

«noted»

Newsletter Of The English Department

Issue N° 1
May 1995

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noTed N° 1, May 1995

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Why a Newsletter?

editorial

More than just another acronym in the jungle of awkward cryptograms, this newsletter is intended to be a practical tool that will address interesting issues and give you useful information as well as the most satirical prose that can be done around. Our goal in publishing this "zine" is to share -about four times a year- our experience as students at the Université de Genève and to gather like-minded people on a specific project.

The quality and interest of this publication will largely depend on your willingness to participate and to contribute actively to this adventure. All ideas to improve noTed are welcomed and those who feel they are "natural born writers" should definitively send their deadly prose our way. Hot topics and controversial issues are welcomed. First year students, if you have something to say, this is the place for fame and glory. "Veteran" students, your experience and wisdom are urgently needed by the new illiterate dwarfs. Teachers and assist-

ants, the students will be delighted to discover the alpha and omega of your wisdom.

Send us your best contribution, enlight and delight the humble and honorable reader that seeks truth in this ocean of uncertainty... We would greatly appreciate to have your articles properly typed on diskette or send via e-mail, but if technology is really problematic, we would eventually accept to go back to the old-fashioned way!

We have decided to use our knowledge together with technology to make the best out of this publication. We have decided to publish it both as hard-copy - available in the English library and at the Comédie - and under its electronical format that will be available on the public server of the university. And remember: Newsletter = News and Letter. Noted= To be Noted.

Nicholas Palffy

NB: Next issue will be published beginning of December. Deadline for submissions: 5th of November, 1995.



What Kind of a Library Would You Like?

Libraries play a very important role in the life of our faculty. It is a place where we can study, consult references and, of course, borrow books. As you certainly know, the "Faculté des Lettres" has several libraries, but what you may not know is that there is also a "Commission des Bibliothèques" which addresses questions concerning the development of the libraries and their harmonization on issues such as opening hours and borrowing policies. This Commission is composed of two representatives from the different bodies of the faculty (that is students, "corps intermédiaire", "corps professoral" and librarians) as well as the administrator, the head-librarian and a vice-dean of the faculty.

I am a member of this Commission, representing the students, and during our last meeting I heard proposals which really scared me. Many members of the Commission believe that the primary role of our libraries is to be devoted to consultation while the BPU should be a lending library. For this reason and to discharge supervisors, they want to restrict the possibility of borrowing books from our libraries! Four ways to reach this goal have been thought of:

1. to shorten the length of the borrowing (which is currently one week);
2. to cut down the numbers of books which can be borrowed at the same time (the present limit is four books);
3. to install borrowing times outside of which one could not borrow books (now we can borrow books anytime when the library is open);
4. to reduce the categories of books which can be borrowed (the present restricted categories include mainly

reference books, books on reserve shelves and precious books).

Apparently the first proposal has already been ruled out as not resolving anything, given that books do not seem to be returned within the deadlines anyway.

The second proposal would prevent us from borrowing more than two or three books at the same time from the faculty libraries as a whole. Nowadays we can in effect borrow four books from each library as there is no coordination



between the libraries. But this will be over when the borrowing procedure is computerized.

The third proposal, to have borrowing hours, will create difficulties for everyone and specially for those who have other activities besides their studies, such as a part-time job or family obligations, and might not easily manage to come to the library at the required times.

Last but not least, the fourth proposal would prevent us from borrowing books of certain kinds. The present suggestion is to forbid the borrowing of literary works. We would have to read them in the library, or to find other libraries

which would accept that we borrow from them or to buy the books ourselves. There might be enough English language book stores in Geneva to find the books we want, but think of languages such as Japanese or Chinese! As for buying the books, we all know the delays when we order books from as close as Great Britain, not to mention the United States.

We might have to choose between one of these four proposals or between a combination of them. Which one would you rather have? If it is the introduction of borrowing hours, which schedule would you find advisable? If it is a reduction of the categories of books, would you prefer borrowing literary works or critical texts? Do you have any other suggestions?

I need your help and your support! Give me your ideas, suggestions and arguments to insure that our libraries remain not only consultative but also lending libraries in the best possible conditions for all of us. My observations will bear more strength if I can state that they are not only my own, but are representative of the students, my task is to transmit anything you want to say to the "Commission des Bibliothèques". If you have any comments, suggestions or questions, or want to become a member of this commission, do not hesitate to call me (022/798 49 68), to write to me:

(5, ch. des Préjins, 1218 Grand-Saconnex) or to drop a note in the pigeonhole labeled "ADEA/Commission Mixte" in the English Department, 12 Boulevard des Philosophes.

Anne Vandevanter

Quantic Teachers...

A comparative analysis of the constituents and quantic properties of teachers vs stable atoms in this part of the Universe shows no real differences between the two.

Teachers –like atoms– are made of a core of emptiness plus a couple of old protons and neutrons, called the nucleus, and of young electrons moving in vicious circles at its periphery. Both are highly excitable in certain situations of imbalance. Teachers and atoms tend to follow an entropic way of manifesting themselves that is directly proportional to the attention an observer concentrates on them. Heisenberg's uncertainty principle is not violated: the more you give attention to that specific object, the more you influence the predictability of locating its position and speed in space. The observer is never separated from the object of attention.

Both parties interact with the opposite object. The observer – who tends to keep silent most of the time, chewing his pencil while keeping an attentive eye on the subject of his experiment –will only be vaguely aware of the amount of energy developed by the particle to prove its existence. The particle, on the other hand, regards the observer as not relevant and useful for its existence. The particle will probably say: "I utter therefore I am", while the observer will most probably say: "I'm bored, therefore there's nothing interesting in this area of the universe at this specific time".

Another aspect of the particle-observer theory becomes very problematic if we approach it from the point of view of relativity. Einstein's theory states that gravity modifies

the quality and properties of time and space in specific portions of the universe. This is confirmed by strict observation. Thus, our subject of experience will modify the mood of the observer– the quality of his lost time and his inner space– according to the gravity of the subject and its location in the university. The more gravity you apply to the object of knowledge, the more deviation you'll measure in the subject of the experience.

Additionally, a teacher is the sum of elements that create a manifestation and a self actualization of its components while being able to recognize by itself that some electrical activity is produced between these components. In other words, emptiness creates the urge of consciousness around it. From a maximal activity developed in the minimal amount of time, the information emitted has to travel time and space to hit the hidden matter of ignorance that composes the university. Teachers are the rudimentary artifacts that are unfortunately necessary to provide, control and govern information between themselves and the rest of the universe, something that slowly tends to be out of fashion. In conclusion, we can say that teachers seem to appear randomly around specific sectors of the university, but when we try to measure their intellectual position and density, they become unpredictably absent from this area, an observation that should invite us to question the significance of the phenomenon.

Nicholas Palffy

in Brief

NEXT YEAR...

...will bring its share of changes to the department with people going and others coming:

- Having been offered a post of professor at the University of Pennsylvania, Nida Surber is leaving the University and the city of Geneva for the lights of Philadelphia. *Maître-assistante* in medieval literature, she introduced many of us to the pleasure of reading Chaucer and others: we will miss her, but nonetheless wish her good luck in the States!
- Two new *assistantes* will be joining the department to teach medieval literature: Fabienne Michelet and Guillemette Bolens.
- A guest of prestige is also announced, as Professor Neil Herz from John Hopkins University will be here next year as a *professeur invité*. His classes, we are told, will be on "Literature and the City."
- Remember that the ADEA is organizing the Ciné-Club, contributing to the newsletter and helping you to set up any other activity. For more information, call Alessandra, the president of the ADEA (757 48 88).
- English Studies and Comparative Literature Graduate Student Forum Swiss Universities: Present and Future, University of Geneva, 8-9 March, 1996. Send questions, suggestions, and abstracts of papers to:
Valeria Wagner, Département d'Anglais, Faculté de Lettres, 1211 Genève 4, FAX: 022 320 0497
e-mail: wagnerv@uni2a.unige.ch

Announcement:

SUBLET available for August and September: Spacious three-room apartment near Gare Cornavin. Quiet, sunny, comfortable, and furnished including tv, video, and English books!. Sfr 1000/month. For more information, call 738.06.10

Meeting Michèle Le Doeuff

We met Michèle Le Doeuff right after her Wednesday lecture, *Femmes et Savoir*. The lecture didn't seem to have tired her a bit and we had the privilege and pleasure to talk with her for several hours. We hope that through this interview you, readers, can also appreciate her views, warmth and humor.

Question: A philosopher in the English Department?

Michèle Le Doeuff: The Faculty of Letters wished to initiate women's studies and thought it would be a good thing to attach this chair to comparative literature. Indeed, comparative literature programs often welcome innovative and interdisciplinary projects. Also, I have always been an anglophile! At the end of my school days, when still in scientific track, I decided to change to a more literary direction and to become an anglicist. But this is not the end of the story, for a week later I "discovered" philosophy... Nonetheless my work focuses much on English philosophy (Thomas Moore and Bacon) and occasionally on Shakespeare. I am simply delighted the English Department is welcoming me, thirty one years after I gave up thinking of myself as an anglicist-to-be.

Q: Can you tell us about your projects and your methods of teaching?

MLD: I want to go on teaching a seminar about "women and Europe" and also to carry further the theme "women and knowledges" as a necessary object for women studies. I also want to broach the small matter of the all-male social contract and the rise of the public woman. My ideas about teaching? Well, it must not be boring, and knowledge acquired should have some meaning.

Q: You are a researcher at the Centre National de Recherches Scientifiques (C.N.R.S.) in France. Is there a difference in working there and in Geneva, as a woman?

MLD: Let us hope so! Life for me as a woman was not easy at the C.N.R.S. Before working there, I was a professor at the *École Normale Supérieure de Fontenay* and held many responsibilities. At the C.N.R.S, I was able to pursue my research, with no other responsibilities, but I would have liked to create my own research team. This required a promotion. But my applications to a position of "director" were always turned down, the five books I have published seemed to have no weight, while men who had published far less were elected. So I asked for some explanations and got this one, in the committee president's own hand: "we are reticent about 'feminine' work". Please notice the quotation marks. A philosopher must be able to laugh when facing tough luck, but those quotation marks were difficult to survive! Lisa Jardine suggested an apt translation for these "travaux féminins". She said that I was to be kept "in charge of needlework"!

Q: Do you see a difference between French Feminism and Anglo-American Feminism? How do you situate yourself?

MLD: French feminism is not what goes under that name in America. It is not just Irigaray, Cixous and Kristeva. It is a much broader movement, still unknown to many. It started as a movement more practical than theoretical. To start with, the main thing was to have huge, informal, and at times pretty chaotic meetings, working like mutual consciousness-raising sessions. Soon, we started fighting about issues of abortion and contraception, organizing demonstrations, performing abortions, and inventing slogans such as "There is someone more unknown than the soldier: his wife". And all this as a mass movement. From these activities gradually emerged a need to rethink various issues in theory, with still an eye on practical issues concerning the position of us all, women intellectual or not.

Irigaray, Cixous and Kristeva appear to us as women with no interest for the real problems encountered by women outside the Academic walls. We were somewhat annoyed that some American Universities made up that artifact called New French Feminism as a sort of lady-like, dainty way of being a feminist or already a postfeminist. I would situate myself as a mid-Channel feminist philosopher, constantly fascinated by English feminists' singlemindedness and happy to take part in their debates, with a bit of a French accent perhaps.

Q: Do you think European feminism is behind American feminism? Civil personal rights are not taken for granted in issues such as sexual harassment, which the French think is a joke.

MLD: You are not telling me you have some stars and a few stripes in your pocket, or are you? Europe is not a unified country from the point of view of women's rights. Concerning sexual harassment, England has many regulations whereas in France the legislation is inadequate, to put it mildly. On the other hand, you will find "crèches" or day-care centers in France, whereas in England there are virtually none.

Matters of domestic violence change from one country to another. In the U.S., this issue is not addressed by any sound regulation, whereas Canadian law is most advanced. And you know reproductive rights are suffering a backlash in America. Therefore it is impossible to see who is behind; I just see that there is still a lot to do everywhere.

Q: What is the difference between the intellectual and the personal in your work?

MLD: It's all one to me.

Q: What do you think about women who studied with much pleasure and then end up housewives?

MLD: As long as women finish the university and find a job that satisfies them, there is little risk that this happens. But my view may be biased. My students at Fontenay tasted financial freedom, as they were paid during their studies. And they were virtually guaranteed a job when leaving. When you experience the pleasures of independence, it is quite unbearable to swear them off.

Comment: Then you could write on your curriculum: "none of my students have become housewives."

MLD: True! But I can't take the credit for that. It was structural.

Q: We would now like to ask you some less serious questions: Who is your favorite actor?

In the French Feminist movement, we had a very dear friend who was Delphine Seyrig. She was one of us, mind you. Even before the feminist movement, I was a fan of Delphine Seyrig. You don't know Delphine Seyrig? Shame on you, my dear! *L'année dernière à Marienbad?* Voilà, that's her.

We must find a way to show *Letters Home* (letters of Sylvia Plath to her mother) to students. Delphine plays the role of the mother. She was the greatest actress.

Q: Favorite books?

MLD: Books? As a rule, I need libraries. But let me acknowledge a tender spot for Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, Ruth Rendell, P.D. James, Val Macdermit, and all the crime queens you might imagine.

Q: What are your hobbies?

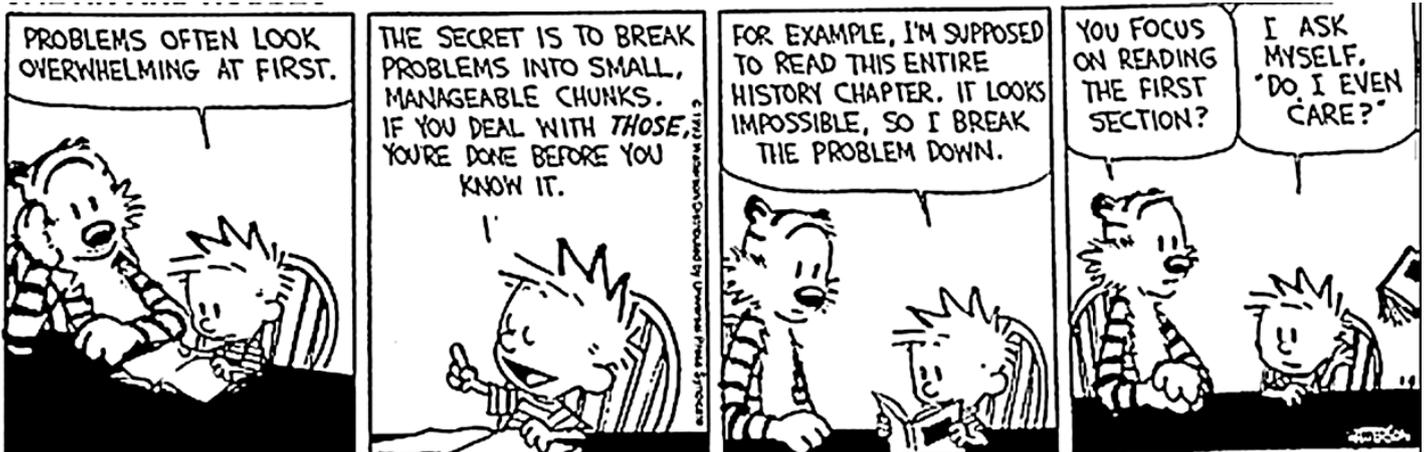
MLD: When I'm not working, I'm sleeping! Sorry, – don't take that down, I was just pulling your leg. My hobbies are: chatting, gardening (the nursery where I buy my plants for my cottage in Oxford used to be by appointment of Dame Agatha Christie) and dining out.

Discussion reported by Agnieszka Soltysik and Erika Scheidegger.

1) The École Normale Supérieure: six of them exist in France. Students are enrolled only after competitive exams and are paid to attend this school! (It is considered to be four times harder than University.)

Calvin & Hobbes

By Bill Watterson



Writing Essays in the English Department: A Shift from Product to Process (or, thoughts on the current AT rewrite backlog)

Essay writing is the single most important thing a student does at the university. Unfortunately, after the initial Analysis of Texts writing frenzy, a student's opportunities to explore ideas and construct arguments in a formal essay with serious feedback are few and far between until they confront the *mémoire*. And when they do get to write a long essay for their 2nd and 3rd year seminars, students often wish they were given clearer guidelines for going about it. So, here are some ideas and suggestions that I have given my 1st and 2nd year students, based on seven years of teaching and tutoring English composition, and updated to address specific concerns I've encountered in this department.

Premises

First of all, the Golden Rule: never forget that you are writing about texts as representations. The most common error that plagues student essays is the pernicious (not to mention, confusing) habit of treating fictional places, people, and events as if they were real. This results in nonsensical analyses of characters' behavior and motivation, as if they had real private lives on some ontological level hidden beyond the words printed on paper. Common though it may be, this sort of confusion never fails to irritate and dismay your instructors, so avoiding it is essential for keeping your professional relationships with them sane and productive.

In other words, instead of spending sleepless nights worrying about whether Hamlet *really* wants to sleep with his mother, or how the play might have been different if he took some Prozac instead of a long trip to England, you should be relieved that your primary concern is only with the exact words in their unique arrange-

ment on the pages of the book you just bought at Elm. In a sense, you need to adjust your eyes like with those MagicVision Posters, except that you want to look *at the patterns* rather than the 3D illusion "inside." Thus, instead of looking "through" the text as if it were transparent, you need to shift your attention to the dense textuality of the poems, novels, films, images, plays, and documents that you read.

Thesis

The second most common and deadly problem that haunts student essays is the lack of a thesis. While not limited to them, this seems to be the special bugbear of the 1st year student, whose first gleams of consciousness of the existence of (and need for) something called a "thesis" seems to begin only when the word shows up on their marked paper next to the first paragraph, with a big urgent question mark next to it.

Students who have already grasped the elusive idea of the essay thesis will still spend several papers mastering its precise nature. Sentences that will try to pass for thesis statements and end up leading the frustrated student into pointless elaborations include: simple descriptions of the plot or theme; vague claims that try to capture the "essence" of the entire text in a single mysterious generalization; or several unrelated observations violently harnessed with misused commas or semi-colons into one schizophrenic sentence.

What a thesis is actually supposed to be, instead, is a single original idea or claim that you are making about some aspect of the text and which you can demonstrate in your argument. Please note the three distinct and important components of this defini-

tion. First of all, the thesis is "original," meaning that it is a proposition based on your own intelligently reasoned-out reading of the topic, issue, or text involved. Since a thesis is by definition *your idea*, you never need to say "I think" or "in my opinion."

Secondly, the thesis will always necessarily be on *some aspect* of the text, and not on its entirety. You obviously cannot mention *everything* that you notice or find important or interesting in the text; an essay is not supposed to be an exhaustive study. Therefore, you must select a single focus that's specific enough to be carefully discussed, but substantial enough to be interesting.

Third, the thesis must be demonstrated (or proved) through textual evidence. This is the point of discussing structural elements, plot details, or quoting specific words or passages. Thus, you should keep in mind that you are *not* just intelligently meditating on a topic or offering a purely subjective interpretation; instead, you are trying to convince your reader that your thesis is a reasonable idea based on a careful and accurate reading of the text and supported by a logical argument.

Needless to say, thinking of the thesis will probably take most of the time you spend on the essay. A reasonable thesis will make writing the rest of the paper interesting, meaningful, and relatively easy. A weak, sloppy, or unsustainable thesis will make writing the paper into an aimless, boring, and hellish waste of time. So, it's worth your while to spend as much time as you can thinking, taking notes, trying out ideas, imagining possible arguments, writing an outline and preferably one or two drafts before finally submitting the essay. It should seem obvious that a carefully planned essay will

always be more interesting, intellectually valuable, and satisfying than a paper you quickly threw together in one desperate burst of energy (a.k.a. “panic”). This “purgative” writing method tends to cost a great deal more time in the long run when you consider the series of unsatisfactory rewrites that it initiates, all of which are doomed from the start by the lack of substance and creativity in the original effort. Besides, I suspect that they’re even more boring to rewrite than they are to read.

Process

This brings me to the question of planning and revision in general. Students often labor under the misconception that writing an essay is merely a matter of expressing some ideas that are born conceptually coherent in their brains and then simply need to be clothed and presented through language. In this Platonic model of writing, essays are mental realities *before* manifesting themselves physically as linguistic matter, i.e. the words in the page. Writing itself then seems to be more a process of translation (of pre-existing mental texts into linguistic ones), and the principal concern of students becomes *expressing* these ideas. The assumption that the actual act of writing is more a matter of *expression* than constant thinking and evaluating might explain why some papers are so tedious, shallow, and mechanical that it seems like the students had switched off their brains when they started to write.

Unfortunately, inertia is a powerful force and critical faculties are not easily reactivated once they’ve been disengaged. This has two even more ruinous effects: once the paper is finished, the student is only capable of imagining the most cosmetic corrections; and more insidiously, since they consider the essay the best they can do to express or “reflect” their critical thinking skills, they become personally over-invested in a text with which they have never really been intellectually engaged.

As a result, they are often too embarrassed and afraid of what the paper says about *them* to give it an honest reading when it’s “done.”

Moreover, this model of writing is simply wrong. One of the basic premises of our current critical practice is that ideas *do not* precede language; nor does language “embody” or express ideas (like a jug holding water). Instead, we would say that texts are complex negotiations of language and ideas, which is why *reading* itself (known to YOU as “analysis of texts”) is so interesting and complicated.

If we understand our own writing process also as a complex negotiation of language and ideas, we can immediately see the implications. For one thing, we need to devise a thesis and construct an argument at least partly in written form. This is why I suggest taking notes, making outlines, and trying out introductions and arguments. Since writing is itself a *process* rather than a product, we must keep our critical faculties constantly engaged. This should also make us more willing to revise entire sections and arguments, since changing one’s mind is a positive part of the process rather than a symptom of confusion or flawed thinking.

Power

Finally, it should be pointed out that students are working with a serious handicap when they write for the university, but this is the institution’s fault rather than their own. When we talk about “authorship,” we understand that the term has more than just an etymological relationship with “authority.” In other words, we know that writers generally assume a position of power or authority vis-à-vis their audience. For example, a critic presumably knows more about the subject, or at least about his or her particular argument, than the reader, and it is this relationship that structures the rhetorical dimensions of the academic text.

Therefore, the beginning student’s institutional activity of producing

texts for an informed and highly critical audience is obviously unnatural and extremely intimidating. This strange dynamic is probably responsible for much of the rhetorical dysfunctionality of student essays. For example, perfunctory introductions and gaps in logic or development could arise from the student’s assumption that teachers already know certain things, while the frequent barrages of pointless detail probably result from students’ eagerness to display the only incontestable distinction available to them, i.e. their astuteness as readers of minutiae. In short, the entire writing situation is fraught with anxiety and intellectual insecurity that inhibits the deployment of new concepts and ideas, and which is reinforced by the negative feedback their weak and timid papers inevitably elicit.

Unfortunately, beyond being aware of these factors, there is not much that can be done. Teachers can help by being as specific and constructive as possible in their feedback. For example, my own experience as a student taught me that there is no “comment” more cryptic and frustrating than the lone question mark tossed reproachfully into the margin. Moreover, students can also help themselves, for a start, by reversing the polarity of investment I just described. In other words, if you approach writing as a process of deepening your knowledge of the text, you can reduce your personal identification with it while strengthening your intellectual investment (and yield). Furthermore, if your thesis is strong and original enough, it will shift the rhetorical balance of power in your favor, since you will be bringing your teacher new insights or a fresh reading of an old familiar text. And teachers get pretty excited when this happens, a phenomenon that Mr. Palfy foreg to mention in his quantitative observations. So try it, at least as an experiment.

Agnieszka M. Soltysik

jokes

The Canonical Collection of Light Bulb Jokes

from kurt@tc.fluke.com

(selected article 7854 of rec.humour)

Q: How many Psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Only one, but the bulb has got to really WANT to change.

A': None; the bulb will change itself when it is ready.

Q: How many graduate students does it take to screw in a light bulb?

A: Only one, but it may take upwards of five years to get it done.

Q: How many mice does it take to screw in a light bulb?

A: Only two, but the hard part is getting them into the light bulb.

Q: How many survivors of a nuclear war does it take to screw in a light bulb?

A: None, because people who glow in the dark don't need light bulbs.

Q: How many surrealists does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Two, one to hold the giraffe, and the other to fill the bathtub with brightly colored machine tools.

Q: How many existentialists does it take to screw in a light bulb?

A: Two: One to screw it in and one to observe how the light bulb itself symbolizes a single incandescent beacon of subjective reality in a netherworld of endless absurdity reaching out toward a maudlin cosmos of nothingness.

poetry

English Is Tough Stuff

Dearest creature in creation,
Study English pronunciation.
I will teach you in my verse
Sounds like corpse, corps, horse, and
worse.

I will keep you, Suzy, busy,
Make your head with heat grow dizzy.
Tear in eye, your dress will tear.

So shall I! Oh hear my prayer.
Just compare heart, beard, and heard,
Dies and diet, lord and word,
Sword and sward, retain and Britain.
(Mind the latter, how it's written.)
Now I surely will not plague you
With such words as plaque and ague.
But be careful how you speak:
Say break and steak, but bleak and
streak;

Cloven, oven, how and low,
Script, receipt, show, poem, and toe.
[...]

Query does not rhyme with very,
Nor does fury sound like bury.
Dost, lost, post and doth, cloth, loth.
Job, nob, bosom, transom, oath.
Though the differences seem little,
We say actual but victual.
Refer does not rhyme with deafer.
Foeffer does, and zephyr, heifer.
Mint, pint, senate and sedate;
Dull, bull, and George ate late.
Scenic, Arabic, Pacific,
Science, conscience, scientific.
[...]
Finally, which rhymes with enough
Though, through, plough, or dough, or
cough?
Hiccough has the sound of cup.
My advice is to give up!!!

Author unknown
(found in comp.eunet.jokes)

Announcement



ADEA New logotype!

We are pleased to present you the new logo of the ADEA (Association des Étudiants en Anglais). We hope you'll see it everywhere and enjoy it for a long time. If you need the electronic copy of the logo please e-mail to: palfy@uni2a.unige.ch to get the eps file.