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NOTES FOR A
NOVEL ON

Future University Life

by Heery Lynn

A FANTASIA BASED ON PRESENT TENDENCIES

THE UNIVERSITY OF _____ IS AN INSTITUTION struggling with more than frozen budgets. In keeping with its expressed mission to work at all times toward a more perfect world, and in order to be, in such efforts, as sensitive as possible to the diverse needs of all communities, even those who may be defined as no longer among the living, the University administration has recently agreed with the Faculty Association to take an extremely bold and innovative step. Both parties are now prepared to allow that expired persons holding positions without definite term or “tenure” may retain their positions after expiration, provided they are cryogenically frozen by an approved authority and have made application to this effect both prior to their expiration and on the appropriate form. In adopting this policy, the University is replicating a retention of position entitlement which faculty members living on disability pensions have enjoyed for many years. Not wishing to be seen to discriminate against any other identifiable group, University authorities felt it best to create this revision to their employment practices both for compassionate reasons and in order to forestall any possible lawsuits. Post-expiration retention rights for parking spaces, however, still remain, regrettably, a

matter of bitter dispute.

The policy revision was at first greeted with considerable enthusiasm by many members of the University community. The revision’s champion and chief campus spokesperson, 63-year-old Effie McHaggis, who herself has been on disability for 17 years but who continues to live in hope of one day returning to her professorship, offered a tearful thank you to University authorities at the press conference called to announce the policy change. Unfortunately, Professor McHaggis had to leave the press conference early when her stress disorder suddenly returned. However, despite these and other accolades initially accorded the University for its extraordinary sensitivity to, as one campus wag has deemed them, the metabolically challenged, the policy has been found to have some awkward and even menacing consequences.

Given the unexpectedly wide popularity of the policy, the number of available tenure-track positions, previously rather small, has now been reduced to virtually zero. As a consequence, the University, in order to meet its teaching responsibilities, has found itself growing ever more dependent on an underclass of youngish academics employed on short-term or



“sessional” contracts, often part-time in nature, which offer much lower salaries and considerably fewer benefits than do the normal permanent or tenurable positions. Despite the provision in sessional contracts of a number of hopefully enticing perks, a few malcontented members of this underclass are now in secret revolt against the University and have organized covert actions to pull the plug, as it were, on various frozen colleagues, creating in the proposed novel a “whodunit” plot about a series of mysterious and permanently fatal thawings.

In order to thwart the rash of thawings, the University has removed the frozen professors from various private sector locations and consolidated them on campus, where they are stored under heavy guard in what used to be the University Library. The Library space was available, since books, magazines and newspapers are no longer permitted on campus due to the exclusive contract the University has negotiated with a noted communications company which donated equipment for the new Information Commons where the aforementioned materials may now be retrieved electronically for a monthly subscription fee to the communications company.

In order to ease the crisis and also ameliorate the fact that the University is consistently ranked near the bottom in the annual survey of universities conducted by a leading national magazine, newly appointed President Diana Diesel (formerly Director-General and Provost of the University’s Harassment Centre) has, in addition to the appointment of an institutional Marketing Director, persuaded the relevant authorities to instigate a campus-wide program of reform called the Strategic Transubstantiation Initiative, wherein, through much obfuscating language, a rather unsuccessful attempt has been made to replace academic staff with software. In pursuing her goals, President Diesel is constantly at odds with her archrival, Dr. Seymour Sinecures, recently returned from his sabbatical year in Maui, now both Director-Designate of the University’s new Transgender Institute and President of the University’s Faculty Association, whose chief mandate is to protect the present status of the professoriate, both fresh and frozen. However, President Diesel is hopeful the appointment of

a new Vice-President (Academic) and seven new Associate Vice-Presidents will help her grease the wheels of change. The new Vice-President, an experienced trouble-shooter, was seconded from the Registrar’s Office, where he was endeavouring to correct the follies of the former Registrar, whose attempt to devise a telepathic registration system had proved a costly failure.

THE STUDENTS, WHO CONTINUALLY GRUMBLE ABOUT inferior instruction and steep increases in tuition fees, are regularly diverted by the construction of campus shopping malls, where a plentiful selection of virtual reality machines also permits them to engage in safe sexual encounters and career fantasies. Weekly rock concerts, free video arcades, a student-run film and television studio, a body art parlour, 14 lottery kiosks, two skate parks, a professional wrestling arena, 24-hour child care facilities, a martini lounge, and multiple beer gardens offering film festivals of favourite television commercials also enhance campus life, as do a staff of personal trainers and psychic advisors, which the University supplies at modest cost. For students from rural areas, a Chaplains’ Centre is also provided. Adjacent the former Bookstore, now a Gap Factory Outlet, is Orator’s Corner, where distinguished visiting speakers such as Kato Kaelin, the Duchess of York and, most recently, Monica Lewinsky ensure that the campus scintillates with lively debate. The Duchess of York, who appeared courtesy of Weight Watchers, gave an especially well-attended lecture on the importance of personal fitness, drawing particularly warm applause when she led President Diesel through a rigorous workout on the StairMaster. Aided by healthy receipts from these events, construction of the University’s Theme Park and Casino is scheduled to begin next fall. Many students support themselves by working as 900 numbers and/or through part-time jobs in the campus malls. Some of the students from wealthier families, who do not live in their parents’ basements, may be eligible for student loans, which some of the less imaginative ones actually try to repay.

THE UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM IS DOMINATED BY THE Faculty of Industrial Training (housing the former Faculties of Science, Management, Law, Medicine and Engineering), where luxurious academic facilities, as well as exclusive recreational and dining arrangements, serve the Faculty’s 666 programs, operated in joint ownership with various national and transnational corporations. Various elite professorships, including the Deanship, are also jointly funded by the same corporations. Professors holding such chairs, including the Dean, are, under strict penalty, at all times required to display prominently on their persons the appropriate corporate logo. The Faculty Dean, Dr. Benjamin Mammon, author of the popular *The Joy of Having* and former Director of the University

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Hospital, which, after privatization, was converted to the Gumbel Organ Farm and Cloning Centre, has employed an array of strategically placed video cameras to ensure relevant staff are complying with this modest request. There is also on campus a small School of Liberal Arts, which operates independent of corporate sponsorship, and whose disciplines were recently clustered with the former Faculties of Education, Social Work, Nursing, and Physical Education. "Change is good...it's how I got my job," chortled the jocund Liberal Arts Dean Zedekiah Wiesel, when he announced the new amalgamation at the School's Annual General Meeting. Dean Wiesel, known for his geniality and sunny humour, is a favourite at the University Senate and local comedy clubs. The physical facilities at the School, unfortunately, are not so popular. Industrial Training or "FIT" students are warned not to go into the area housing the Liberal Arts School, and taxi drivers normally decline to take one there. From time to time, the disparity between the rich and poor elements on campus is remarked upon, and President Diesel is occasionally called upon to defend the growing corporate control of University affairs. She is steadfast, however, in her embrace of change. "We must prepare for the 22nd Century," she often reminds her sometimes unhappy charges.

THE UNIVERSITY MAINTAINS THESE LIBERAL ARTS disciplines on the books, as it were, in order to qualify for certain federal grants and initiatives. There is much grumbling about this by the Provincial Government and the University's Board of Governors, in particular, who see this necessity as emanating from the typically dictatorial behaviour of a Francophone federal authority. It is said many members of the Board, in private, scabrously refer to the School as the Frog Pond. However, the School's opponents have also admitted there is an upside to its presence. Liberal-arts students work regularly as inexpensive body-servants to both students and staff in the Faculty of Industrial Training, shining their shoes, parking and washing their cars, carrying their cellphones, pagers, laptops, pocket PCs etc., often making themselves available evenings for light housework as well. Students in the Fine Arts Department, housed atop the Parking

Arcade, are especially popular and often engaged as clowns, minstrels or face-painters for receptions and soirees given in Industrial Training.

IT WOULD BE HIGHLY INACCURATE, HOWEVER, IF THE University were understood to be a cultural and intellectual wasteland given over almost completely now to commercial and vocational considerations. Mindful that the student facilities carry perhaps too great a bias toward the popular arts, the University has in its wisdom obliged itself to be a custodian for the preservation of the traditional fine arts. To this end, it permits corporations, philanthropists and others of like mind to erect various facilities in honour of art, music, dance and drama, provided the benefactors also agree to create an endowment fund to meet the operational costs of maintaining such structures. A number of proposed projects have foundered when no agreement could be reached about who would service the restrooms.

However, several such facilities have been so erected, most notably the much beloved Agrium Arts Centre, where, despite a series of barely containable scandals involving the Centre's management, the national proclivity for victim-worship is given special emphasis. At the entranceway, a 12-foot statue of Terry Fox directs the eye to the Wal-Mart Stage, where the new pageant in honour of the late Princess of Wales is enacted each noon hour, save on December 6, a special day when classes are cancelled and a dawn-to-dusk memorial service for the martyrs of the Montreal Massacre is given pride of place. Each person attending receives a two-for-one admission pass to the Diana



Museum at Althorp, as well as a small gift certificate redeemable at Harrods. In the adjacent Simon and Zelda Maimonides Gallery, the careers of David Helfgott, Andrea Bocelli and Sheldon Kennedy are honoured in colourful wall murals. The Gallery's Curator, Angela Calvary, is fond of pointing out that those who examine the murals closely can see that, even in his proudest moments, Sheldon's eyes are filled with tears.

Music, too, is not neglected here. Hildegard von Bingen concerts are now a regular feature on the front lawn (weather permitting), and each spring, the University Gay Men's Chorus presents a moving tribute to the Avro Arrow. The student-run Kurt Cobain Cabaret regularly offers an open mike to alternative performers, and it is packed nightly now that video lottery terminals have been added. The Centre's charming Cry & Cuddle Cafe (known fondly as the C & C) is also a popular meeting spot for tea, light lunches, and pre-theatre dining. "Meet you at the C & C" is an oft-heard campus remark.

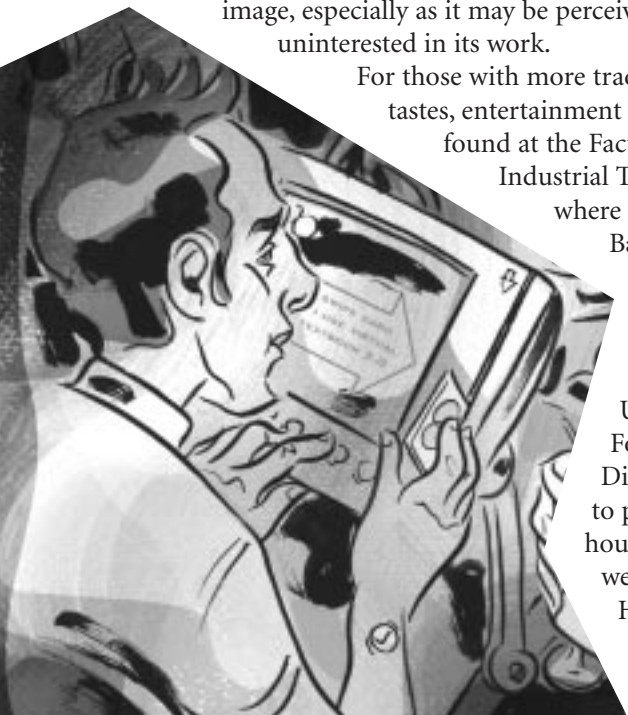
Plans are presently afoot to raise money for an extension to the Centre to house more multicultural exhibits, especially the collection of Pre-Columbian coinage attempts recently donated to the University by a local family prominent in the natural resource sector. University authorities are most distressed at the accusations of both Euro and Phallogocentrism, which have been levelled at the institution from various quarters since the Centre's construction (hence the hasty arrangement of the Diana pageant and von Bingen concerts to at least partially offset the criticism). A selection of Marilyn Monroe posters has now been hung in the Cobain Cabaret, and Canada Council support is being sought for a Culturally Diverse and First Peoples Inter-Arts Showcase, to be staged at the Centre at the earliest possible date. The University is most fastidious about its image, especially as it may be perceived by those uninterested in its work.

For those with more traditional tastes, entertainment may also be found at the Faculty of Industrial Training, where the popular Babbitt Room Dinner Theatre, operated by the University Food Services Division, plays to packed houses each weekend. Here,

between cocktails and visits to the famed Carvery Buffet, faculty members may relive their youth at revivals of musical plays and revues from the 1960s and 1970s. Audience participation is usually encouraged, and lively choruses of "Let the Sun Shine" or "Pretty Woman" are apt to rock the Babbitt Room until well past the midnight hour. As the facility is private, however, one must be either a FIT staff member or guest of one in order to attend. Tickets are highly prized, and an invite to the Babbitt Room offers no little campus cachet. There are also, of course, the student efforts presented by the Fine Arts Department's Drama Division, known for their challenging "post-modern" interpretations of the classics. Audiences are small, but family and friends who attend are warmly enthusiastic. As part of the Special Cultural Olympics recently hosted at the University, Professor Quentin Feathers offered a daring all-male version of *Romeo and Juliet* (retitled *Romeo and Julio*), which drew a rave review from the student newspaper. Professor Feathers is quite a celebrity on campus, and students are eager to work for him, especially now that the sexual harassment charges against him have been withdrawn.

DESPITE THE CO-OPERATIVE POSTURE THE UNIVERSITY has at all times tried to maintain, the Provincial Government nevertheless continually berates the University for its perceived inefficiency. Advanced Education Minister Flint Dinders constantly terrorizes a cowed bureaucracy at the University, requiring them to submit reams of statistics and graphs, which in turn has led to the creation of a special administrative jargon known as PedaSpeak. No one can remember what many of the formulas and jargon of PedaSpeak are supposed to signify, but for fear of the consequences that might flow from such a revelation, all parties are reluctant to admit this to anyone. President Diesel, for example, gained quite a bit of negative publicity for her recent loss of composure when asked in public to explain the details of some of the University's agreed-upon outcomes, inputs and other performance indicators.

The novel's protagonist, Hector Marple, 83-year-old Associate Professor and long-time Chairperson of the Queer Studies Department, has been for many years a leading activist in the ongoing struggle against the University's periodic attempts to impose compulsory retirement. He credits his longevity to the good people at the Gumbel Organ Farm, and his avuncular invocation "Stop Ageism Now" has been a rallying cry for a generation of scholars. It is he whom the University appoints to chair a special investigative committee to solve the mysterious thawings. He is aided on the committee by Assistant Professor Lana Losingfeathers, Coordinator of the newly formed Lesbian Native Arts division within Queer Studies, whose recent collection of poems *Vaginal Thunder* has caused quite a stir within feminist circles.



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She is accompanied on the committee by Mr. Godameye Gladimeouttauganda, a graduate student in African-Canadian Education, and Ms. Tiffany Flowers, an undergraduate major in the new Conjoint Program in Recreational Science, offered collaboratively with the DeVry Institute and the SpaLady Wellness Centres. Also serving, on a non-voting basis, is Faculty Association representative Mike McSorley, Professor Emeritus of Male Biology and former Associate Dean in the old Faculty of Science, now Adjunct Professor in Industrial Training and Caffeine Technician in the Syllabus Clearance section of the University's Office of Diversity. Professor McSorley's career took an unfortunate tumble when the memoirs of his ex-wife were published, and he sometime later tried to bite a colleague's ear off in a bitter merit increment dispute. Other members of the Industrial Training Faculty declined to sit on Professor Marple's committee due to heavy consultancy schedules.

The novel's chief antagonist is 38-year-old sessional instructor Delbert Muffin, who on the surface seems an unlikely choice for the rebellious role the novel assigns him. Delbert is basically a timid soul, and, like much of his generation, so tyrannized by a need to conform to appropriate behavioural norms that he must, for example, dress in women's clothing in order to comfortably eat quiche. His opposition to University policy therefore has been masked through the years by an apparently cordial and compliant affability, which has endeared him in University administrative circles, winning him the University's coveted Good Egg Award on three occasions and making him second in popularity only to Dean Wiesel. He normally teaches an eclectic selection of courses—whatever needs to be taught, actually—and supplements his meagre earnings from the University through his work as folk singer, children's playwright and cater-waiter. However, he is also the mastermind behind the mysterious thawings and has, in fact, been the chief organizer of the sessional guerrilla movement which, buoyed by its battle cry "Stop Geritocracy Now," has plagued the tenured community for years.

Delbert's normal timidity has been emboldened of late by his burgeoning love affair with fellow conspirator Olivia Twist. Formerly a sessional instructor in English,

Olivia's contract was not renewed when she asked Dean Wiesel for more than the minimum stipend. She has since filed a formal grievance against the Dean, alleging bias because of her past support of Palestinian causes. The grievance is now in its third year of appellate hearings, although the appeal panel is expected to conclude its initial phase by year end. She has been supporting herself of late by working as co-organizer of the Calvin Klein Campus Fest, the annual celebration of shopping presented by the Students' Union. She also operates a gourmet pet food service out of her apartment, offering home-baked dog and cat biscuits, and other culinary delights, to discriminating pet lovers, winning a nomination for Entrepreneur of the Year at the local Womyn of Distinction Awards. She and Delbert have also become a formidable team of campus terrorists. Most recently, for example, they were responsible for the appearance of spiked capsules in the Faculty Club's Prozac Dispenser, which had to be removed after dozens of patrons were made seriously ill one day. Initially, such occurrences were thought to be merely the pranks of unusually witty undergraduates, but when the thawings began, it was observed by many that the events were all part of an ominous pattern, and Professor Marple's committee was struck forthwith.

THE NOVEL'S DÉNOUEMENT, WHICH (ON THE ADVICE OF my literary agent) I am reluctant to describe in detail, will (I can say) be fully in accord with the very latest principles of post-modern, post-colonialist writing. Published only in interactive CD-ROM format, reader-viewers may choose from a variety of endings, and select and/or rearrange details of plot and character to suit race, nationality, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, religious beliefs, gender identity (both real and imagined), hair colour, skin colour, eye colour, mental disability, age, height, weight, mood and sexual orientation. Advance copies may be ordered now. Price available on request.

Heery Lynn is associate professor of drama at the University of Calgary. He has written for the CBC, the *Calgary Herald* and *The Canadian Theatre Review*.