretold the future too, located lost objects through divining techniques and distributed amulets, charms and remedies to their neighbours. Most of them were women, but priests and monks constituted a significant minority too. When tragedy struck villagers in the form of collective catastrophes, like epidemic or famine, or when infants and adults died of a wasting illness, people feared that these magicians had done it to them. Village women were among the first to press their menfolk, or to go themselves before the magistrate to complain, and they usually provided a list of misdeeds that they attributed to the witch. In most cases, magistrates waited for accusations to build up before they acted, and in any event, there were no police forces that could have rounded up large numbers of suspects and forced witnesses to appear without co-operation from below.

Criminal trials of all sorts were conducted behind closed doors, the plaintiffs, the accused and the witnesses appearing individually, their testimony taken down (often verbatim) by a scribe. Once the magistrate felt that there was enough evidence to make a case, the accused witch (like those accused of other crimes, usually men) were tortured; and in many cases, the testimony was recorded during torture. However, the number of confessions obtained under torture was never more than a small percentage, and even confession under torture had to be corroborated by other evidence before it could be admissible. Local judges responding to local pressure, often quickly came to a guilty

The primary question I had for the reps was what exactly their role is on campus and whether or not they are getting paid to endorse the magazine. Apparently I was not the only one whose curiosity was piqued. This was the first question put forth.

According to Bruce and B.W., they do not promote the magazine at their parties and their dedication to the porn industry is completely voluntary, aside from the one free issue they each receive per month (this admission was eventually extracted after some fairly intense interrogation from disgruntled members of the audience).

According to the reps, the parties are merely an avenue to

verdict; but in countries with a judicial pyramid, conviction for a serious crime entailed an automatic appeal, and appeals courts usually overturned them. Beginning around 1600, and systematically after 1650, appeals judges dismissed cases of witchcraft out of hand, and witches continued their activities undisturbed in the major countries of western Europe: France, England, the Netherlands, Italy and Spain. Germany, with its myriad jurisdictions and lacking centralized judicial mechanisms, evolved more slowly, and the number of witches executed there over about two and a half centuries (circa 1480-1730) probably numbered in the tens of thousands — but because of its extreme decentralization, firm figures are hard to come by. A generation of close work on the trials themselves (in both secular and church courts) has come up with approximative and plausible figures for most European countries, and the Killam Library has a fair selection of scientific publications. The information is available to those curious enough to consult it, and this is the material that I will continue to assign my classes.

History, when it is done methodically, with the aim of attaining some reality, has to make it clear where the information comes from. Those who make sweeping claims should be ready to supply some clear evidence for it, and outrageous claims require compelling evidence. It is not enough to make extrapolations from selected literary documents, taken out of context, when European archives bulge with a wide variety of first-hand documents dealing with the question. These documents are accessible to the general public and are indispensable to any study of the past. I have not seen any ability on the part of the apologists of a "Women's Holocaust" to determine where and when — exactly — these atrocities occurred.

The huge tallies advanced by feminist writers (hundreds of thousands, or millions of victims) are fortunately only twisted fantasies. The Holocaust envy of my critics cheapens the real one, that of 1939-45.

GREGORY HANLON

encourage people to gather in a friendly atmosphere and have a good time. They present an emancipation from the conservative attitude which is apparently impeding Halifax's nightlife. They provide an opportunity for people to get dressed up, listen to some skilful DJs, and essentially revive some spirit into the apathetic students at Dalhousie. One has to admit, their intentions were respectable.

The problem that I, and seemingly everyone else who attended the forum, have with this is the corporation they have chosen to represent themselves with. The *Playboy* reps were subjected to the scathing condescension of those in attendance. This became quite tiresome towards the end of the hour long discussion and what commenced as a public forum on the topic of pornography quickly escalated into a personal attack on the morality of the reps.

The hostility which infiltrated the room is understandable — pornography is a contentious topic. Personally, I find it incomprehensible as to why anyone would want to be affiliated with a

corporation whose primary source of financial success is through the degradation of women. However, I also think that although the reps are defending a belief system many of us may find questionable, it is not our right to deem them unprincipled or amoral.

Pornography is a societal problem and banning *Playboy* reps from campus is not going to change that. Yes, I believe that *Playboy* magazine objectifies women. As does *Cosmopolitan* magazine. I also believe that beer ads often objectify women. I also believe that music often objectifies women. If one is going to pose the argument that the insidious images in *Playboy* magazine may encourage some men to indulge in violent acts such as rape, then one must also acknowledge that the same can be said for multitudes of other images which we are presented with everyday. Nobody seems to have a problem with beer reps on campus, or DJs who play misogynistic music on campus, and I do not see anyone protesting the fact that *Cosmo* is sold in the campus bookstore. The images are subtle, and ubiquitous. The fact is, there are always going

to be issues which particular people will find offensive, or situations which cause particular people to feel uncomfortable. If we start trying to eradicate them all, where do we draw the line?

At the risk of sounding as if I am simplifying a very complex issue, I do believe that if *Playboy* reps and their beliefs make you feel uncomfortable then the obvious solution is to not attend their parties. Remove yourself from the situation. As crooked as I believe the entire pornography industry and anything remotely affiliated with it to be, the strength of my belief in freedom of speech far exceeds it. Perhaps this intense contention is the unexpected result of something as simple as two guys trying to figure out a way to throw a really good party. Perhaps the fact that they chose *Playboy* to support them in this endeavour was merely a poor judgement call. However, if what they claim is true, that is, that they are standing up for something they truly believe in, so be it. Freedom of expression is, fortunately, and in this particular case, unfortunately, still a basic human right.

JAIME JACQUES

## Apathy on Remembrance Day

Apathy is never an excuse. A Canadian should never say they are too busy to give a moment of silence for the war-fallen. And an American should never say they don't care about past wars while their country prepares to make war on another.

Last Wednesday, I went into a drug store to get some tissue for my sore nose and went up to the cashier to pay for it. I said "Well, it wouldn't be Remembrance Day without weather like this," referring to the rain outside. The cashier responded, "I don't really care... it doesn't affect me so I don't care... I'm not from this country so it doesn't affect me." All I could spurt out in my astoundment was, "Oh, well what country do you come from?" After informing me Virginia was her origin, I asked, "Yeah but don't you have Memorial Day down there?" Her final response was, "Yeah, but it doesn't affect me so I don't care." I left in disgust.

Now I'm sorry, absolutely no one should say that in this country on this day. Although the US lost many lives in what is typically believed to be their saving the day, the loss was probably a smaller proportion to the total population than here in Canada. Every life was touched either directly or indirectly by a death in the war. I am certain there were some in the U.S. who didn't know and didn't care. Unfortunately it has carried down to today. (And don't think I'm anti-American, I have many close American friends — I just don't like their policies).

The second incident occurred

or rather didn't occur earlier that day at the Grand Parade, where the main Halifax ceremony took place. I went with the King's delegation because there was an invitation for anyone to go down and I knew there wasn't a Dal delegation. The only universities represented were King's and SMU, even though no SMU students attended to place their wreath. I can't speak for MSU or NSCAD, who may have placed wreaths at other cenotaphs. I asked the DSU why they weren't there and apparently our president was away conferencing so the DSU told the Canadian Legion no one from Dal could place a wreath. I was there... I'm a Dal student... hey, I could have placed it! There are 13,000 Dal students and most of those who got out of bed that morning could have placed a wreath on behalf of the others.

So why am I telling you this? I think we are witnessing a change in Remembrance Day. There are less and less veterans each year and more and more forget even as people try harder to remember. We get bombarded by images of individuals suffering the horrors of war... while teachers throw out numbers of dead and atrocities. It's not that these images are invalid; it's just we who were not there can not process the dichotomy. I would never pretend to understand. I only finally talked to a related veteran two weeks ago, and this year's ceremony marks the first live one I ever went to (having always watched it on TV every other year). I don't really think I began to understand until my second year of

university. And you have to wonder sometimes how much those award-winning junior high and high school students really understand "dying for country and freedom" — hell, I can't even define freedom.

Now the point of remembering is to not forget, lest it never happen again. I talked to a WWII vet and he said they believed that war would be the end of it and there would be no more, but it was all a "bunch of B.S.". This has been the century of war and it doesn't seem to slow down as we approach the supposedly "inevitable apocalypse". We get this sense sometimes *our* world is a safe, warm, fuzzy blanket of love and happiness, while we desensitize ourselves to children carrying grenades and sub-automatic machine guns. The post-modern utopia? I doubt it.

It might be easier to kill people now while you sit in a chair and push a button and never see the face of your enemy. You can say, "Well the two world wars had inferior technology and now we don't use trenches and inefficient things like that." But the lesson of war was not more-war-made-easy, nor was it appeasement until someone kills six or more million people out of hate. We have to think about what happened on a historical level and an individual level and at least try to understand. Remembrance Day doesn't seem to reduce war, but at least it's there. you just have to get out of bed and think.

TRISTAN STEWART-ROBERTSON



Writers, may we impose on you to pen a few words for the erudite readership of this eclectic publication.

The Dalhousie Gazette, room 312, SUB. Meetings Mondays at 4:30

