

English on the brink

WOW, it's amazing how time flies when your department is dying.

It seems like just yesterday that English at Dalhousie was among the best undergraduate programmes in the country. In fact, a scant three or four years ago, one of the most prestigious degrees a student could land in this university-centric city was that of Dal English Honours. Yet today, the department is a mere shadow of its former self, and the possibility of its resources being further depleted looms large.

Much hard work has been invested by various members of faculty in hopes of restructuring the department, and yet a brief survey of the damage done shows that there is still a long road ahead. Also, recovery will partially depend on us, the collective student body, to ensure the continuing survival of this essential facet of our university.

Drastic alterations in the make-up of the English department have recently been made in order to accommodate an increasingly dwindling budget, and although these are nowhere near finished, the effects have already been devastating.

The previously illustrious honours program has been hit particularly hard. The number of seminars in the 1995-96 session have been reduced to three from a former low of eight, and as a result many honours students are now fulfilling their credits in classes of more than ninety people, instead of the customary fifteen or so in seminars. While it could be argued that reductions of this kind to a department's limited-enrollment programmes are to be expected in the present economic climate, the sad fact is that entry-level courses have had to undergo similar changes. The single most fundamental class offered at the undergraduate level, English 1000, is now taught by more part-time and contracted instructors than it is by permanent faculty members. In addition, the increasing shortage of professors is now forcing the department to consider the possibility of expanding its first year classes to such unthinkable numbers as 150 students. With all of these problems, and the fact that further downsizing is an imminent reality, it is all too clear that the department has indeed fallen upon hard times.

Well la-de-da, you say, our entire university is currently suffering from tremendous hardship, and this type of situation is hardly unique to English. What is unique, however, is the extent to which the department has taken the brunt of some of the most severe blows levelled at Dalhousie. For example, in the spring of 1995, the faculty of Arts and Sciences was instructed to reduce its number of positions by 9.5; more than half of these were shouldered by English, which reluctantly lost five professors. While this continuing decimation of the department has obvious implications upon its ability to entice future majors and honours students, it also has severe ramifications on the quality of instruction available to the hundreds of students who every year choose English as their writing require-

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ment. There is now talk of removing this requirement altogether, but even if it remains, it is quite possible that the same student who less than three years ago would have received invaluable attention in bettering their ability to communicate, might tomorrow be attending their classes at the Dalplex gym. And although immense enrollment may be acceptable for other first year classes, skills as rudimentary as reading and writing can in no way afford to be jeopardised in the name of fiscal responsibility.

One concerned group of students attempting to confront these circumstances is the Dalhousie English society, and we need your help. An integral step on the long road ahead is the promotion of a heightened awareness concerning the critical nature of the situation, and this is an avenue that the society has targeted in its efforts to save the department. More help than the work of any society, however, is the voice and opinion of us all-too-often silent types. As a collective student body concerned about our quality and access to education, we must empower ourselves through insisting upon our basic rights and needs. One of these is the ability to capably communicate and understand our own language, which is precisely what the English department has, and must continue to, offer.

If you have ever been touched by the profundity of poetry, or been invigorated by the inspiration of a novel, or even simply believe in the need for varied avenues of expression, then you also believe in the importance of protecting what remains of the Dalhousie English Department. What you now need to do is voice this belief, in any way you can.

MATTHEW COHEN

Please E-mail us at english-society@tuweb.ucis.dal.ca or drop by one of our meetings, Wednesday at 3:30, 1434 Henry St.

blacks on black

A WEEKLY COLUMN BY A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE BLACK UNITED STUDENTS

The making of a 'Tom'

(The following comment was made to me by a young Halifax brother, currently attending Dal. He is at the moment involved with four white females and has received numerous gifts in exchange for his sexual 'services').

"Man, white women will do all sorts o' stuff for you. I get the lovin' whenever I want and they'll buy me anything. I ain't forgotten where I'm at. I'm gonna get me a Black woman when it comes time to settle down..."

The practice of interracial coupling, more commonly known as 'Jungle Fever,' has found a loving home here in Halifax. This is an indisputable fact. However, if we are to truly understand why it occurs with such disturbing regularity, we must first climb inside the mind of this young black man and critically examine how he was created, and then analyze how the presence of the interracial relationship within the black community is of benefit to white power and privilege.

Allow me to set the scene...

The young brother (let's call him 'Tom') enters kindergarten. His mind is sharp and malleable; his interest is high and his potential is great. He opens his first book. 'See Dick jump, see Sally run.' He reads 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,' 'Alice in Wonderland,' 'Cinderella,' and 'Sleeping Beauty.' Nobody in any of his readings looks like him.

The class is assigned a task called 'Trace your family tree.' Some of Tom's white classmates can trace their line to the 12th century. He can only go back to his great-grandmother. Nobody told him about slavery and how it destabilized his Black family. Tom travels home to East Preston on the Metro Transit bus. As the bus rumbles down Gottingen street, he peers out of the soot-covered window and sees the faces of Black men who look just like him standing on the corner.

He arrives home and is greeted by his mother and father. His parents remember the racist attack on

Africville during the 60's; his parents also know that Halifax has changed very little since that time, and yet they tell the boy none of this. February is greeted as Black History Month. Tom's classmates and teachers expect him, as a Black person, to be fully aware of his culture. However, Black history does not appear in the curriculum. All Tom knows is what is fed to him on television — that is, Black people starving, playing sports, and committing crimes.

By the time Tom is nine years old, he honestly believes that white people own everything, create everything, and are more intelligent. He views his own culture through the corrupting lenses of white racism; thus, he sees his people as savage and contributing nothing to the world, besides drugs and crime. By age nine, Tom has a strong unconscious hatred for all things Black, including himself. He has been overwhelmed by the eurocentric propaganda machine which is the education system, as well as the failure of his parents (and the larger Black community) to provide him with a counteractive ideology of Black mental emancipation, groomed to negate the psychological terrorism caused by white racism.

Fast forward to grade nine. Tom is now 14 years old. He is discovering his sexuality and is beginning to see the female form in a different light. His ideal woman is a white woman, not because they are what he sees all around him, but because racism decrees that the white woman is the ultimate representation of all that is beautiful and pure. Racist mythology also misrepresents the Black male in white minds as a brute with an enormous penis, who has the sexual stamina of ten white men; and, in a culture obsessed with sex, this myth makes the Black male a very desirable sex partner. Tom begins to view himself as a sexual being, whose sole 'raison d'être' is to ejaculate inside a white woman. He is now ready for his first interracial relationship, whose existence is a necessary factor in the subjugation of Black people in Halifax (and indeed, throughout the world).

To be continued in next week's Gazette.

C. BURCHALL

A sensitive New age

It never ceases to amaze me that we've made it this far. We've come close to extinction as a people many times; our ability to survive on this planet is incredible. With all of the social problems our society faces, from poverty to the acceptance of homosexuals, and from racial equality to trying to find a decent pizza, the most dangerous social trend in history has arisen. It is the New Man and New Woman movements.

It has swept across North America in a tidal wave of tears and feminism. Fifty Thousand New Men gathered at the Minneapolis Metrodome for a cry-in, and women's liberation conferences have arisen in every major city.

For women, the fight against male oppression is a never-ending battle. All around them, there is oppression. No New Woman would ever grace the male-dominated delivery room where the fruit of the woman's womb is ripped from her. For the New Woman, the only place to have a child is at home or in a birthing clinic where they can be at one with their pain, and not have the experience forced away from them by male epidurals.

New Men on the other hand have gone in the opposite direction. Every man has been abused as a child, and every man's father is a bastard. The ability to be in touch with our feelings is the hallmark of the New Men's movement. One New Man proclaimed that he has always been sexually aggressive because he never saw his father's penis (I don't understand the rationale either).

The New Woman's movement stems from the highly successful Women's Liberation movement of the first eighty years of this century. What started out as a place for disgruntled wives to explore the problems of their marriage has, in just ten years, turned into a major religious force.

Every major North American university (including Dalhousie) has a women's studies program. At Oberlin college in the U.S., it is a mandatory course for all arts students (male and female), and any person who dares criticize the position taken by this program is written off as disillusioned and in need of education (male or female).

The New Man's movement is primarily stocked with unattractive, overweight, balding, middle-aged men (resembling George from Seinfeld), all of whom are trying to find a place to belong and explanations as to why their life has been so terrible. These men are encouraged to blame anyone and everyone else for their problems and seek solace in their own emotions.

New Man's meetings are remarkable, for almost every session begins with therapeutic breathing and stretching routines (ten thousand overweight men showing the crack of their collective asses at the same time — Oh! Joy!), and ends with a vigorous turn of tears.

Allow me to state my position. Women and men must be equal. Because a woman is strong she should not be mistaken as lesbian, and because a man can cry does not mean that he is gay (these are the stereotypes of Homosexuals and Heterosexuals that are ripping our society apart).

That aside, I don't believe that women need to devote their entire existence to kicking ass and taking numbers, or conversely, to cooking and cleaning. Men should not feel the need to cry every time an operatic Aria strikes an especially solemn tone, or even to fight every time we get drunk. As a people we shouldn't need to blame everyone else for our problems. Take responsibility for your actions and dispositions.

There is a happy medium. Men can cry and not be any less masculine, and women can be tough without becoming Lorena Bobbitt! I am not a New Man. I am not an Old Man. I am me. I cry when I need to. I get depressed. I have never laid a hand in anger on a woman, and I never will. I am far from perfect (I actually look like a New Man, but with all his hair). What I am is a Daniel Clark, and that is my identity.

DANIEL CLARK