

The BennZineVortex

A Periodic Newsletter of the Bennington College M.A./M.F.A. Writing Program
*Student Life Committee * Vol. II No. 2 * January 9, 1995*

Singing Shakespeare Students Shove Writers Aside in Lunchtime Debacle

MFA students angered by mealtime rivalry

THE COMMONS -- Hungry Thespians with Shakespeare & Company upset the lunchtime schedule set for Bennington's tuition-paying MFA students this week, prompting massive confusion in the timing of student readings and triggering a dining room debacle.

The food fracas erupted quietly as the happy-go-lucky tenant Shakespeareans took over the Commons cafeteria at 12:30 p.m., displacing the resident writers on their own campus. By dinnertime Saturday night, writers were asked to attend lunch as late as 1 p.m. -- to give the food-crazed actors priority.

The request came off as more of a tragedy than a comedy as MFA students reacted harshly.

"It's not fair!" declared George Carver, a famished fiction writer. "One of the reasons I chose Bennington is for the food."

Gene Baker likened the lunchtime lot to Hamlet, stating: "Shakespeare himself said 'neither a borrower nor a lender be, but to thine own self be true.' Translated," said Gene, "that means don't eat our goddammed lunch."

Sharon Cook said that this

would surely be an issue for Sven Birkerts. "He's got to duke it out with them."

And Sharon added: "What fools these morsels be!"

Some students analyzed the crisis philosophically. Why did this happen?...asked a pensive Margo Aragon, who finally concluded, "it's because they sing and we don't!"

Asked Cynthia Koenke: "And they pay how much?"

Yet while the dining debacle derailed ordinary mealtime gossip, others saw the benefit in being bumped by the Thespians. "It's good that the Shakespeareans eat first," quipped a cunning Carole Merritt. "They can test the food for us."

Betty Kronsky insightfully noted: "If music be the food of love, play on!"



Mentor plan gets started informally

The mentor program, first discussed during the summer 1994 residency, got underway informally this week, as senior students and newcomers paired up on their own.

Designed to assist freshman writing students with navigating the program and the Bennington campus, several senior students filled the role of mentors.

The Student Life Committee voted earlier in the week not to

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RADIANT NOTES AND CLUSTERS

Congratulations to fiction writer **Tim Wooten**, whose short story, Painters, was published in the October 1994 issue of Virginia Quarterly Review. Tim's story was first workshopped here at Bennington during the January 1994 residency.

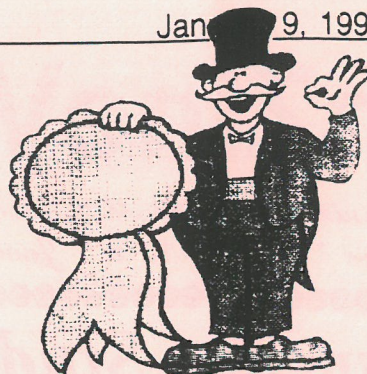
Kudos to **Kristin Lee**, whose three poems, Soil, Shells, and Mugging, were published in Western Humanities Review this past fall.

Accolades also to poet **Carol Malone** who saw Persephone to Demeter published this past fall in Boulevard.

Poet **John Lane** was one of two finalists for the Associated Writing Programs' 1994 Creative Non-Fiction Publication Award with his book-length manuscript, A Stand of Cypress. John reports that AWP is now querying publishers on his behalf.

Fiction writer **Maudy Benz** has published book reviews during the last few months in The Charlotte Observer, Spectator and Small Press Review. Maudy's earlier fiction and poetry has been published in Plain Song, Hyperion, Farmers' Market and Southern Poetry Review.

A salute goes out to **Gail Hathaway** whose four poems have been accepted for publication in Stud Duck, based in Los Angeles. Gail's poems are Ginger Has an Idea, The Good Death, Forked Leaves Keep Hinting at my Door, and the deliberate mis-translation, Au Bout du Monde.



Deborah Gillespie's poem, The Platteville Journal, was published in the most recent issue of Earth's Daughter's.

Congratulations are also extended to **August de los Reyes** whose poem, Scandinavian Studies, is scheduled to be published in the summer 1995 issue of Gerbils.

A pat on the back goes out to **Robin Neidorf**, whose story Book Groups: The New CR? appears in this month's Ms. Magazine. Robin's poem, Off Off Broadway, has also been accepted for publication in Stud Duck.

Laudations too are extended to **Mark S. Guralnick**, who's signed a contract with Greenwood Press to write a book on the Pennsylvania Constitution, his second book for lawyers, and whose doctoral dissertation won the 1994 Bernard C. Watson Award for Outstanding Dissertation in the Social Sciences at Temple University -- the highest commencement award conferred by the University. The name of the dissertation is -- you'll be sorry you asked -- Status vs. Content: Dysfunctional Paradigms of the Constitutional Right to a Free Press Based on a Six-Factor Classification Matrix in the American Law of Defamation.

Finally, applause for **Robert Hornbuckle**, whose poem, The Silence of Deep Cold, was published in the October 1994 issue of Midwest Poetry Review.

Take a P...

Take a "P" word from Katha Pollitt. There certainly are enough of them to go around. The perspicacious Plath-loving Pollitt plucked plenty of P-words from the popular post-neo-Aristotelian era. Here's a sampling:

"Pomposification"

"Problemitize"

"Pathography"

Stokes initiates movement to name wings

Stokes residents have named one of the hallways in their building "The John Keats Wing," according to Stokesperson Carol Malone.

Malone, a poet, said the movement to dignify the building wings was the product of like-minded Stokes-dwellers who wanted to share a literary theme during their stay at Bennington this winter. She encouraged other students to dub their wings accordingly.

Mentor plan is off and running

-Continued from front page-

formalize the program, but rather to encourage students to find their own mentors. Anybody who needs a mentor or wants to be a mentor should contact a Student Life Committee member.

Sven Birkerts Becomes Liam Rector

Anti-Tech Teacher to Take on Troubled Students

Sven Birkerts, non-fiction faculty member and author of "The Gutenberg Elegies," announced Saturday that he had fully assumed the duties of assisting troubled students, a task heretofore managed by Program Director Liam Rector.

"I'm the dog who rolls over on his back and lifts his legs up in the air," said Birkerts, explaining his new role. "I'm throwing myself at your mercy."

Birkerts said he would serve in an ombudsman sort of role, assisting students with difficulties which might arise with other students or faculty members.

"Come and complain about the teachers all you want," he said, "I love that stuff...but what can be done about it, I don't know."

Birkerts, well-known in literary circles for assailing the "metamorphosis" of the electronic age and its negative impact on the printed word, said he was unsure as to exactly what his jurisdiction would include.

He was, nevertheless, clear about the fact that he would tackle many, if not most, of the social management issues previously handled by Liam Rector.

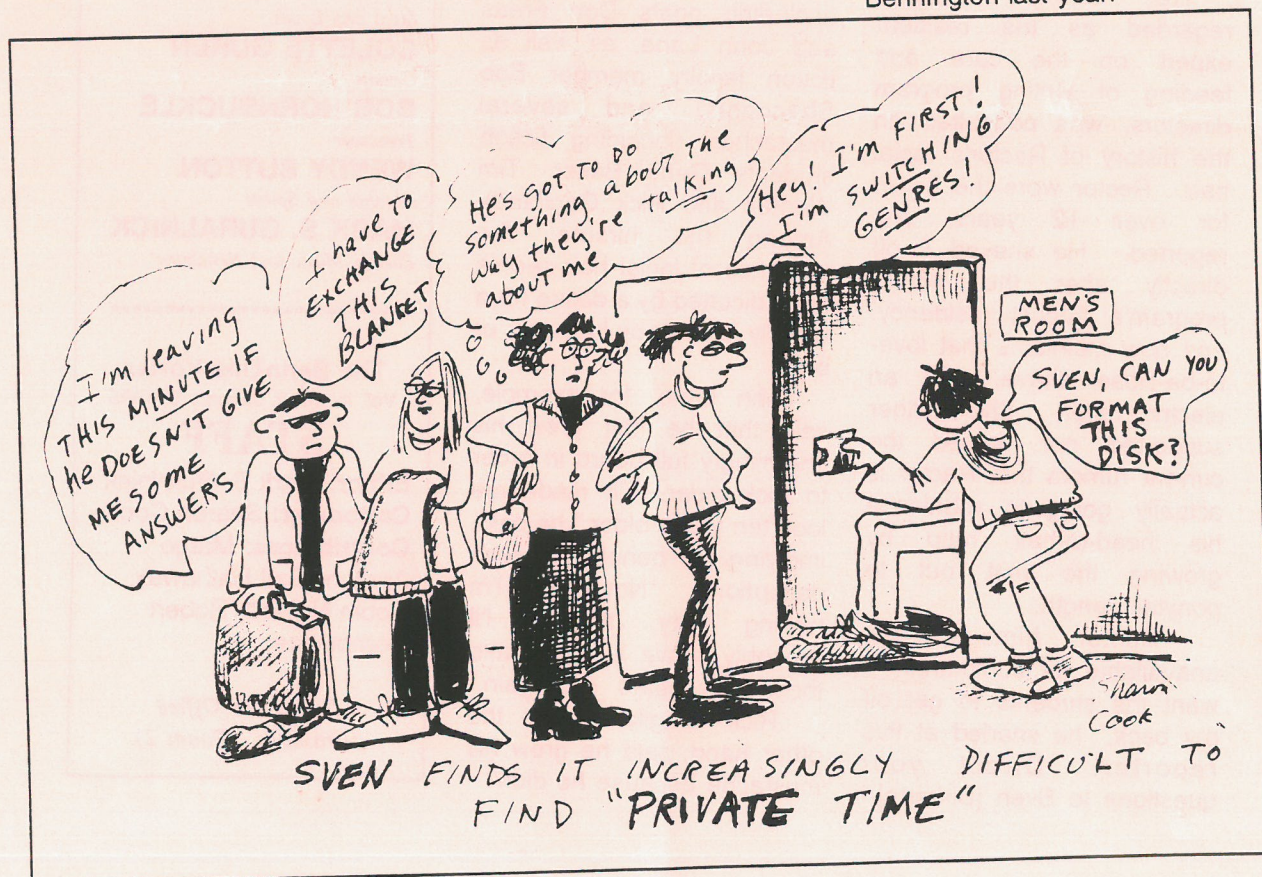
Buh!

Birkerts reminisced about his life before marriage, when he was single and staying in Italy. He recalled making presentations to his mentor and was greeted simply with the rejoinder "Buh!" Now, he said, he is that person, and now he gets to say "Buh!"

During Sven Birkert's announcement on Saturday, Liam Rector hailed his colleague's new undertaking, recalling how tedious it had become for him (Liam) to manage multitudes of minutia on his own, as students tracked him down day and night last year, often with trifling matters.

Birkerts said he would maintain office hours from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. daily to address student problems and implied that he would be otherwise available, by appointment, on a one-on-one basis.

Birkerts' "Gutenberg Elegies," subtitled "The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age," was published last year by Faber and Faber. It included essays based in part on lectures he gave at Bennington last year.



Hairy Situation Comes to an End

By Robin Neidorf

The first literary revelation of 1995 has hit all MFA students at Bennington simultaneously: Liam Rector has dimples. And a chin.

This revelation was only slightly more startling than the concurrent discovery that our creative collusionist and roving reporter, Mark Guralnick, Esquire, resembles a youthful Harrison Ford, now that he has been divested of the hairy punctuation mark that once adorned his upper lip.

Is it a trend? Is it a travesty? Is it time to buy stock in Gillette? We sought comments on the newly naked faces among us.

Tree Swenson, widely regarded as the resident expert on the care and feeding of writing program directors, was consulted on the history of Rector's facial hair. Rector wore the beard for over 12 years, she reported. He shaved it off directly after the writing program's August residency, and now maintains that love-to-be-close shave, with an electric razor. She neither supported nor denied the current rumors that Rector is actually going to rebalance his head-to-hair ratio by growing the rest out to ponytail length.

Rector himself was unavailable for comment. "I want the students to get off my back," he snarled at this reporter. "Direct your questions to Sven [Birkerts]."

Birkerts only shrugged when approached.

It should not go unnoticed that Birkerts himself is clean-shaven.

Guralnick was more forthcoming about the whys and wherefores of his new look; essentially, he wanted to look younger to catch the eye of a more nubile class of babe.

"Once I shaved, all these young women started to say hello to me," Guralnick reported with a slight blush. Guralnick also explained that the removal of mustache from lip had the unintended result of deepening his resemblance to his father.

To date, the Bennington Writing Seminar boasts several remaining full beards (including poets Don Freas and John Lane, as well as fiction faculty member Bob Shacochis), and several mustaches (including fiction students Gene Baker, Tim Wooten and Rick Gagliano). Among the hirsute, the presence of facial hair seems to be dictated by a desire for a worldly look, or by laziness, or both.

John Lane, for example, said that he first grew his charmingly full beard in order to look older. "It made me look ten years older," he said, implying the benefits of such deception. "Now that I'm turning forty, though, I'll probably shave it off, to take those ten years off again."

Rick Gagliano, on the other hand, said he grew his mustache because he didn't

like to shave. "The real advantage is that I don't have to waste time dragging a razor over my upper lip," he said. Asked about the absence of a beard, which would take another minute and a half off of his morning ablution, he replied, "I'm not allowed to have one because of my job." Rick is employed in law. Watch those faces for further developments on the naked face trend. And stay tuned to the Bennzine Vortex--June edition--for an analysis of trends in leg shaving: half way, full leg or au natural.

Student Life Committee

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TIMOTHY WOOTEN

Ideas and Issues

COLETTE GUREN

Gossip

BOB HORNBUCKLE

Treasurer

WENDY BUTTON

Alcohol and Spirits

MARK S. GURALNICK

Parties, Music and Newsletter

The BennZine Vortex

Vol. II, No. 2, January 9, 1995

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Aragon, Gail Hathaway,

Robin Neidorf, Robert

Hornbuckle

Newsletter Office
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Easier said than done...**Bennington-Bound Writers Blocked**

WHO THE HELL KNOWS WHERE -- Bennington-bound writers and poets encountered more than the usual variety of difficulties reaching campus in time for the winter residency this year.

Students from the West and the Midwest reported numerous airport delays and traveling travails as they negotiated airlines, limos and buses bound for Bennington, Vermont.

Colorado's Colette Guren organized a carefully-timed travel itinerary for herself, along with Jacqueline de Angelis, Adlyn Frasier and Tess James, only in fact to be snowed in for hours at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago.

Missouri's Robert Hornbuckle didn't arrive at Bennington until 2:20 a.m. Saturday, when a four-wheel drive "limo" dumped him here, after eight arduous -- and drunken -- hours in the St. Louis and Detroit airports (See sidebar)

"I could have driven here in the same length of time," said a good-humored but exhausted Hornbuckle.

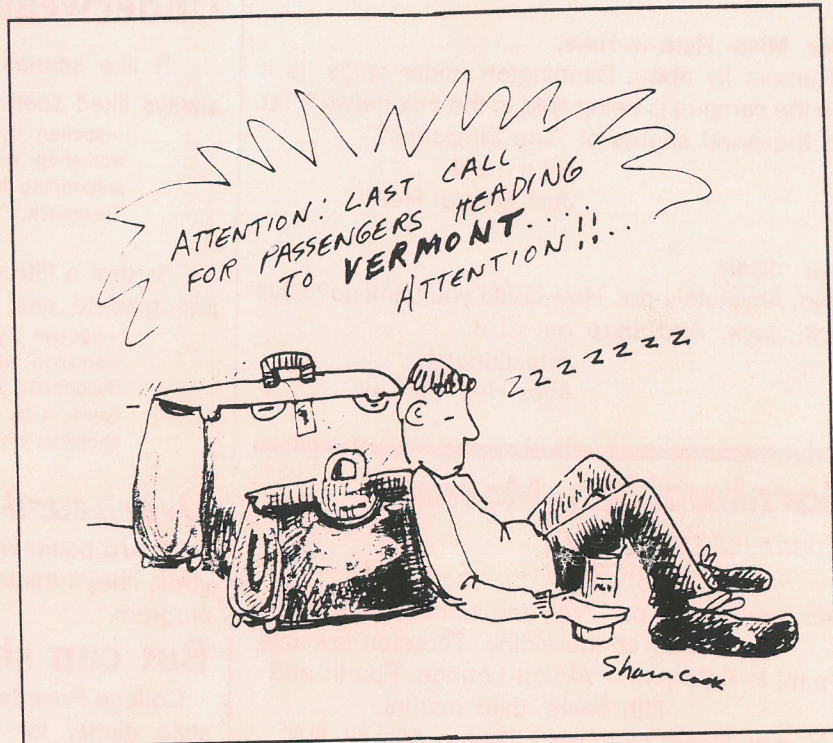
Traveling mishaps even befell those who arrived here on time. Connecticut's Kristin Lee had no difficulty getting to the campus for the Friday afternoon check-in. Unfortunately, she misplaced the key to the trunk of her Toyota Tercel and was unable to open the trunk until sometime Saturday morning when a second set of keys (courtesy of her husband) arrived by Federal Express.

Inside the trunk were Tom Rehtin's belongings -- and so both of the second semester poets were found at breakfast Saturday morning wearing Friday night's clothing.

Kristin's key calamity may have troubled her good friend, Carol Malone, more than Kristin herself. The Tennessee-based Malone imbibed wine at the cafe, then kept a date with Jack Daniels back at Stokes Friday night. According to widespread reports, Carol suffered the

consequences all night long -- in true dorm-like demeanor.

Kristin, meanwhile, having slept in Carole's Atlanta Braves T-Shirt, was seen later Saturday, announcing that she was going to "drive off the campus and drive on again, and pretend this never happened."

**Hornbuckle's Horror Story**

Here is a breakdown of Bob Hornbuckle's horrific travel schedule, as it actually turned out:

- 6:30 a.m. - Leave St. Peters, Mo.
- 7:40 a.m. - Arrive at the St. Louis Airport
- 10:15 a.m. Original departure time for connecting flight to Detroit.
- 10:30 a.m. First beer
- 12:15 p.m. Actual departure on Northwest Airlines.

- 1:30 p.m. Second beer.
 - 2:35 pm.- Arrive Detroit.
 - 2:40p.m.- Flight to Albany slated for departure.
 - 2:45 p.m. Northwest Airlines cancels Bob's reserved ticket to Albany.
 - 3:00 p.m. - Third beer; first martini
 - 4:30 p.m.- Next flight, slated for 5:15 p.m. cancels.
 - 4:35 p.m.- Second martini
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Let Me Help....

By Ernestine Hem-in-Haw



Miss Hem-in-Haw would like to welcome the new MFA students to our lovely campus. If you have any problems you would like solved by yours truly, drop me a line. I am particularly good at helping with those personal issues. Don't worry, you can be as graphic as you like. Miss Hem-in-Haw promises not to be judgmental.

My colleagues and I, however, may discuss those filthy little habits of yours over morning coffee. (Only teasing, dears. Go right ahead and bare your....soul).

Dear Miss Hem-in-Haw,

Rumors fly about Bennington under seige. Is it true the campus is being sold to the Fox network for two thousand shares of "The Simpsons?"

Signed,
Just Sick at Heart

Dear JSaH,

No. Absolutely not. How could you think so? Chill back, Jack. And snap out of it.

Affectionately,
Miss Hem-in-Haw

Hornbuckle's Horror

-Continued from page 5 -

4:45 p.m. to 5 p.m. - Yell and scream . Declare war on the airline. Threaten lawsuits.
5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. - Airport Lounge. Fourth and fifth beers, third martini.
8:25 p.m.-Board Northwest flight to Albany, N.Y.
9:30 p.m. - Flight leaves the gate at Detroit.
9:30 to 11:10 p.m. - Plane sits on runway, emergency de-icing underway.
11:55 p.m. - Sixth beer. First double-martini.
1:15 a.m.- Arrive Albany Airport.
2:20 a.m.- Arrive at Bennington College in four-wheel-drive "limousine."

Question of the day.....

Is it true that these blankets under which we bake and shiver are recycled Astroturf? Or is that simply problemized Neo-Aristotelian rumormongering?
--- D.A.F.

Student readings daily before lunch

Student readings are being held daily from 11:45 a.m. to 12:45 p.m, according to the Student Life Committee. The readings are being held in the new dining room, where faculty readings are held nightly. Readings will feature eight students per day, each reading for up to six minutes, according to Student Life Committee coordinators Colette Guren and Bob Hornbuckle. Interested students should sign up on the list posted on the bulletin board across from the student mailboxes.

Underwear quotes.....

"I like scenes with underwear involved. I've always liked scenes with underwear."

---spoken by Bob Hornbuckle in Sunday's fiction workshop with Jill McCorkle and Bob Shacochis, responding to a passage in Lynn Wallace's story, "Bareback."

"Is that a fifth of gin in your pocket or are you just glad to see me?"

---spoken by Doug Bauer at his Sunday fiction workshop with Amy Hempel, when Carole Merritt described a shoplifter's technique of depositing jars of caviar in his underwear, based on a true account of a shoplifter who stole alcohol in the same manner.

Overheard at faculty meeting

"You'd better watch where that BennZine Vortex goes...they'll think we're some kind of cockamamie program."

But can she beat the lamb...

College President Liz Coleman will host a buffet-style dinner for Bennington's MFA students on Wednesday night. Last January, she invited the first class to her home for lamb chops and fine wine. Now, because the size of the student body has tripled, the President's Dinner will be held in the central Commons dining room.

Missing in action

Pamela Bailey Powers and Charlotte Lemann were unable to join us at the beginning of the January 1995 residency. These two late-breaking vacancies brought to seven the number of students missing in action this year. Earlier, Cristina Del Sesto of Washington, D.C. and Victor Cruz of Lexington, Mass., announced a one-semester leave-of-absence. Bee Ring of Ireland, Elizabeth Bryant of Poughkeepsie, N.Y. and Jo Ann Clark of New York City have left the program.