

*In 1996 the Kootenay School of Writing decided to sell obviously-fake university degrees, to raise some funds. As advertised, a BA cost \$10, an Honours BA \$15, MAs \$25, and Ph.Ds \$50. The backlash provoked by this mild prank was unexpectedly harsh, including a total boycott of the KSW by (most of) the UBC Department of English. Peter Quartermain recalls the signs that were posted around the department warning students not to associate with the KSW, involved as it was in the selling of illicit degrees. Some KSW audience members expressed similar dismay at this "flaky behaviour" and some irate messages were left on the answering machine for the Office Manager Colin Smith to deal with. A couple of months before the convocation, the Ministry of Education got into the action with a Cease and Desist letter. The KSW's curt reply to the Ministry was in turn replied to with a threat of legal action, to which the KSW made no reply. The fundraiser went ahead. It was a success, netting over \$900, but the bad vibes resonated for years afterwards.*

*Below is Colin Smith's speech for the 1996 convocation ceremony.*

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**SPEECH**

Good evening, Citizens of the Peaceable Kingdom, West Coast chapter, chapter and verse, verso and recto, wet coat, erectile tissue.

Welcome to this convocation. Welcome, males and females, boys and girls, unabashed and unacknowledged hermaphrodites. And a prosthetic welcome to the other species they may share their habitats with, whose evidence tonight may be purely spectral.

Welcome.

The libations are at the bar, the feast is before your senses, the goats have been skinned. Music awaits us in the antechambers. Soggy sidewalks await our feet. A future salivates upon our clothing.

We are gathered. We are gathered here tonight in community, erudition, and celebration. We, Citizens of Language. Language with the power to abstract and intensify. Language, that sentient animal of multiform bodies with the power to delimit description and yet build problematical zoos of identity. We, in our guises of sensibility. We, as our indexical shifters. We, in our prolix verb forms. We, in the labels of many fashions, — Yea!, O Persons of the Brute Millennium!, Yea!, O Citizens of the Chronic Body! — O Hostages to Gender!, O Perverts of the Sexual Water!, O Speedsters along the Infobahn!, O Users of TurboGopher!, O Receivers of the Munificent Tax Break!, O Caregivers to the Short Flesh!, O Children of the Uncertain Present Tense!, O Display System for Extraterine Foods and Chemicals!, O Anarchs on a Wheat-Paste Budget!, O Afforders of the Paperback!, O Believers of the Oracular Hegemony!, O Cable Viewers!, O Users of Acoustic Typewriters!, O Acolytes of the Artifice of Sincerity!, O Sociopaths!, O Heterosexuals in a Vertical Position!, O Receivers in the Face of the Weighted Business End of the Race and Class Sporting Implement!, O Utopian Dreamers who Wish to Find All Cultural Terms Outside the Purview of the *Chicago Manual of Style!*, yea — we are gathered.

O forgive me if I have omitted anyone....

On this sodden evening, in this winter of our statistical and metaphorical discontent, we have come together to honour the Kootenay School of Writing's first group of graduates. In large part due to their generous and beatific off-loading of their pecuniary resources, these students have given ample demonstration of their commitment to the School and its ethos of differently abled education, alternative humour, and fund-raising. I cannot say enough about this exemplary group of citizens, although incipiently I shall certainly attempt to.

They are an intensely focused yet diverse cadre of theoretical individuals who are well aware of the sheer Protestant graft of hard work. With a remarkable lack of suspense, we know that most of them are writers. (We should also assume, in the case of workers in other media, that they are cognizant of the notion that oft-times the divisions between sundry artistic practices

are pellucid as February's urban slush.) To the best of our knowledge, none of them have criminal records. None of them has been observed divesting themselves of each and every item of garment and racing along the public sidewalks shrieking at the top of their musical range — although, in these unhappy and hypermelodramatic times, I for one would not counsel essaying criticism toward them should they decide to do so. A certain portion of them are left-handed, although, to be scrupulously fair, many of them are right-handed. (The possibility of some ambidextrous beings must not be ruled out.) Most of them are living out the memoirs of someone they have not met. Some of them are capable of switching their genitalia at will. Their accumulated childhoods average out. They show stubborn tendencies toward eating, sleeping, dreaming, elimination, and locomotion. Some have demonstrated the ability to walk 0.62 mile while wearing another's footwear. With the exception of those of them who have unlimited financial power and a reserved spot in the Walt Disney cryogenics laboratory, all of them shall, one day, die.

What might we owe these people?, you may ask. I would like to postulate that, now that we are in knowledge of their lives and works, we cannot retroactively unimagine them. We cannot disincorporate them atom by atom and pitch them back into the abyss. We cannot break our faces against their mirrors. With their deep structural stance of themselves as socially committed actors in this morality play that could be entitled *The Way We Live Now And What To Do About It*; with their darkneses manifest; with their risibility at port arms, they provide for us and with us a certain kind of knowledge and spirit that enables a democratic impulse to load Injustice's bullets into Patriarchy's rifle in order for Father History to unwillingly shoot himself in the foot, or, how to get the weapon and ammunition off the stage altogether. Put another way, they know how to distribute equally, on the Scales of Experience, our afflatus and our vomitus. Put yet another way, they remind us that, in that ineffable school that we like to call Life, we are all Siamese twins going to different classes together.

And now they shall have the certificates to prove it. For your delectation and with the kind assistance of other collective members of the Kootenay School of Writing, I should now like to present these fine people to their worthy audience and to gift them with their diplomas.

[cue up music: *Propers from the Graduale Romanum* ]

Citizen Paul Mutton, will you please step forward and receive your Honours B.A.

Citizen James anthony pope, will you please step forward and receive your Honours B.A.

Citizen janis bowley, will you please step forward and receive your M.A.

Citizen michael lawlor, will you please step forward and receive your M.A.

Citizen catherine bennett, will you please step forward and receive your PhD.

Citizen lisa robertson, will you please step forward and receive your PhD.

Citizen john n. fuller, will you please step forward and receive your PhD.

Citizen david clayton ayre, will you please step forward and receive your PhD.

Citizen susan clark, will you please step forward and receive your PhD.

In absentia, Citizens

james newton  
terry crane  
carol sawyer

erin jeanne o'brien  
oliver kellhammer  
robert mittenthal  
david r. phillips

patsi longmire  
cornelia wyngaarden  
annette hurtig  
nancy newman  
monika kin gagnon

[halt music]

Ladies and gentlemen, with the sublimest of emotion and the most odious of fraternal appropriation, I would like to propose a toast and a round of apple sauce ... — I am very sorry; I shall read that again — ... applause to the 1994 Graduating Class of the Kootenay School of Writing!

[reaction!; plus!; etc.!; sensation!]

Devoted Audience, thus we come to the conclusion of the formal part of these proceedings, hereby leaving a Gap in Time for a democratic, unscripted saturnalia. I would like to thank all of you for being the probable most that you can possibly be. Yea!, blessings upon your house! Yea!, let the always already wild rumpus always already commence!

[cue up music: "School's Out" by Alice Cooper]

[exuent Professor, snarling and hissing, miming and dancing]

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