

'What fools these mortals be'

A modern, five-act tragedy on the follies of registration

By RALPH MELNYCHUK

"One is tempted to define man as a rational animal who always loses his temper when called upon to act according to the dictates of reason."

—Oscar Wilde

After witnessing that epitome of human frustration, better known as registration week, one is tempted to define man as a rational IBM number who always acts with stupefied blind obedience when called upon not to bend, fold or mutilate the furniture.

At the risk of being permanently ostracized from the English department, I would like to examine the registration procedure as fitting into the pattern of the classic, five-act tragedy.

The protagonist is a freshman. His/her/its tragic flaw is his decision to attend university. From here on he's finished. Our tragic hero is at the mercy of the fates (the infernal machine, as it were).

Fate could be more specifically defined as efficiency, for it is in the interests of efficiency that various things happen to the protagonist.

After overcoming such minor hurdles as finding the phys ed building, our hero first comes face to face with the forces of destruction. The arch-fiend, of course, is the sly, insidious, well oiled piece of machinery—the registrar.



But the arch-fiend has many faces, the first of which is one of U of A's finest, the campus patrol, who politely tells our hero he cannot approach Part I until the allotted time in the schedule.

Our hero, true to form, takes the bold and courageous way out of this dilemma—he waits.

Then, through the door, he shoulders the burden he will carry on his back throughout the rest of his ordeal.

"What, oh what, can it be?" he cries, as he marches briskly towards Part II.

He stops. He looks to the right. Then to the left. Then, with sweaty fingers darting swiftly, he opens the package.

Horror of horrors! A bundle of IBM cards.

But our protagonist is unaware of the evil powers of an IBM card, which can twist his fate by one misplaced hole,

so he proceeds gamely on. He has passed the point of no return. From here on, his trails will multiply in a rhythmic crescendo to their ultimate climax in Part V and the hero's resulting fall to the fate worse than death which awaits him.

In Part II he is subjected to a trial which is the scourge of the automated man.

He is forced to make a decision.

Believe it or not, from that endless list of courses, none of which he knows the first thing about, he actually has to decide, not which five he would like to take, but which five he can get away with.

This is something for which his previous education never prepared him. For, decision making involves thought. And thought has no place in an educational system that places all its emphasis on the ability to regurgitate information.

Somehow our stalwart hero finds the energy to pull through. With swift, slashing strokes of his pen, he scribbles down sequence numbers, course numbers, I.D. numbers, etc. etc. ad infinitum.

TURNING POINT

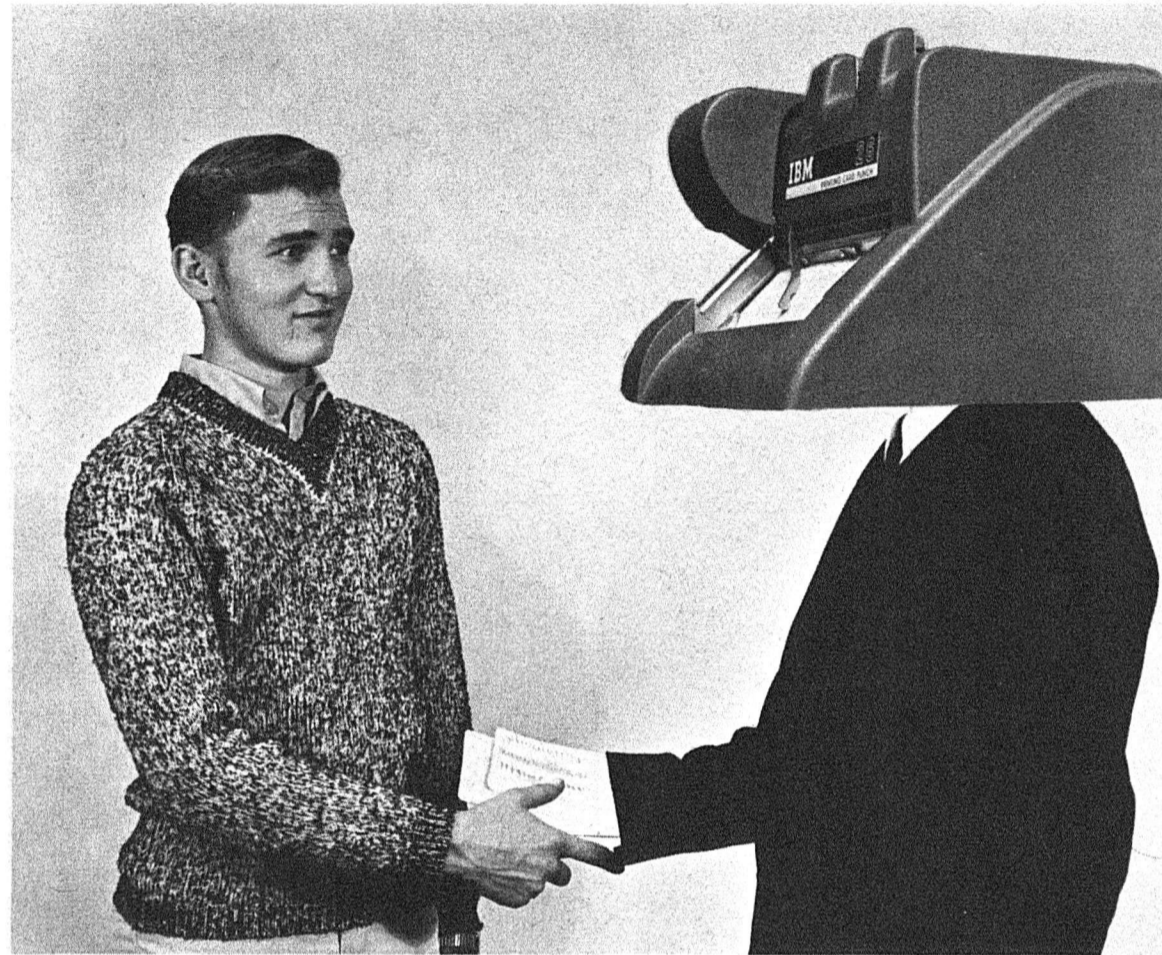
In a dazed and bewildered stupor he hands his cards to the faculty advisor, listens unhearing to mumbled instructions, and stumbles out. In department after department, room after room, he battles with the foe.

Full sections, alternate selections, back for approval.

As his constant struggles are finally beginning to take a definite pattern, our hero finds that he has somehow completed Parts III and IV. Bloody, but unbowed, a new vigor enters his step as he approaches Part V, for what he knows will be the ultimate showdown.

He knows that he has passed the turning point. Part III was his last chance to assert his individuality and remain a man, but he has failed to do this, and knows he must face the consequences.

(Note to the uninitiated: the turning



point of a tragedy comes in Act III.)

The climatic struggle and downfall in Part V is almost too terrible for words. Our hero's life is laid bare, decoded, recoded, encoded—in short, transformed into electrical impulses.


Our hero, in a magnanimous gesture of defeat, surrenders his IBM cards, collapses into a quivering heap, and dies.

His last words, which echo through the minds of every true-blue university student are

"I must not use my initiative: I must do what I'm told.

"I must not . . .

"I must not . . ."



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